









THE DULVERTON TRUST

An introduction to supporting young people with additional needs in your community business

Plunkett Foundation

This guide was created with funding from Dulverton Trust, as part of the #IWill movement, and was part of a programme aiming to strengthening rural community businesses' engagement with young people delivered by the Plunkett Foundation between 2022-23.

Part of the programme included a webinar, which this resource is based on - it seeks to offer an overview of the principal considerations and issues that a community business might think about if they have an ambition to begin to engage with young people. Alternatively, it can also be used as a reference guide for rural community businesses who are already engaging with young people and are wishing to consider how their current practices might be built on.

It should also be highlighted that the language used in this resource is intended to be as inclusive and nonprejudicial as possible – however, in recognising and acknowledging that everyone understands and experiences disability, neurodiversity, and similar, differently, should any reader take offence at any term or reference used, please let us know and we will review the content accordingly.

1. What we mean by 'inclusion'

The term 'inclusion' in the context of this resource refers to 'disability' or having additional support needs of any type – typically, this can usually be understood as relating to a young person who is experiencing a physical, auditory, or visual impairment of some type.

However, it is important to remember that "not all disabilities are visible". The term 'inclusion' can also relate to less immediately visible characteristics – such as neurodiversity (autism, ADHD, etc), epilepsy, and dyslexia.

2. Why should our community business create opportunities for young people with additional needs?

There are many reasons as to why it may be beneficial for any organisation to explore and develop opportunities for young people with support needs to become involved in taking on roles within it – however, through the iWill programme, Plunkett members identified the following as being the most pertinent to rural community businesses:

Fits with the core values of community businesses

As the heart of any community business is a desire to encourage, benefit, and support everyone within the local area. Community businesses should therefore be actively considering and exploring ways in which they can create and offer most the opportunity to the widest groups of people in their area – otherwise, they risk compromising their identity as such.



Helps review practices and systems to create wider benefits for others

Any given community business will have a range of procedures, systems, and practices that allow it to deliver its day-to-day activities, as well as management and governance functions. Typically, these will have been designed at the outset, and based on the circumstances of its initial volunteers, staff, and members.

However, there is a risk that these systems may start to exclude other groups of people unintentionally and unknowingly in the future. This is because the community business has not undertaken a systematic review of these practices – starting a process of exploring how it might offer opportunity and support to a young person with support needs would 'force' such a review.

And the outcome of this internal review, regardless of the role the young person may or may not subsequently be able to be offered or take up, will mean that the community business can better assure itself that it is as accessible and inclusive as possible for everyone within its community – as customers, volunteers, staff, and in governance roles.

Enhances reputation

Engaging young people with additional needs can strengthen links into wider local communities of interest amongst that person's peers, families, and others they relate to. As such, it allows the community business to better engage a wider group of potential customers, supporters, members, and volunteers into the future.

With that in mind, rather than start with exploring the question of what a community business might be able to offer a young person with needs, it may be more useful to consider the question "why would a young person with needs, and their carer/family, want to engage with your community business to gain employment, volunteering, or another role?"

3 - Ways to start exploring options to support a young person with additional needs

'Reasonable adjustments'

There is legislation that all community businesses need to comply with in relation to this topic in the form of the Disability Discrimination Act – broadly, it requires organisations to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that anyone who may be experiencing a disability is not unfairly discriminated against through not being able to access or engage with that organisation's services or activities.

Many community businesses have taken approaches to comply with this that are usually based around physical access (ramps) and having staff or volunteers who can act as 'personal shoppers' for any customers who may otherwise struggle to be able to read, lift, or carry items.

However, in the instance of neurodiversity (which can also be recognised in law as a disability) such physical adaptations and occasional roles may not be as relevant – it is therefore important to bear in mind that 'reasonable adjustments' can also cover non-physical adaptions or services: for example, it could include offering counselling or training for other staff and volunteers to better understand and support someone who would be sharing roles with them in the community business.

'Reasonable adjustment' can also relate to how roles are structured and designed, to offer more flexibility and opportunities for someone who may not be able to take on all the responsibilities usually associated with current roles in a community business.

The consideration of what adjustments may be needed (and possible) should also include the young person and their current supporters – they will know better than anyone else what would work best, be most needed, and how far they themselves may also be able to reconsider their expectations of what they could do within the community. Such young people can be initially approached in several ways,

with each being more or less appropriate based on the circumstances of the young person and the community business: through direct contact, through contact with carers/parents, or through contact with a local college where a young person may already be involved in study.

Ultimately, the phrase 'reasonable adjustment' comes down to what is reasonable for the community business to be able to commit to, and sustain, without compromising its ability to continue to trade and operate sustainably. For more detail about this, see https://www.gov.uk/reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-workers and https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/work/discrimination-at-work/taking-action/asking-your-employer-for-changes-to-help-if-youre-disabled/

Recruiting new staff

There is also the potential that a community business may find themselves 'forced' to consider how they might support a young person with needs to take on a role with them – if a community business were undertaking a recruitment process for new staff, and a young person with needs applied, the community business would not only have to consider their application on merit with other applicants', but also how they might be able to make adjustments to that role for the young person if they were felt to be the best applicant for it.

Exploring these options and ideas outside of a recruitment process would allow a community business more time to carefully consider ideas and implications, rather than feeling they were having to rush them within the timeframe of recruiting for a new role. However, this scenario might lead a community business to begin to explore this question when it might not otherwise have, which in turn, could lead to future opportunities for all (such as those listed in section 2).



Developing wider support pathways

Also, depending on circumstances and motivations of the community business, it may be that the creation of opportunities for young people with needs could form part of a wider programme of support for them, and not just be a 'stand alone' activity or role.

For example, it could be that as part of a partnership with a local college, a community business offers a number of time limited work placement opportunities for young people with needs. This would allow the young person to gain experience and insight as part of a wider learning and development programme which potentially could see them gain more from the opportunity. It would also mean that the community business would not be solely responsible for supporting the young people, in working with its partner college to design and accommodate a young persons' circumstances.

4. Support for a community business considering/ starting to support a young person with additional needs

Any community business considering, exploring, or actively supporting, a young person with needs should always know that there is a range of additional resources and support available to them to do so:

- The Access to Work scheme can offer financial support in the form of supporting one-off purchases of equipment, or ongoing support such as British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters as needed. These would benefit not just the young person, but also the wider community business in how it is able to best support them in a role.
- More information about this scheme can be found at: https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/ resources/access-work
- Local specialist Special Education Needs (SEN) colleges may be able to partner with a community business to structure additional learning and educational activity around the role that that young person takes on. This is in recognition that a community business may offer a young person with needs a more conducive and enabling environment to develop and learn in, rather than a traditional school format or structure.
- The British Association for Supported Employment (BASE) offers a range of information, guidance, and advice: https://www.base-uk.org/information-employers
- The Plunkett family of community businesses also have a range of experiences and insights into how they have approached and managed creating opportunities and support for young people with additional needs. You can read about how the Westbury Community Shop partnered with a local SEN school to create work experience opportunities for young people with a range of needs as one such example, here:

 https://plunkett.co.uk/westbury-community-shop-supports-local-school-students/

5. Trying to not trip up despite best intentions

Sometimes, despite best intentions on all sides, things cannot always work out as hoped or anticipated for all sorts of reasons that hindsight teaches, but we wish we might have considered sooner. With that in mind, when designing and creating roles and systems around creating opportunities for young people with additional support needs in a community business it may be useful to consider:

The benefits trap

Depending on the individual circumstances of the young person, they may be in receipt of a range of income support to help them maintain and enjoy a quality of life. Depending on how any role is created, adapted, remunerated, etc may adversely impact on this income support which that young person and their carer and family have come to rely on. It is therefore important to explore this potential risk at the outset of any conversation with a young person and their carer/family about possible roles and opportunities a community business might be able to offer them.

Time needed at the start, and ongoing

Developing new opportunities for a young person with needs will require an investment of time on the part of the community business – not just in its planning, but also in its introduction, and ongoing support for the young person. A community business should be mindful of what this time requirement might be, and how it might be able to meet this from the outset. It may be that some of the time can be met through accessing additional supports (such as highlighted in section 4), but this could also fall under the heading of what a community business might ultimately and regrettably deem to be 'unreasonable' to be able to commit to (see section 3).

Information - too much, or too little

In order for a young person and their carer/family to consider if a role (re)created for them might be a 'best fit', they will need information – depending on the circumstances of the young person, they may need a longer period of time to process and understand that information than others. And this may also be the case for them in any induction process if they subsequently take on a role. It is therefore important that when considering and exploring the option of what a community business could offer a young person with needs, and opens a conversation with them as part of this (see section 3), that this theme be carefully talked about.

Current staff and volunteers

A critical consideration for any community business in not only being able to create a supported opportunity for a young person with needs, but also make it successful and sustain it, will be the impact that doing so may have on existing staff and volunteers.

Just as it is important to involve the young person and their carer/family in understanding what may or may not be suitable and helpful when considering and exploring creating/designing an opportunity, it is equally so in engaging staff and volunteers who will be working alongside that young person in their own roles.

It may be that additional training, coaching, or mentoring for current staff and volunteers would help allay any concerns or limitations they feel might otherwise compromise the potential benefits that involving the young person could create (see section 2). But as highlighted in section 4, supporting the young person in a role need not automatically be the sole responsibility and duty of the community business – it may be possible for the young person to be accompanied by a carer/family member as they undertake their role, which would in turn reduce the extent of expectation or need on existing volunteers and staff to extend their role to support that young person.

6. Where next?

As already stated, the purpose of this resource is to act as an introductory guide and overview for community businesses thinking about creating opportunities for young people with additional support needs.

It is based on the experiences of Plunkett's member businesses, as well as reflections from on-line workshops. As such, it is not intended to be definitive, but rather a 'starting point' to help community businesses best begin to engage and support young people with needs in different ways.

As have been referenced in different sections, there are several national bodies who specialise in offering guidance, checklists, templates, and advice on how to create opportunities to support young people, and it would be beneficial to review their resources to build on the knowledge and insight that this guide has offered.

Ultimately, just as every community business is unique to its area, every young person with needs will have unique circumstances and potential – and whilst not every community business may decide that it is able to offer roles to a young person with needs, it is important that every community business at least explore the option of doing so, for the reasons outlined in section 2.

This resource was written by Plunkett Adviser Adrian Ashton, in consultation with Plunkett Members.

If you would like to access further advice on engaging young people in your community business please call us **01993 630022** or email