Working together to make things better

Impact and Learning
Review 2017-19
On-screen navigation tools

Click on the on-screen graphics to navigate around our report.

- Click on this icon to return to the contents page.
- Click on this icon to visit our website.
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The interactive navigation in this document works best in Acrobat Reader. Download here if required.
“If it wasn’t for the Co-op Foundation, we wouldn’t have been able to open. Thanks to their support, we’re bringing together local people and subsidising services for those most in need.”

Lynn
Director of the Grangestown United community hub.

“When you’re a young carer, you can feel no-one is caring for you. I got involved in the Lonely Not Alone campaign to help others and to build a community.”

Elorm
A young carer who is helping us all show we care about youth loneliness.

“Coming here has been a big part of my life. I’ve grown in confidence and self-esteem and I feel good knowing I’m helping children younger than me who feel alone.”

Amy
Helping young people deal with bereavement through peer-to-peer support.
Throughout this report, you’ll find stories from work we’ve supported around the UK. You can also visit threesixtygiving.org to find details of every project we’ve awarded a grant to since 2016.

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When I joined the Co-op Foundation Board in 2016, I was excited about the possibilities that lay ahead. The Foundation had been through some challenging times but was exploring how it could start a new chapter, up its game and build on its unique position as the Co-op’s charity. As a brand new Board of Trustees, we began to imagine a brighter and bolder future for the Foundation. Together with Jim Cooke, our Head of Foundation, we moved quickly to translate this ambition into a clear three-year strategy.

Each year since then, we’ve been able to look back at some fantastic achievements - from the launch of our Belong programme in 2017 to our record-breaking income year of 2018. 2019 has been no exception. Highlights from the last year have included launching our £1.6 million Space to Connect partnership to boost community spaces, and Lonely Not Alone – an exciting campaign developed with young people to help everyone show they care about youth loneliness.

But it’s when we look back at our whole journey over the past three years that I feel most proud of what the Foundation has accomplished. Back in 2016, we had identified that youth loneliness was widespread, but little understood. Since then, £6.5 million of Belong grants have helped to connect and empower thousands of young people in every part of the UK. Even more importantly, we’ve brought this issue into the spotlight, so that others, from central government to front-line youth workers and the wider public, are starting to come together to do more to tackle it.

We’ve contributed to improving more than 200 community spaces, whether through investing in an area’s ideas to develop a disused building into a sustainable venture or empowering young people to campaign for local venues to become more inclusive and accessible. We passionately believe in the power of co-operation and our co-operative values have guided everything we’ve done, demonstrating how much more can be achieved by working together.

By partnering with other grant-makers, we’ve secured more than £6.8 million in additional funding commitments to significantly extend the impact of our work. Most of all, I’m delighted that as we head towards another new chapter of the Foundation’s story, our relationship with the Co-op is stronger and more mutually beneficial than ever before.

The enormous progress we’ve made since 2017 and the support we’ve built - both from our parent business and other partners - puts us on a firm footing, not only to plan for another three years, but to create an ambitious agenda for the next decade.

This report focuses on the work we’ve done to deliver our 2017-19 strategy and the difference this has made for communities, but also highlights what we’ve learned along the way. It is this learning that will shape our new 10-year strategy, which we look forward to sharing with you in 2020. I’d like to give my heartfelt thanks to all our partners and supporters who have contributed to the Foundation’s growth and impact, and of course, to my fellow Trustees and our brilliant team, whose passion, commitment and hard work have made all these achievements possible.

January 2020
We re-launched the Co-op Foundation in 2017 with a mission to help disadvantaged communities to overcome their challenges by putting co-operative values into practice.

We aimed to stimulate and strengthen community action that would connect and empower people so they could work together to make things better. Our 2017-19 strategy set out to achieve this through three specific goals and I’m proud of the achievements we can show against each of these.

I’m also privileged to lead a talented and committed team who are constantly striving to improve the way we work and the difference we make. Throughout this report, they’ll share some of our learning from the past three years that we’ll be taking forward into our new strategy.

**Belong**

**Our goal was to champion young people’s ability to contribute positively to their communities and help strengthen their sense of belonging.**

*We said*

“We will develop a national network of projects tackling loneliness among disadvantaged young people through activities that connect them to and benefit their wider communities. This network will have a focus on collaboration and shared learning, stimulating a national conversation and strengthening local practice.”

*We did*

• Awarded more than £6.5 million of grants to 177 partners tackling youth loneliness in every UK nation and region.
• Established the Belong Collective, a national learning network for organisations tackling youth loneliness.
• Launched Lonely Not Alone, a campaign designed by young people to help their peers talk about loneliness.

**Strengthening communities**

**Our goal was to invest in disadvantaged communities’ capacity to overcome social, economic or environmental challenges.**

*We said*

“We will identify communities that are under-resourced in relation to the challenges they face, and work with them to strengthen their long-term self-reliance. We will support partnership working to develop the skills and infrastructure that make sustainable, community-led change possible.”

*We did*

• Awarded £2.2 million in grants and interest-free loans to help 33 community spaces grow their long-term income through trading activities.
• Provided early-stage support for another 66 community organisations to develop more sustainable local spaces.
• Established a co-working community of 28 Manchester-based social enterprises using technology to benefit communities.

**Championing co-operation**

**Our goal was to build our reputation as a trusted charity with a co-operative difference, uniting with others to make a sustainable impact in communities.**

*We said*

“We will work in partnership with the Co-op and other stakeholders to make effective use of our collective resources, including volunteer time and expertise as well as new income streams. We will develop a clear Foundation identity, and aspire to become a beacon of good practice, transparency and accountability.”

*We did*

• Developed funding partnerships with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the National Lottery Community Fund and Luminate.
• Raised more than £2 million through new Co-op income streams, including Membership and the Welsh carrier bag levy.
• Launched our Values in Action framework to define our co-operative difference and report on our progress.
In 2017, we launched our Belong programme, aiming to tackle youth loneliness through three goals:

• Connecting and empowering young people
• Strengthening local youth services that provide vital support and opportunities
• Starting a national conversation that breaks down the stigma of youth loneliness.

Three years ago, youth loneliness was little spoken about and poorly understood – despite research showing that under-25s feel lonely more often than any other age group.

Young people themselves were reluctant to acknowledge these feelings openly, and as a result, youth services were not being designed with loneliness in mind.

This has started to change. In 2017, we began offering grants to help youth organisations explore youth loneliness in depth and find ways to address it. Our network of Belong projects quickly grew, as we formed partnerships with other funders to expand our reach. Thanks to the support of the #iwill Fund, DCMS, and funds raised by Co-op Members and others, 18,734 young people have taken part in Belong projects so far.

Over the following pages, we explore how this work is helping young people improve their relationships, sense of belonging, confidence and skills. We’re aiming to record specific, measurable outcomes for at least 7,500 young people by 2021, when all Belong projects will be completed.

We also share how Belong is equipping youth organisations to do even more to tackle loneliness, growing their understanding and strengthening the sustainability of their work.

Finally, we look at how we’re helping young people to feel more comfortable opening up about loneliness, so they can take action to help themselves and their peers. We want young people to know that even though they may feel lonely, they’re not alone.

We’ve awarded more than £6.5million to projects tackling youth loneliness and started to build a legacy that will help all young people find ways to belong.

Thank you to Co-op Members
Between 2017 and 2019, 138,000 Co-op Members raised more than £500,000 for Belong by choosing it as their Co-op Local Community Fund local cause. Thank you for your support!
Connect  

We’re on track to reach our target for 7,500 young people to achieve measurable outcomes by March 2021.

**Connecting**

3,130 young people have more trusting relationships

2,648 young people feel valued by their community

**Empowering**

5,327 young people have improved confidence

5,033 young people have gained skills

*Based on outcomes reported by Belong partners, 2017-19*

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**CASE STUDY**

**Amy advocates to help bereaved young people belong**

We awarded Edward’s Trust a grant of almost £80,000 from the Building Connections Fund Youth strand. Funding empowers young people like Amy, 14, to support friends through group counselling sessions, and advocate to help the wider community understand the needs of bereaved young people.

Amy said: “I started coming to Edward’s Trust to meet other young people going through the same thing and it’s like a family. I’ve grown in confidence and self-esteem and I feel good knowing that I’m helping children younger than me who are going through bereavement and feel alone.”

In 2020, we’re launching a new strand of our #iwill Fund to support more young people going through bereavement, funded in partnership with Co-op Funeralcare.

"The Co-op Foundation have been outstanding leaders of the #iwill campaign. It is inspiring to see how youth voice plays such an important role in shaping the Foundation’s projects and funding decisions. Through its partnership with the #iwill Fund, they are playing a powerful role in growing the power of young people to tackle key societal challenges."

Dr Rania Marandos
Chief Executive, #iwill Campaign

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**CASE STUDY**

**Beating loneliness with music**

Students from Co-op Academy Stoke are helping younger children beat loneliness on the move to secondary school by writing songs about belonging and performing them at local primary schools.

Songs are written in music classes run by local charity, Make Some Noise, using a grant from our #iwill Fund.

Students who take part get to know each other over a full school term, developing friendships, skills and confidence. By performing the songs they’ve created to Year-Six students due to join the Academy, they build peer networks and a sense of community between year groups.

Band member Lizzie says: “It feels amazing to help people and to know that younger students will see they’re not on their own through our songs. And once they’ve moved up (to secondary school), they can join the group and start to help others, too. It’s the gift that keeps on giving.”

Our #iwill Fund will support more projects focusing on the transition to secondary school in 2020.
Strengthening youth organisations

As our Belong network grew, we regularly brought together our partners to share what they were learning about tackling youth loneliness.

We began exploring how even more youth organisations could benefit from this learning. To find out from youth workers what would help them do even more to tackle loneliness, we funded a research report by UK Youth, ‘A Place to Belong’.

In response to this research, we went on to commission two national programmes as part of our Building Connections Fund Youth strand:

- the Belong Collective, a learning network facilitated by UK Youth open to anyone with an interest in tackling youth loneliness.
- the National Youth Partnership, led by Youth Focus: North East, is creating a set of youth loneliness resources and training materials for youth workers.

A £1.4 million extension to the Building Connections Fund also supported 144 co-design projects that invited young people to suggest how local services and spaces could be improved to tackle youth loneliness more effectively.

Looking ahead, we know that sustaining the impact of this work in the long term will depend on the strength of the youth sector as a whole. In 2019, we became one of 10 original members of the National Youth Agency (NYA) Research Hub steering group, building the evidence base for the benefits of preventative youth work. We are also supporting the work of UK Youth, NYA and Step Up To Serve to shape the development of effective youth policies at a national level for the next decade.

“"It is important that professionals can share effective ways of helping young people tackle loneliness. The Co-op Foundation’s support for the National Youth Partnership means that professionals can input into the tools and resources we create, particularly helpful for smaller organisations that may struggle to access formal training.”

Steve Watson, from Youth Focus: North East, lead partner of the National Youth Partnership

“"We have brought together 80 youth organisations from around the UK to connect, collaborate and learn from each other to tackle youth loneliness through our Belong Collective. We love Co-op Foundation’s approach to working in partnership and putting young people at the heart of everything they do.”

Kayleigh Wainwright, Head of Engagement & Advocacy at UK Youth

What we learned

“We’re proud that we’ve combined grant-giving with new training and networks that will have an impact long after our funding has ended. However, we also need to improve how we communicate these fantastic new resources so as many organisations as possible can benefit.”

Alison McNulty, Co-op Foundation Impact and Learning Lead
Breaking down the stigma of youth loneliness

Loneliness can be difficult to talk about. This makes it hard for youth organisations to identify and tackle the problem.

In 2018, we committed to understanding the problem in greater depth and published our ‘All Our Emotions Are Important’ research. We found that 65% of young people saw loneliness as a problem for people their age, but less than one in five felt it was taken seriously as a social issue.

Many of our Belong partners are tackling this issue locally through a variety of methods that help young people open up about their experiences. Youthscape, in Luton, use cooking classes to build friendships and focus on the topic of ‘belonging’ in group discussions.

This decision was based on feedback from young people. Project lead, Gemma Milligan, said: “We work with some very shy young people who struggle to make friends. They said they found it hard to talk about ‘loneliness’ and opened up much more when we looked at ‘belonging’ instead.”

By 2021, we expect 25,000 young people to take part in Belong projects that are contributing to a national conversation that breaks down the stigma of youth loneliness.

In 2019, we brought together a group of young people to co-design a campaign that would help break down the stigma of youth loneliness.

The young people were all aged 11 to 22 years old and they’d all experienced loneliness at some point in their lives. They fully embraced the co-operative values of solidarity and caring for others to create Lonely Not Alone, a campaign designed to help themselves and their peers become more confident talking about loneliness, and more likely to take actions to help themselves and others.

The campaign ask was simple - wear yellow socks to show you care about youth loneliness.

We were delighted to see youth organisations, young people and adults from all over the UK get involved.

Thank you to everyone who took part and also to our partners who helped to build Lonely Not Alone. We are particularly grateful to youth co-design specialists, Effervescent, who supported the young people in the creative process, and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport who part-funded our work.

We look forward to working with young people to build this campaign in 2020 and beyond.

What we learned

“I remember how nervous I was when the young creative group first pitched the Lonely Not Alone campaign. But I was blown away by how authentic their ideas were. It proved to me that young people really are the experts on the issues that affect them, and we should put them in charge more often!”

Andy Mortimer,
Co-op Foundation Communications Manager
Our highlights 2017-19

- **Awarded £6.5m** to projects that will connect and empower young people to beat loneliness
- **Awarded £2.2m** of interest-free loans and grants to help 33 community spaces become more sustainable
- **Provided free desk space to 28** ethical enterprises that use tech to strengthen communities
- **Supported the first Charity Digital Code of Practice** to help charities improve their impact
- **We launched Lonely Not Alone** to help everyone show they care about youth loneliness by wearing yellow socks
- **We’ve leveraged £6.8m** of match-funding and grant commitments to expand our work
- **18,734 young people have participated in Belong projects UK-wide**
- **5,033 young people have gained skills through our Belong projects**
- **Supported the first Charity Digital Code of Practice**
- **138,000 Co-op Members raised more than £500,000 for Belong by choosing it as their Co-op Local Cause**
- **Supported the first Charity Digital Code of Practice**
- **Won a Better Society Award** with our long-term supporter Allan Leighton
- **Launched our Values in Action framework to guide the way we work and the difference we make**
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Since 2017, we’ve been investing in local spaces that bring people together and build co-operation.

We’ve also been helping charities and social enterprises use technology to serve their communities in new ways.

Community enterprises

Spaces for people to enjoy shared interests are key to strengthening communities.

That’s why we invest in local spaces that bring people together, helping community organisations grow their incomes so they can improve and sustain these spaces longer-term.

In 2018, we launched a programme of interest-free loans and grants to help community organisations that run spaces boost their trading activities and financial sustainability.

By supporting them to secure their own futures, we help them concentrate on the important things, like developing people’s skills and improving their wellbeing.

Over the past two years, we’ve approved interest-free loans and grants worth £2.2 million to 33 organisations across the UK.

CASE STUDY

Grangetown – a community united

We awarded the Future Regeneration of Grangetown a £50,000 interest-free loan and £30,000 grant to help build the Grangetown United community hub.

Our funding helped complete building work on the café and creche that will provide sustainable funds for the centre. We also covered running costs while the centre built-up its customer base.

More than 2,000 people passed through the doors in the first three months.

Lynn Pallister, Future Regeneration of Grangetown director, said: “Grangetown United” has allowed us to put regeneration back into the town, and give local people access to services they desperately need.It’s bringing people together again and the community sees it as their building. Everyone wants to be part of it.”

CASE STUDY

Community needs are the primary focus

Our £50,000 interest-free loan and £20,000 grant to the Oban Communities Trust is helping convert a derelict former primary school once under threat of demolition into a thriving and sustainable cultural centre.

Funding will help build a hub of activity that will give the local neighbourhood access to arts exhibitions, co-working space and children’s activities. The team will also generate income by renting out venue space.

Eleanor MacKinnon, project facilitator, said: “We are all very excited about the forthcoming few months and everyone is ready to see the start of a new era for The Rockfield Centre.”
Early support for spaces
All our investments have built on years of hard work by people dedicated to creating vibrant and sustainable assets for their community.

Inspired by their success stories, we wanted to help people in other places to take steps towards realising the potential of their community spaces.

In 2019, we launched Space to Connect, a £1.6million match-funding partnership with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to help community organisations identify, improve and protect spaces where people can connect and co-operate.

In its first year, Space to Connect supported:

- 11 community organisations to enhance a space that they were already using in an innovative and creative way
- 46 communities to explore ways that local challenges could be addressed through better use of spaces.

We also recognised that for groups managing green spaces, it can be particularly challenging to develop these spaces’ financial sustainability while protecting the benefits they bring for communities and the environment.

We funded a series of pilot support schemes for local groups in Wales, Northern Ireland and the north of England, to help them find ways of balancing these needs.

The results of this work will inform our future support for community spaces, including further Space to Connect funding and the re-launch of our investment offer in 2020.

CASE STUDY

Getting the best out of Bestwood village

In 2019, we awarded a £6,000 Space to Connect ‘Explore’ grant to help a community group in Bestwood, in the East Midlands, bring together residents and help them plan ways to repurpose a former village school as a local hub.

Community hubs are important in areas with poor access to services, like this ex-mining village. Our funding has paid for facilitators to run a series of consultation events as well as door knocks with local neighbours. The community hope to use their learning to build local volunteering opportunities and create a space that works for all.

CASE STUDY

Get ready to grow

We’re helping community groups in Northern Ireland to balance their environmental and financial sustainability through a £16,000 grant to Co-operative Alternatives.

They use this funding to provide expert financial and governance advice to local groups who are looking after green spaces.

CEO, Tiziana O’Hara, said: “Our programme is a mixture of inspirational mentoring and practical help.”

What we learned

“We’ve seen that flexible and patient funding can bring really positive outcomes for community organisations. We now need to explore how we can continue to offer groups the support they need in a way that is sustainable for us as a funder.”

Ella Smyth,
Co-op Foundation Programmes and Partnerships Advisor
Tech to benefit communities
When guided by a purpose beyond profit, technology can be a powerful force for social good.

In contrast, tech developed without strong ethical values, or accountability for its wider impact, can reflect and reinforce existing inequalities in society.

This digital double-edged sword was the starting point for our partnership with The Federation, the Co-op’s workspace for digital and social innovators in Manchester.

With funding from Luminate, since 2018 we have brought together a co-working community of 28 emerging social enterprises.

From teaching young people digital life skills to raising awareness of health and wellbeing issues through community film making, these start-ups are committed to advancing the positive uses of technology.

Each of them is receiving support to grow their social impact, financial sustainability and digital capabilities. Many have formed new collaborations with each other to create even more ambitious change.

We’ve also started a wider conversation about technology and society. We’ve hosted a diverse series of events at The Federation, from meet-ups of local grassroots activists to talks by leading international academics.

Ideas explored through our events are now turning into action. Our funding has led to the emergence of the Greater Manchester Responsible Tech Collective – a group of organisations committed to more ethical ways of using and developing technology. Our funding is also helping more civil society organisations to get involved in shaping the impacts of technology on communities.

CASE STUDY
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Working together to inspire young women into tech
InnovateHer joined our co-working community in 2018. The social enterprise aims to challenge levels of gender inequality in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) by running school programmes for girls aged 12 to 16 that teach digital skills and increase their awareness of tech careers.

With the security of a funded workspace for 18 months, they were able to focus on growing their organisation and building new partnerships to achieve their aims.

The team have collaborated with two other social enterprises based at The Federation to secure funding from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority for a digital skills programme for schools. This will inspire 10,000 young people into considering a career in STEM.

Co-founder Jo said: “We are a values-based organisation that exists to serve our community and build gender equality and we believe The Federation shares these values, too. We joined the co-working community to help us connect and grow partnerships with other social businesses. It’s a lovely family to be part of that can support each other to grow our impact.”

CASE STUDY
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Charity Digital Code of Practice
We are a founding funder of the Charity Digital Code of Practice, which aims to help charities make better use of digital to increase their impact and secure their futures.

The Code launched in November 2018 offering guidance around seven key principles of digital use, including skills, culture and leadership.

Read more at charitydigitalcode.org

What we learned
“At first, our support offer at The Federation had very formal eligibility criteria for would-be residents. This made it hard for some start-ups to join our community even though they had great potential for social impact. We reflected on that and found a way to open up our support to lots more exciting social enterprises as a result.”

Sam Freston, Co-op Foundation Programmes and Partnerships Advisor
Over the past three years, we set out to build our reputation as a trusted charity with a co-operative difference, uniting with others to make a sustainable impact in communities.

Values in Action

We launched our Values in Action framework, created with the support of Co-operatives UK, in June 2018. It set out how the way we work and the difference we make is shaped by the values that unite millions of co-ops worldwide.

CASE STUDY

Solidarity and caring for others

Our work connects people, helping build trust, empathy and a stronger sense of community.

We support the ‘Freedom’ and ‘Mentality’ projects at Off The Record: Bristol through our #iwill Fund. These empower young people who are LGBTQ+ or passionate about their mental health to co-ordinate and deliver campaigns that support their peers, and connect them to each other and the community.

As a result of their work, almost 130 young people said they felt less lonely and had built a stronger sense of community by creating resources about young people’s rights.

The difference we make

CASE STUDY

Self-help and self-responsibility

Our work empowers people, helping them develop the confidence and skills they need to achieve their potential.

Our Belong partner, KIDS, runs a ‘Secret Shopper’ programme that empowers young people with disabilities to advocate for more accessible community spaces for their peers.

This means young people like Olly, 15, can work with others and learn skills that will help him become more independent in the future.

Olly said: “I’ve made friends, I feel more confident and I’m making a difference.”

Project workers from KIDS said the 20 young people involved have become more confident going to new places and developed social skills that have helped to build friendships.
The way we work

Honesty and openness

We’re committed to:
• Telling stories from our work that champion the co-operative difference.
• Sharing our plans, celebrating success and being open about where we think we can do better.
• Clearly and simply explaining what we do and why.

We publish all our grants on the online platform, 360giving. This open data platform enables more transparency and better decision-making in grant giving across the sector.

Read more at threesixtygiving.org

Democracy

We’re committed to:
• Listening to the communities we serve, and helping them have a stronger say over what matters to them.
• Widening participation in community action, so that it is representative of the whole community.
• Involving all our stakeholders so they can contribute to shaping our work on an equal basis.

We launched our Youth Advisory Group in 2019, facilitated by our partner Youth Focus: North West.

Jill Wells, our Programmes and Partnerships Manager, said: “Our Youth Advisory Group gives young people a voice across our whole funding cycle, from planning to grant assessments. Their input will ensure our decision making is youth-informed for the best outcomes for their peers.”

We’re also widening participation in community action by supporting the Young Trustees Movement that aims to double the number of trustees aged 30 and under on charity boards by 2024.

Equality and equity

We’re committed to:
• Sharing our resources fairly to support communities in all parts of the UK.
• Giving extra help to communities that are facing the biggest challenges.
• Making sure everyone, whatever their background, can access opportunities and have their voices heard.

In 2019, we extended our diversity survey across all our partners. As well as asking about who their projects supported, we started to explore how representative their leadership was of their communities.

A total of 103 partners took part. We found that:
• 13% of our partners’ work is mainly or partly targeted at people with a specific ethnic background.
• 19% mainly or partly target a specific gender.
• 29% mainly or partly target people with a disability or health condition.
• 6% mainly or partly target people with specific sexual orientations or gender identities.
• 46% do not target based on demographics (other than youth projects working with particular age groups).

Social responsibility

We’re committed to:
• Putting ethics and values at the heart of our decisions - from how we raise our funds to how we spend them.
• Making the most of our resources, and encouraging others to contribute what they can towards shared goals.
• Balancing risks and opportunities to maximise our impact.

We’re using money raised from the sale of single use plastic carrier bags in Welsh Co-op stores to help green spaces across Wales to become more sustainable - a great example of how environmental and social impact can go hand-in-hand.

We’ve awarded almost £280,000 to date to support 12 organisations, including Green Squirrel, near Cardiff.

Our £10,000 grant is helping Green Squirrel to turn under-utilised brownfield land previously blighted by anti-social behaviour into a green oasis with a workshop and training space.

Becca Clark, of Green Squirrel, said: “We have been shown to be among the most deprived areas of Wales, yet, we know that our community has the skills, generosity and motivation to make this project a success.”
Uniting with others
Bringing together resources and expertise from the Co-op and other partners helps us achieve far more than we ever could alone.

Since 2017, we’ve deepened how we collaborate with the Co-op towards our shared objective of stronger communities. We’ve also formed new partnerships with other grant-makers to extend the scale and influence of our work.

The impact of our Belong programme was boosted by the Co-op’s campaigning to tackle loneliness. This wider work raised public awareness of how loneliness affects people of all ages and drove commitment to policy action. The Foundation’s work, which includes our continuing partnership with Government on some of the key commitments from its loneliness strategy, will form a major part of the legacy of the Co-op’s campaign.

As we increased our focus on community spaces during 2019, we integrated this with a new Co-op campaign, Endangered Spaces, which aims to protect, support and improve 2,000 at-risk spaces by 2022. Through our interest-free loans, our Space to Connect grants, our support for green spaces and our youth advocacy work, the Foundation has already supported more than 200 spaces, and we plan to build on this over the next three years.

Another shared space that is the product of collaboration is The Federation - a Co-op building where our community of social enterprises is based, supported by a grant from Luminate. This partnership sees businesses, charities and social enterprises working together with a shared ethical agenda to increase the positive impact of technology on people’s lives and communities.

What we learned
“Over the past three years, we’ve explored which aspects of our volunteering offer were most effective in developing communities’ own skills. We’ll reflect on everything we’ve learned as we develop new plans to support organisations that best understand and represent the communities they serve.”

Jill Wells, Co-op Foundation Programmes and Partnerships Manager

“Congratulations to the Co-op Foundation for everything you’ve achieved over the past three years. Your work has shone a light on the issues faced by lonely young people and communities and helped to provide long-lasting solutions. We look forward to seeing the impact of our Building Connections Fund and Space to Connect partnerships, and working together on future collaborations that tackle inequality.”

David Knott, Director of the Office for Civil Society

“When we launched our Co-operate 2022 plan last year, it was clear that by working with the Foundation we could make an even bigger difference on the things that matter to our communities. Through its partnerships with government and others, the Foundation is not only extending the reach of our Co-op, but is truly putting co-operation into practice.”

Rebecca Birkbeck, Director of Community & Shared Value, Co-op
Our focus on developing strategic partnerships resulted in great success in growing our income.

This was achieved both by diversifying the sources of funding we accessed through our relationship with the Co-op and by securing grants from other major partners.

2018 was a record year for income, in part because of a lump sum payment received from Co-op’s carrier bag levy in Wales, which we will spend over several years. Other Co-op sources included donations from Group Chair Allan Leighton, the Local Community Fund, clothing donations collected at stores and a variety of colleague fundraising activities.

This generosity - together with the support of our partners at DCMS, the #iwill Fund and Luminate - allowed us to significantly scale up our programmes over the course of our three-year strategy.

CASE STUDY
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Colleagues building wellbeing and stronger communities

Getting fit and healthy is even more rewarding when you can do it for a good cause. And thanks to Nuffield Health, Co-op colleagues raised £1,000 by taking part in spin classes and a 12-hour fitness marathon at Co-op’s Support Centre in Manchester. Thank you to everyone who got involved!

CASE STUDY
–
Award winning

Congratulations to Co-op Chair Allan Leighton, who won a Better Society Award for philanthropy in recognition of his work with the Foundation.

Allan donates 100% of his Director’s fee to help fund our work. We’re extremely grateful for his ongoing support and his belief in what we do.

“I’ve always been passionate about the Foundation, but its growth and achievements over the past three years have been particularly impressive. I’m delighted to see the huge impact this has had for young people and communities, and how our Co-op is working hand-in-hand with its charity to make an even bigger difference.”

Allan Leighton, Co-op Chair

CASE STUDY
–
Making your unwanted clothes go further

Our partnership with Co-op’s Property team has seen the public raise more than £1.9 million for the Foundation since 2017 by donating unwanted clothes and shoes to official textile banks at Co-op food stores. Thank you to everyone who has given so far, and to the Salvation Army, which also participates in the scheme.

* 2019 figures are unaudited and may be subject to adjustments. Our full audited accounts for 2019 will be available on the Charity Commission website when finalised.
† includes direct Co-op funding and donations from members, customers and colleagues.
‡ includes social investment.
We’re proud of what we’ve achieved with our partners since 2017. We’ll use our learning to continue to build on this work over the next three years, but we’re also setting our sights on how we strengthen communities for the longer term.

In April 2020, we’ll launch a new 10-year strategy, setting a clear, overarching purpose and direction for everything we do. This strategy will be supported by a three-year plan, refocusing our current programmes and developing new areas of work that will contribute to our long-term goals. This plan will focus on the following priorities, which some of our recent projects have already started to lay the groundwork for.

**Changing perceptions and influencing practice to leave a legacy that helps all young people beat loneliness**

From our partnership work with Government to the resources we’re developing for front-line youth workers, our impact on tackling young people’s loneliness will extend far beyond the individual projects we fund.

Our youth-led Lonely Not Alone campaign has also started to engage with young people directly, helping to change how they view and respond to the issue of loneliness.

In 2020-22, influencing others will become an even more important focus of our work, as we draw out, share and embed the learning from Belong to create lasting change for young people.

**Improving communities’ wellbeing, skills and spaces, bringing together resources from the Co-op and others to make collaborative funding the norm**

As the Co-op’s charity, we’re fortunate to work alongside a business with a genuine commitment to communities, based on the co-operative values we also share. Our 2017-19 achievements have shown that we’re at our best when working together with Co-op colleagues and members, drawing on all our strengths and resources.

This includes building on the Foundation’s track record of collaborating with other funders to make Co-op’s support for our work go further. We’ve already extended our partnership with the #iwill Fund until 2022, to support young people’s wellbeing, develop their skills and improve community spaces - priorities we share with the Co-op.

**Building communities’ long-term capacity to reduce inequality and amplifying under-represented voices through collective action**

Throughout 2017-19, our focus on disadvantaged communities responded to the inequalities that persist in society. As we start to work towards a 10-year horizon, we will increase our focus on empowering communities to challenge the long-term causes of inequality and exclusion they face.

The voices of people with first-hand experience of social issues will be central to this, building on our past support for co-research and co-design with young people to explore and address youth loneliness. We’ll also join wider collective efforts to increase diverse representation in civil society, like the Young Trustees Movement whose launch we supported in 2019.

We’re proud of what we’ve achieved with our partners since 2017. We’ll use our learning to continue to build on this work over the next three years, but we’re also setting our sights on how we strengthen communities for the longer term.
Co-op Foundation is a working name of Co-operative Community Investment Foundation, a charity registered in England and Wales (1093028) and Scotland (SC048102).

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