

Older people and community-owned shops *The value of volunteering*

Final report



Funded by:

Hastoe
Group

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*Helping rural people through community ownership
to take control of the issues affecting them*
www.plunkett.co.uk



Hastoe resident Sue Norris (right) and her neighbours at a local consultation day, where plans for their community shop in Islington, Devon were welcomed readily by the community. The village action group assisted by the Plunkett Foundation are seeking to fundraise for an extension to the village hall to open the shop.

This report was prepared by a research team comprising Gill Withers and David Fisher from the Plunkett Foundation.

The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and the organisations they represent.

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Foreword

I am delighted to present this research report on the role of older people in creating and operating community-owned shops within their local communities which we commissioned from the Plunkett Foundation. Hastoe is a leading provider of rural housing, owning nearly 5,000 homes across southern England, from Cornwall to Norfolk. Though we develop homes mostly for young families in housing need, we are committed to understanding and contributing to the sustainability of the wider community. We commissioned this research in order to strengthen our understanding of the challenges and opportunities for older people living in rural communities.

The community owned shop provides an example of a service that is both used and actively shaped and run by older people. The volunteers who run the shops (75% of whom are over 50) recognise the benefits both to them and to the wider community of community-owned shops in their villages. Nearly all describe their involvement as being highly beneficial in terms of their social contacts, health and sense of belonging.

We commend the report to you and hope you will join in our journey to learn from these success stories. Being innovative is at the heart of our identity and there are some real opportunities to support this model in other rural communities including other social enterprises such as, community run pubs, community transport proposals, and training and support for setting up local businesses. We look forward to exploring these options in the future in partnership with Plunkett.

Anne McLoughlin-Flynn
Operations Director of Hastoe Housing

At the Plunkett Foundation we want to see more and more rural communities embrace the advantages of community ownership. Helping communities to take control of the services that matter to them is how we see our mission today.

We are delighted that Hastoe Housing commissioned this piece of research. This research shows clearly that community-owned shops deliver multiple benefits - to their communities and to those involved as volunteers. The older people, kindly participating in this piece of work, illustrate how people can enjoy and benefit from a service whilst at the same time gain personal satisfaction by being involved. We can learn from these success stories and strive to replicate the benefits as widely as we can.

We look forward to working in partnership with Hastoe and together improving the lives of those living in rural communities.

Peter Couchman
Chief Executive of Plunkett Foundation

Contents

	Page
1. Summary and Conclusions	5
2. Project outline	7
3. Community owned shops: Background	8
4. Methodology	11
5. Results of telephone interviews	12
6. Results of focus groups	19
7. Finally...	22
Appendices	
A: List of community owned shops	23
B: Map of community owned shops	24
C: Telephone questionnaires	25
D: Focus group format	28
E: Focus group write-ups	29



Volunteers at Thorncombe shop enjoy their cafe

1. Summary and Conclusions

The project

The purpose of this research project is to understand the role of older people in creating and operating community-owned shops within their local communities. The community owned shop is an example of a service that is both **used** and **actively developed/run** by older people. The assumption is that being an active participant yields significantly more benefits than merely being a passive recipient. This project seeks to gain a greater understanding of the role in older people's lives in the setting up and running of a community led enterprise and understand more deeply how volunteering impacts on their lives.

Methodology

The research has been carried out in the counties of Somerset and Dorset where there are 18 community-owned shops¹. The research has been obtained through a combination of telephone interviews (37) and 4 focus groups.

Key findings

The research has highlighted that older people play a very significant role in community-owned shops. On average at least 75% of all the volunteers are older people (defined as aged over 50 for this piece of research).

This research seeks to gain a deeper understanding of this volunteering from the point of view of the volunteers themselves. Does being an active participant in an enterprise yield significantly more benefits than merely being a passive recipient? If this is the case then support that encourages communities to set up and run a community-owned enterprise would deliver not only the service itself but provide a vehicle for older individuals to increase the quality of their lives through volunteering.

The key findings of this research actively support this viewpoint. The volunteers are all very grateful to have a community-owned shop in their village and recognise the benefits both to them and to the wider community. The benefits are far wider than purely "shopping" and encompass other services as well as the social and heart of the village aspects. Over and above this appreciation of the offering itself, the volunteers all recognise the tremendous benefits that they themselves, as individuals, gain by volunteering in their shop.

For this group the personal advantages of volunteering outweigh significantly any disadvantages. The over-riding impression is of individuals who gain much in terms of social contact and sense of worth through their volunteering

¹ At the time of writing in 2010 there were 18 community-owned shops. At the time of publication there are 25.

activities. This is true whether the volunteer plays a pivotal role, such as championing the set-up or chairing the management committee, or is a volunteer who does a weekly session on the till. The shop, with its myriad of tasks and roles, gives enough flexibility for each volunteer to find a role that suits them.

The research supports the view that being an active participant in an enterprise yields significantly more benefits than merely being a passive recipient. Nearly all describe their involvement as being highly beneficial in terms of their social contacts and sense of belonging. The majority also perceive at least some benefit to their sense of worth and overall health.

This research has identified the dual benefits to older people who can enjoy the service itself and gain great satisfaction by being involved in the running of it.

Conclusions and recommendations

Despite the recent success story of community-owned shops, there is much more to do. Around 90% of village shop closures are currently not prevented by community-ownership and more needs to be done to ensure that rural communities have the support to help them through every step of the process.

There are opportunities for Hastoe Housing to support rural communities through the success story of community owned shops. Community owned shops make a real impact on people's lives and address some of the disadvantages facing older people. By supporting local communities through community enterprises there are real opportunities to help them tackle the issues themselves. There is learning from the successes so far that can be mirrored and shared. Being innovative is at the heart of Hastoe's identity and there are some real opportunities to develop this model, be creative and experimental and support local communities. There are opportunities to help new communities set up and run a community owned shop so that older people can benefit from the double advantages of service and volunteering. Support could be offered in terms of funding advisory support, helping with premises or grants for set-up.

This research has also highlighted a number of areas where support for volunteers working in existing shops would be beneficial. There is a feeling from the volunteers that they would benefit from more training and that there is plenty to learn and share about improving volunteer management and the role of the committees. The importance of recruiting and keeping a sufficient pool of volunteers has also been highlighted. Some shops are better at this than others and there is some learning that could be shared.

There are also opportunities to be creative and for Hastoe to bring their own expertise to the issues of community enterprise in rural communities. This piece of research has focused on community owned shops but there are other models too such as community-owned pubs which are much less developed as a sector.

2. Project Outline

Hastoe Housing wishes to explore the best ways it can support the needs of older people in rural communities. In this research the focus looks at volunteering at community-owned shops in Somerset and Dorset. All community-owned shops rely on volunteers in the setting up and running of the enterprise. This research seeks to gain a deeper understanding of this volunteering from the point of view of the volunteers themselves. Does being an active participant in an enterprise yield significantly more benefits than merely being a passive recipient? If this is the case then support that encourages communities to set up and run a community-owned enterprise would deliver not only the service itself but provide a vehicle for older individuals to increase the quality of their lives through volunteering.

The research commenced with a telephone survey with the community-owned shops in Somerset and Dorset. This work was followed up with focus groups at four different community-owned shops across the same geographical area. The shops were selected to give a range and the volunteers taking part were also selected to offer variation in terms of involvement and experience. Older people for the purposes of this study are defined as anyone over the age of 50. The age range of participants has been from 50 to late 80's.

Before detailing the research it is worth taking time out to give some context to the project by considering the history, context and impact of community-owned shops.



3. Community owned shops: Background

Context

Community-owned village shops have been one of the recent success stories of rural community ownership in the UK. There are now (end July 2010) 247 community-owned shops in the UK with new shops opening most months². In 2009, a record 38 new community-owned shops opened. This, when compared to an estimated village shop closure rate of 400 per annum, means that a community approach is now saving 10% of village shops from closure. On 2 June 2010, a community-owned shop opened in Ambridge, the fictional home of The Archers which is the longest running radio drama in the world. Since October 2009, their 800,000 daily listeners have been taken through the process of setting up a community-owned shop. This has undoubtedly contributed to awareness of community-ownership being at an all time high.

The Plunkett Foundation is the only national organisation supporting the development of community-owned shops in the UK. Plunkett works in partnership with a range of funding and support organisations to assist communities to set up and run a successful community-owned shop. The Plunkett Foundation was founded in 1919 by Sir Horace Plunkett, a pioneer of rural co-operation in Ireland and much of the English speaking world.

Community-owned shops exist in varying forms depending on the need and resources of the community in which they are based. Some are located in former shop premises, some are based in village halls, pubs, churches, portakabins or new shop buildings, while others have found a use for previously unused or underused community buildings. There is even a community-owned shop, in the case of Lanreath in Cornwall, which is based in a former public toilet!

Over the past 25 years a very small number of these shops have closed (about 10). This is a telling statistic and proves what a flexible and resilient business model this is. The vast majority of community-owned shops rely on volunteers partially or wholly for their labour input. This provides flexibility on the operating costs and the use of volunteers also provides additional resilience as the shops are able to draw upon the energy and creativity of a whole community rather than an individual or couple.

Despite the recent success story of community-owned shops, there is much more to do. Around 90% of village shop closures are currently not prevented by community-ownership and more needs to be done to ensure that rural communities have the support to help them through every step of the process.

² At the time of publication in October 2011 there are 265 community-owned shops across the UK

History

The history of community-owned shops as we currently know them began in 1984 in the village of Halstock in Dorset. The village shop was threatened with closure and the community responded by setting up a community-owned shop, alongside a support service for other communities looking to do the same. The Village Retail Services Association (ViRSA) was born. The growth of community-owned shops was steady but accelerated as more communities saw the benefits that it brought and more communities who had been through the process were able to help. By 2000, there were 54 community-owned shops in the UK. In 2004, the Plunkett Foundation took over the activity through a merger with ViRSA and produced two reports on the sector³.

Impact

The success of village shops, in building community resilience and cohesiveness, has led to increasing policy and financial support in recent years, of which the most prominent example is the Village CORE Programme. This programme provides a targeted package of support to communities wishing to set up and run their own community owned shop. The Programme is a partnership between the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, the Plunkett Foundation and Co-operative and Community Finance (Co-op Finance) and supported by Lankelly Chase Foundation⁴. At the time of writing Esmee Fairbairn provides grants of up to £20,000 to each community, Co-op Finance provides loans of at least the grant value and the community matches this amount through fundraising, community shares and other avenues. The Plunkett Foundation provides advisory support and manages the overall programme. In return the beneficiaries show benefit to at least 50 disadvantaged residents, match fund through community fundraising and adopt a community ownership model.

Unsurprisingly, the bedrock of provision in the shops consists of groceries, with fresh produce, newspapers and local produce forming an important part of the retail mix. Importantly, some of the community-owned shops also run a Post Office (either under a sub-postmaster contract or as an outreach location). Whilst much of the range of services can be offered by either a community-owned or privately-owned shop, the propensity to offer services such as home delivery and prescription collection are indicative of their commitment to disadvantaged members of the community and the need to offer services that do not contribute to the financial bottom line.

Turnover ranges from very low levels to just under £300,000 reflecting the range of community-owned shops across the UK. Virtually all community-owned shops are profitable albeit on a small scale and rely on voluntary

³ Plunkett Foundation (2005a), *Database and Survey of Community-Owned Village Shops*, (DTI: Small Business Service; Defra).
Plunkett Foundation (2005b), *Sustainable Models of Community Retailing* (London: DTI Small Business Service; Defra).

⁴ Plunkett Foundation (2009), *Village CORE Programme Evaluation* (Woodstock: Plunkett).

labour. Any profits are reinvested in their business or donated to community causes. A typical community-owned shop has 114 members, 25 volunteers and 1.3 full-time equivalent paid staff.

Volunteer time is critical to the success of this model. It is volunteers who provide the drive and determination to set up the shop in the first place. This is often at the point when the last commercial grocery and/or post office is closing but not always. A wide range of volunteers and skills are needed at set up. It starts with those championing the project, who are often bringing skills that they use or have used in their working lives. Some volunteers get involved at a particular stage with a particular professional skill. For example this might be as an architect or lawyer. Then it is essential that there are volunteers willing to join the team and play their part - be it communicating with the village, part of the committee and all of the inevitable leg work that is required. Then once the shop opens, they nearly all rely on volunteer hours in the running of the shop itself. A typical volunteer will do a weekly session in the shop on the till, stacking shelves etc. However there are plenty of other roles that need filling and each shop can create and develop roles to match the volunteering capacity in their community. Examples include banking, doing the cleaning, book-keeping, serving in the café area, collecting stock and sorting papers.

It is time now to return to this particular piece of research.



Volunteers at the topping ceremony for Mells café extension

4. Methodology

The research has been carried out in the counties of Somerset and Dorset where at the time of writing there were 18 community-owned shops. The research has been obtained through a combination of telephone interviews (37) and 4 focus groups.

Appendix A lists the community-owned shops in Somerset and Dorset. It shows those that took part in the telephone interviews, those in the focus groups and the three shops that did not take part. All 18 shops were targeted and 15 took part

Appendix B is a map showing the locations of the community-owned shops.

Stage 1: Telephone interviews

The telephone interviews started with someone with a key management role within the enterprise (either the manager or a key individual on the management committee or championing the project). They were asked a structured set of questions (**Appendix C1**) and at the end of the interview were asked to identify two older volunteers for second stage interviews. These second stage interviews (**Appendix C2**) focused on the person's role within the shop (as both volunteer and user) and the impact this involvement has on the quality of their lives.

The answers to these questions were a mix of quantitative responses and open-ended answers with more qualitative narratives telling a story.

Stage 2: Focus Groups

A small number of shops were selected (four) and older volunteers asked to take part in a focus group.

The shops selected were Bathford, Crowcombe and Mells in Somerset and Thorncombe in Dorset. These shops were chosen in order to give a geographical spread across the research area and a range of shops with different characteristics. The volunteers were selected to ensure a representative cross section and typical community shop involvement. Criteria for selection included their role (shop volunteer, management committee, set up), age range, male/female and length of time involved with the shop. A total of 18 volunteers took part in these focus groups.

David Fisher ran the sessions. David is a very experienced adviser to community owned shops in the Somerset, Devon and Dorset area. He has worked for the Plunkett Foundation (and ViRSA before that) for over 15 years.

The format of the session and the questions asked are shown in Appendix D.

5. Results of Telephone Interviews

First stage interviews – individuals with key management role

Participants

A total of 15 people were interviewed; 9 male and 6 female. 11 of them are volunteers and the remaining 4 are paid staff (either as manager or tenant). The management roles of these individuals varied as is shown in fig 1.

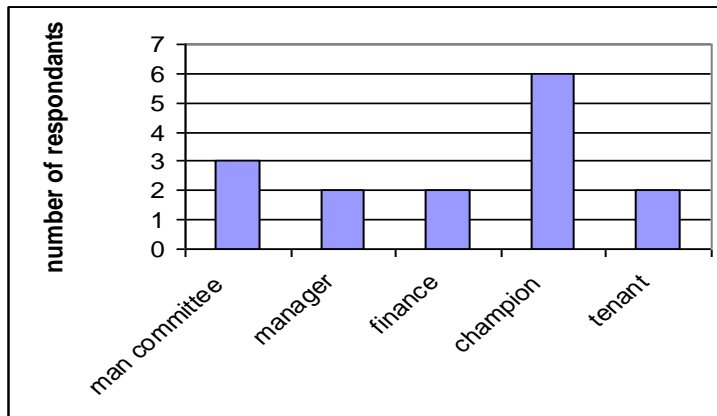


Fig 1: Primary role of respondents

Characteristics of the shops

13 (80%) of the shops use volunteer labour in the day to day running of the shop as well as on the management committee. The remaining 3 (20%) of the shops have a volunteer management committee and the shop is run by a tenant who reports to that committee. All shop start-ups relied solely on volunteer time and effort.

13 (87%) of the shops are open seven days a week. The other two are open six days a week.

Volunteering

There is a range in the number of volunteers actively involved at each shop. This is shown in Fig 2.

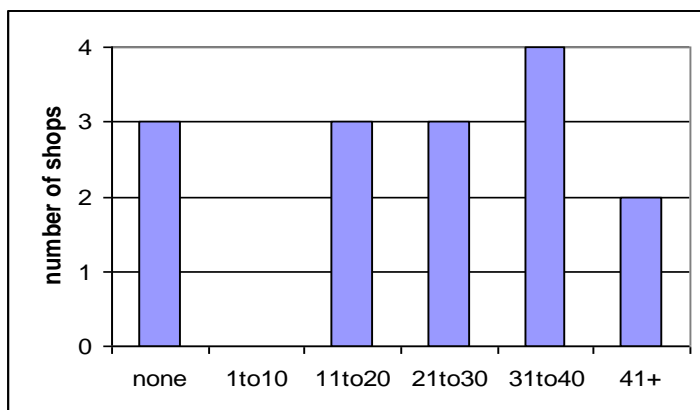


Fig 2: Numbers of volunteers involved in running each shop

Three of the shops have less than 20 volunteers involved in the running of the shop. The general feeling is that this does not give a large enough pool and there is too much pressure on those that do volunteer. At least one of the shops in this situation is actively looking to recruit more volunteers and see 25 as a good number.

75% of the remaining shops have more than 20 volunteers with the most common range being 31-40. Two shops have more than 40 volunteers regularly involved. Those with larger numbers of volunteers are able to breakdown the roles and responsibilities and find appropriate roles fitting with the capacity and commitment of the volunteer. There is some good learning from these examples that could be shared more widely.

Quotations from shop in the 41+ volunteers category

*“We have 60 volunteers in different categories with many specialist roles”
Shop champion (9A⁵)*

*“I am 84 and every evening since the shop opened (one year ago) I look after the coffee machine and sometimes in the mornings I sort the newspapers. I have lived here for 17 years and because of the shop I am meeting people I had never met before. This job is wonderful”.
Volunteer (9C)*

In terms of the age range of the volunteers in the shops, at least 50% of the volunteers are over 50 and in half of them older volunteers account for more than 70%. This illustrates that older people have a very key role in the running of the shops and has implications in terms of recruitment and turnover.

Staffing

Three (20%) of the shops employ no paid staff at all and so by definition are completely reliant on volunteers. Three (20%) employ up to 1 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) and the majority nine (60%) employ up to 2 WTE.

⁵ Individual participants have been given an unique code

In comparison to the volunteer profile the age range of paid staff is generally younger. 75% of them are under 50 and the remaining 25% are over 50. This is perhaps not a surprising statistic but does illustrate that community-owned shops can provide local paid employment for older people as well as volunteering opportunities for them.

Quotation from shop with no paid staff, all volunteers

“We have been running for sixteen years. We are open 6 mornings a week and 2 afternoons. All our volunteers (between 31 and 40) bar one are over 50”.

Impact the Shop has on the wider Community

The participants were asked to tick against a list of services and activities that take place at the shop. The results are shown below.

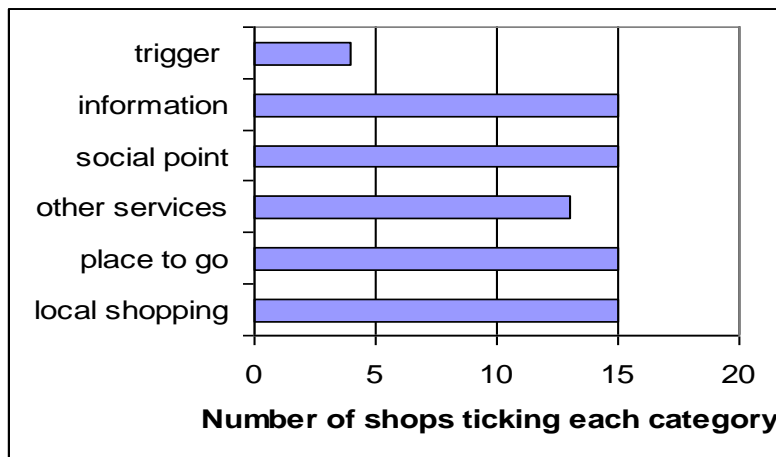


Fig 3: Impact that the shop has on the wider community

It is clear from these results that the role of the community shop is not only to provide groceries. For all of them it also has a role as an information point, a place to go and a social hub. These other roles are seen as just as important as the “shopping” role. There were numerous comments reflecting this such as “life line”, “supporting the vulnerable”, “long visits for a chat”.

The “other services” include post office, café, prescription point, access to cash, deliveries to the housebound, deliveries to other villages and recycling.

In a number of cases (4) the shop has been a trigger for other initiatives. The examples include setting up café, links with sports pavilion and better supporting those who are housebound.

“A key part of our shop ethos is to help as many people as possible stay independent. We have customers who come once or twice a day for a chat, we provide a delivery service, we have a customer with Alzheimers and manage his purchases/money for him.”

Volunteer (10A)

“The shop is co-located with the village club which is our pub too – also run by volunteers. Our whole village has been transformed”

Volunteer (3A)

Second stage interviews – with volunteers

The results of the quantitative questions are shown below. As will be seen it is clear that the participants value the volunteering they do in the shop. It is seen as highly beneficial to the individual in the vast majority of cases. This is particularly true in terms of the impact on social contact and a sense of belonging to the community.

These interviews also brought out some very personal stories. These have been captured to some extent in the quotations below. It is a way of showing the commitment and emotional importance that the individuals attach to their contribution to the running of the community-owned shop. All the quotations are referenced by their interview number and it goes without saying that these quotations remain anonymous.

Participants

A total of 22 people were interviewed; 10 male and 12 female. All of them are volunteers and customers of the shop. 16 (73%) of them use the shop several times a week and the remaining 6 (27%) use it daily.

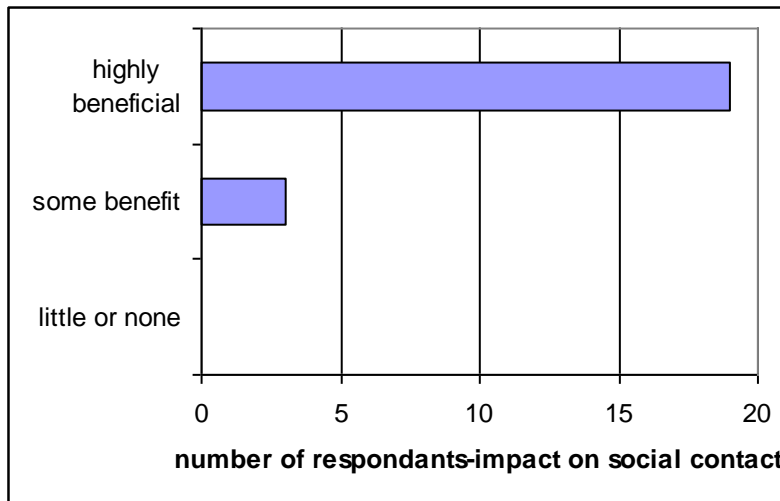
2 (9%) use it for everything, 9 (41%) use it for a good variety, and the remaining 50% use it for “run outs” and daily items such as milk, bread and fresh items.

Impact of Volunteering

This section of the questionnaire asked about the impact that volunteering (in the shop) has on the quality of their life. In the earlier responses they had highlighted the benefits that having the shop in the village meant to them. Here the focus is on the impact of volunteering itself. And it is in these answers and the individual narratives that the strength of this model really comes alive.

Social contact

20 out of the 22 respondents (91%) feel that volunteering in the shop is highly beneficial in terms of their social contact.



"I have lived in the village for 11 years. The last three have been the enlightening ones because of my involvement in the shop. I get to do far more things"

Volunteer aged 79 (5B)

"I volunteer each week and am on the cleaning rota for a regular blitz. I enjoy meeting people and keeping up to date. I have a severely disabled son and it is nice to do other things."

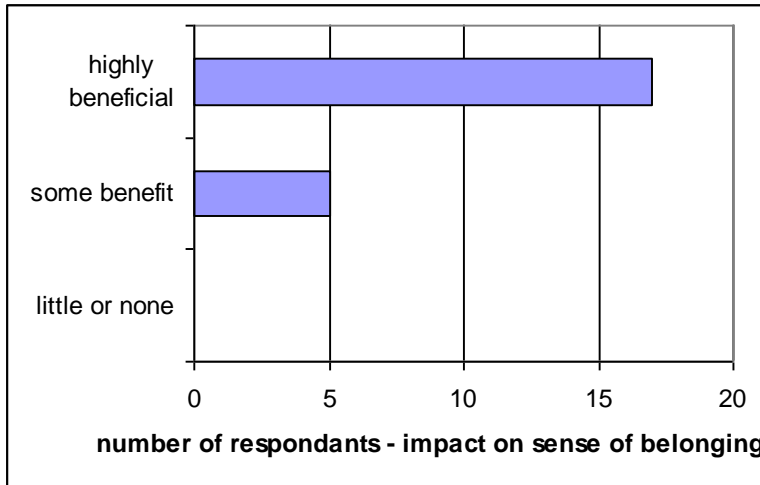
Volunteer (15C)

"I have lived here for twenty years and through volunteering at the shop even now I am meeting new people."

Volunteer (10C)

Sense of Belonging

Seventeen (77%) see as "highly beneficial" the impact of volunteering in the shop in terms of sense of belonging in their community.

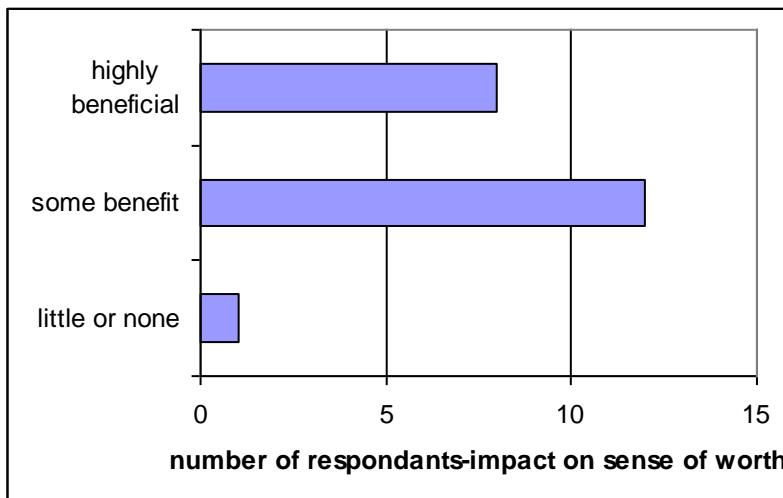


“I am in my early days of retirement and currently I gain some benefit from a sense of belonging. This will grow as I get older and I know it will be a chance to meet new people in the village”
 Volunteer ticking some benefit (3B)

I am a newcomer to the village and now do as much or as little as I can. There are no disadvantages”
 Volunteer ticking highly beneficial (10B)

Sense of Worth

Eight (36%) participants see volunteering in the shop as highly beneficial to their sense of worth. If this is extended to include those that see “some benefit” then the percentage for whom this is true is 20 (91%). For those that said it had little or no benefit then this was because they cited a range of other interests.



"I am an early riser (5.30) and I love coordinating and delivering the newspapers."

Volunteer aged 71(1B)

"The shop is a life saver for some and saves getting into the car. I like contributing to the success more than anything else".

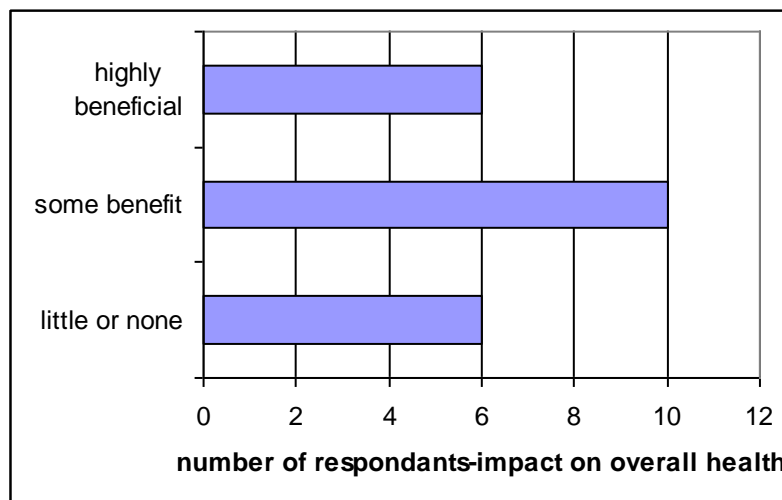
Volunteer (8C)

"Sometimes I can feel pressurised a bit but that is my problem not the shops"

Volunteer (9B)

Overall Health

The results from this question are less clear cut because of the judgement individuals placed on the definition of "overall health". For those that concentrated on the wider definition of physical and mental health then they tended to answer some or highly beneficial. For those that focused more on their physical health only then they were more likely to say "little or no" benefit.



"I can hardly walk and have had a stroke and a heart attack. Volunteering in the shop gets me out and about and realise there are others a lot worse than me"

Volunteer (7B)

6. Results of Focus Groups

The four focus groups were an opportunity for a small group of volunteers to get together and discuss the impact of volunteering in the shop and share their views. The focus groups were held at Bathford (4 volunteers), Crowcombe (5 volunteers), Mells (5 volunteers) and Thorncombe (4 volunteers). A total of 18 volunteers took part.

The discussions were very lively and stimulated much debate. The key findings from these sessions are pulled out below and the full responses for each of the four shop groups are detailed in Appendix E.

What do you like best about volunteering in the shop?

Without exception the volunteers taking part were enthusiastic about volunteering and what they gained from it. At selection we had asked for a range of individuals and specifically made a comment about including those who may have negative views. In the event there was little negative comment and the participants had many more positive views than negative ones.

In terms of what they liked best about volunteering the main themes to come through were

- Meeting people and staying in touch
- Being able to give something to the community and the sense of self worth this gave
- Recognising the important role that the shop has in creating and developing community cohesion
- The fun of being involved and helping out
- Contributing to the shop's performance and success

It was acknowledged that volunteering is particularly important once someone had retired; it serves to replace some of the elements of working life that were missed. For example - a routine, a reason for leaving home, social contact and a role with a purpose.

What do you least like about volunteering in the shop?

The responses to this question varied from "I love it", "there are no downsides" to practical reasons such as the rota and making mistakes. Those people with key roles, such as Chairperson, commented on longer hours than expected and those with responsibility for the rota highlighted this was difficult at times. However there were no negative comments about the idea of volunteering per se in the community-owned shop. This is further borne out by the responses to the later questions when it is clear that it is perceived that there are clear advantages of having a volunteer run shop rather than a private one.

Has volunteering increased your quality/enjoyment of life?

The resounding answer to this question was “yes”. This answer came out not only in answer to this particular question but was implicit in all the other answers too.

Does a shop with volunteers offer a better experience?

Overall the participants felt that a community-owned shop offered an improved offer when compared to a non-volunteer organisation. The main reasons put forward were

- **Familiar faces and friendly service.** This is particularly important to those for whom the shop represents a “place to go” and an important part of their social interaction rather than merely to purchase a few items. A number of people commented on those individuals who pop in a number of times a day for a chat or make one visit last a long time. A community-owned enterprise with its social mission as well as its trading one will take special care to look after these particular customers.
- **Encouraging sense of community and being “our” shop.** The blurring of lines between being a customer/volunteer/committee member is seen to encourage the free flow of information. This is both in terms of helping the shop to offer the most appropriate service/goods for sale and also in terms of acting as a hub for other village activities and interactions.

When asked about disadvantages the participants struggled to find many. A number commented on making mistakes and being properly trained. This is harder for a community-owned shop with its high numbers of people involved and the difficulty with continuity when many are there just once a week. Training and supporting volunteers is an area where additional support and guidance may be beneficial. The advantages were seen to far outweigh the disadvantages.

What impact has the shop had on the village?

Positive impacts are

- The community owned shop is seen as a tremendously positive asset to the village. Participants commented on its key role as a focal point, how it gives a sense of identity and cohesion, how it draws people together and how it gives a heart to the village.
- A community owned shop can survive where a commercial one fails because of its volunteer input. It can be open longer hours than would be the case without volunteers for the same reason.
- There were a number of comments about how without it the village is “dead”, is “lifeless”.

Negative impacts are

- There were few negatives.
- “Prices higher than TESCO.....! Nothing else, and this remark was offered ‘ tongue in cheek ‘.
- Products may be slightly more expensive but this is discounted by the saving on fuel use.
- Cannot think of any.

An unexpected benefit of the focus groups was that they all commented on how enjoyable it was to share experiences. They had never done it before in this semi formal way. Lots of useful information had been shared and in all cases there was something that had emerged that they felt was worth exploring further with all the volunteers.



Mells focus group: Volunteers in discussion and debate

7. Finally.....

Community-owned shops deliver multiple benefits. They combine trading with a social purpose and it is this addition of social purpose that means they achieve so much more than merely offering village shop goods. In addition to providing groceries and services such as post office and dry cleaning they are significantly contributing to the wellbeing of the village. They are an important hub for the village – a place to go and a place for chat that is accessible to everyone. The volunteering aspect of the community-owned shop adds yet another dimension. It provides an important opportunity for individuals, and older people in particular, to feel that their social contact, sense of belonging and sense of worth is enhanced by their role as volunteers in the shop. The participants in this research saw many positives of volunteering and few negatives.

Finally I would like to formally thank all those who took part in this research. They all gave their time willingly and were very happy to discuss and elaborate what volunteering in their community-owned shop means to them. Their individual responses will remain anonymous whilst the themes and answers that have been uncovered can be shared and the learning can be used to better support and encourage other communities and individuals.

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Appendix A

Community-owned shops in Somerset and Dorset

	Community - owned shop	Involvement	County
1	Bathford	Focus group	Somerset
2	Bickernoller	Telephone	Somerset
3	Briantspuddle	Didn't participate	Dorset
4	Brompton Ralph	Telephone	Somerset
5	Croscombe	Telephone	Somerset
6	Crowcombe	Focus group	Somerset
7	East Harptree	Telephone	Somerset
8	Freshford/Limpley	Telephone	Somerset
9	Halstock	Telephone	Dorset
10	Lympsham	Telephone	Somerset
11	Mells	Focus group	Somerset
12	Middlezoy	Telephone	Somerset
13	Stawley	Didn't participate	Somerset
14	Thorncombe	Focus group	Dorset
15	Wellow	Didn't participate	Somerset
16	Winsham	Telephone	Somerset
17	Witchampton	Telephone	Dorset
18	Wootton Courtenay	Telephone	Somerset

Wider community

What impact does the shop have on the wider community?

Local shopping		Information point	
Place to go		Trigger for other things	
Other services		Other	
Social point		Other	

Names and contact details of 2 older people who would be willing to talk to me

Thank you!

C2: with volunteer

Telephone Interview: older volunteers

Interview number: _____

Date:

Start time:

Total time:

Name:

Contact details:

Name of shop:

1. Role(s): How would you describe your role(s) at the shop now?

Set up champion/set up/management committee/volunteer/customer

2. Has this changed over time? If so, in what way and why?

3. Open question for qualitative narrative following previous answer

Narrative: Setting up shop/running shop/other

4. As customer how do you use the shop?

Frequency: Daily/several times week/weekly/rarely

Purchases: Nearly everything/good variety/run outs/dailies (milk,papers)

5. What impact does volunteering in the shop have on the quality of your life?

	Little or none	Some benefit	Highly beneficial
Social contact			
Sense of belonging			
Sense of worth			
Overall health			

Thank you very much for taking part

Appendix D

Focus Group Format

Purpose: Interaction between a small group of older volunteers on the benefits and disadvantages of volunteering at their community-owned shop.

- Session to last 1 hour
- 5 main questions to be asked
- 3-4 volunteers per session
- To be held at shop or nearby
- Refreshments to be provided

Format

Introduction by David Fisher (facilitator) with reminder that his role is neutral - not allowed opinions

Ask people to introduce themselves

Confirm purpose of group

After asking each main question allow few minutes for reflection and responses on cards. Then give each person a minute or so to answer the question in turn before opening out discussion.

Use cards to get quotes and arrange answers.

After each main question reflect back a summary of what heard.

Questions

First we are going to look at the **impact** of volunteering on **your** life.

1. What do you like **best** about volunteering in the shop?
2. What do you like **least** about volunteering in the shop?
3. Do you think volunteering has increased your **quality/enjoyment** of life?

Now look at the shop itself and whether having volunteers adds value to the shopping experience.

1. In what ways does a shop with volunteers offer a “**better**” experience to the customers?
2. In what ways could it be considered a **disadvantage**?

Finally going to look at the impact having a shop has had on the village

1. What is the **impact** having a shop has had on the village?
Positive impacts?
Negative impacts?

Appendix E1

Bathford volunteer focus group

Community: Bathford, BANES

Date: 12.08.2010

Location: 39, Ashley Road, Bathford, Bath, BANES. BA1 7TT.

Attending: 4. Volunteer Sessions of: 3hrspw.3-4hrspw+ short daily visit to shop, ave4-5hrspw,involved on most days checking accounts.

Background:

Of the four shops involved in the survey, Bathford is probably the most active in both turnover terms, c£240- £250K pa. and serving a population of 1800. The community is within four miles of Bath City centre and benefits from a large population of working, young couples with a substantial number of the comfortably retired. The shop, an attractive Bath stone building is at the village centre and is close to the A4 Bath – Corsham Road. A broad range of local food, quality staples, confectionery and a successful cafe etc., have contributed to the shop's survival following the Post Office's decision to shut the service.

The business is managed by a committee of eight and run by a paid manager (30hrs.pw) and assistant (10hrs) plus the contribution made by a team of 40+ volunteers. A busy, appealing atmosphere ensures a reasonably constant stream of customers. The news agency supplying 20% of turnover is run by two 'specialist' volunteers and much appreciated by the community. N.B 70% of all volunteers are 70 years of age or over.

The unanimous feeling from the volunteers is that more training is needed and a clearer mechanism established to improve communication between volunteers and the committee.

Responses:

What do you like best about volunteering in the shop ?:

Involvement with the community

Meeting people

Playing shops..!

Having fun

Keeping the brain active

Keeping a shop in the village

Knowing what's going on

Keeping an eye on residents particularly the elderly and disabled

Learning about the handling of money and generally running a small business, Making good use of my time in retirement, and keeping my mind active

Meeting people that I would not normally be able to do

Feeling valued.

What do you least like about volunteering in the shop ?:

Possibly making errors and getting confused by the till

Feeling committed and responsible when there are problems

Dealing with the local council

Awkward customers who complain a lot

Not always knowing the right procedures

There is no organised system for making suggestions and sorting of difficulties.

What ways does a shop with volunteers offer a better experience for the customer?

There are lovely committed people involved in the shop which makes shopping a pleasure

Knowing the customer

The village love "their" shop

Useful information point

Volunteer / customer relationships

Is a social centre

More customer input in choosing products to stock.

Disadvantages?

Depends on the knowledge of the volunteer

Sometimes maybe not as good as it should be

Sometimes queues form as a volunteer might be slow at the till

Volunteers can forget procedures because of working short shifts

For some customers it might matter that process is slower and the volunteer gets flustered.

What is the impact having a shop has had on the village?

Positive:

It's a focal point for so many people and so many activities

The heart of the village perhaps

Develops a community spirit

Many more people shop locally (great for the environment)

It provides a good range of stock.

Negative:

No shop – dead village

Can't think of any

Products may be slightly more expensive but this is discounted by the saving on fuel use.

Appendix E2

Mells volunteer focus group

Community: Mells, Somerset.

Date: 04.08.2010

Location: Rock Edge, Mells Green, Mells, BA11 3QR

Attending: 5. Volunteer sessions of: 1.5hrspw, 9.30-1.00 once pw,
4hrs.Saturday, 3hrspw.

Background:

Mells Village Shop and Post Office in Somerset was supported by the Village CORE Programme and the shop opened in May 2009. It followed a decision by the postmaster to scale down his involvement in the shop and to concentrate on the post office side. Instead of losing the shop, villagers formed a working party and launched a £120,000 appeal to keep it open.

Mells Village Shop & PO are developing well with turnover currently in excess of £200K per annum and a target Gross Margin of 23%. Employment costs are high with two part time and one full time employee supported by 15 volunteers. The profitability will inevitably increase once the planned conservatory café is open with direct access from the shop. Lack of volunteers is of constant concern with recruitment now aimed at the younger residents – they really need in excess of 25 dedicated volunteers to be 'comfortable' and the search is on...

Stock range and layout are excellent, complimented by a very active Post Office. The prognosis for continued expansion is good, guided as they are by a capable committee. Training is a key issue especially with the forecast of continued strong growth.

Responses:

What do you like best about volunteering in the shop ?

Opportunity on retirement to get to know more local people

Being able to give some input into the village

Enjoy having no real responsibility

Meeting the community particularly new residents to the village

I wanted to become part of the village and it's great fun to be part of the village shop

Contribute to my local community

Know all the key people in Mells and area

What do you least like about volunteering in the shop ?

As Chairman longer hours involved than expected

Lack of volunteers to cover when unable to do my time

Nothing really to dislike

More on-site training needed
Being responsible for running the volunteer rota to keep cover complete
Fear of making mistakes.

What ways does a shop with volunteers offer a better experience for the customer?

Reduces waiting time
Brings own perspective of what customers want
Familiar faces and friendly service
Encourages sense of community
Free flow of information
Older customers like to see a friendly face
Being able to help customers with new ideas

Disadvantage...?

Possible lack of product knowledge, embarrassment.

What impact has having a shop had on the village?

Positive:

Open longer hours than would be the case without volunteers
Slowly bringing the village together
Funding opportunities for village events
A focal point for the community
Great service providing what's needed

Negative:

Prices higher than TESCO.....! Nothing else, and this remark was offered 'tongue in cheek '

Appendix E3

Thorncombe volunteer focus group

Community: Thorncombe, Dorset.

Date: 02.08.2010

Location: Thorncombe Village Shop

Attending: 4: Volunteer sessions of: 2-3hrspw. 4hrspw. 2hrspw. 5.1/4hrspw

Background:

The shop and Post Office have been operating for approx. nine months, and are now doing better than 'break even'. Employment costs are currently the greatest outlay with two paid employees, a manager and manager's assistant for 20 hours per week each. The business is maintaining its very attractive appearance with a constantly improving and well ranged stock. Customer interest has not slackened and continuing promotional efforts have high priority.

Response: Please incorporate with cards A1 – D1.

What do you like best about volunteering in the shop ?

Co- operative ethos

Meeting people, getting a broader understanding of the community

Helping out

Creating social cohesion

Being involved with the shop and making it success after so much preparatory work

Creating and promoting interesting ideas to improve the shop's performance and the satisfaction there from

Responding to customer's needs and suggesting alternatives

Being involved in a community project that helps particularly older or disabled customers and the young – their first experience of using money

Having a village shop gives a community a sense of identity

What do you least like about volunteering in the shop ?

Some people may not like you knowing about their personal circumstances especially when dealing with the PO.

Embarrassment when not fully understanding how systems work – till etc.,

Difficulties with encouraging others to join the volunteer team, occasional break downs with the rota system.....

Do you think volunteering has increased your quality/enjoyment of life?

A unanimous ' yes ' even though life gets difficult sometimes particularly with in – house relationships.

What ways does a shop with volunteers offer a better experience for the customer.?

Personal service / relationships all building towards a 'together' community

Meeting and making friends

Volunteers sell the concept to other villages.....

Disadvantage...?

Cannot think of anything

Some embarrassment if you don't know what you're doing

What is the impact having a shop has had on the village?

Having a village shop gives a community a sense of identity and cohesion

It draws people together and is a great way of advertising village events

Without it the village would become nothing more than a serial dormitory

Place would be lifeless without it

Appendix E5

Crowcombe volunteer focus group

Community: Crowcombe, Somerset

Date: 09.08.2010.

Location: Lower Halsway, Crowcombe, Somerset. TA4 4BA

Attending: 5. Volunteer sessions of: 2.5hrs p.fortnight, 3.5hrspw (1 session)
2hrspw on the till, 1hrpw, 1.5hrs, one stint is ideal.

Background:

Crowcombe lies at the foot of the steep south-western slopes of the Quantocks - a small village lying off the A358 that runs between Taunton and Williton on the way to Minehead. The present population is about 500. Crowcombe Village Shop is run wholly by volunteers of which there is a reservoir of 40+. The much valued PO service is run separately with the postmaster who is also on the shop management committee. The internal relationship, volunteer on volunteer is extraordinarily good, a 'family' atmosphere, with very clear lines of responsibility and clearly defined job functions – a model for some other community shops.

Expansion plans are underway with a 'bolt on' building to the rear of the existing shop to provide a better layout and more space (the shop is in a very heavily tourist area being directly adjacent to the Quantocks). The business is working at better than break even and the trading position will improve further with the opening of the new building.

The committee are very aware of the benefit of stocking local food but are restricted by lack of space, otherwise they stock a broad range of quality staples and the whole is much valued by this community.

Responses:

What do you like best about volunteering in the shop?

Helping the village community
Meeting local people and visitors
Offering good service and feeling valued
Contributes to making life enjoyable both mine and other
It is useful work and good fun meeting people
I feel valued in the community and can keep in touch
It is good to be doing something out of the home
Contributes to the quality of life, fulfilling, togetherness

What do you least like about volunteering in the shop?

I really do feel there are no 'down sides' perhaps sometimes it can be a little boring
This is a very happy place to work – no problems
I love it.

What ways does a shop with volunteers offer a better experience for the customer?

More relaxed, enjoyable
Good to have a little chat if not too busy
The personal touch
Great service with the large number of volunteers

Disadvantage...?

We probably sound a bit smug about this but we all (volunteers) get on very well and are happy with what we do
Till work does sometimes cause problems
We all make mistakes but help each other out

What is the impact having a shop has had on the village.?:

Positive:

It's given 'heart' to the village – for a short period when there was no post office & shop the village seemed dead
Increases property prices
The business is run by an excellent committee and always has been, very important to retain the post office, an attractive place to go
I think the impact is very good for almost everyone from people who use the shop as a 'top up' to those who cannot drive and rely more on the shop
With the school, pub, church and village hall it is a very popular village, we are getting a number of young families coming to live in the village
The elderly can cope better
Brings walkers to the village
Useful information point with much used notice board outside shop, encouraging people to attend local events.

Negative:

Possibly inadequate stock levels
Difficulties sourcing local produce.