

Impact report 2025

99%

The five-year
survival rate
for community
businesses.

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A message from our supporter, Webmart

I'm proud to introduce Plunkett UK's Impact Report, a testament to the meaningful partnership between our organisations.

Together, we turn income into impact by sharing a commitment to empower people in rural areas to create and run community-owned businesses.

Plunkett's community ownership model builds resilient local economies with thriving, inclusive communities by providing practical advice, business support and training. This resonates perfectly with our guiding ethos of Do Good, Be Good at Webmart. Webmart strives to support our whole ecosystem – clients, suppliers, Web marteurs, communities and the planet – whilst delivering sustainable marketing campaigns with measurable impact.

By partnering with Plunkett we can make a meaningful difference to local communities across the UK, demonstrating how businesses and communities can collaborate to make lasting, positive change. As we continue to strengthen our relationship, I would really encourage you to join us in supporting this vital charity.

Kelly O'Sullivan
CEO, Webmart



Who are we?

Plunkett UK is a national charity with a vision for resilient, thriving and inclusive rural communities.

We achieve this by supporting people throughout the UK to set up and run a wide range of community-owned businesses such as village shops and pubs, through to woodlands, farms and fisheries.

Our mission is to ensure these businesses create innovative, impactful and inclusive spaces benefiting everyone who lives and works there.



What are community businesses?

We support any type of business which is owned and controlled by community members, where membership is open to anyone at accessible prices, and all members have equal and democratic say in how the business is run.

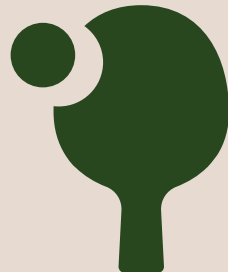
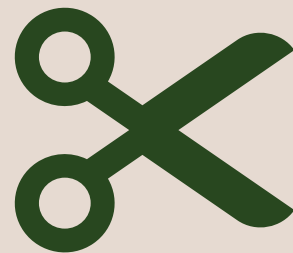
Plunkett has supported over 800 community businesses to open and, with almost another 800 in our pipeline, and 30 opening each year, the sector is growing.

The sector has grown by 70% in the last 10 years with a total of 828 community-owned businesses trading as at the close of 2024.

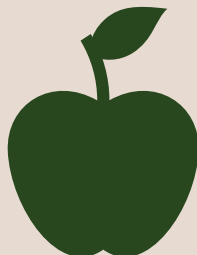
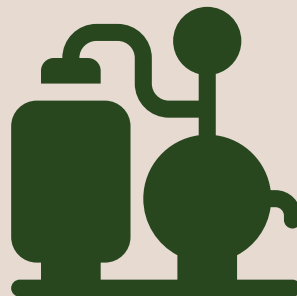
2014:
490

2024:
828

Our community-owned businesses include:



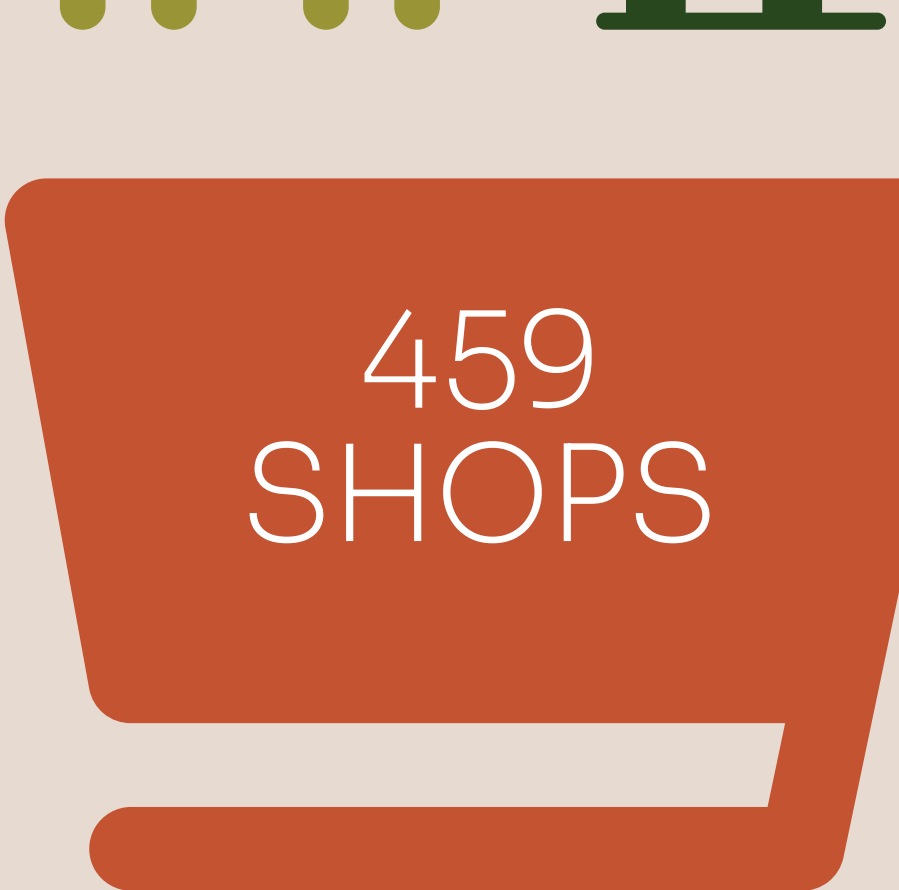
30 FARMS



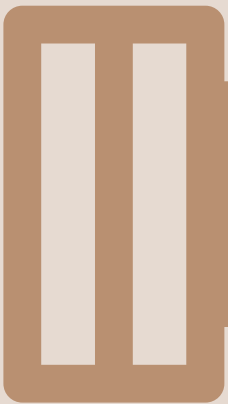
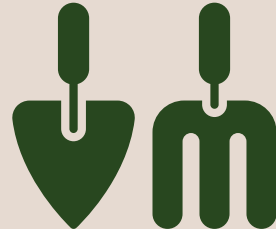
18 CAFÉS



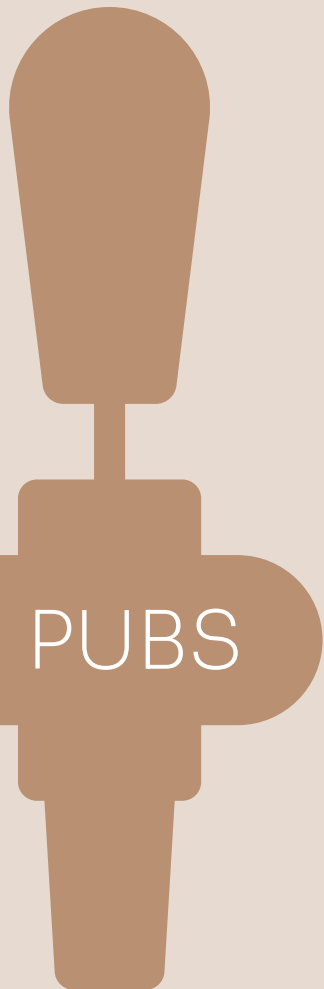
36 WOODLANDS



459 SHOPS



199 PUBS



Other businesses:
13 community centres, 10 leisure and arts, 10 health and sports, 10 land trusts, 9 energy producers, 8 markets, 6 breweries/distilleries, 6 bookshops, 6 transport providers, 5 bakeries and 3 credit unions.

Plunkett's impact

We are the only organisation dedicated to supporting rural community-owned businesses across the UK. At a practical level, our dedicated and expert team:

- Raise awareness of the community ownership model through proactive press, media and campaigns
- Provide practical support to people setting up and running community-owned businesses via specialist business advice, training, webinars and toolkits
- Represent our members' interests through policy, research and advocacy.

In 2024:

- We reached an estimated total media audience of **15 million people** via 20 national and local TV, radio and print channels, including The Sunday Times, BBC Radio 4, Countryfile and The One Show
- We assisted **302 community groups** with community ownership advice via our accessible advice line
- We commissioned specialist business support to **174 community groups** setting up or running community businesses via our advisers
- We delivered **44 training events and webinars** benefiting a total of 1,259 attendees
- We welcomed **484 community businesses** who joined or renewed their Plunkett membership.

“When we started our community business, none of us were experts, but we could rely on Plunkett to support us with warmth and understanding.”

Graeme, Bledington Shop and Café, Gloucestershire



1,259

attendees at our training events and webinars.



Our national conference in London.

15m

Estimated number of people reached through national and local TV, radio and print channels.

302

community groups assisted with community ownership advice.



44

training events and webinars delivered.



Panel discussion at our national conference.

External Affairs

We undertake a wide range of policy and advocacy on behalf of our members, and to ensure they can operate in a positive trading environment. In 2024, we responded to six government consultations; engaged with government departments in Westminster, Scotland and Wales; took part in 11 national campaigns and alliances; and met with 12 MPs and MSPs calling for:

- Continuation of a ‘Community Ownership Fund’ – supporting more community businesses to open via funding and business support
- Introduction of a Community Right to Buy – giving communities first right of refusal to purchase assets they value
- A review of Business Rates – providing consistent levels of rate relief for rural community businesses.

Our representations are evidence-led rooted in feedback from our members, and an additional member panel. In 2024, this led to the creation of a taskforce to investigate the reported challenges from community shops in accessing the supply chain and generating practical and policy recommendations.

“We were honoured to join Plunkett’s Future of Rural Retail Taskforce, under the stewardship of Mary Portas OBE and The Earl of Devon. By bringing together key partners and championing cross-sector collaboration, this initiative aligns closely with our commitment to sustaining essential services in rural communities, including post offices.”

Jack Foden, Head of External Affairs at Post Office Limited



Plunkett’s support and advocacy resulted in:



287 community groups embarked on a new community ownership project.



73 groups registered a new community business using **Plunkett’s model rules for a Community Benefit Society**.



30 new community businesses commenced trading.



A total pipeline of **797 community businesses**.



Several community businesses were saved from closure resulting in a **5-year survival rate of 99%**.



A total of **828 community businesses** successfully trading.

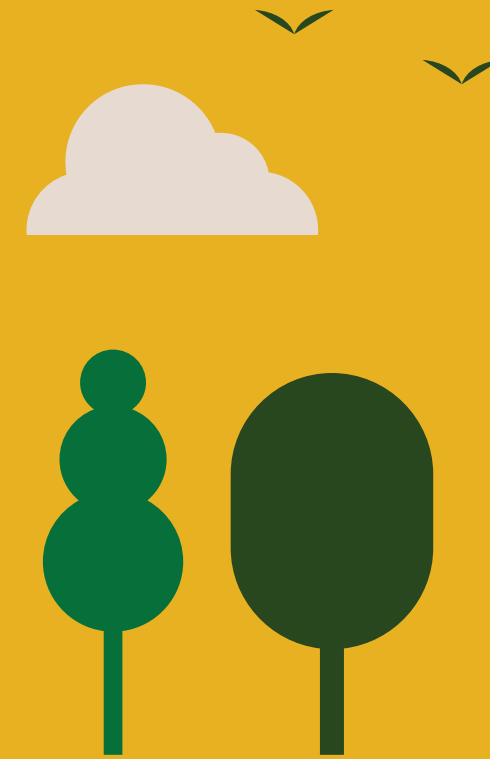
The impact made by community-owned businesses

Plunkett has promoted the community ownership model for over 100 years because of its track record for delivering better businesses for people, communities, the economy, and the environment.

The following pages illustrate this in five measurable themes:



Impact 1
Safeguarding access
to a wide range of
goods and services.



500

residents in the immediate
population are typically
served by community-owned
businesses.



2,000,000

Estimated number of people that currently
benefit from rural community businesses.

We estimate that 300 village shops and 200 pubs shut in 2024 alone, alongside school closures, reduced public services, limited healthcare and inadequate public transport. When such businesses close, they leave people without access to vital supplies and services and increase the risk of isolation.

Older people, and those experiencing poverty, disability, and poor health, are especially affected. This often forces them to leave their communities and social networks and the wider rural environment that is part of their identity, and sense of belonging.

Community-owned businesses, supported by Plunkett, are reversing this trend. Thriving where others fail, they offer more than basic services – acting as multi-service hubs that proactively reach out to support those most vulnerable in a rural community. Typically serving an immediate population of 500 residents, with a further 2,000 able to access their services from surrounding parishes, this means an estimated 2 million people currently benefit rural community businesses, of which 25% of beneficiaries are likely to be over the age of 65 and more vulnerable to poverty, isolation and loneliness.

(Source: Defra)

“A number of elderly and vulnerable village residents prolong their time living at home independently thanks to the support and understanding of our staff and volunteer team. We hold spare front door keys for forgetful residents and work with grown-up children of older residents with dementia to ensure they are supported in their shopping visits, with payments made by relatives.”

Laura, Appleton Community Shop, Oxfordshire



Providing more than a traditional pub in Nefyn, North Wales.

Yr Heliwr, a community-owned pub, in Nefyn, North Wales, partners with a local residential home to provide dementia services and hosts a Digital Café to people experiencing digital exclusion. This is typical of community pubs, often doubling up as a shop or café, or and hosting a broader range of activities including health visits, keep-fit classes, and after-school clubs.



Impact 2

Boosting the local economy.

In 2024, community shops sourced from an estimated total of:



For every £1 spent with a community business, 56p stays in the local economy – compared with just 40p for large private sector firms.

Source: Power to Change



Total combined turnover of rural community businesses:

£166m

Total reinvested into local community projects in 2024:



Rural community businesses contribute significantly to both the local and the UK economy. Their total combined turnover reached an estimated £166 million in 2024, and new research from Power to Change has calculated the typical Gross Value Added (GVA) that could be generated by community businesses, which if applied to rural community-owned businesses would be in the region of £437 million.

Community businesses tend to source goods and services locally, creating a circular economy in the places they exist. In 2024, community shops sourced from an estimated total of 13,000 local suppliers, with many helping other new business start-ups such as bakers, brewers, distillers, and artists who used their local community shop as a first step to market

Beyond local food and drink, our members are committed to supporting other local businesses and trades. According to Power to Change, for every £1 spent with a community business, 56p stays in the local economy – compared with just 40p for large private sector firms.

Profits from community-owned businesses typically stay in the local area too. According to our research, 34% of community-owned businesses were able to invest their surplus to support local community action. With average profits of £5K per business, this represented a total possible investment of £1.4 million in 2024 into local communities.

With the consistently high survival rates (99% over 5 years and 94% longer-term), it is also important to note the resilience and stability community businesses offer to the local economy in contrast with other forms of business (39% survival rates over 5 years).
(Source: Statista)



of community businesses invest surpluses to **support local initiatives.**



Long-term survival rate.

Showcasing local suppliers and craftspeople in North Yorkshire.

When moving into new premises in 2024, Huby and Sutton Community Shop in North Yorkshire used local architects, builders, electricians, and shopfitters, all within a 17-mile radius. The expanded space now showcases local suppliers and crafts.



Impact 3

Creating opportunities for employment, training and volunteering.

53%

of community businesses employ young people, aged 16-25.

6/10

of community businesses pay the Real Living Wage or higher.



On average, in 2024, each rural community business engages 15 volunteers and 4 staff. That is approximately 25,000 volunteers and 3,500 staff in total.



Rural community-owned businesses boost local employment, training and volunteering in areas where such opportunities can often be limited and in decline.

Many actively employ people who face barriers to work, such as those with caring responsibilities, disabilities, or limited qualifications. They do so by providing flexible and part-time employment, and by investing in practical and hands-on training in a supportive environment of staff and volunteers.

Similarly, volunteering provides meaningful opportunities for people to participate in any way they can, helping to build confidence, skills, and employability. Volunteering is equally important for younger and older people –

whether it is that opportunity to remain physical and mentally active, or an opportunity to overcome anxiety and develop confidence and life skills – it is an opportunity to be part of something and feel valued.

An increasing number of community businesses are working in partnership with schools and charities to create opportunities for people with disabilities, health issues, and additional learning needs. Westbury Community Shop in Buckinghamshire is a great example of this with their shop manager, Mel Cooper, saying:

“This is what sets us apart as a community business. It takes us time, but it’s so worth it. We’re helping these young people to develop their confidence and become more independent, whilst also developing skills which will hopefully help them find a job.”

Mel, Westbury Community Shop



Young volunteers in Westbury Community Shop, Buckinghamshire.



Impact 4

Tackling climate change.

58%

of community businesses have an ambition to invest in energy saving and efficiency measures if grant funding is available to them.



of community businesses took some form of climate action last year.

85%

of community businesses have either installed or are considering installing energy saving measures.



With Plunkett’s support, rural community businesses are investing time and resources into initiatives that have a positive environmental impact. It is integral to the way they do business, not an add-on, and they do it for the greater good, not because it translates to sales.

Whether it is a community-owned farm, woodland, or other land-based initiative, it will be more likely adopting organic principles and regenerative practices that protect soil health, biodiversity, and water quality. For community shops, sourcing goods and services locally minimises the need for long-distance transportation, cutting down on car journeys and associated carbon emissions. Increasingly, the buildings in which community businesses are located are

designed or retrofitted with energy efficiency at their heart including the production of renewable energy where possible. Across our membership, we see a commitment to raising environmental awareness and education amongst their customer base. Whether through introducing refill stations into a community shop, organising repair cafés, or car sharing clubs, they are encouraging environmentally responsible behaviours within their community.

For community shops, sourcing goods and services locally minimises the need for long distance transportation.



Reducing food miles and fixing bikes in Gressenhall, Norfolk.

The White Swan at Gressenhall in Norfolk has installed a device that collects kitchen fats, oils and grease. Collecting 256 litres of waste oil converts to 286kWh of sustainable energy each year. The community-owned pub has also set up a free bicycle repair service, enabling more people to use pedal power as an alternative to car travel.

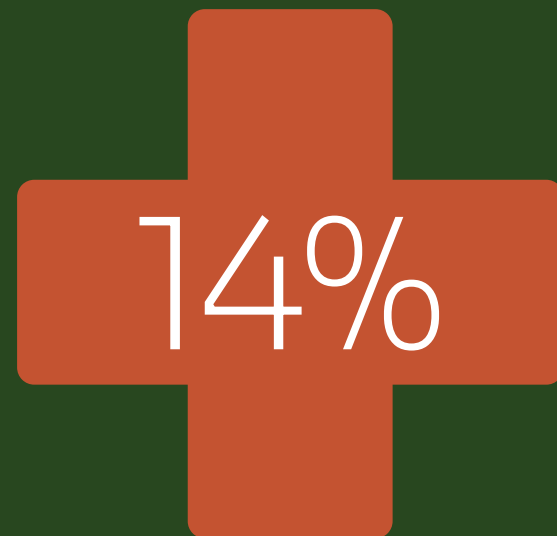


Impact 5

Promoting equity, diversity and inclusion by creating safe and welcoming spaces for all.

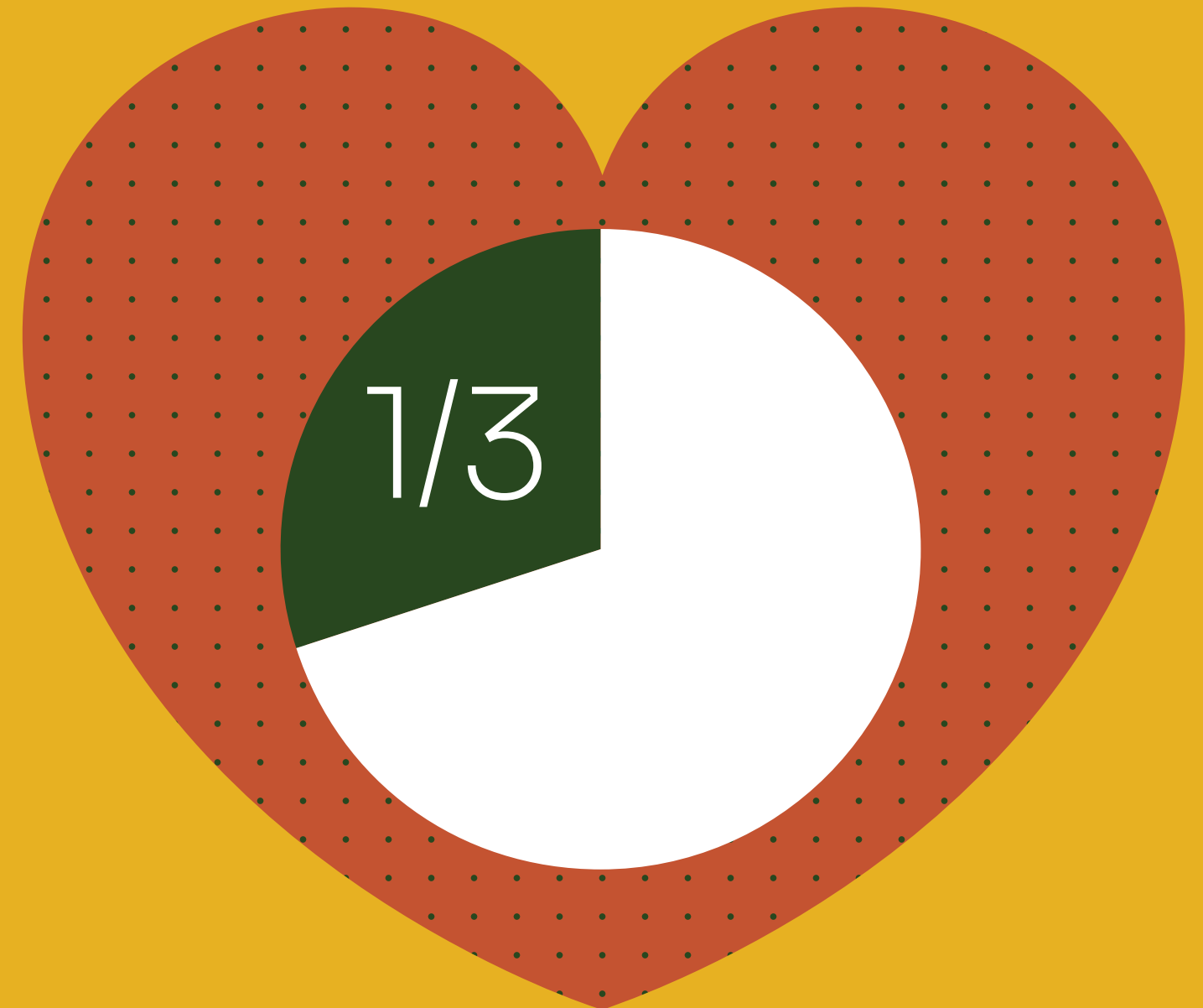
33%

of community businesses offer employment to people for whom it was their first paid job.



of community businesses offer employment for people with a disability or long-term health condition.

According to our research, a third of community businesses partner with other charities and organisations to offer volunteer opportunities for people with additional support needs, a disability and/or long-term health condition.



Rural community-owned businesses are naturally inclusive as a result of their democratic ownership structure and founding principles to benefit the wider community above that of their members.

Unlike a village church or hall, which you might visit only if you belong to a specific faith or society, a community business often serves as the sole public space open to everyone – welcoming visitors without any particular reason. It is therefore a gathering place that fosters social connections and a sense of belonging, regardless of background, age, or ability.

They evolve their services through regular consultation. Asking the question, ‘whose voice is currently missing?’, results in a diverse

offering to a diverse customer base, often responding to the needs of underrepresented or vulnerable groups.

By hiring from within their communities, community businesses offer flexible and supported employment and training opportunities for people who are often excluded from, or disadvantaged within, wider society. As a result, social and economic deprivation, and hidden needs such as poor mental health, loneliness can be addressed and improved.

“We are here to help those who feel lost find their place.”
Celia, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Community Shop, Oxfordshire

“By volunteering at the community shop, I have enriched my English language and gained actual work experience. Because of these skills I had an ability to work in M&S, Waitrose, and now I am a manager at Next.”
Olha, a refugee from Ukraine, who volunteered at Barford Village Shop, Warwickshire



Tackling community poverty and nurturing the next generation in Drylswyn, Carmarthenshire.

Located in an area where residents have some of the poorest access to services and facilities in Wales, Drylswyn Community Shop in Carmarthenshire partners with charities to provide supported work placements for people with disabilities and neurodiverse conditions. It is also an active Food Hub contributor and collection point, and has strong ties with the village school to ensure that the next generation is nurtured as part of the community shop family.



“Thank you for taking the time to read our latest Impact Report. Not only do community businesses deliver on protecting vital rural services, but they continue to place social value at the heart of what they do. It’s a simple act such as placing a chair near a till for a spontaneous cup of coffee and chat that demonstrates their commitment to being welcoming and inclusive places for all, especially to those in need of a sense of connection and belonging.

We are very proud of our impact for rural communities across the UK, which we would not be able to do without the support of philanthropic trusts and foundations, corporate partners and organisations in the placemaking sector.

Working in partnership and collaboration with others ensures the community business sector will continue to go from strength to strength, creating thriving, resilient and inclusive communities for generations to come.

We invite anyone with an interest in our work to get in touch and look forward to hearing from you.”

Harriet English,
Deputy Chief Executive

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