

Impact report 2026



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Building resilience for community businesses

2025 marked another pivotal year for Plunkett UK and the communities we support. Set against ongoing economic pressure, rising costs, and strain on local services, the community business sector has responded with growth and determination.

34 new community-owned businesses were established during the year, while those already trading deepened their commitment to expanding social, economic, and environmental impact, reinforcing their role as vital community anchors.

These achievements are not incidental. Plunkett has played a pivotal role in inspiring and guiding communities – supporting both the creation of new enterprises and the strengthening of those already in operation.

At the same time, the picture is not without challenges. While the sector has shown strong economic resilience, with just four closures recorded, we are increasingly aware of fatigue among businesses and volunteers, alongside declining optimism for the future.

Our 2025 survey found that 32% of community businesses were only just surviving and 2% considered themselves at risk of closure.

This dual reality shapes our focus moving forward. We will continue to work closely with partners and funders to access new resources, and build resilience of the sector, ensuring communities not only survive, but thrive.

This report captures both the strength and challenges of the sector – and our shared responsibility to support its future.

James Alcock

Chief Executive, Plunkett UK

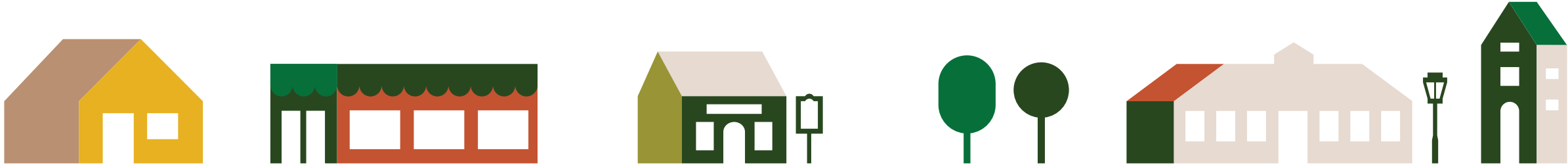
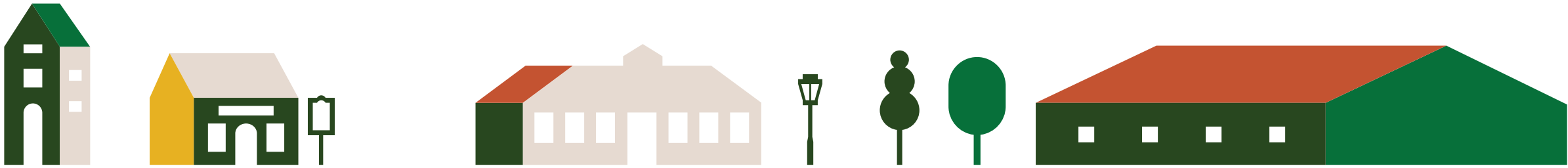


Who are we?

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.

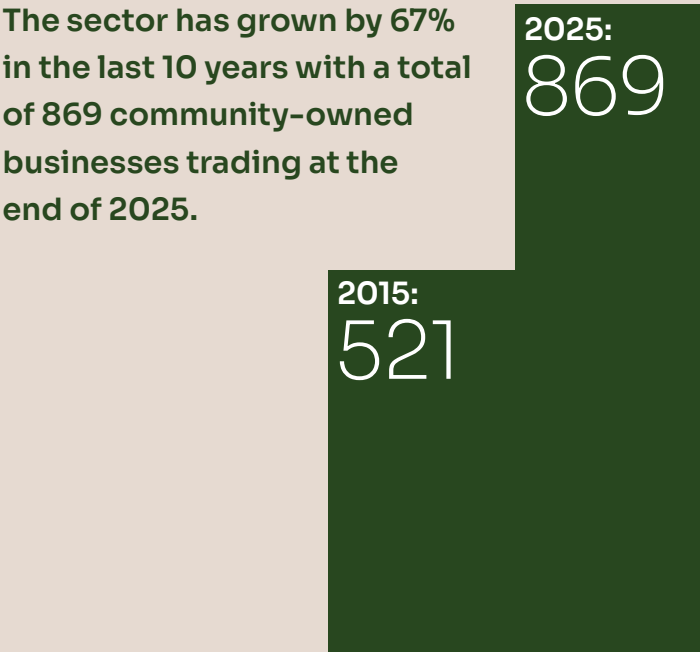
Our mission is to ensure these businesses create innovative, impactful and inclusive spaces benefiting everyone who lives and works there.



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 almost 900 community businesses to open and, with more than another 1,000 in our pipeline, and 30-40 opening each year, the sector is growing.



Our community-owned businesses include:

- 36 WOODLANDS** (represented by a large tree icon)
- 30 FARMS** (represented by a sheep icon)
- 467 SHOPS** (represented by a shopping cart icon)
- 25 CAFÉS** (represented by a coffee cup icon)

Other icons include: scissors, a person, a person at a desk, an apple, a person at a computer, a shovel, a pitchfork, a bar, a person at a bar, a tree, and two circles.

Other businesses: 22 community centres, 10 leisure and arts, 10 health and sports, 10 land trusts, 10 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 setting ownership model through proactive press, setting media and campaigns
- Provide practical support to people who are 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 2025:

- We reached an estimated total media audience of **12 million people** via 33 national and local TV, radio and print channels, including The Guardian, The Telegraph, BBC Morning Live, BBC Radio 4 and Countryfile Magazine
- We assisted **366 community groups** with community ownership advice via our accessible advice line
- We commissioned specialist business support to **200 community groups** setting up or running community businesses via our advisers
- We delivered **50 training events and webinars** benefiting a total of 1,590 attendees
- We welcomed **475 community businesses** who joined or renewed their Plunkett membership.

“Plunkett has provided expertise we simply couldn't have accessed elsewhere. They understand what makes community shops thrive.”

Michelle Davies, Donderry and Seaton Community Shop and Café, Cornwall



1,590

attendees at our training events and webinars.



Our networking training event.

12m

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

From left-right:
 Caroline Voaden MP,
 Alison Jeffers
 (Plunkett's Chair),
 Gareth Snell MP,
 James Alcock
 (Plunkett's CEO) and
 Robbie Moore MP.



From left-right:
 James Alcock
 (Plunkett's CEO) and
 Robbie Moore MP.

External Affairs

We undertake a wide range of policy and advocacy on behalf of our members, to ensure they can operate in a positive trading environment. In 2025, we responded to several government consultations; engaged with government departments in Westminster, Scotland and Wales; took part in a number of national campaigns and alliances; and met with various MPs and MSPs seeking:

- Creation of a 'Rural Community Ownership Fund' – supporting more community businesses to open and existing ones to thrive – via a provision of business support and capital and revenue funding
- Introduction of a Community Right to Buy – giving communities first right of refusal to purchase assets they value UK-wide
- A review of Business Rates and other taxation – with an aim to incentivise and reward rural community businesses for trading for 'community benefit'
- Planning reforms to embed placemaking within all new housing developments

Our representations are evidence-led and rooted in feedback from our members. In 2025, this led to the continuation of a 'rural retail' taskforce in response to mounting challenges facing community shops, bringing together 19 cross-sector leaders and insights from over 100 community retailers across the UK. The resulting report set out practical recommendations to help shops adapt and thrive, focusing on diversifying their offer, strengthening their role as community hubs, and calling for greater collaboration and support from policymakers and industry.

“Without the hard work that Plunkett UK have put into not only producing this Community Ownership report, but also reaching out to MPs, the rural voice would not be at the heart of government thinking. I would absolutely like to see rural community-owned businesses be supported both with direct support and easier access to finance.”

Robbie Moore, MP for Keighley and Ilkley and DEFRA Shadow Minister



Plunkett's support and advocacy resulted in:



172 community groups embarked on a new community ownership project.



A total pipeline of 1,004 community businesses.



46 groups registered a new community business using Plunkett's model rules for a Community Benefit Society.



Several community businesses were saved from closure resulting in a 5-year survival rate of 98% and a 20+ year survival rate of 94%.



34 new community businesses commenced 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:

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

2 Boosting the local economy.

3 Creating opportunities for employment, training and volunteering.

4 Tackling climate change.

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



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.

2,200,000

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

We estimate that 300 village shops and 200 pubs shut in 2025 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 2.2 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)

Providing connection and essential services in Gloucestershire.

As Woodcroft’s only shared facility, The Rising Sun inn is central to everyday life. Monthly coffee mornings bring together around 50 people with free refreshments and transport, helping residents feel connected again. Free live music, open-mic nights and school performances sit alongside litter picks, CPR training and flexible community space. A 20% increase in footfall has strengthened both social impact and long-term sustainability.

“It’s always a hive of activity here! There’s a group for children and young people, a monthly meet-up for people learning to speak Welsh, a walking group meets here for a cuppa, a coffee morning and a monthly quiz. People are grateful to have a warm, safe, welcoming place to come to whenever they want a bit of company or want to feel a part of something.”

Sioned Rowlands, Ty’n Llan Community Pub, North Wales



Impact 2

Boosting the local economy.

In 2025, 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:

£174m

Total reinvested into local community projects in 2025:



Rural community businesses contribute significantly to both the local and the UK economy. Their total combined turnover reached an estimated £174 million in 2025, with Gross Value Added (GVA) in the region of £458 million.

Community businesses tend to source goods and services locally, creating a circular economy in the places they exist. In 2025, 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. We estimate 34% of community-owned businesses were able to invest their surplus from 2025 to support local community action. With average profits of £5k per business, this represented a total possible investment of £1.5 million in 2025 into local communities.

With the consistently high survival rates (98% over 5 years and 94% over 20 years), 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)

Keeping it local in Yorkshire.

Bishop Wilton Community Shop prioritises local suppliers wherever possible, from daily essentials to gifts and café produce. By actively seeking local alternatives, it has helped several village-based businesses grow, with home bakers and growers expanding into larger kitchens and wider markets. Strong relationships with suppliers also help keep core food items affordable, ensuring the shop supports both livelihoods and household budgets.



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



Long-term survival rate.

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.



Rural community businesses typically engage 25 volunteers and 4 staff. That is approximately 22,000 volunteers and 3,500 staff in total.



77%

of rural community businesses support people to grow their skills and confidence as a pathway to permanent employment.



50%

of rural community businesses support people living with disabilities.



75%

In more than 75% of rural community businesses, volunteers aged 60+ make up over half of the workforce, contributing experience and commitment.



14%

of rural community businesses partner with organisations to provide opportunities for people with additional support needs, disabilities or long-term health conditions.



37%

of the rural community businesses support younger people with additional learning needs.



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 an opportunity to remain physically 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.

In more than 75% of rural community businesses, volunteers aged 60+ make up over half of the workforce, contributing significant experience and commitment. Among these, 94% reported demonstrable benefits of volunteering to the health and wellbeing of volunteers, with 44% believing it to have led to enabling some volunteers to remain living at home for longer.

“After my husband died, I had severe depression. I came to the shop and café and I can honestly say it saved my life. It gave me a focus, it gave me a purpose – you’re in the community again. You meet new people. I absolutely love it.”

Yarpole Community Shop and Café volunteer



Older volunteers at Amberley Shop and Café.



Young employees at The White Horse, Stonesfield.

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.

96%



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 more than likely be 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.



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.



Powering change in rural Hampshire.



A £24k grant-funded solar and battery system now generates **30% of its annual electricity.**

Woodgreen Community Shop and Café is taking practical, evidence-led steps to cut its environmental impact while strengthening its role at the heart of the village. LED lighting and efficient refrigeration radically cut energy use, while a £24k grant-funded solar and battery system now generates around 30% of its annual electricity. It means that during power outages, the shop and café has continued trading, with a warm, safe space for residents. Unavoidable food waste is diverted to local animal feed, strengthening relationships with landowners and cutting landfill. Wastage represents just 0.4% of turnover, well below the 2% benchmark advised by Plunkett. Data drives decisions, including replacing in-house baking with a local supplier when energy use proved too high – and this keeps sustainability transparent, community-led and built to last.

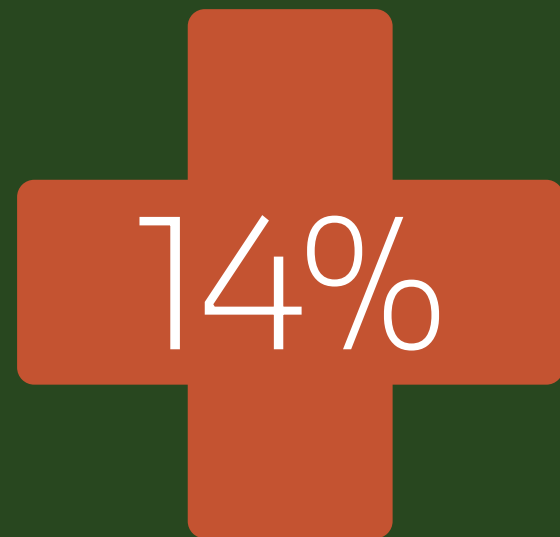


Impact 5

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

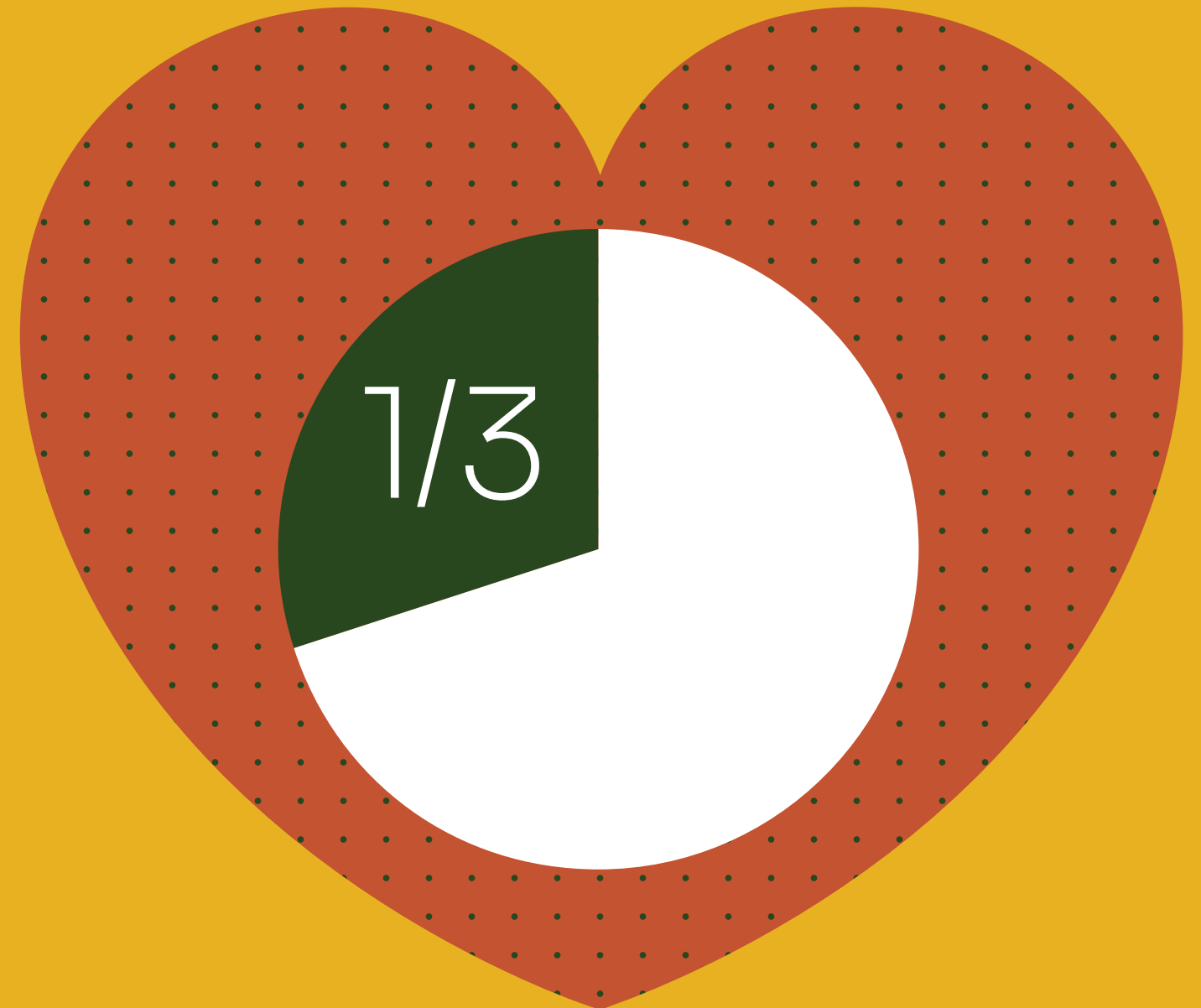
33%

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.

“Adjusting to rural Scotland from South Africa was a challenge. But it’s a real community here and people have made me feel really included and comfortable. The community spirit shines through.”

Michelle, a young employee at The Kenmuir Arms, New Luce, south west Scotland



The Maybush Inn: A safe and welcoming space.

Described by local people as “the heart of the village, physically and emotionally”, this community pub in Essex provides a trusted space for connection, celebration and support. Inclusive events such as Poems and Pints attract people who might not usually visit a pub, many living alone. As one regular says: “As a woman, I’ve never been able to walk into a pub and sit on my own. Here, at The Maybush Inn, I walked in one evening, and at every bar stool at the bar there was a woman sitting there, and they’d all come independently. This is a special place.”



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