



power to  
**change**

business in  
community  
hands

# Valuing the contribution of volunteers

to community businesses supported  
by the Community Business Fund



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction to the paper

There is extensive existing literature on the role and value of volunteers in the charity sector and on the value of volunteering to volunteers themselves.<sup>1</sup> However, less is known about the value of volunteers to community businesses, their role in the business model, and how it impacts the profitability and sustainability of different types of businesses.<sup>2</sup> In February 2020, Power to Change commissioned a piece of research with the objective of applying a methodology developed for Nesta to the community business sector, to develop initial estimates of the value of volunteering in community businesses.<sup>3</sup> To build on this piece of work, Renaisi and MyCake were funded by Power to Change to add depth to what is already known about volunteers in community businesses by researching organisations supported by the Community Business Fund (CBF). The project began in August 2020 and the research ended in April 2021.

## 1.2 Background to the study

We know that the community business sector relies upon, and attracts, a significant number of volunteers, with pre-pandemic levels at around 205,600 in 2019.<sup>4</sup> The average ratio of volunteers to staff in community businesses is 4:1, although this varies across sectors.<sup>5</sup> Many of these volunteers provide essential support to the community businesses: recent research on the financial sustainability of community-owned assets found that 25 per cent of respondents cited ‘not being able to recruit a full volunteer base’ as a factor negatively affecting their financial health over the past three years – more than double the number of those who cited ‘not being able to recruit a full staff complement’.<sup>6</sup> Data from Twine (Power to Change’s data tool for community businesses) has provided indications of the type of roles that volunteers fulfil and the number of hours they provide, although the number of community businesses providing data is limited.

- 1 e.g. NCVO’s extensive research outputs: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/policy-and-research/volunteering-policy>.
- 2 Given this, Power to Change also ran a themed open call for research around volunteering in community business, in January 2020, publishing: Higon et al. (2021) [The role of volunteers in community businesses](#), London: Power to Change, in June 2021. Further research on the meaning, practice and management of volunteering in community business, conducted by CRESR, is also forthcoming.
- 3 Nicol Economics (June 2020) [Assessing the value of volunteers in community businesses](#) (A report prepared for Power to Change).
- 4 Higon, J. et al. (2019) *The Community Business Market in 2019*, London: Power to Change. This has fallen to 148,700 in the Community Business Market in 2020, partly as a result of the pandemic but also due to improved secondary data on village halls.
- 5 Miller, S. *Time for Change: The importance of volunteers for community businesses* (unpublished).
- 6 Archer et al. (2019) *Our assets, our future: The economics, outcomes and sustainability of assets in community ownership*, London: Power to Change.

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Renaisi and MyCake's ongoing evaluation of the CBF has raised some important questions about the role and value of volunteers to community businesses.<sup>7</sup> We know many provide vital support to the community businesses – but we also know that managing and deploying them well comes with a cost. Our evaluation is evidencing how community businesses impact on their volunteers; however we are less able to demonstrate how volunteers impact on community businesses. This is because we lack detailed data on what roles volunteers fulfil, the value to the community businesses of those roles, and the link between volunteers and the business model.

This matters, because:

- understanding the value of volunteers to the business model is essential to **understanding the profitability and sustainability** of the community business overall
- this, in turn, is essential to understanding the impact of the CBF on its grantees via the effect (if any) of the grant on volunteer labour
- our research to date suggests that community businesses would benefit from **practical advice and guidance** on how to manage and deploy volunteers well, and to see this as part of strategic business planning.

### 1.3 Research questions

In our original proposal for this piece of work, we set out to answer the following question: **'What is the value of volunteers in business-focused roles to CBF grantees?'** More specifically, we wanted to explore:

- What types of roles do volunteers fulfil in CBF grantees? How prevalent are those roles? Are there any trends across different types of businesses?
- What value do volunteers in different roles contribute to the business model, and what is the cost of supporting those volunteers? Does this differ across sectors?
- Can we identify the 'hidden' value and costs of the volunteer workforce in community businesses' profit and loss accounts, to draw conclusions about the value of these volunteers to businesses' financial profitability and sustainability?
- What advice and guidance can we offer community businesses to help them best utilise their volunteer resource to improve business sustainability, in the context of their particular sector, maturity and business aims?

7 Litchfield et al. (forthcoming 2021) Power to Change Community Business Fund, Trade Up, Bright Ideas evaluation report, London: Power to Change.

## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the UK after these research questions were agreed. We therefore adjusted the questions to take account of the fact that the research took place during the crisis, adding a COVID-19 lens:

- ◆ What is the impact of COVID-19 on the value of volunteers, the types of roles they fulfil and the cost of supporting them? Are there any differences comparing before COVID-19 with now? Are changes expected in the future and, if so, what might this change look like?

As detailed in the limitations section (1.6), the scale and scope of this research evolved over the course of the project, primarily due to ongoing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The research was narrowed to focus on the following key questions:

- ◆ What types of roles do volunteers fulfil in CBF grantees? How prevalent are those roles? Are there any trends across different types of businesses?
- ◆ Why do community businesses decide to engage with volunteers and what determines if a role is fulfilled by a volunteer or a staff member?
- ◆ Can we identify the types of value brought to community businesses by their volunteer workforce?
- ◆ What investments do community businesses make in order to sustain a volunteer offer? i.e. what are the costs of engaging volunteers?

## 1.4 Methodology

The research is a mixed-methods study drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data, as well as community businesses' financial accounts. This included:

- ◆ A **rapid literature review** looking at the landscape of current research on the value of volunteers.
- ◆ **Engaging a total of 28 community businesses**, which included an **online survey** and a follow-up semi-structured telephone interview with members of the research team from Renaisi and MyCake. These interviews took place between December 2020 and February 2021.
- ◆ A **review of community businesses' financial accounts** to understand how volunteering fits within the wider business model.

The online survey focused on factual questions about, for example, how many volunteers and paid staff the community businesses have, how many people manage volunteers and the demographics of their volunteers. All questions were asked using a pre- and during-COVID-19 lens. The purpose of the interviews was to further understand the data shared by respondents in the survey, and to explore

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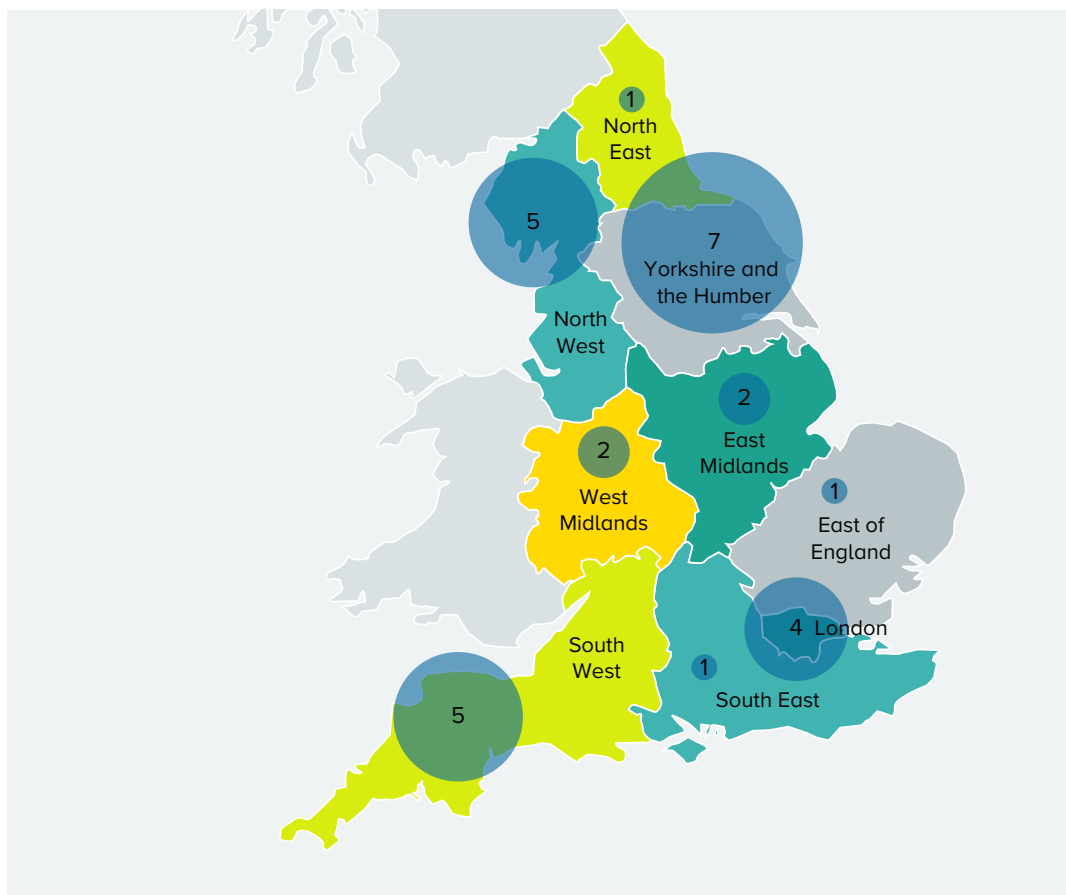
more qualitative responses about the value of volunteers to their community businesses. The questions included in the online survey and telephone interview can be found in the Appendices.

We have used quotes throughout the main body of the report (Sections 2–4) to illustrate or elaborate on some of the key findings. Unless otherwise attributed, these are all from CBF grantees who participated in the research.

### 1.5 The sample of community businesses that took part in the research

Our original sample consisted of 61 community businesses funded by the CBF. We aimed to include a spread of community businesses in our sample based on the following characteristics: primary sector, region, size, legal structure and funding round.

**Figure 1: Map of CBF community businesses that took part in the research, by region.**




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However, due to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic only 28 community businesses from our original sample engaged in this research.

The tables that follow provide an overview of the community businesses that took part by sector, annual income, Indices of Multiple Deprivation decile (2019), legal structure and value of assets.

**Table 1: Community business sample by primary sector**


 Primary sector	Percentage of sample	No. of community businesses	Percentage of all CBF grantees	No. of all CBF grantees
Art centre/facility	4%	1	5%	8
Community hubs, facility or space	54%	15	43%	73
Community pubs, shops or café	7%	2	11%	19
Employment, training, business support or education	14%	4	9%	16
Health, care or wellbeing	4%	1	7%	12
Sport and leisure	4%	1	6%	11
Transport	4%	1	5%	9
Visitor facility or tourism	4%	1	1%	2
Other	7%	2	3%	5

**Table 2: Community business sample by annual income**


 Size	Percentage of sample	No. of community businesses	Percentage of all CBF grantees	No. of all CBF grantees
£0	4%	1	1%	2
£0–100,000	25%	7	25%	43
£100,000–250,000	21%	6	29%	50
£250,000–500,000	14%	4	18%	31
£500,000–£880,000	25%	7	14%	24
£880,000–£1.6 million	11%	3	12%	21

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**Table 3: Community business sample by Multiple Deprivation Index (2019)**

 Multiple deprivation index	Percentage of sample	No. of community businesses	Percentage of all CBF grantees	No. of all CBF grantees
IMD 1–3	75%	21	76%	132
IMD 4–6	21%	6	19%	34
IMD 7–10	4%	1	3%	5

**Table 4: Community business sample by legal structure**

 Legal structure	Percentage of sample	No. of community businesses	Percentage of all CBF grantees	No. of all CBF grantees
Community benefit society	7%	2	13%	22
Company limited by guarantee	64%	18	46%	79
Co-operative society	12%	4	2%	4
Charitable incorporated organisation	4%	1	16%	27
Community interest company limited by shares	4%	1	1%	1
Other	4%	1	4%	7

**Table 5: Community business sample by value of asset**

 Value of asset	Percentage of sample	No. of community businesses	Percentage of all CBF grantees	No. of all CBF grantees
Zero/no assets	4%	1	6%	10
Less than £50,000	36%	10	29%	17
£50,000 - £250,000	18%	5	25%	42
£500,000 - £1,000,000	29%	8	25%	42
£1,500,000+	14%	4	15%	25



## 1.6 Limitations

At the same time as conducting this research, Power to Change had commissioned several research and evaluation projects which involved engaging with CBF grantees. It was important for Power to Change and the research team that community businesses did not experience research fatigue by being asked to participate in too many projects. To ensure this, the pool of community businesses from which we could take a sample was limited to those who had little, or no, involvement with other research projects. Despite this, the tables above show that the sample of community businesses used in this project is relatively representative of the wider cohort, with the exception of legal structure (Table 4) which shows that companies limited by guarantee are over-represented and co-operative societies are under-represented in our sample.

The number of community businesses participating in this research was smaller than our original desired sample size. Involvement was optional and, despite using an incentive to encourage involvement, not all community businesses chose to take part.<sup>8</sup> A smaller sample size means that it is difficult to draw strong conclusions around differences in the value of volunteers between types of community businesses, for example by sector, age or geographic location. However, we were able to understand each individual community business' circumstances in greater depth than would have been possible otherwise.

Our initial selection of CBF grantees excluded organisations which do not publish their annual profit and loss data, as without this it is hard to contextualise the value of volunteering within an organisation's business model. Due to the restrictions described, the final sample included some organisations whose public financial data is limited to a balance sheet. This has had an impact on the level of financial analysis which has been possible.

Although we have endeavoured to capture detailed and accurate data from each community business, in many cases we found that community businesses did not collect records of their volunteering figures and many participants struggled to provide accurate figures. Where there are discrepancies between figures provided in the online survey and telephone interviews, we have chosen to use those provided in interviews where the interviewee was able to provide us with more explanation and context.

8 The incentive was a £75 payment for engaging with the online survey and follow-up telephone interview.

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## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

This section explores the reasons why community businesses funded by CBF engage volunteers; the types of volunteer roles community businesses offer; the number of volunteers they engage, and the time that volunteers contribute; as well as volunteer demographics.

### 2.1 Why community businesses engage volunteers

Community businesses supported by the CBF engage volunteers for a variety of key reasons. Most community businesses do so for a combination of these reasons, rather than just one:

- To support with the running and maintenance of an asset
- To provide core business operations and service delivery
- Because volunteering is part of the community business' ethos, vision and values
- Volunteers help the community businesses contribute to social impact
- To increase capacity when needed
- Volunteers help to improve the quality of service.

#### **Running and maintaining an asset**

Community businesses with a large asset were likely to engage volunteers in its running and maintenance. This is because some assets can be costly and resource-intensive to maintain, irrespective of the income (grant or earned) which can be derived from the asset, thus increasing the need for volunteer labour. For example, one community business must fulfil annual requirements to maintain their garden as part of their 125-year lease, and they engage volunteers to help. In addition to maintaining outdoor spaces, community businesses also need volunteers to help with running certain aspects of their asset including welcoming visitors as reception staff or operating a community shop. This need arises because the community businesses wish to charge prices that are accessible to members of their community who could not afford to pay market rate for goods and services. The use of volunteer labour thus reduces the cost of maintaining assets and delivering services which in turn enables a lower price to be charged.

As well as providing much-needed labour, these volunteering roles also increase the sense of community ownership because volunteers who contribute to the upkeep and running of the community business' asset were more likely to value it as 'theirs'.

## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

**“ Our park which is our founding project, needs a lot of maintenance. We have year on year requirements to raise every beam to do that, with 125-year lease, and we’re responsible for the grass-cutting for all that time. So, volunteers coming into the park [and working on the landscape], we can animate the space. We can make people feel a sense of ownership of that space, it’s theirs, they’ve done the work on it and they’re therefore more likely to value it.**

### **Core business operations and service delivery**

Community businesses that tend to engage volunteers as a core part of their business operations or to support with delivering services, did so for three main reasons:

**01. Charities experiencing ‘underfunding’:** these community businesses, typically charities, use volunteers to deliver projects or services, where project funding does not cover the cost of hiring enough employees to deliver to the best standard.

**“ When we get funding, we’re not always able to do everything within the project budget ... So, we have to bring in the community to help us**

**02. As an investment towards increasing income from trading:** community businesses trying to move away from grant dependence and generate more income through trading activity use volunteers to increase their capacity to deliver while keeping costs low.

**“ We’re trying to run a business. And we’re trying to make it cover its costs, independent of grants ... I want an employee team who are there earning their keep and acting to deliver that business plan ... the part of that business plan that is for developing a meaningful response to community development creates opportunities to volunteer, so people that we can’t pay can come and interact.**

**03. To underpin the viability of the business:** some community businesses simply cannot afford to employ staff to deliver core functions and, without volunteers, the business would not be viable. One example is a community shop in a rural village, which cannot bring in sufficient profit to run the shop on a commercial basis, so the use of volunteers allows the shop to at least break even.

**“ It was difficult to explain the reason for [having volunteers]. A commercially run shop would not be viable in this village because you wouldn’t have enough profit margin.**

## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

### Part of their ethos, vision and values

Some community businesses choose to engage volunteers because the values associated with volunteering are core to their ethos as an organisation. There are two discrete reasons that drive these principles: community businesses want to provide for their community and community businesses want to be part of their community.

- ◆ **Providing for their community:** Community businesses provide opportunities for people to develop their skills, increase their confidence, gain qualifications and improve their wellbeing by empowering communities to engage and build relationships with each other. Volunteering is a key part of this provision. In turn, the community business also benefits from offering volunteer roles because volunteers make an important contribution to the running of the organisation.

“ We are firm believers in that volunteering [is] part of a process that [benefits the community] ... For us it is about helping people develop their skills, confidence and attributes so that they can be helped to be moved on to becoming part-time working, or gain professional qualifications and then utilise that experience to gain a paid job, if that is what they are seeking.

- ◆ **Being part of the community:** For some community businesses, engaging volunteers is an essential part of demonstrating who they are as an organisation and a signal that they are part of the community. Community businesses expressed that volunteering allows people to better connect to their community and creates strong personal bonds and relationships. Providing opportunities to volunteer therefore helps towards sustainable community building, strengthening a sense of community and promoting inclusion. These informal relationships can help to build trust and contribute to the generation of soft outcomes for volunteers, such as confidence and leadership skills, that enable community development to be owned and sustained at the local level.<sup>9</sup> This in turn helps some community businesses to fulfil their charitable purpose, such as to promote the community’s heritage and culture or to provide facilities that improve the local environment.

9 Institute of Development Studies and VSO (2015) Valuing volunteering: The role of volunteering in sustainable development.

## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

### Part of their social impact

Another, related reason that community businesses engage volunteers is that it contributes to their social impact. Renaisi's evaluation of the CBF for Power to Change outlined the ways in which community businesses impact on people and place, including reducing social isolation, improving health and wellbeing, increasing employability and creating better access to services for their staff and volunteers, as well as their beneficiaries, customers and members.<sup>10</sup> Engaging volunteers helps in two ways: volunteers help the community businesses to benefit others, but also experience benefits themselves.

One significant social impact for volunteers is the opportunity to upskill and access paid employment. For example, experienced volunteers are often recruited to take on paid employment within community businesses.

**“ It’s part of the mission of the charity. We are improving health and wellbeing [by improving] individual’s skills or [bringing the] community together to make them stronger. For example, a volunteer that has been at the gymnastic group as a child, then becoming a young coach and then becoming a coach etc. That benefits the organisation and the person.**

### To increase capacity when needed

There are some instances where community businesses engage volunteers to increase capacity outside of the day-to-day running of the community business, and support with one-off events or special circumstances. Volunteers can be brought on to support with events related to either fundraising or community activity including art, crafts and music exhibitions and workshops. Community businesses prefer to engage volunteers in these types of activities as the costs of running events can otherwise outweigh the financial returns. Using volunteers can also help bolster the sense of community that is crucial to the success of these events:

**“ The biggest number of volunteers we normally have is the events, and you know events are about being community-led ... The value of the event is so much bigger than what we fundraise because people perform for free, people run workshops for free, people steward for free.**

<sup>10</sup> Renaisi (forthcoming 2021). Power to Change Evaluation of CBF, Trade Up and Bright Ideas: Impact on people and place learning paper, pp. 9–28.

## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

### Impact of volunteers on quality of service

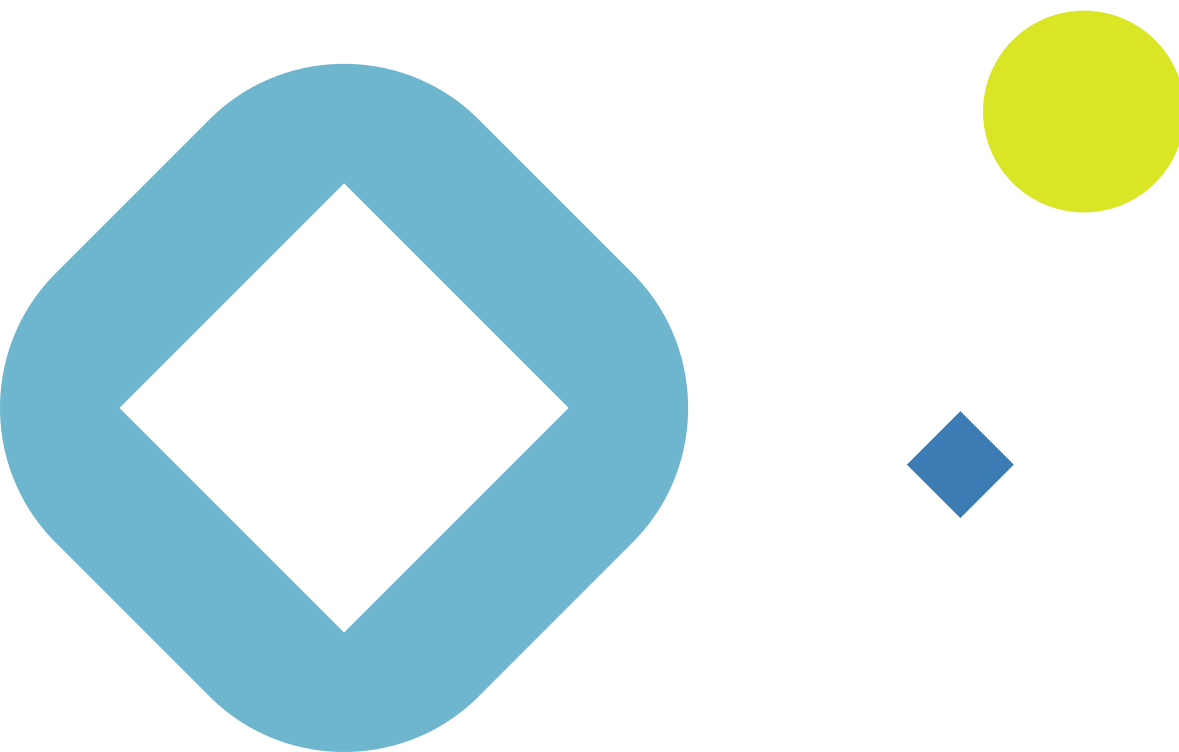
As well as increasing capacity, community businesses engage volunteers to deliver some activities because they have a positive impact on the quality of the service, for example many community businesses note that the dynamics of group sessions change when they are led by volunteers, who are more like 'peers'. As a form of community engagement, community businesses also sometimes consult volunteers to better understand the needs of the community which then facilitates a better quality and suitability of activity.

“ I think our reasons for [having volunteers is] more around quality and what that service feels like for the service users ... group [sessions] are different because they are led by volunteers.

### Community businesses engage volunteers for a combination of reasons

Across the sample of community businesses that we spoke to, volunteers tend to be involved for a combination of reasons rather than one particular purpose. They highlight that although one of the reasons they engage volunteers is to reduce social isolation and increase participation, they also would not be able to operate with paid employees alone.

“ [Why we have volunteers is] two-fold. [Number] one: it is one of our main social roles, helping with routes to work, removal of things like isolation, being able to participate [in the community]. So, it is 50 per cent social impact on the person ... [the other] 50 per cent is [that the] activities we do that are public facing. [We can reach an] awful lot more people [with] volunteers. We wouldn't be able to open to the public with [only] paid staff.



## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

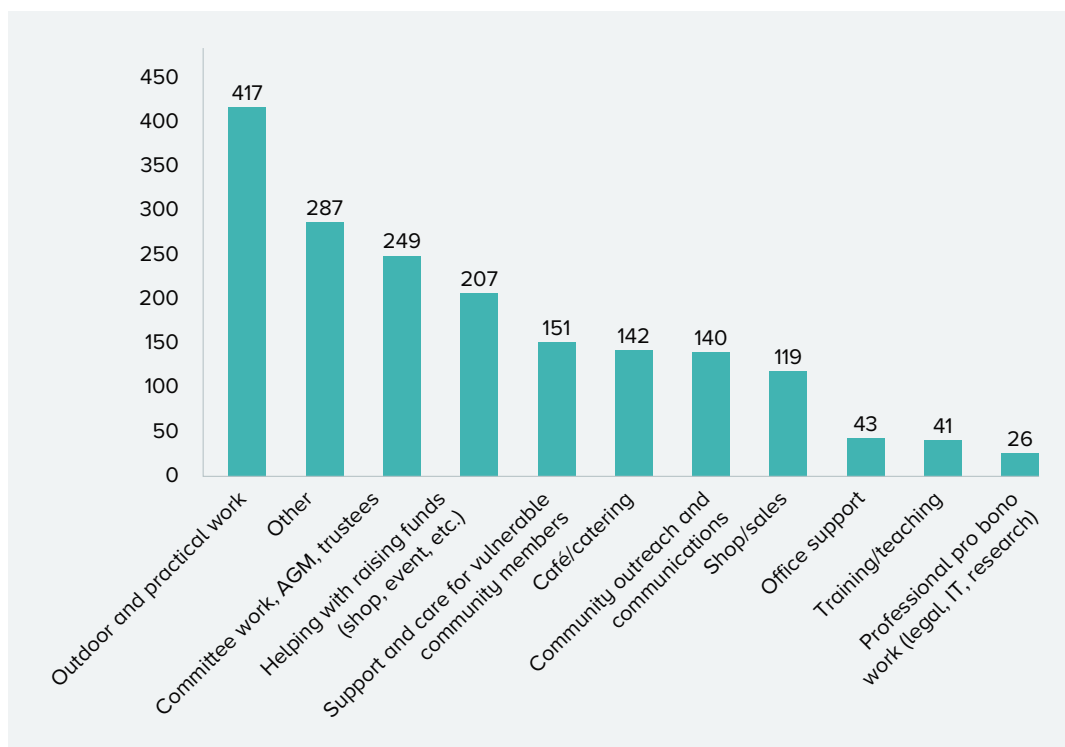
### 2.2 Types of volunteer role

This research uses the typology of volunteer roles developed by Power to Change and used in Twine:<sup>11</sup>

- ◆ Outdoor and practical work
- ◆ Café/catering
- ◆ Office support
- ◆ Support and care for vulnerable community members
- ◆ Helping with raising funds (shop, event, etc.)
- ◆ Committee work, AGM
- ◆ Community outreach and communications
- ◆ Professional pro bono work (legal, IT, research)
- ◆ Training/teaching
- ◆ Shop/sales
- ◆ Other

**Figure 2: Total number of volunteers CBF community businesses had by role type in the pre-COVID period (n=28)**

Number of volunteers by type of role (n=28)



11 Twine (2020) 'Time for change? Opportunities and challenges for community volunteering', <https://www.twine-together.com/resources/volunteers-week-community-volunteering>.

## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

Figure 2 shows the total number of volunteers engaged by the community businesses who took part in this research project, by type of role, as reported by community businesses in our online survey.

Figure 2 highlights several key findings:

- **The largest number of volunteers engage in outdoor and practical work.** Committee work, AGM and trustees, and shop/sales also require a relatively high number of volunteers.
- **The more knowledge-based the activity, such as office work or pro bono work, the lower the number of volunteers** that were found or used. Although this has not been explained by the findings, this could be for a number of reasons: organisations may find it harder to access these skills, those who have these skills may not be interested in being involved in these more knowledge-based activities, or it may be easier to direct volunteers to do less knowledge-based and more practical or retail based work.
- **A significant number of community businesses marked their volunteer role type as 'Other', indicating that the Twine typology may be missing some key roles** that are used by the community businesses in this project's sample, or community businesses may find some of the categories confusing. This is evidenced by the fact that the online survey found a noticeably low number of volunteers working on support and care for the vulnerable in the community, whereas the qualitative interviews found that volunteers often play a significant role in interacting with and supporting the community and its more vulnerable members. 'Other' volunteer roles described by community businesses include ad hoc volunteers for large events such as festivals or community events.

These roles can be undertaken in different circumstances and by different people, which changes the nature of the volunteering. Community businesses highlighted six key volunteer types that can arise in these different contexts:

- 01. Founder volunteers** – people who are heavily involved in establishing the community business and continue to be involved in the running of the organisation, for example as trustees.
- 02. Essential to supporting the service** – volunteers who are brought in to support with specific business needs, such as those with responsibility for community businesses' finances.
- 03. Regular but not required** – people who volunteer on a regular basis, providing a skill or labour that is useful but not essential to the community business, such as gardening.
- 04. Ad hoc support** – volunteers who step up to support the community business as and when a need arises, such as for one-off events.



## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

**05. Therapeutic** – volunteer roles that are not essential to the success of the business but are beneficial to the individual volunteer, such as those experiencing poor mental health.

**06. Staff who also volunteer** – part-time or full-time staff who work additional hours outside of their contracted hours in a voluntary capacity, because of their personal commitment and investment in the community business.<sup>12</sup>

“ What we find is that we have people that we can rely on, and they have roles, but others wander in. We have a list of things that need to be done that can be done by this kind of volunteer.

### How community businesses decide which roles can be offered to volunteers

The reasons that community businesses offer some roles to volunteers rather than employees include:

- ◆ **Financial factors** influence whether certain roles are paid or voluntary, depending on grant funding and trading activities. Community businesses were keen to pay those who volunteer if they could afford to, however once organisations become more sustainable or have a larger turnover, they prefer to invest more in paid staff than in recruiting more volunteers.
- ◆ **Policy and procedure**, such as health and safety requirements or qualifications required, can influence whether a role is suitable for volunteers. For instance, one community business that operates a swimming pool cannot offer prospective volunteers lifeguard roles due to the health and safety requirements of the role.
- ◆ **Need for consistency and stability in the role.** Certain roles require long-term commitment and in these cases community businesses may prefer to appoint paid staff (perhaps with volunteers in supporting roles).

12 It is important to note that for the category of staff who also volunteer, there is often a grey area between paid and unpaid work. For some community businesses it was clear that some paid staff worked additional hours as volunteers intentionally, whereas in other cases staff worked additional hours in order to get through their workload.

## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

### Impact of COVID-19 on types of roles offered

The types of roles offered by community businesses changed as a result of their emergency response to COVID-19. New volunteer roles that emerged included:

- Food shopping and food deliveries for people that were shielding from COVID-19 or experiencing difficulties that meant they needed support with accessing food. Some community businesses also created a foodbank service (or already had one) and volunteers helped with distributing essential groceries such as food and hygiene items.
- As a result of the pandemic, some community businesses developed telephone and online befriending service for older people to reduce social isolation and volunteers took on these befriending roles.
- Some community businesses helped to recruit or redeploy volunteers to support other community initiatives. For example, one community business provided volunteers to a pharmacy to support with the vaccination programme by managing crowd control and delivering medication.

### 2.3 Number of volunteers

Accurately assessing the number of volunteers engaged by community businesses is challenging, for two main reasons:

Community businesses' definition of a volunteer can vary and this can affect how they count the number of volunteers they have at any one time. For example, community businesses may make a distinction between consistent and long-term volunteers, volunteers on a reserve list who may or may not engage, and volunteers who do engage but only when required such as for one-off events. This means that the number of volunteers can fluctuate as a result of how they are defined.

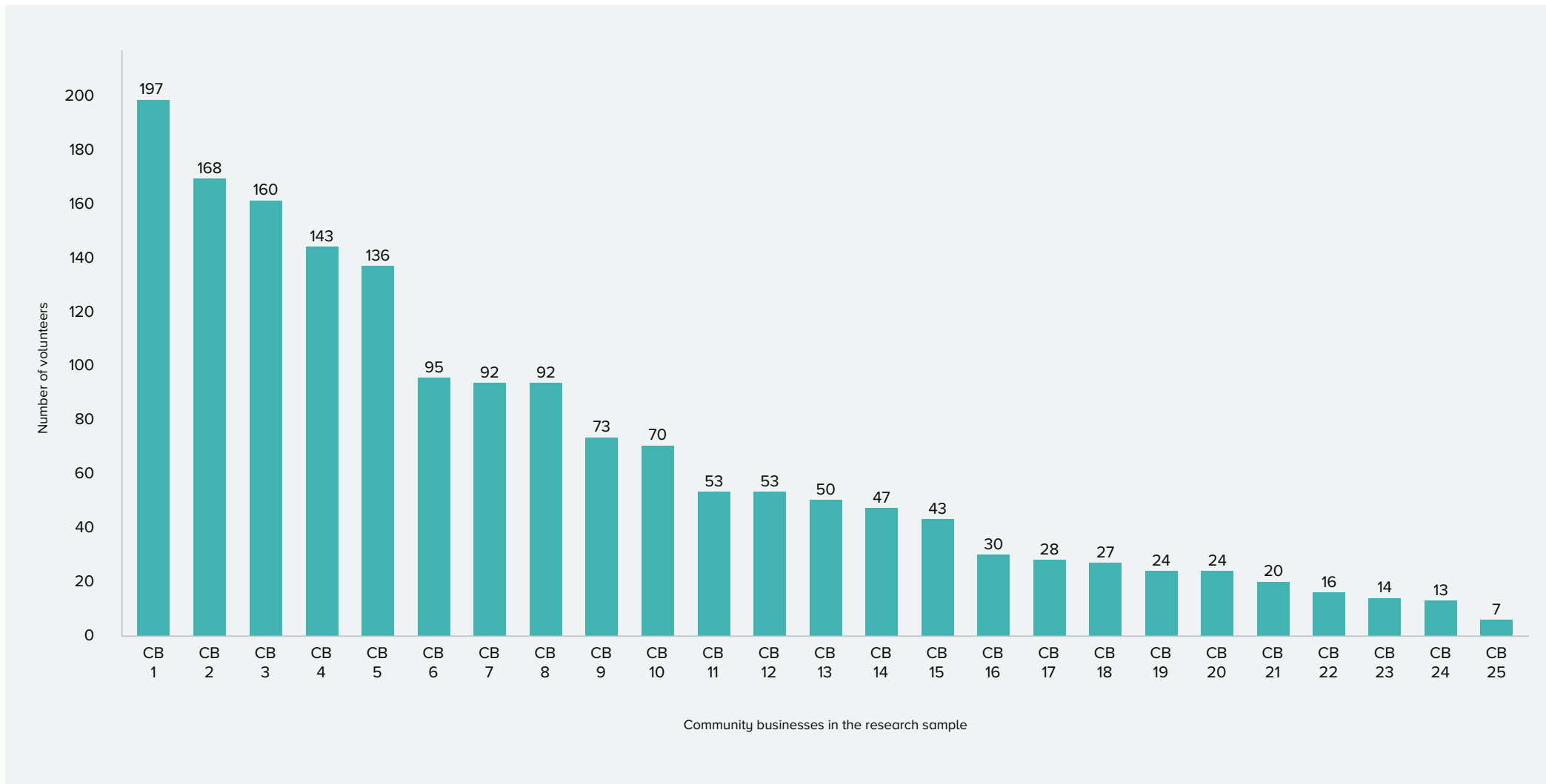
There is considerable variation in the way that community businesses record volunteer engagement. More often than not, community businesses do not have a formal or systematic way of recording volunteer engagement. Embedding systematic approaches to measure and record volunteering requires investment from the community business and this can be costly.

**“ Yeah, this stuff is challenging ... nobody pays us to measure this stuff. And, measuring stuff properly like this really takes a lot of investment of time.**

2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

Figure 3: Total number of volunteers per CBF community business pre-COVID (n=25)

Number of volunteers by CBF community business (n=25)



## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

Figure 3 shows that the number of volunteers reported by community businesses varies significantly, ranging from seven to more than 190. The community businesses taking part in this research reported having more than seven volunteers, with all community businesses reporting that they at least have trustees or board members as volunteers.

Figure 4 shows the proportion of volunteers in different types of roles engaged by each community business sector represented in our research sample.<sup>13</sup> It shows that:

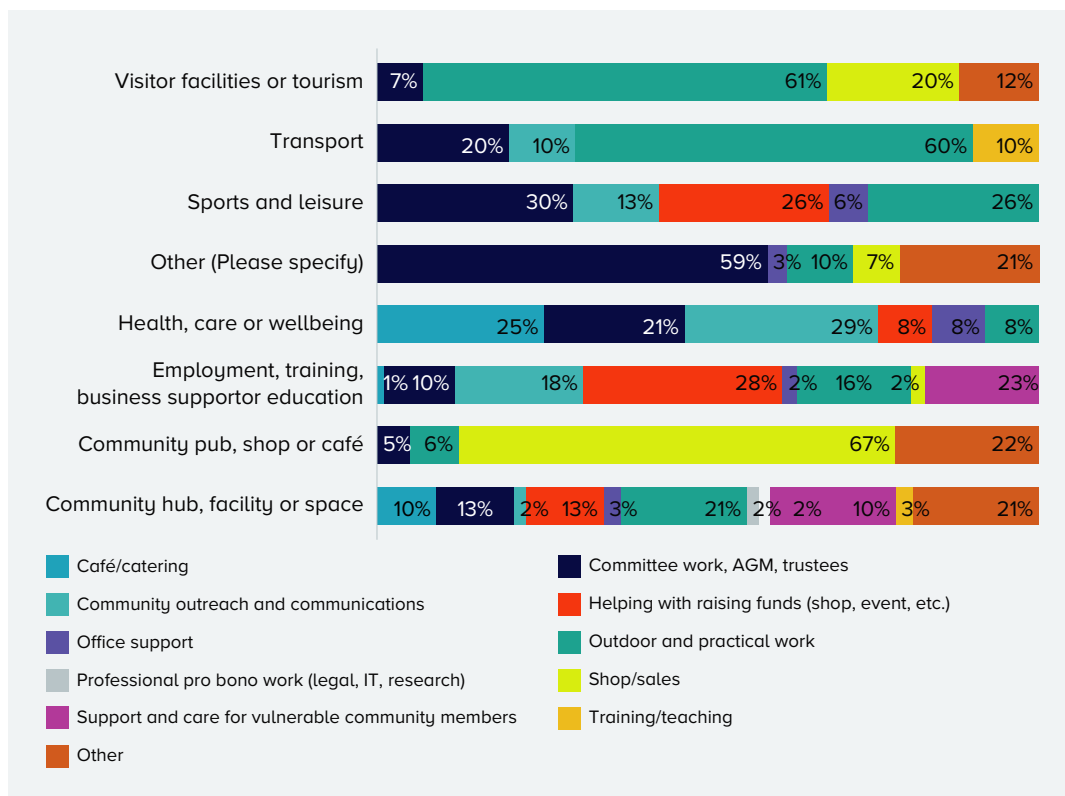
- Community hubs have the greatest variation in volunteer roles, including outdoor and practical work, fundraising, café and catering roles, and supporting vulnerable community members (amongst others).
- As might be expected, community pubs, shops and cafés have a high proportion of volunteers in shop or sales roles. These roles are also relatively common in visitor facilities or tourism businesses.
- Outdoor and practical volunteer opportunities are available in every sector of community business. These represent a large proportion of volunteers in transport, visitor facilities and tourism, and sports and leisure.
- A higher proportion of fundraising roles are available in sports and leisure, and employment and training businesses, compared with other types.
- Health, care or wellbeing community businesses have the highest proportion of volunteers in community outreach roles.

<sup>13</sup> Note that some categories of organisation are represented by a very small number of businesses, and may not be representative of the sector as a whole.

## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

**Figure 4: Percentage of volunteer role type by sector of CBF community business pre-COVID (n=25)**

Percentage of volunteers role types by sector of CBF community businesses (n=25)



### Number of volunteers prior to COVID-19

Before COVID-19, community businesses reported that:

- **Volunteers tended to volunteer together** – a group of volunteers could be on the same shift.
- **The regularity of volunteers was variable** – for some community businesses the number of volunteers was consistent and for others the number fluctuated due to the nature of their services or volunteer availability.
- **The number of volunteers fluctuated** – because of the seasonality of their community business or the demographics of their volunteer base, for example those with a volunteer base of university students saw numbers increase in term time.

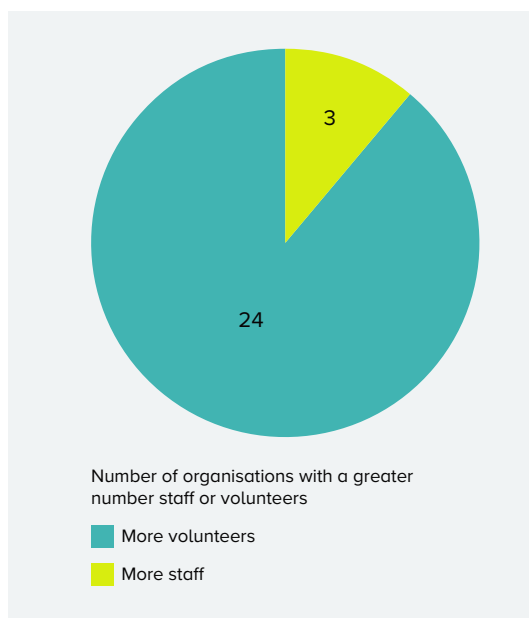
Figure 5 shows that most community businesses have more volunteers than members of staff, and Figure 6 indicates that, on average, the volunteer workforce

## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

is three times larger than employees.

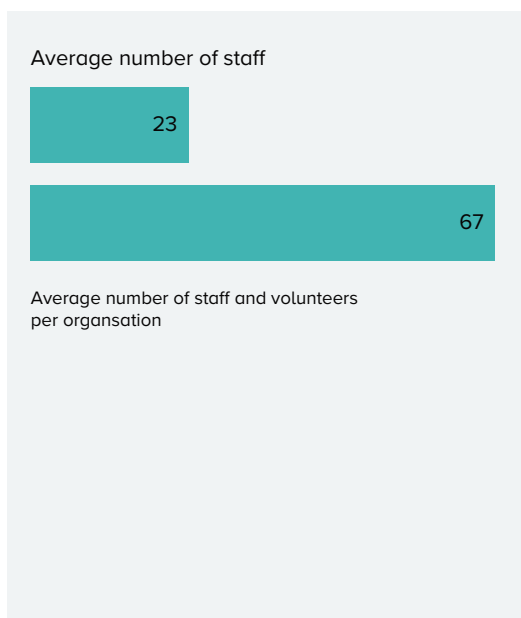
**Figure 5: Number of CBF community businesses that have a higher number of staff in comparison with those that have a higher number of volunteers pre-COVID (n=28)**

Number of CBF community businesses with a greater number staff or volunteers (n=28)



**Figure 6: The mean pre-COVID number of staff and volunteers of CBF community businesses in the sample (n=28)**

Mean number of staff and volunteers (n=28)



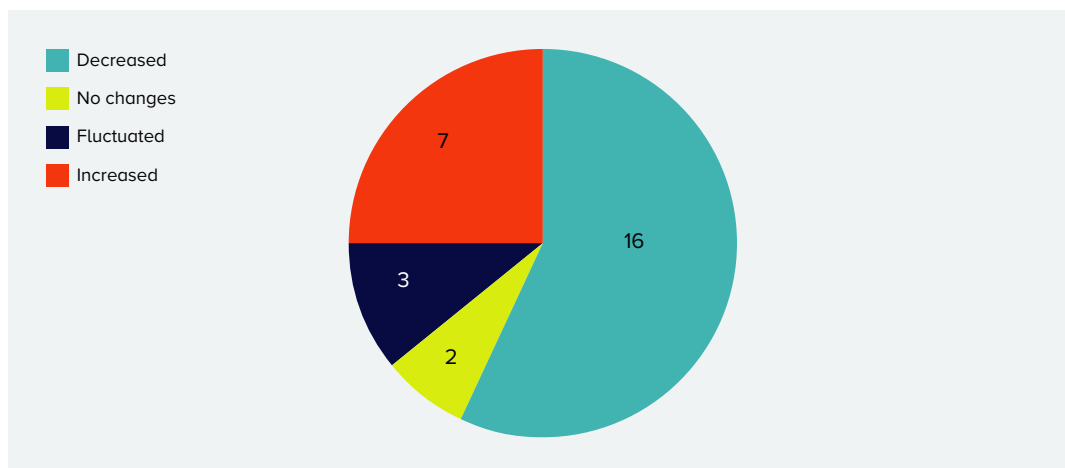
### Number of volunteers since the COVID-19 pandemic

Figure 7 shows the number of community businesses that reported either no changes, a decrease, an increase or fluctuations in the number of volunteers during the 2020–2021 financial year, since the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Overall, more than half of the businesses in our study saw a reduction in the total number of volunteers.

## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

**Figure 7: Number of CBF community businesses with a change to volunteer numbers as a result of COVID-19 (n=19)**

Changes in the number of volunteers during COVID-19 (n=19)



- For some community businesses, **concerns about the pandemic** meant that it became **more difficult to involve volunteers** in the delivery of activities because people were fearful about the risk of becoming ill or their risk to COVID-19 meant they needed to shield. For example, one community business saw a reduction in disabled and older people volunteering due to their apprehension relating to COVID-19.
  - Other community businesses saw an **increase in the number of people coming forward to volunteer** and growing interest to support their local community through volunteering. In some cases, this led to a slight shift in the demographic of volunteers from older to younger volunteers.
  - Some community businesses **anticipated a further increase in volunteering in future** because of the socio-economic ramifications of COVID-19, which are likely to increase poverty and inequalities, leading to high levels of unemployment and increased loneliness. As a consequence of further austerity, community businesses may also feel the impact of the pandemic on their service delivery as they experience funding cuts.
- “ [We] have someone now that is taking on the role of volunteer coordinator. We are pivoting because of COVID to ensure that the community is supported. A huge number of people are now unemployed, and they are looking to be part of a new support mechanism.

## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

### 2.4 Number of volunteer hours

The number of hours that volunteers contribute to community businesses varies based on several factors:

- ◆ **The number of hours and consistency of those hours can depend on the nature of the role.** Some roles are based within a particular service or project that occurs on a regular basis, which means that there will be a rota for these roles and volunteers will consistently contribute the same number of hours. Other roles may be seasonal, which means that volunteer hours might reduce significantly when activities temporarily pause.
- ◆ **The demographic of volunteers can influence the number of hours they are able to contribute.** For example, corporate volunteers may be encouraged to volunteer for a day as part of their corporate social responsibility, university students might volunteer for longer periods during their holidays, and older retired volunteers may have more time to contribute on a more regular basis.

#### Impact of COVID-19 on the number of hours volunteers contribute

As a result of the pandemic, and for several reasons, the number of hours that volunteers contribute to community businesses changed.<sup>14</sup> Figure 8 shows that the number of hours volunteers were able to contribute dropped in the majority of cases, and Figure 9 shows that the number of hours decreased for every type of role, but most significantly in outdoor and practical work, office support and café and catering roles. The least affected role was community outreach and committee work. At the time of this research, community businesses highlighted that they have not yet been able to return to pre-COVID operations and therefore some activities have not been able to continue at the same level as previously, which has had an impact on volunteer engagement.

“ Well, we can't have volunteers on site, that's the problem ... We're not at the end of COVID, so we don't know [how many volunteers won't come back]. As far as we know, nobody is not volunteering but we've not got volunteering activity taking place if that makes sense.

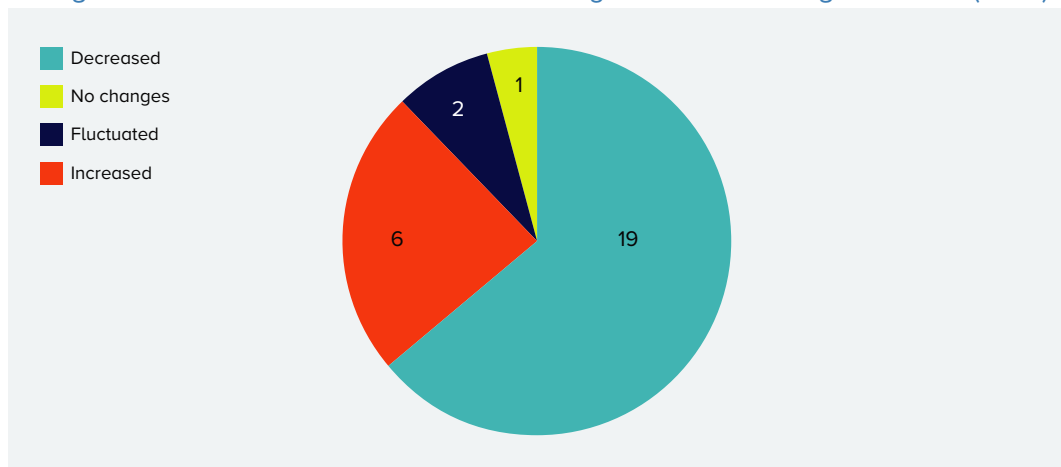
14 To reduce the spread of COVID-19, the government put restrictions in place across the country. This included limiting the amount of people that could meet, a stay-at-home mandate and the closure of hospitality, public buildings and facilities.



2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

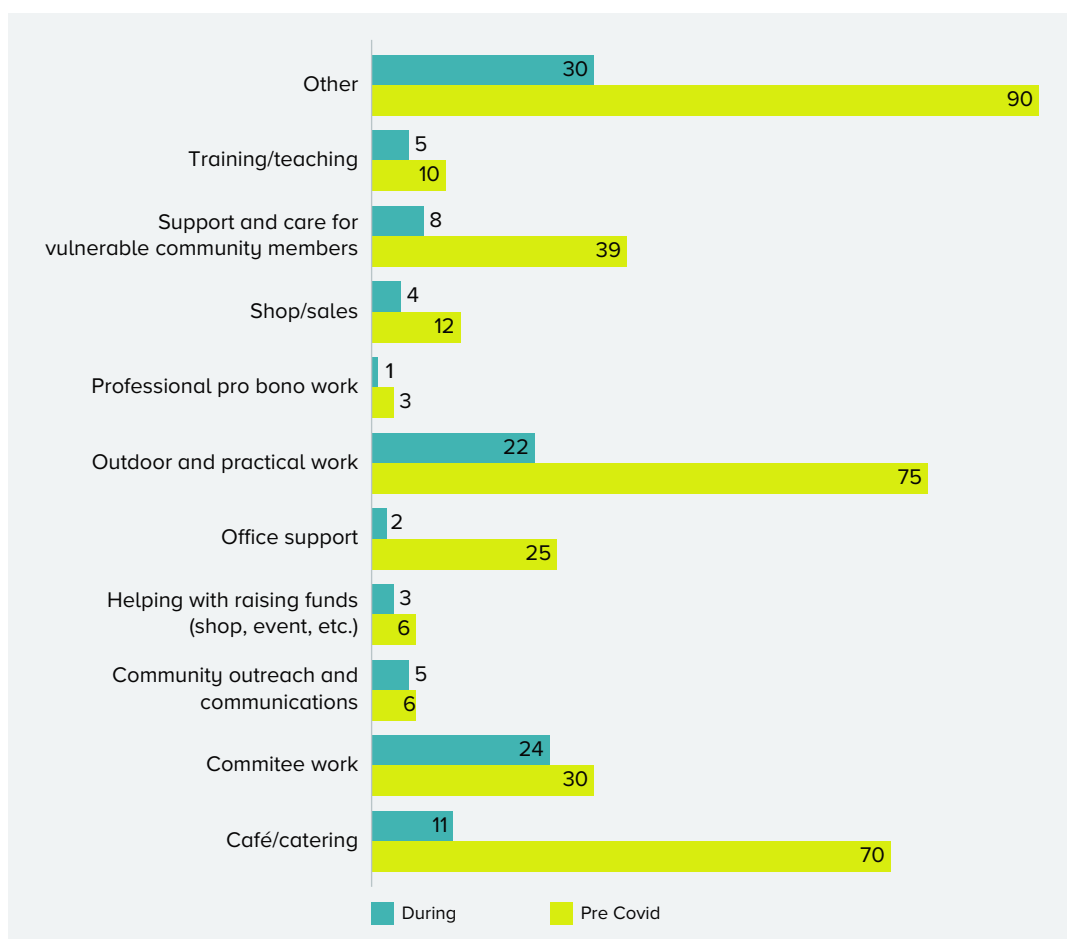
**Figure 8: Number of CBF community businesses with a change to volunteer hours as a result of COVID-19 (n=28)**

Changes to the number of hours contributed by volunteers during COVID-19 (n=28)



**Figure 9: The average number of hours volunteered by role type before and during COVID-19 for CBF community businesses (n=28)**

Number of hours volunteered per role type before and during COVID-19 (n=28)



## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

### Volunteer regularity

The regularity of volunteer numbers and the hours they contribute varies, more so than employees. Community businesses told us that they tend to prefer volunteers that are more regular and consistent because of the time and cost that is required to train them.

## 2.5 Volunteer demographics

### Volunteer demographics prior to COVID-19

Before the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the nature and extent of volunteer opportunities, community businesses funded by the CBF indicated that:

- ◆ **Younger volunteers were more likely to take on frontline roles**, i.e. directly interacting with customers, often with the aim of gaining experience to support them in their job search.
- ◆ **Older volunteers were more likely to be retired professionals**, with spare time, seeking to give back to their local community. This meant that they were more likely to use their skills to help on the board of trustees, although older volunteers also volunteer in frontline delivery.
- ◆ **The skills, experience and ability required to fulfil the volunteer role sometimes determined the demographic of the volunteers.** For example, some roles required physical labour or technical skills, such as digital expertise.

“ In fact, one of our paid staff is a former volunteer, we give people volunteering opportunities, so they get upskilled themselves and become eligible for paid work ... then we have older people who have time to spare if they are retired and want to give back to their community.

Figure 10 shows that prior to COVID-19 the majority of volunteers across the total cohort of community businesses we spoke to for this research were White, female, not limited in their day-to-day activities and aged over 45.<sup>15</sup> Although we did not ask for quantitative data on socio-economics, there was a perception amongst some interviewees that volunteers tend to be middle class because they are more likely to have the skills and capacity to volunteer. It is not possible to say whether this perception is borne out by the facts.

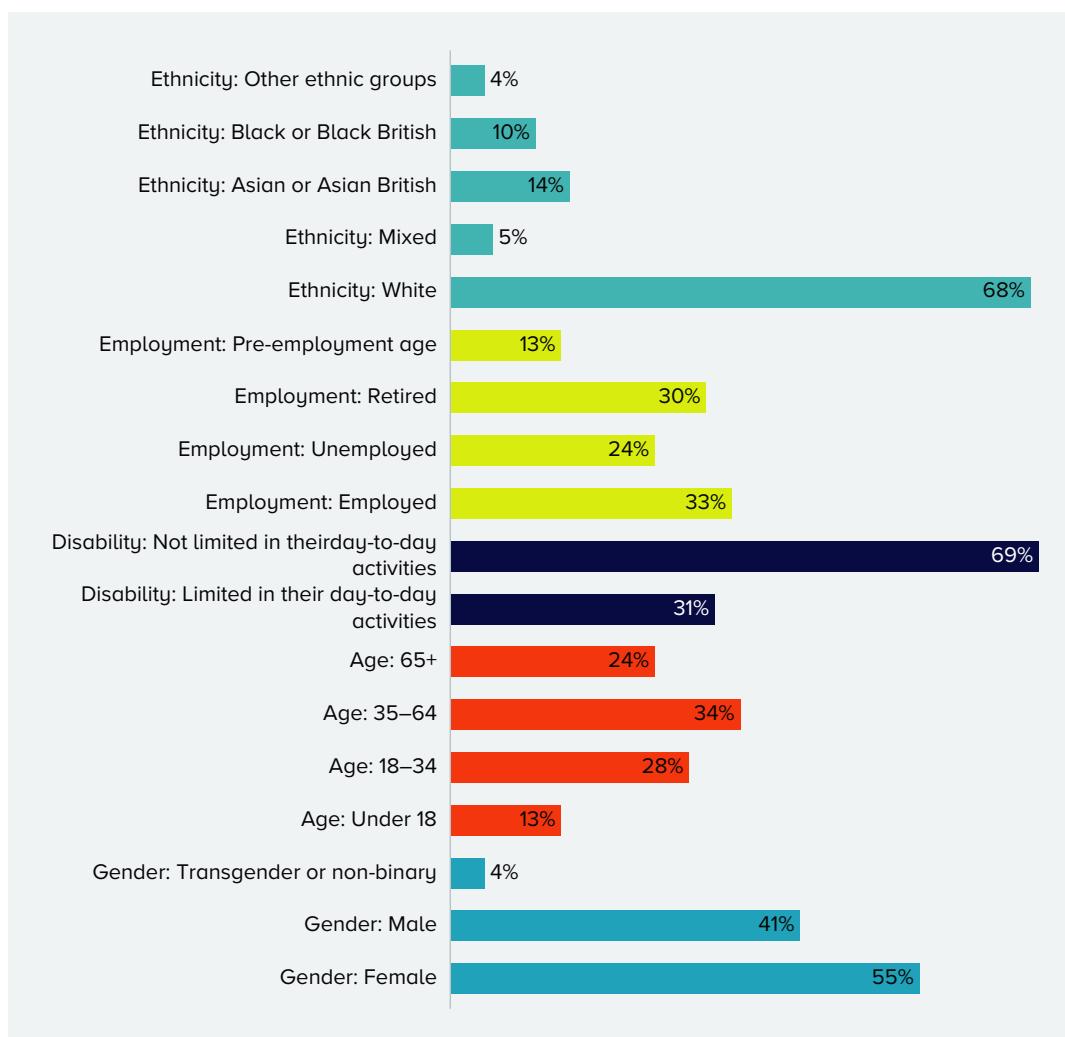
<sup>15</sup> Note that these data were provided as estimates by representatives of community businesses. Many businesses do not hold formal records on volunteer characteristics.

## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

“ But basically, our volunteers [the] majority of them are middle class. Right? So, they have an education that means that they understand already the value of volunteering and that they need to contribute ... And it’s easy to volunteer if you’re a retired person on a pension, and you’ve had a professional career. And it’s really hard to volunteer if you’re at home with three kids, and you’ve got no childcare and you’re hungry. And we haven’t overcome that.”

**Figure 10: Demographic characteristics of volunteers in CBF community businesses pre-COVID 19 (financial year 2019-20)**

Demographic characteristics of volunteers pre-COVID (2019-2020) (n=26)

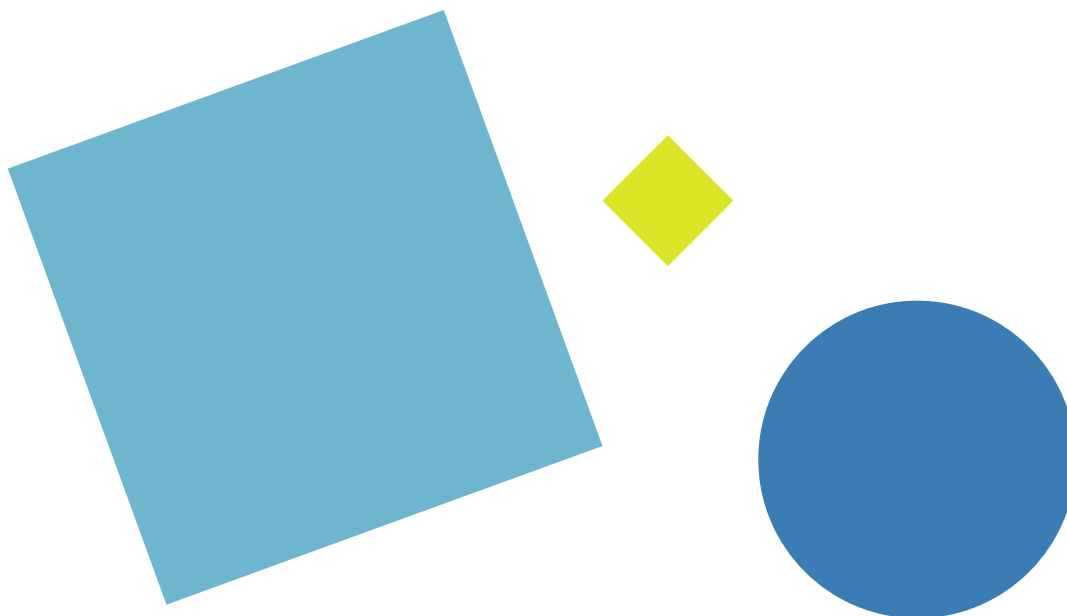


## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

These findings might suggest that the CBF community businesses that took part in our research have not succeeded as well as they could or should do in attracting and supporting a more diverse volunteer base. In order to determine whether these community businesses are achieving sufficient diversity in the volunteer base, a comparison against the population norms in the geographic area they serve would be required.

As part of this research, an attempt was made to make this comparison. Table 6 shows the breakdown of ethnicity data of volunteers in 15 CBF community businesses and the breakdown at their ward level.<sup>16</sup>

There are limitations with this data, however, and it does not allow for a robust conclusion on the ethnicity of volunteers compared with the demographics of their local community. A small sample size means that findings cannot be generalised and 57 per cent of survey respondents declared not having a formal way to record demographic data (and therefore that most of the ethnicity data is self-reported estimates).



<sup>16</sup> Office for National Statistics NOMIS Dataset DC1201EW: Household composition by ethnic group of Household Reference Person (HRP). Data from this dataset was extracted for the ward in which the organisation was based, selected by the postcode of the organisation. It is worth noting that most organisations in our sample had no rigorous method of recording ethnicity and some actively did not collect it. Therefore, in the majority of cases, the community business data are self-estimates.

2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

**Table 6: Demographic breakdown of volunteer ethnicity in 15 CBF community businesses and breakdown of ethnicity data at ward level**

Community business	Volunteer ethnicity data				Ward level ethnicity data			
	White	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Other ethnic groups	White	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Other ethnic groups
1	80%	10%	10%	0%	53%	24%	14%	9%
2	90%	0%	0%	10%	93%	2%	3%	2%
3	96%			4%	98%	1%	0%	1%
4	67%		18%	15%	67%	5%	21%	7%
5	98%	0%	2%	0%	96%	2%	0%	1%
6	80%	10%	10%	0%	87%	1%	7%	5%
7	89%		11%	0%	86%	2%	4%	8%
8	4%	75%	17%	4%	12%	2%	70%	17%
9	90%			10%	93%	1%	2%	3%
10	70%	10%	10%	10%	89%	2%	6%	3%
11	100%			0%	98%	1%	1%	0%
12	100%			0%	99%	0%	0%	0%
13	96%	2%	2%	0%	97%	1%	2%	1%
14	95%			5%	84%	2%	5%	9%
15	90%	2%	2%	6%	38%	6%	15%	41%

Despite this tentative finding that ethnic diversity at ward level is reflected in the diversity of volunteers, community businesses across the cohort were keen to diversify their volunteer base.

“ [Currently, the majority of the board are retired], but the newer ones that we’ve taken on are actually working people or younger people and certainly one of my targets is to recruit some new local people. And I would probably, you know, hope to recruit some younger and also some wider diversity. And I don’t mean that particularly about the BAME community, but diversity in terms of background, aspiration, which I think is really important.

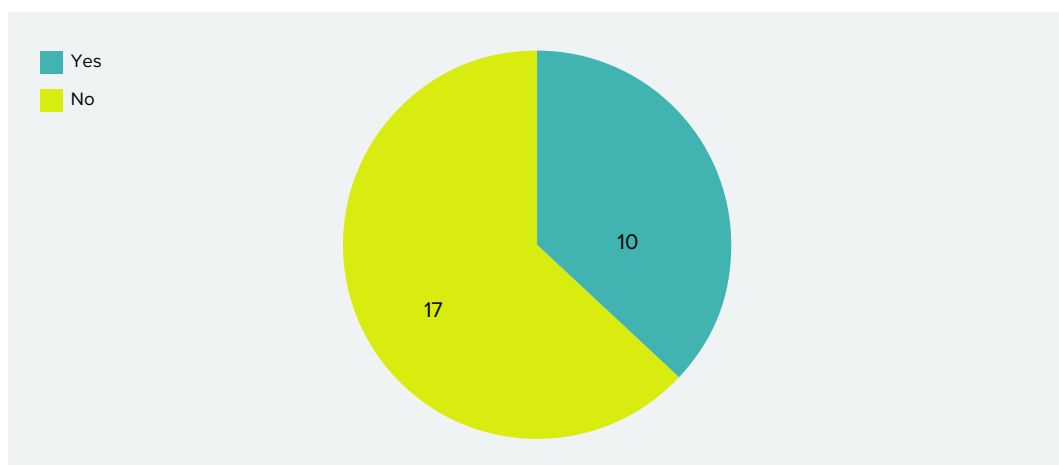
## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

### Impact of COVID-19 on volunteer demographics

The impact of COVID-19 on the volunteer demographic has been mixed, with most community businesses reporting no changes. This can be seen in Figure 11, which shows the number of community businesses whose volunteer demographics changed between financial year 2019–20 and 2020–21. However, for those who did report an impact, two key changes have emerged:

- ◆ **Volunteer demographics have changed as a result of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions and the risk to some volunteer groups**, although at the time of this research it is not possible to say whether these changes will continue in the longer term. For example, at-risk volunteers continued to shield and may only return once it is safe to do so, which has meant some community businesses' volunteer base has become younger and more skewed towards people without underlying health conditions. Other community businesses have moved to online delivery, which has also seen a change in the demographic of their volunteer base towards younger volunteers.
- ◆ **In some cases, former volunteers became beneficiaries of the community business if they were shielding and needed additional support**. Community businesses experienced an increased sense of their duty of care for their volunteers and supported them throughout the pandemic, for example by helping them to access food and medicine. Social isolation was a key challenge for volunteers and community businesses supported them with wellbeing calls, involving them in befriending services and creating opportunities for social interaction when it was safe and appropriate to do so. We explore this in more detail in Section 4.3 on the impact of COVID-19 on community business' investment in volunteers.

**Figure 12: Number of CBF community businesses reporting a change in the demographics of their volunteers between financial year 2019-20 and 2020-21**  
Changes in volunteer demographics (n=27)



## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

### 2.6 Factors impacting community businesses' use of volunteers

Overall, several interconnected factors influence the types of volunteers and volunteer roles that community businesses use:

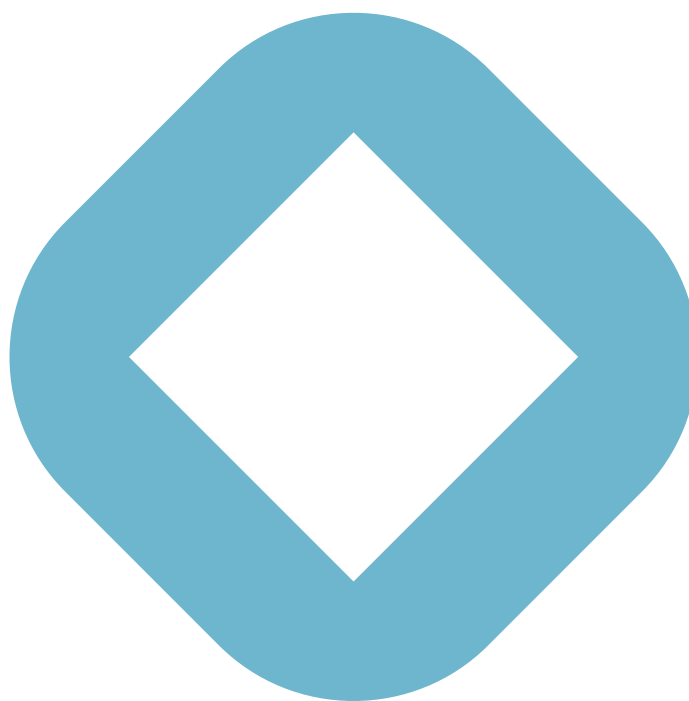
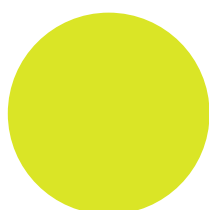
- ◆ **Sector and business model** of the community business. This can affect the type of roles available, for example café volunteers, gardening opportunities or volunteer reception staff. This in turn can affect typical volunteer demographics.
- ◆ **Whether the community business has an asset or not, and what kind of asset(s) they have.** For example, community businesses with large estates tend to rely on volunteers to help maintain their green space, and community businesses with a large or heritage building might require support with the conservation and maintenance of that asset.
- ◆ **Purpose and primary social impact** of the community business. This can influence community businesses' motivations to use volunteers, how they are deployed and how diverse the volunteer base is.
- ◆ **Community businesses might offer different volunteer roles at different times of the year.** For instance, there may be a greater need to maintain outdoor spaces during the summer. The annual calendar of one-off fundraising or community events can also influence when volunteers are needed in greater numbers.

Table 7 shows the relationships between different characteristics of community businesses and how they influence different aspects of volunteers or volunteering.

2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

Table 7: The characteristics of CBF community businesses that impact on the volunteer factors explored in this report

		Characteristics of volunteering				
		Reasons for volunteers	Volunteers roles	Number of volunteers	Number of hours volunteered	Volunteer demographic
Characteristics of community businesses	Sector of community business	X	X	X	X	X
	Asset	X	X	X		
	Local Community					X
	Social impact	X				X
	Seasonality of activities	X	X	X	X	X





## 2. The role of volunteers in community businesses

### 2.7 Summary

In this section we explored why community businesses funded by CBF engage with volunteers and what that engagement looks like. We found that:

- ◆ Community businesses engage volunteers for a combination of reasons, including to support with running and maintaining an asset.
- ◆ Community businesses offer a diverse range of volunteering roles, and most offer at least two different types. COVID-19 meant that the types of roles offered changed as community businesses responded to the emergency.
- ◆ The number of volunteers reported by a community business can depend on how they record volunteer engagement and their definition of volunteers.
- ◆ Most community businesses experienced a reduction in the total number of volunteers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but they anticipated a subsequent increase in volunteering due to the socio-economic ramifications of the crisis.
- ◆ The COVID-19 pandemic also reduced the number of hours contributed by volunteers and the demographic of community businesses' volunteer base.
- ◆ The overall demographics of community business volunteers (age, gender, disability, employment status and ethnicity) were not especially diverse, despite a tentative finding that the ethnicity of volunteers to some extent broadly reflected demographics in the local community in most cases. All community businesses in this research expressed a desire to increase the diversity of their volunteer workforce.

## 3. Value of volunteering

This section explores the value of volunteering to community businesses funded by CBF, by looking at what roles are essential to their success and the benefits of volunteering that community businesses report.

### 3.1. How essential are volunteers to community businesses?

Community businesses were asked about the value of volunteers to their community business based on the following categories:

#### Categories of volunteer value



**Essential:** Roles that are crucial to the running of a community business, i.e. roles that need to be fulfilled



**Valuable but not essential:** roles that are not crucial to the running of a community business but nonetheless add a lot of value, e.g. volunteers that support with non-essential services.



**Individual benefit:** Volunteer roles that are offered primarily for the benefit of the individual rather than to benefit the business.

Based on these categories, community businesses tended to describe the value of volunteer roles in three clusters. Some described all their volunteers as essential; some said most volunteers are valuable but not essential, making a distinction between the role of volunteers versus paid staff; and others reported that their volunteers are a mixture of all three categories.

Most community businesses identified at least one type of volunteer role as essential to their business. Interviewees based their assessment of how essential volunteers are on the following factors:

- The type of volunteer role: how core volunteers are to trading activities and the delivery of services for the benefit of the community.
- The structure and business model of the community business: the extent to which the organisation is structured around volunteering (i.e. volunteer-led or run).
- The mission and values of the community businesses: whether volunteering is a central part of the organisation's social impact.

### 3. Value of volunteering

#### The type of volunteer role

Three types of volunteer roles were commonly identified as essential:

- ◆ **Trustees:** of all the volunteer roles, trustees were most frequently identified as essential to community businesses, not just because of the legal requirement to have them (in the case of registered charities), but also because of the central role they play in governance and strategic development.
- ◆ **Income generating roles:** volunteers who support trading activities were often identified as essential because they provide capacity and skills that underpin a core part of the business. One example of this is volunteer bakers for a community-owned bakery.
- ◆ **Service delivery roles and activities for the benefit of the community:** these roles were often highlighted as essential because they provide community businesses with capacity and resource to reach and benefit the community. These roles include volunteers who deliver key frontline services such as food banks or befriending services.

#### The structure and business model

Some community businesses have a structure and business model that is designed to be volunteer-run or volunteer-led, and therefore their operation as an organisation relies predominantly on volunteers. For community businesses that have such models, all volunteers are essential. One example is a community owned village hall that is exclusively run by volunteers.

“ The volunteer model we have was a practical choice ... Everything to do with the village hall is volunteer-led, the committee is all volunteers.

The mission and values of the community business

Several community businesses identified their volunteers as essential to their organisation not because of the role that they play in its operation, but because of the position they hold in the mission of the organisation. For these community businesses, volunteering forms a core component of their social impact. This ranges from community businesses that provide therapeutic volunteering opportunities, to community businesses that support people who are out of work to gain skills and experience. In these cases, community businesses highlight volunteers as essential because they were also, in effect, beneficiaries.

“ Most of the rest of our volunteers are here for what they can get out of being a volunteer, actually ... The way we do [it is for the] health and wellbeing [of volunteers] ... it is fundamental to us.

### 3. Value of volunteering

Community businesses often found it hard to categorise certain volunteers as essential over others, with the notions of ‘value’ and ‘essential’ being highlighted as complex and potentially loaded terms. A number of community businesses indicated that their assessment of whether volunteers are essential depend on how ‘value’ is understood in practical or ideological terms, and ultimately the lines are not that clear.

**“ I think of all three sets [of categories]. That [volunteers] do all three, they sit in all three ... you’ll have a Venn diagram ...**

For example, one community business spoke about their gardening volunteers, who were not essential in terms of the operation of their business but were essential in the benefit they provide to the community or the individual.

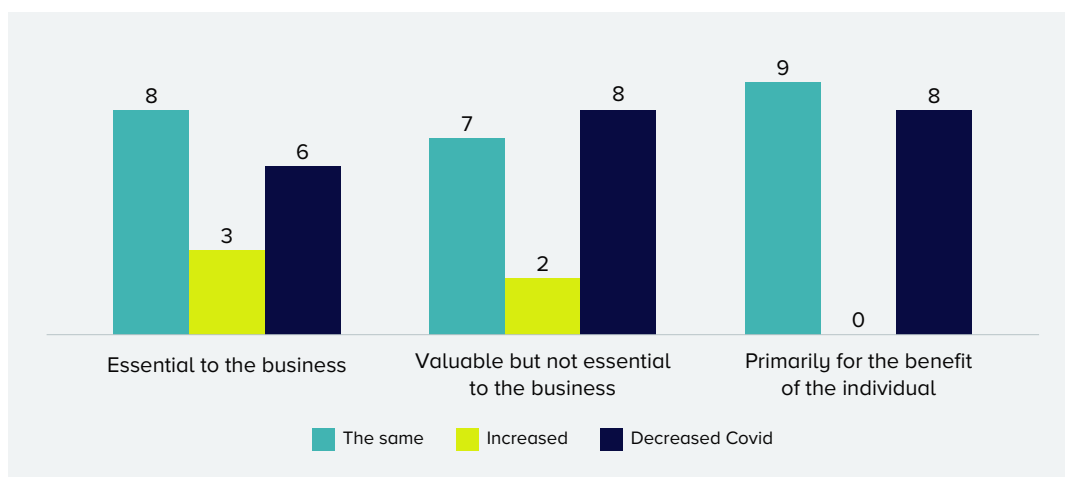
**“ In terms of the valuable but not crucial, I would probably put most of our volunteers in that [category]. So, you know the world wouldn’t end if our gardening groups didn’t happen, but it would make a significant difference to the community ... it makes a significant difference to some of our volunteers, for whom the gardening group is a real fixture in their week.”**

#### Impact of COVID-19

Figure 12 shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a varied impact on the value of volunteers to community businesses.

**Figure 13: Number of CBF community businesses who felt that the value of volunteers either stayed the same, increased or decreased.**

Impact of COVID-19 on the number of essential volunteer roles (n=14)



### 3. Value of volunteering

The majority of community businesses felt that the number of volunteers in essential or valuable roles has either not changed or has decreased, because volunteers have often not been able to volunteer to the same degree they did previously as a result of restrictions on social interactions due to COVID-19. In contrast, a few stated that the number of volunteers that are essential or valuable has increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, for the following reasons:

- ◆ **The community business' response to COVID-19:** While some community businesses have adapted their service provision to be COVID-19 secure, other community businesses implemented new activities and programmes to directly address emerging needs such as food poverty and social isolation. Developing this COVID-19 response provision has been resource-intensive, and often relied on volunteers to help deliver new frontline services. For these community businesses, the value of volunteers has significantly increased.
- “ Well, I think the value and the contribution of volunteers to our community services have significantly increased as a result of COVID. And that's because we've had to shift to providing more extensive community services and to respond to the impact of COVID on our neighbourhood.
- ◆ **The leadership of trustees:** Community businesses with trustees reported that the value of trustees has increased during this unprecedented time, because of the importance of their leadership and support.
- “ The trustees in particular [have been essential], especially during COVID-19. We had a hands-on board. [They have been] very, very active. What they provide [has been] necessary.
- ◆ **The additional capacity provided to staff by volunteers:** As a result of the pandemic, community businesses have often found themselves with reduced staff capacity. This could be because staff in more vulnerable groups have had to shield or due to staff being placed on furlough. In these situations, community businesses have often found that volunteers have become more essential as they provide additional capacity.
- “ Volunteers in the food bank – we rely so heavily on them now. They're a big part [of our response to COVID-19]. Some of the staff members are shielding or isolating. Volunteers allow us to reach more people.

### 3. Value of volunteering

#### 3.2. Benefits of volunteering to community businesses

The manner in which volunteers provide benefit to charity and voluntary organisation has been written about extensively. For example, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations frames the benefits of volunteering in terms of the human, economic, social and cultural capital that volunteers provide.<sup>17</sup> In this section, we look at the value and benefit of the volunteering workforce as described by community businesses funded through the CBF. We find that the volunteer workforce benefits community businesses in five ways, which are closely connected to the motivations for having volunteers described in Section 2:

**01. Start-up and early-stage capacity:** Community businesses are often established by individuals and groups in the local community. These volunteers provide community businesses with vital capacity at the start-up and early stages of business development, before the organisation is constituted or at a stage when they are unable to afford paid positions.

**“ We had a lot of volunteer hours for set up ... For the start-up, it was hugely valuable to have volunteers.**

**02. Ongoing additional capacity:** A significant value of volunteers is that they provide community businesses of all sizes with additional capacity to carry out both trading activities as well as activities to benefit the local community. As already highlighted, in some situations the additional capacity volunteers offer is essential to the functioning and viability of community businesses.

**“ We’ve always had a core of paid staff. Just to maintain the continuity and certainty ... volunteers generally are, I feel, very much the icing on the cake. If we get a volunteer, they’re helping us ... We’ve always made very big use of volunteers.**

<sup>17</sup> The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (2020) ‘What are the benefits of volunteering?’, <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/impact/benefits-of-volunteering/#overview>.

### 3. Value of volunteering

#### 03. Improved community engagement and quality of service delivery:

Volunteers often come from the local communities and can be representative of the different demographics of the local communities. As a result of this, community businesses credit volunteers with supporting and improving community engagement, service delivery and the experience of service users when accessing support. This ranges from volunteers taking an active role in engaging the wider community to volunteers providing their insights as members of the community, often facing the same challenges as service users.

**“ Our reasons for [having volunteers] are much more around quality and what that service feels like for other service users ... also the group [activities] are different because they are led by volunteers, there is something about the quality which is important.**

04. Added value to the culture of community businesses: Volunteers bring added value not only to the delivery of trading activities or activities for wider social benefit, but also the community businesses themselves. We found that community businesses often feel the benefit of volunteering within their own structure and workplace environments. This is because volunteers can bring in different and diverse opinions, skills and approaches to delivering impact for the good of their community.

**“ It makes us happier [to have volunteers]. They bring a different culture to the place ... It brings people from lots of different walks of life together, breaking down cultural barriers for people resistant to change and who reinforce their own beliefs. They bring a much wider [sense of] community.**

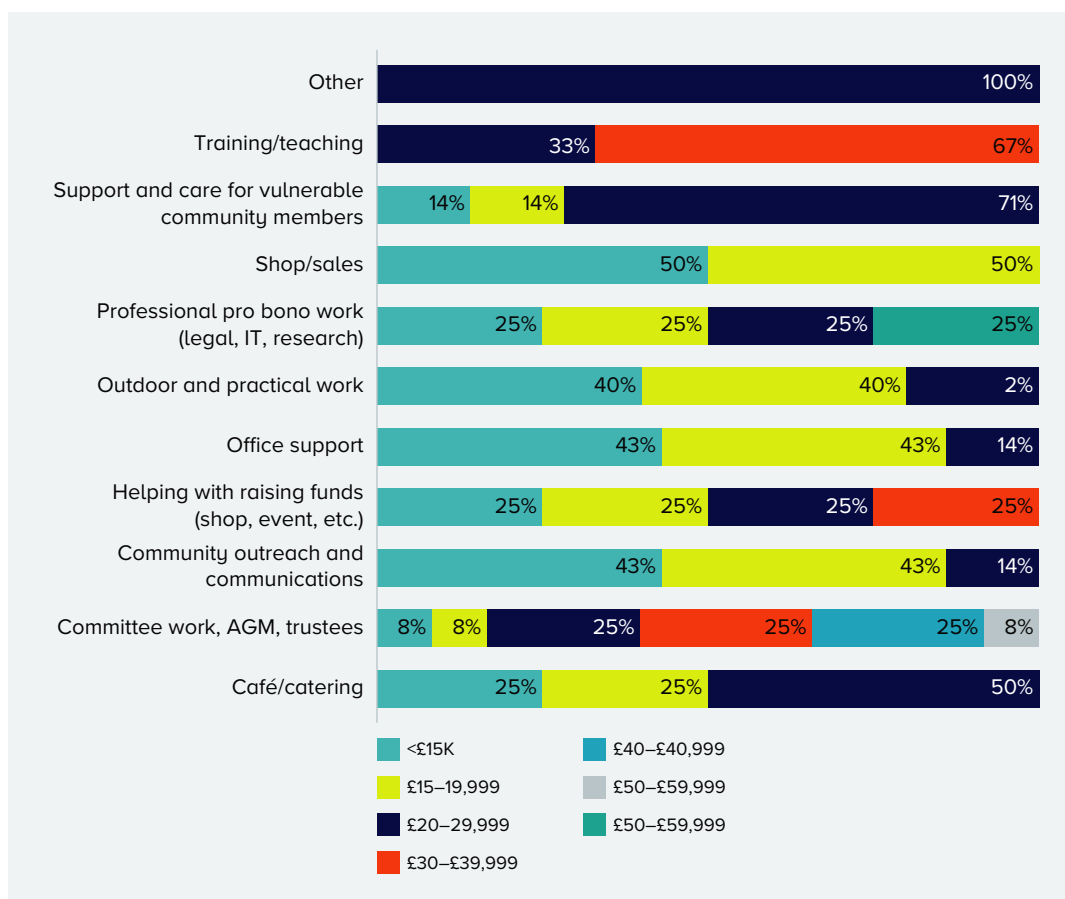
05. Financial viability and sustainability: As previously highlighted, volunteers provide significant capacity and support to community businesses in delivering activities. Given the fact that this resource is unpaid, bringing in a volunteer workforce can be a cost-effective way to run community business activities. Figure 5 (in Section 2.3) shows that most community businesses in our research had more volunteers than paid staff. Figure 13 shows that if volunteer roles were paid, they would cover a wide range of salary bands – 48 per cent of volunteers would fall into the two lower salary bands pay bands, 48 per cent into the middle range and 4 per cent into the two highest salary bands. As a result, volunteers can play a significant role in the financial viability and sustainability of community businesses.

**“ It’s very sustainable, even with all the difficulty over the last year. We are still in a financially secure situation, only as a volunteer-run operation ... We don’t intend to change that model ... I can’t think of any way to change.**

### 3. Value of volunteering

**Figure 14: The salary band attributed to different types of volunteer roles if they were paid at an equivalent rate to staff members**

Salary band attributed to volunteer roles (n=11)



### 3.3. How many volunteers is ideal?

Clearly, volunteers add value to community businesses in a range of ways depending on various factors, including the type of volunteer role, but also the characteristics and needs of the community business itself. However, data shown in Figure 14 indicates that there is a cluster of organisations of varied size, trading income and age in our sample which nonetheless have a relatively consistent volunteer workforce of between 30 and 50 volunteers. A small number of community businesses have larger numbers of volunteers, due to their large estates, but with the exception of these it is perhaps surprising that there seems to be relatively consistent volunteer numbers, given the variety of community businesses within the sample.



### 3. Value of volunteering

**Figure 15: The age of CBF community businesses in comparison to earned income as a percentage of turnover, and by number of volunteers**

Age of CBF community businesses versus earned income as percentage of turnover (n=28) Size of bubbles indicates number of volunteers in each organisation



Note: size of bubbles indicates number of volunteers in each organisation

Figures 15 and 16 show simplified versions of this chart:

- Figure 15 shows those community businesses with fewer than 30 volunteers
- Figure 16 includes all community businesses with between 30 and 100 volunteers

Figure 15 reveals that:

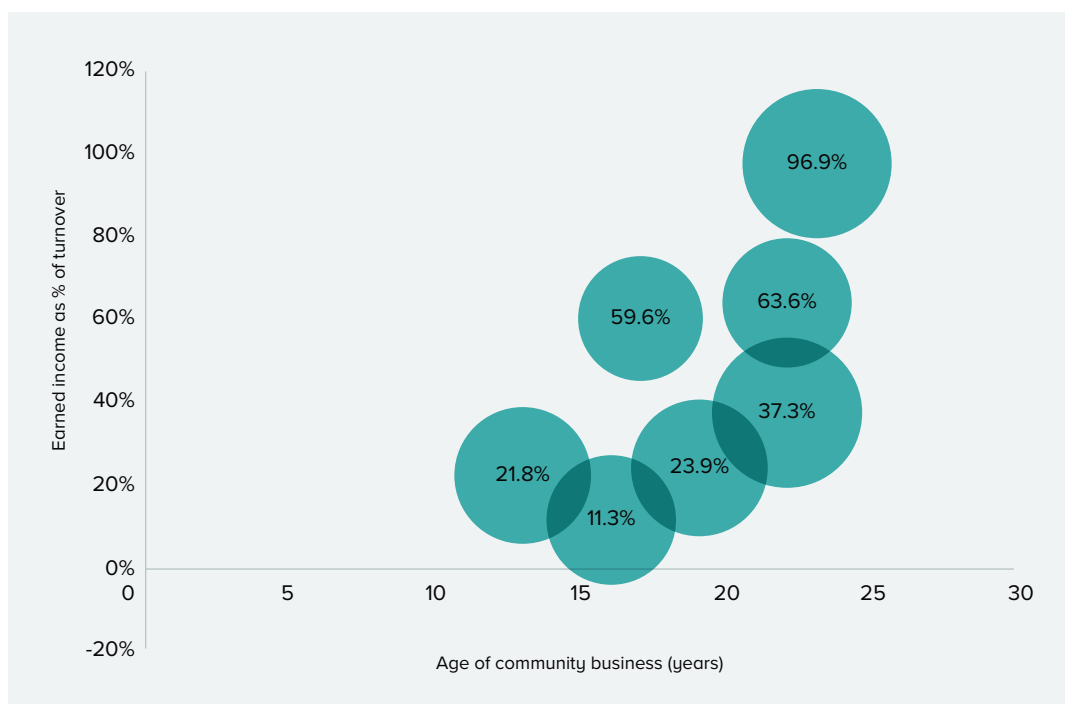
- The cluster of community businesses with fewer than 30 volunteers are about 15 to 20 years old, and by this point in their development seem to have recruited (or settled upon) a relatively small number of volunteers.
- Their reliance on income from trading varies substantially, from less than 15 per cent to over 95 per cent, therefore it seems unlikely that their trading model is the predominant factor driving the size of their volunteer workforce.

### 3. Value of volunteering

It is important to highlight here that age was not part of the sampling criteria and, by the design of the programme, community businesses funded by CBF are older.

**Figure 16: Age of CBF community businesses in comparison to earned income as a percentage of the turnover for community businesses with less than 30 volunteers based on pre-COVID data for number of volunteers and income.**

Age of CBF community businesses versus earned income as percentage of turnover mapped for community businesses with fewer than 30 volunteers (n=9) Size of bubble indicates number of volunteers in each organisation



Note: size of bubbles indicates number of volunteers in each organisation

Figure 17 reveals that community businesses with larger volunteer workforces fall into three distinct categories (excluding outliers with large estates and very large numbers of volunteers):

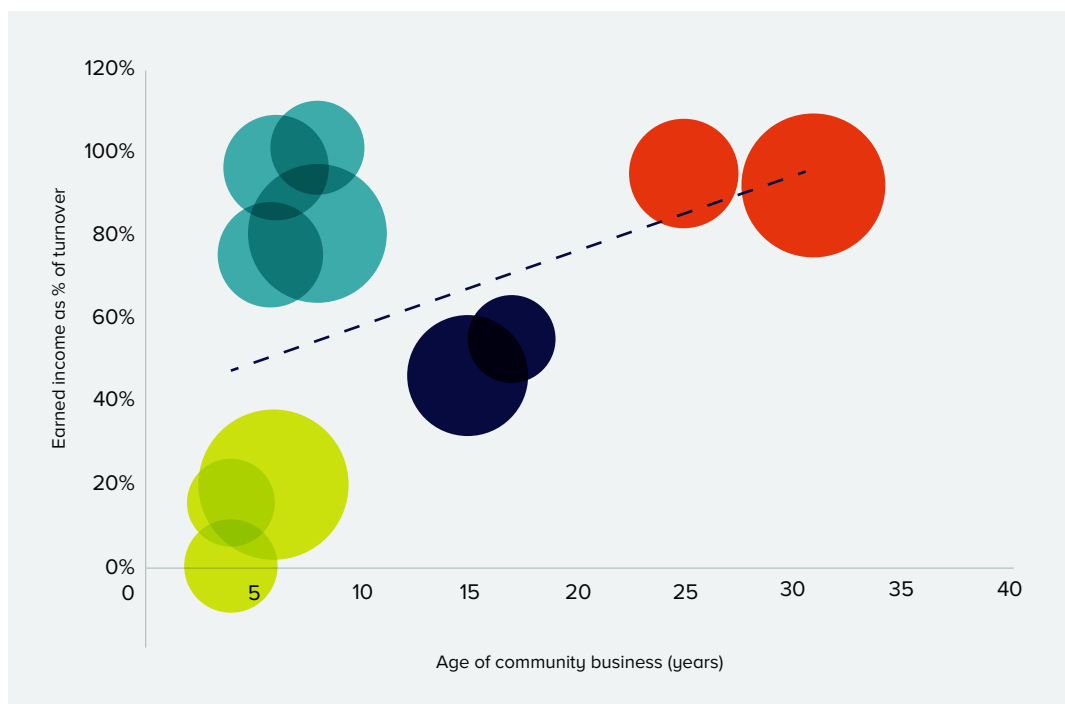
- Those coloured blue are relatively young, with a high proportion of income from trading activities. These community businesses tend to be community shops or heritage assets which rely on income from trading to fund their space and position in the community. Volunteers have an essential role in supporting trading activities, alongside paid members of staff, to ensure the business model remains viable.

### 3. Value of volunteering

- Community businesses coloured green are young organisations with a much lower proportion of income from trading (less than 20 per cent). These community businesses may have relatively high numbers of volunteers to support the development of the organisation from start-up to a steady state and are likely to be reliant on grant income as they develop their business model.
- Red community businesses are more established, with higher levels of trading income; their volunteer workforce may be used to support the viability of trading activities.

**Figure 17: Age of CBF community businesses versus earned income as a percentage turnover, mapped for organisations with between 30 and 100 volunteers (n=11). The size of the bubble indicates number of volunteers per organisation.**

Age of CBF community businesses versus earned income as a percentage of turnover, mapped for organisations with between 30 and 100 volunteers (n=11) Size of bubble indicates number of volunteers per organisation



Note: size of bubbles indicates number of volunteers in each organisation

### 3. Value of volunteering

The data in these figures suggest the following conclusions:

- ◆ If a community businesses is to be dependent on trading, a substantial number of volunteers over and above trustees would be a valuable and essential asset. These community businesses should consider investing in volunteer management as a priority.
- ◆ If the community business' core activity is not trading it would benefit from active volunteer organisation, but swift recruitment of high numbers of volunteers might not be the priority from the beginning.
- ◆ Community businesses that have a larger estate, particularly one that includes buildings and gardens or farm space, should expect to have substantially more volunteers and should anticipate volunteer organisation as part of the acquisition of the asset.

#### 3.4. Summary

In this section we explored the value of volunteering based on the extent to which roles are seen as essential, and the wider benefits of having a volunteer workforce. We found that:

- ◆ Volunteers were commonly identified as essential based on the type of role they have (notably trustees, income generating roles and in delivering services), as well as the organisation's business model, mission and values.
- ◆ The number of essential or valuable volunteers typically stayed the same or decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a minority of community businesses increased the number of essential and valuable volunteers due to the need to expand emergency response services, with the leadership of trustees playing an important role, and the need for additional support at a time of reduced staff capacity.
- ◆ The benefits of volunteers to community businesses are wide ranging, including providing start-up capacity, ongoing additional capacity to paid staff, improving community engagement and quality of service delivery, adding value to the culture of organisations and helping with financial viability and sustainability.
- ◆ The ideal number of volunteers for a community business is dependent on factors such as age of the organisation and income. For community businesses that are dependent on trading, a substantial number of volunteers would be of value. Finally, for community businesses with larger estates, such as buildings or parks, a substantially larger volunteer workforce is beneficial.

## 4. Costs of volunteering

In this section, we look at the costs of having a volunteer workforce to community businesses funded by CBF. These include the costs of recruiting, training and managing volunteers, as well as the challenges community businesses funded by CBF face in doing so. We also look at the impact of COVID-19 on the costs of volunteering for community businesses.

### 4.1 Type of costs needed to sustain a volunteer workforce

The most common costs associated with having volunteers were identified by community businesses as:

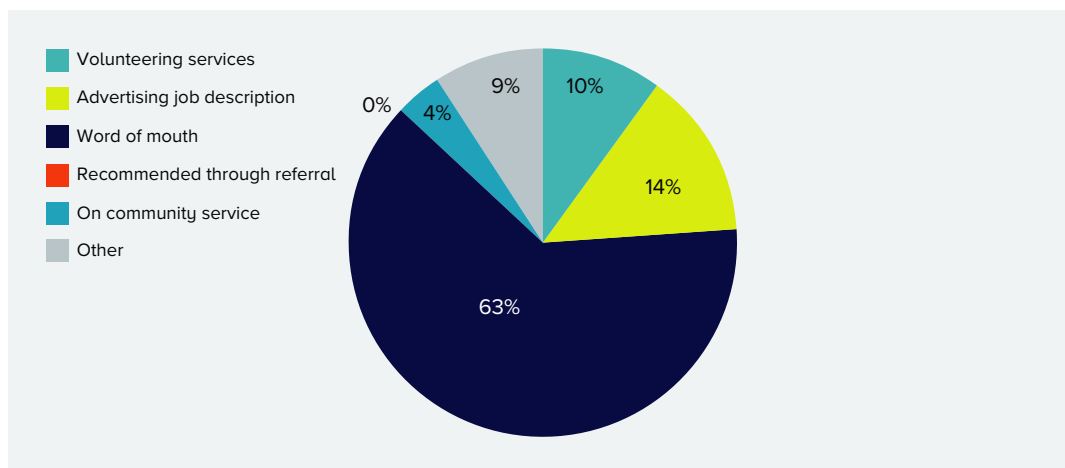
- recruiting volunteers
- managing volunteers
- training and developing volunteers
- volunteer wellbeing and duty of care, particularly in a COVID-19 context

#### Recruitment and induction

Community businesses need to invest time and resources in the recruitment and induction of volunteers. They use a range of methods to recruit volunteers, shown in Figure 17. Many rely on relatively cheap methods like word of mouth, however some use more formal mechanisms like advertising and referrals from volunteering services.

**Figure 18: Methods used by CBF community businesses to recruit volunteers pre-covid**

Percentage of CBF community businesses using following methods to recruit volunteers (n=25)



#### 4. Costs of volunteering

For some community businesses, the process of recruiting volunteers is similar to recruiting paid members of staff, and their recruitment and induction can be similarly costly and time-intensive.<sup>18</sup> This includes creating an application process and volunteer job descriptions, screening applicants, interviewing potential volunteers and the onboarding process, including Disclosure and Barring Service checks.<sup>19</sup>

**“ It [is] the same process for recruiting, supporting and supervising volunteers ... They apply on the basis of responding to a job description, in terms of describing what the volunteering activity is going to comprise of. [They] are given an induction program.**

However, it is important to note that not all community businesses invest as heavily in volunteer recruitment and induction as they do for paid staff members, with several community businesses stating that it is a significantly less costly process. For example, depending on the role, many community businesses do not have specific volunteer job descriptions or interviews, and it is common for community businesses to offer more ad hoc volunteering opportunities.

**“ The recruitment process is different. Volunteers fill in a form and show their interest that way. Then we have a volunteer induction to iron out any questions. We don't have any interviews or 1-2-1s.**

#### Management of volunteers

To be an effective source of support, volunteers need to be managed well. How to do so is a key question for community businesses, particularly those with significant numbers of volunteers. Figure 18 shows that 12 out of 27 community businesses who responded to this question report managing staff and volunteers the same, whereas 15 manage them differently. It also shows that for the majority of community businesses in this sample, managing volunteers is a stated part of someone's role.

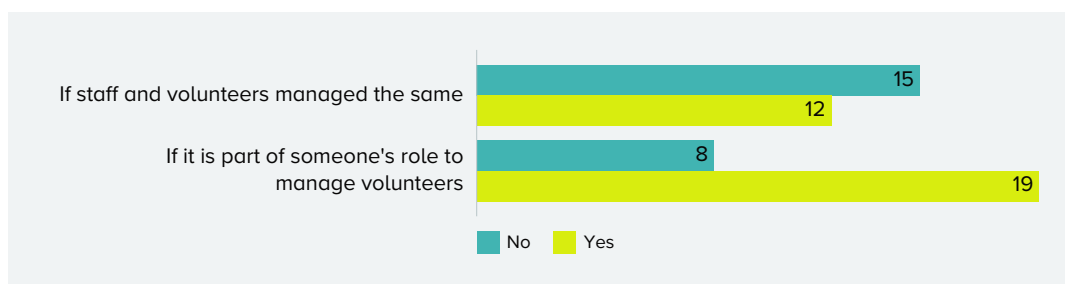
18 Accounts and Legal (2019) 'Employee costs revealed: average employee costs SMEs £12,000 to replace', <https://www.accountsandlegal.co.uk/small-business-advice/average-employee-cost-smes-12-000-to-replace>.

19 You can find further details on the volunteer recruitment process here: National Council for Voluntary Organisations (2020) 'Recruitment planning', <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/your-team/hr/recruitment-and-starting-employment/recruitment-planning>.

#### 4. Costs of volunteering

**Figure 19: The number of CBF community businesses that have the same approach to managing staff and volunteers and where there is paid capacity to manage volunteers.**

Management of volunteers in 2019-20 (n=27)



The management of volunteers includes support with onboarding, organising volunteer schedules and supporting volunteers throughout their time at the community business. We found that while the exact way community businesses manage volunteers differs, three broad models are apparent:

- ◆ **Managed with a designated resource:** Some community businesses have an employed staff member such as a volunteer coordinator or volunteer manager who holds responsibility for managing volunteers.<sup>20</sup> This model is often the preferred one, as it allows volunteers to be fully supported and community businesses are better able to use the volunteer workforce effectively. However, this model requires significant resources and direct financial investment, with some community businesses having a full-time paid role dedicated to managing volunteers. Not all community businesses are able to make this investment and often rely on short-term grant funding to finance these roles.

“ The volunteer coordinator’s post has been through a [grant] ... It’s unusual [for us] to have a volunteer coordinator and [it is] a real treat. The funding wasn’t around when we started and we’re really excited to have [the coordinator].

20 You can find further details and guidance on managing volunteers here: National Council for Voluntary Organisations (2021) ‘Supporting and managing volunteers’, <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/information/volunteer-management>

#### 4. Costs of volunteering

- ◆ **Embedded management:** In some community businesses, the responsibility to manage volunteers sits across multiple members of staff. In this model staff manage volunteers that are directly involved in their projects or areas of responsibility, and the cost of doing so is reflected in these staff members' time. While this model is often the default approach, as it does not require dedicated funding for a volunteer manager post, it can present challenges which we explore further below.

“ We have volunteers acting in every bit of the organisation. So, if you're managing a project, you'll likely have some volunteers, and you'll likely be managing them.

- ◆ **Self-managed model:** In some instances, volunteers manage themselves or are managed by other volunteers. This is the case particularly in community businesses that are volunteer-run or volunteer-led. As with the embedded model, this method of managing volunteers involves minimal direct financial costs, although it can also present challenges.

“ Volunteers who have volunteered for a long time, known as 'senior volunteers' act as mentors for new volunteers coming in.

A common challenge with managing volunteers in all of these models is effectively managing interpersonal relationships and performance management, given that roles are unpaid.

“ Managing volunteers is difficult, we always talk about how important they are, but it can be an absolute nightmare because they aren't being paid – there's no accountability. You must manage them so much more softly, which is really hard.

The capacity to support volunteers in their role can also be a challenge.

“ We're a really small team and managing volunteers is really time-consuming. There are all these people offering us their time, but we don't have the time or the energy to put into creating the structure for those people to put in their time.



#### 4. Costs of volunteering

##### Training and development

As well as needing ongoing management, many volunteer roles also require either one-off or ongoing training and development. Community businesses provide this training in different forms and for various reasons.

- ◆ For some community businesses, training and development are provided to volunteers in the same way as staff to increase volunteers' abilities to do their roles.
- ◆ In some instances, training and development are provided to volunteers as part of the business' social impact, to help increase volunteers' skills and improve their future chances of employment.

Training can include technical skills such as woodworking, through to more general topics such as safeguarding, and can be provided through on-the-job support and externally provided courses.

**“ [Volunteers] get access to the same training and development opportunities [as staff do]. And that's reflected in ... a number of people [who] have moved into paid employment as a result.**

Despite the opportunity to provide training, community businesses can find it difficult to develop volunteer roles that are both useful to the business and worthwhile to the individual volunteer.

**“ Well, I think the struggle that we've had is creating worthwhile volunteering opportunities. Providing support hasn't been so much of a challenge ... it's developing a structured, worthwhile volunteering opportunity.**

#### 4.2 Costs of volunteers compared with staff wages

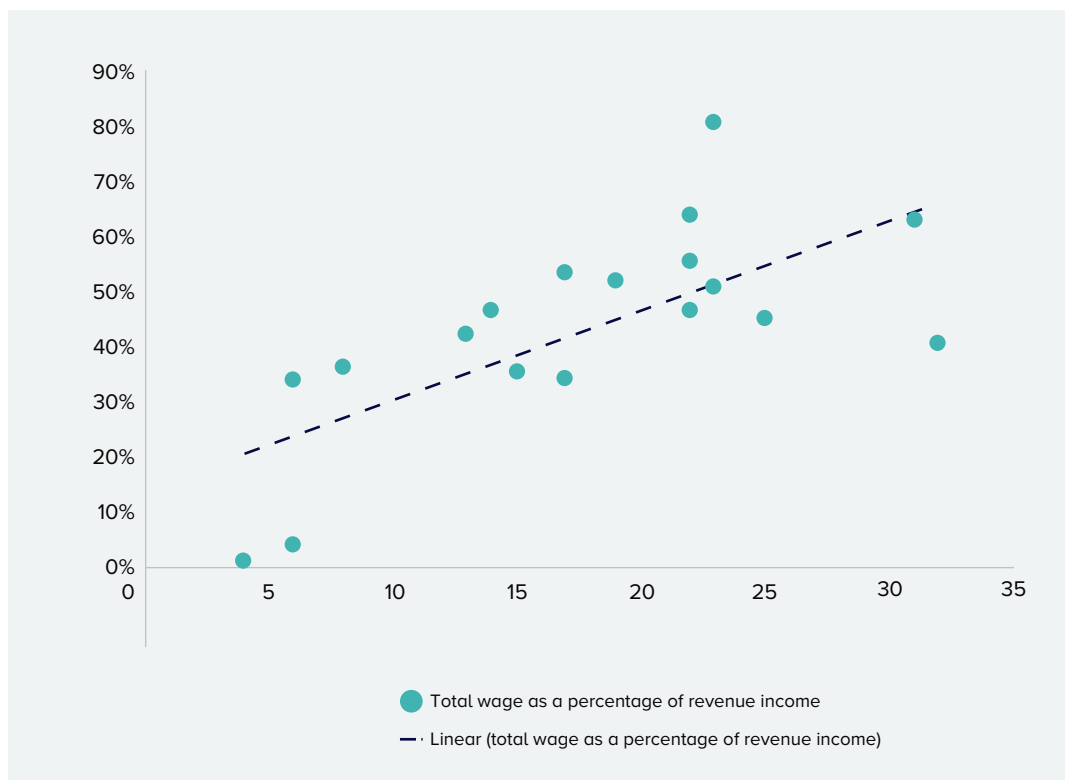
While recruiting and managing volunteers has cost implications, the level of investment needed to hire paid staff is evidently more substantial. As community businesses grow and become more established, decisions need to be made about the extent of investment that should be made in volunteers compared with paid members of staff (or indeed other areas of investment need).

Figure 19 shows that the older community businesses in our sample tend to spend a higher proportion of their revenue income on staff wages.

#### 4. Costs of volunteering

**Figure 20: The relationship between the age of CBF community businesses and percentage of revenue income spent on wage costs**

Relationship between the age of CBF community businesses and the percentage of revenue income spent on wage costs pre-COVID



This suggests that once organisations become more established and mature, they prefer to invest more in paid staff. This may be for a variety of reasons: it may be necessary as the organisation's turnover and scale of operation grows; perhaps volunteers are perceived as more difficult to manage than paid staff, or indeed need more staff to manage them; or there may be a need for the consistency that paid staff can offer. Other data collected by MyCake for Power to Change suggests that in any one year around one third of non-profits make a loss.<sup>21</sup> Further research is required on the relationship between the propensity to employ paid staff, successful volunteer management and the sustainability of organisations. In particular, it is currently unclear whether there is a relationship between contributing to or using community business' reserves and using volunteer labour to reduce the cost of running the community business and underpin its financial viability. This study cohort is too small to offer a robust analysis of this relationship between age of the community business, turnover level, role of volunteers and

21 As part of the Empowering Places evaluation, MyCake has reviewed six place-based cohorts of non-profits. In each of these six locations data was sourced on all non-profits which publish a profit and loss statement to Companies House, Charity Commission or Mutual Register. We found in each place that in any given year approximately a third of non-profits made a loss.

#### 4. Costs of volunteering

year-on-year contributions to reserves.

### 4.2 Impact of COVID-19 on volunteering costs

The impact of COVID-19 on the cost of volunteering for community businesses funded through CBF has been difficult to ascertain. For the majority community businesses, the cost of volunteering has reduced as their volunteering offer has shrunk in line with restrictions on social interactions and volunteers required to shield for their own health and safety. For a few community businesses, the cost of volunteering has stayed approximately the same. There are however a number of community businesses that have reported that the cost of volunteers has increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community businesses we spoke to reported that costs of volunteering increased for three primary reasons:

- ◆ **Increased measures required to ensure volunteer safety:** some community businesses have needed to invest in ensuring that volunteers are able to carry out their roles in a safe and secure manner. This includes conducting risk assessments, adjusting activities and continuously managing changing government guidelines and risk.  
  
“ We have basically done a risk assessment for all activity on site where we can manage the risk which is pretty much outdoors. We have put in place what structures we can ... It’s about risk management.”
- ◆ **Reduced staff capacity to support volunteers:** for various reasons including staff shielding, increased workload due to higher levels of need, and restrictions on staff capacity through furlough or lockdown, the workforces of community businesses have been affected in a large number of cases.<sup>22</sup> For some, this has resulted in reduced capacity to support volunteers and therefore an increase in the cost of managing them. This is because, in addition to reduced staff capacity to address higher needs, the value of volunteers has in many cases decreased or stayed the same (see Figure 12). In order to address this, some community businesses have distributed management responsibility more widely: Figure 20 shows that seven community businesses in our sample experienced an increase in the number of people managing volunteers.  
  
“ There should be supervision and direction and support. That hasn’t always happened during COVID-19 because it is [all] moving very quickly. Organisations and individuals were making it up and we were finding out what to do [as we went along].”

22 Byrne (Power to Change) ‘Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on community businesses’, <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/research/understanding-impact-COVID-19-community-businesses/>.

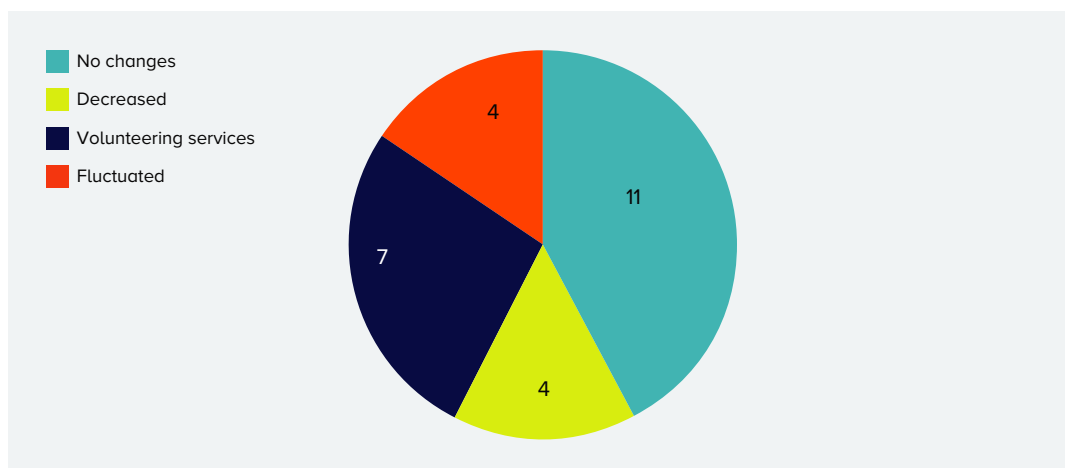
#### 4. Costs of volunteering

- ◆ **Increased support needs of individual volunteers:** Several community businesses reported that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the demographic and personal situations of their volunteers, their support needs and therefore the cost of supporting them has increased. In some situations, community businesses have reported volunteers requiring the same level of support as their beneficiaries, with community businesses feeling a duty of care towards more vulnerable volunteers.

“ There’s probably more regular contact, actually, with the volunteers by telephone, as a check-in with them ... We did provide probably more intense support, so we probably had less [volunteers] but had more regular contact with them.

**Figure 21: The number of CBF community businesses that reported a change in the number of people managing volunteers as a result of COVID-19.**

Changes to the number of people managing volunteers since COVID-19 (n=26)

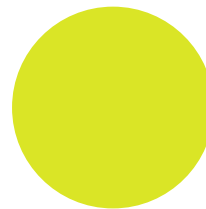
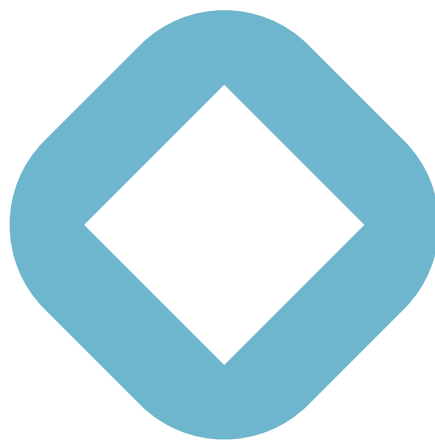


#### 4. Costs of volunteering

### 4.3 Summary

In this section, we looked at the costs associated with having a volunteer workforce both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. We found that:

- ◆ Community businesses need to invest in:
  - ◆ the recruitment of volunteers
  - ◆ the management of volunteers (either through having a designated resource for volunteer management, through an embedded structure or through a self-managed mechanism)
  - ◆ training and development of volunteers
  - ◆ looking after the wellbeing of volunteers (particularly in the context of COVID-19)
- ◆ While it is currently unclear if there is a relationship between contributing to or using community businesses' reserves and their use of volunteers to reduce running costs and help financial viability, we found that once community businesses become more established and mature, they prefer to invest more in paid staff.
- ◆ COVID-19 increased the cost of volunteering to community businesses as there were increased needs to ensure volunteer safety, reduced staff capacity to support volunteers, and an increased duty of care towards some volunteers.



## 5. Looking ahead

This section explores community businesses' future plans related to volunteer engagement, at the time of our research. It is important to note that most community businesses were in a period of flux when we spoke to them because of the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

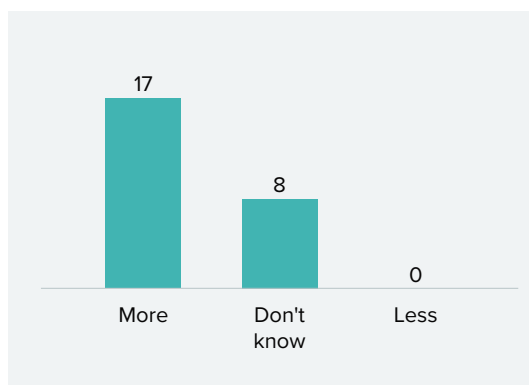
While individual community businesses' plans varied, four key themes emerged:

- ◆ **Belief that the value of volunteering will increase, and the intention to engage with more volunteers:** Figures 21 and 22 show that two-thirds of the community businesses in our sample believe that volunteers will become more essential, and nearly four-fifths intend to engage more volunteers in future.

“ I would definitely want to use more volunteers ... a priority is to increase the volunteer pool in the organisation.

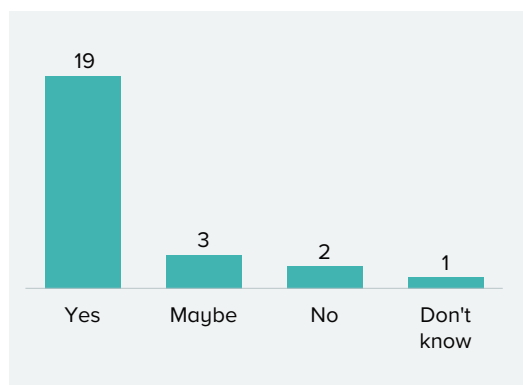
**Figure 22: Number of community businesses who think that volunteers will be more essential in the future.**

Do CBF community businesses think volunteers will be more essential in the future (n= 25)



**Figure 23: Number of community businesses that intend to engage more volunteers in the future**

Do CBF community businesses intend to engage more volunteers in the future (n=25)



## 5. Looking ahead

- ◆ **Impact of COVID-19 on the value of volunteers:** the impact of COVID-19 and the role that volunteers have played in the response to the crisis has influenced community businesses' future volunteering plans. Some plan to design programmes that have a greater role for their volunteer workforce, and many recognise that volunteering could become more important for volunteers themselves if there is a surge in unemployment.  
  
“ I think the board has taken some strategic decisions to increase our community projects ... our experience during the pandemic has been that volunteer engagement in those projects is pretty important ... the board have [also] recognised that due to the pandemic, there's going to be a surge in youth unemployment ... so we're going formalise, develop and increase the scope of the volunteer training opportunities that we provide.”
- ◆ **Diversity of volunteers:** For many community businesses, a key component of their future plans is to increase the diversity of their volunteer workforce.  
  
“ [We have also been] working on access, inclusion, diversity of our volunteers. We have had a lot of conversations about inclusion. We've always been a welcoming organisation, but we have to look at taking things a step further and to break down barriers for the community ... We are trying to get more people in the community to work with us.”
- ◆ **Investment in volunteers:** With the majority of community businesses stating that they intend to engage with more volunteers in future, a number have ambitions to improve their organisational structures and processes in relation to volunteer programmes. In particular, several community businesses expressed an interest in developing a dedicated post to support volunteers.  
  
“ That's one of my to-do list things, thinking about how we get a volunteer coordinator, I have talked to a couple of other organisations in the area about doing a joint volunteer coordinator and joining in with a couple of other organisations.”

The findings indicate that, despite the challenges they face with volunteering offers, most community businesses are looking to invest further in their volunteer workforce, albeit in different ways. Community businesses have indicated a strong desire to increase their volunteer engagement, diversify their volunteer workforce and improve their structures and mechanisms for engaging with volunteers. This has been accelerated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with many community businesses feeling that the value of volunteers has increased due to COVID-19 and will continue to do so in future.

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## 6. Conclusions

It is common knowledge that volunteers bring a huge amount of value to community businesses. What our research has shown is just how varied that value is, across CBF community businesses of different types, sizes, ages and places. We have also shown that the ‘volunteering model’ that businesses use – the types of roles that volunteers fill, how many of them are engaged, and how they are managed – varies depending on a range of factors relating to the particular characteristics and circumstances of the community business.

Key findings from our study include:

- **CBF community businesses engage volunteers for a variety of reasons** – some **ideological**, some related to **quality** and some about business **viability**. Most use volunteers for a combination of these reasons.
- **Volunteers fulfil a wide range of roles.**<sup>23</sup> The types of roles offered by CBF community businesses varies across different sectors, with **outdoor and practical volunteering** – as well as **trustee or board positions** – being the most consistently used across different types of organisations.
- **The number of volunteers engaged by CBF community businesses tends to be around 30–50**, except for those with large assets that tend to rely on a much larger volunteer workforce.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on volunteer numbers**, which have in many cases decreased in the short term. It has also impacted on volunteer demographics to some extent, with some CBF community businesses attracting a younger volunteer workforce than previously.
- **Improving the diversity of the volunteer workforce is a key ambition for the CBF community businesses in our sample.** While we could not assess whether the volunteer workforce demographic reflected the demographic of their local community, nonetheless the overall cohort of volunteers in this group are predominantly White, female and over 45.
- The economic value that volunteers bring to CBF community businesses varies by role but, **despite the critical role that volunteers play in underpinning business models, many CBF community businesses emphasise the value of their volunteers for other reasons** – for example, because volunteering is part of the ethos of the organisation, helps to improve the quality of services provided to the community, or increases the organisation’s social impact.

23 Which we found were not fully reflected in the Twine typology of volunteer roles currently used by Power to Change.



## 6. Conclusions

- ◆ **Volunteers are not ‘free’ and engaging a volunteer workforce is associated with a range of costs** including recruitment, ongoing management, training and support. These costs represent an **investment in growth, quality and viability** and, like other types of investment, raise questions for community businesses about when and how much to invest; what volunteering model to use; and how to ensure that both parties gain from the relationship.
- ◆ **Many CBF community businesses predict that volunteers will become more important as the COVID-19 pandemic starts to come to an end and intend to increase the number of volunteers engaged** to help support the business and its community in this period of change.

The volume of community businesses funded by CBF available to participate in this research project was relatively small. They were however very varied both in their activities and their uses and volumes of volunteers. While it has not been possible to develop an ‘equation’ which sets out the fiscal value of volunteers of different types, the findings from this research can be used as a basis to set out a more detailed set of requirements for the size and shape of any future research cohort.

Many CBF community businesses in our study did not accurately record information about their volunteer workforce, which presents a significant limitation to our findings. Many also find it challenging to manage volunteers effectively, because of the level of investment needed to develop and maintain a high-quality volunteering offer which benefits the community business and, perhaps more importantly, supports individual volunteers to the full extent possible. How funders like Power to Change can support community businesses to think more strategically about their volunteer model and invest in their volunteer workforces in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, is a key question raised by this research.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Telephone interview discussion guide

### Introduction

- ◆ Brief introduction to your community business
- ◆ About you
  - ◆ What is your role at [name of community business]? Check whether this is the same person who completed the survey
  - ◆ Main responsibilities at your community business
- ◆ What is your relationship (if any) to volunteers at [name of community business]?
  - ◆ e.g. do they manage volunteers, work alongside volunteers, have nothing to do with volunteers, are they a volunteer themselves, are they an ex-volunteer ...?

### About paid roles

#### **Pre-COVID: the financial year 2019–20**

- ◆ Do you have any additional comments about your paid employees between 1 April 2019 and February 2020, i.e. before any changes caused by COVID-19? e.g. did the number fluctuate throughout the year, any further detail about part-time roles and how many hours those roles are contracted for?

#### **During COVID-19: the financial year 2020–21**

(In the survey, you told us that the number of paid employees [increased/ decreased/fluctuated/ did not change] between February 2020 and now.)

- ◆ If there were changes, please can you explain why these changes happened?
  - ◆ e.g. seasonal workers, financial reasons, COVID-19, furloughing
- ◆ If there were no changes, please can you explain why?
  - ◆ e.g. COVID-19 didn't affect us

## **01. Reasons for having volunteers**

### **Pre-COVID: financial year 2019–20**

- ◆ Prior to COVID-19, what were your main reasons for having volunteers support your community business instead of only paid employees? Prompts:
  - a. To increase capacity
  - b. To improve the quality of service
  - c. To enable staff to focus on other tasks
  - d. There is not enough funding to pay staff to do these roles
  - e. To improve volunteers' wellbeing
  - f. Volunteering is part of our outreach to clients
  - g. Other, please describe

### **During COVID-19: financial year 2020–21**

- ◆ Have the main reasons for having volunteers changed since February 2020, i.e. since the COVID-19 pandemic hit?
- ◆ If yes, what has been the main reason for having volunteers since then? Prompts:
  - a. To increase capacity
  - b. To improve the quality of service
  - c. To enable staff to focus on other more important tasks
  - d. There is not enough funding to pay staff
  - e. Volunteers' wellbeing
  - f. Volunteering is part of our outreach to clients
  - g. Other, please describe
- ◆ What factors have driven this change?
  - ◆ e.g. whether the need has changed because of COVID-19 – closed down offer because of lockdown, volunteers having different motivations, etc.

## 02. Number of volunteers and average number of contributed hours

### Pre-COVID: the financial year 2019–20

#### Number of volunteers

(In the survey you told us XX number of people volunteered for your community business in total in the financial year 2019–20.)

- Can you tell us more about the consistency of volunteer engagement?
  - Prompts: Did your volunteer numbers fluctuate or were they stable throughout the year? And why?
- How many of the volunteers were regular vs irregular?
  - And what were some of the factors that determined how regular the volunteers were?

(In the survey, you told us that you offered XX types of volunteer role before the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. café/catering, community outreach).)

- Can you tell us more about what each of these roles involve?

(In the survey, you also told us about the average number of volunteers you had per role.)

- How regular or irregular were the volunteers for each type of role?
  - Can you tell us more about why certain volunteers were regular or irregular?
- Do the number of volunteers for each role fluctuate? If so, why is this?
  - e.g. one-off volunteers, volunteers coming regularly for three months and then leaving ... don't have the data
- Anything else you want to say about your volunteer numbers in the last financial year?

### **Number of contributed hours each week**

(In the survey, you told us that the average number of hours contributed each week by volunteers in each role was [go through each type and specify the number of each].)

- Can you tell us more about these numbers?
  - Explore any interesting findings, e.g. why so many hours on café volunteering, etc.
- What was the consistency of volunteer hours per volunteering role type?
  - And what are some of the factors that determine this?
  - Prompt: did the hours fluctuate?
- Anything else you want to say about volunteering hours in the last financial year?

### **During COVID-19: the financial year 2020–21**

#### **Number of volunteers**

(In the survey, you told us that volunteer numbers [increased/decreased/ fluctuated/did not change] between February 2020 and now.)

([If they changed] you also told us that now you have a total of XX volunteers.)

- If the number of volunteers has changed, please can you explain why?
  - e.g. increase because COVID-19 food delivery, decrease because working with vulnerable adults
- If the number of volunteers did not change, please can you explain why?
  - e.g. COVID-19 didn't affect the type of roles that volunteers do

([If the number of volunteers changed] In the survey, you told us that the average number of volunteers you have for each role is now XX [go through each type and specify the number of each].)

- [For roles where the number has changed] Please can you explain why the number of volunteers delivering this role has changed?
  - e.g. needed more capacity for food delivery, etc.

- [For the roles where the number changed] How did the regularity or irregularity of the volunteers change? Please can you explain what the factors were?
- Anything else you would like to tell us about the number of volunteers during COVID-19?

### **Number of contributed hours each week**

In the survey, you told us that the number of hours contributed by volunteers each week [increased/decreased/fluctuated/did not change] between February 2020 and now.

- If the number of hours has changed, please can you explain why? [Skip question if they've answered question in column BQ]
  - e.g. increase because COVID-19 food delivery, decrease because working with vulnerable adults
- If the number of hours did not change, please can you explain why?
  - e.g. COVID-19 didn't affect the type of roles that volunteers do

[If the number of hours changed] In the survey, you told us that the average number of hours contributed each week by volunteers in each type of role is now XX [go through each type and specify the number of hours for each].

- [For roles where the number of hours has changed] Please can you explain why the number of hours spent delivering this role has changed?
  - e.g. role has become more needed, more volunteers available so expanded capacity, role became less needed/less popular

### 03. Value of volunteering

- ◆ By **'essential'**, we mean roles that are crucial to the running of your community business. These roles need to be fulfilled, so if all of the volunteers doing these roles left you would need to replace them with paid staff or other volunteers. For example, this could include volunteers who are responsible for your finances.
- ◆ By **'valuable but not essential'**, we mean roles that are not crucial to the running of your community business but nonetheless add a lot of value. For example, this could include volunteers who help you to run a non-essential service.
- ◆ The third category are those types of roles that are offered primarily for **the benefit of the individual** rather than to benefit the business. For example, this could include gardening work that is not essential to the success of the business but is beneficial to the volunteer.

We do understand that these categories may not be clear cut, for example a volunteer who is essential to your business may also benefit personally from giving their time. For the following questions, please focus on the primary purpose of the role.

In this section, we are hoping to understand the value of having volunteers to your community business – both in a financial sense but also other types of value.

- ◆ In the survey, we asked you to highlight how essential your volunteers were using three categories of essential, did these categorise make sense to you?
- ◆ For each type of role that you offered [refer to previous answers], please can you tell us how many of the volunteers were essential, valuable but not essential, or volunteering primarily for their own benefit?
  - ◆ Probe around any interesting findings, e.g. why are certain roles more essential than others?
- ◆ Is there anything else you would like to add about which roles were most essential to your community business in the last financial year?



### **During COVID-19: the financial year 2020–21**

If changed:

- For each type of role that you offered this year [refer to previous answers], please can you tell us how many of the volunteers were essential, valuable but not essential, or volunteering primarily for their own benefit?
  - Probe around any interesting findings, e.g. why are certain roles more essential than others?
  - [If changed since COVID-19] why has this changed since last year?
- Is there anything else you would like to add about which roles were most essential to your community business in the current financial year?

## **04. Managing volunteers**

### **Pre-COVID: the financial year 2019–20**

In the survey, you told us that XX people had responsibility for managing volunteers prior to COVID-19.

- Please can you tell us more about who these managers are? What are their roles? How many volunteers are they each responsible for?

In the survey, you told us that volunteers [were/were not] managed differently to paid members of staff.

- [If volunteers were managed differently], please explain what those differences were
  - e.g. thinking about timetabling, coffee breaks, access to training ...
  - e.g. differences depending on the type of role – which roles are managed differently?
- Anything else you would like to add about how volunteers were managed in the last financial year?

### **During COVID-19: the financial year 2020–21**

In the survey, you told us that there has been an [increase/decrease/fluctuation or no changes] to how many people manage volunteers.

- [If the number of people managing volunteers has changed], why has the number of people managing volunteers changed since February 2020?
  - e.g. furlough, decrease/increase in the number of volunteers
- Can you tell us more about who these managers are now. What are their roles? How many volunteers are they each responsible for?

In the survey, you told us that the way volunteers are managed compared to paid members of staff has [changed/not changed] since COVID-19.

- [If volunteers are managed differently], please explain what those differences are
  - e.g. thinking about timetabling, coffee breaks, access to training ...
  - e.g. differences depending on the type of role – which roles are managed differently?

## **05. Demographic characteristics of volunteers**

### **Pre-COVID: the financial year 2019–20**

In the survey, you told us what proportion of your volunteers pre-COVID-19 were different genders, ethnicities, ages, their disability and employment status.

- Did the demographic mix of your volunteers fluctuate during the year? If so, why is this?
- Is there any connection between the types of roles you offer and the demographics of volunteers who typically fulfil those roles? (e.g. do Committee roles tend to be fulfilled by retired people?)
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the demographics of your volunteers prior to COVID-19?

### **During COVID-19: the financial year 2020–21**

In the survey, you told us that the demographics of your volunteers [changed/did not change] since the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

- [If changed], why has the demographic of your volunteers changed? Has it fluctuated during the year? If so, why is this?
- Can you tell us more about these new estimates?

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the demographics of your volunteers this year?

### **06. Final questions**

- Have any of your volunteers brought in key contacts or key management skills that have had a substantial impact on the success of your community business? If so, please describe
  - e.g. fundraising skills, introduction to key regional organisations ...

#### **Your financial accounts**

[If relevant] I have access to your financial accounts dated XX and I have some clarification questions to ask you.

- [Ask relevant clarification questions tailored to each community business' accounts, e.g. where are volunteering costs accounted for?]

#### **The future**

- You said in the survey that you think volunteers will be [more, same, less] essential to your community business? Please explain.
- You said in the survey that you [intend/don't] intend to engage more volunteers in the future? Please explain.
- [If yes] How do you plan on engaging new volunteers in the future?
- [If yes] Why do you plan on engaging new volunteers in the future?

## Appendix 2: Online survey

### Page 1: About the survey

[Renaissi](#) and [MyCake](#) have been funded by Power to Change to conduct a research project to understand the value of volunteers to community businesses. As part of this research, we are undertaking research (survey and a follow-up call) with 40 community businesses.

Your participation in this survey will help us to understand the value of volunteers to your community business. It asks questions about, for example, how many volunteers you have, what type of roles they do, and how important that is to your business model. Each section begins by asking about volunteering roles in the last financial year (prior to COVID-19) and then what volunteering looks like now. We are undertaking this survey with about 40 community businesses, and our analysis will combine the findings across all of them.

This survey is the first part of your participation in this research. The survey should take about 20 minutes to complete. When you have completed this survey, we will follow up with you to arrange a 45-minute interview over the phone to ask for more detail about your answers. When you have completed both research activities, we will transfer £75 to you as a thank you for your participation. We will also share the report when it is available in April/May 2021.

Thank you for your time.

**By clicking next you consent to your data being processed in this way.**

### Page 2: About you

[OPEN TEXT]

#### 1. Name of your community business

[OPEN TEXT]

#### 1. About you

- a. Name
- b. Job title
- c. Email address
- d. How long have you been involved in the community business? (e.g. as a volunteer, employed ...)
- e. How long have you been employed at the community business? (if you're not employed, put in n/a)

## Page 3: About paid roles at your community business

### Pre-COVID-19: financial year 2019–20

In this section, we want to get a sense of how many people you employed in the last financial year. If the numbers have fluctuated throughout the year, please provide the number of employees (full-time and part-time combined) you had in February 2020, before you experienced any changes due to COVID-19.

[OPEN TEXT – number]

**3. Including yourself, how many paid employees did your community business employ in the last financial year?**

[OPEN TEXT – number]

**4. How many of those were full-time employees?**

[OPEN TEXT – comment box]

**5. If you want to, please add any additional information or comments about your paid employees in the financial year 2019–20 here, to help us understand your business context.**

## Page 4: About paid roles at your community business

### During COVID-19: financial year 2020–21

[SINGLECODE]

**6. Between 29 February 2020 (the figures you provided in the previous section) and today, has the number of paid employees changed?**

- a. Increased (direct to page 5)
- b. Decreased (direct to page 5)
- c. Fluctuated (direct to page 5)
- d. No change (direct to page 6)

## Page 5: About paid roles at your community business

### During COVID-19: financial year 2020–21

In this section, we want to get a sense of how many people your community business currently employs. Please include any employees who have been furloughed in the figures you provide us.

[OPEN TEXT – number]

**7. If the number has changed, how many paid employees do you have now?**

[OPEN TEXT – number]

**8. How many of those are full-time employees?**

[OPEN TEXT – comment box]

**9. Any additional comments**

## **Page 6: Number of volunteers and average number of contributed hours**

In this section, we want to understand how many individual volunteers you engaged with in the last financial year and how many you engage with now. Volunteers include, for example, trustees, regular volunteers (e.g. people who volunteer the same number of hours every week), and irregular volunteers (e.g. where people sometimes volunteer but not regularly, this could be e.g. at one-off events). If you do not have an exact number, please provide an estimate.

**Pre-COVID: financial year 2019–20**

[SINGLECODE]

**10. Did your community business engage any volunteers in the financial year 2019–20?**

- a. Yes (direct to page 7)
- b. No (direct to page 8)

## **Page 7: Number of volunteers and average number of contributed hours**

**Pre-COVID: financial year 2019–20**

[OPEN TEXT – number]

**11. If yes, between 1 April 2019 and February 2020 how many people acted as volunteers (regular and irregular) for your community business in total?**

[GRID]

**12. Between April 2019 and February 2020, which of the following types of volunteer roles did you offer? Please tick all that apply.**

- a. Café/catering
- b. Committee work, AGM, trustees

- c. Community outreach and communications
- d. Helping with raising funds (shop, events ...)
- e. Office support
- f. Outdoor and practical work
- g. Professional pro bono work (legal, IT, research)
- h. Shop/sales
- i. Support and care for vulnerable community members
- j. Training/teaching
- k. Other(s), please describe

In this next question, we want to get an understanding of the average number of volunteers you had for each type of role you chose in the previous question during the 2019–20 financial year. If you added any types of roles to ‘other’ in the previous question, please continue adding those roles in the following questions.

[LIST OF BOXES – allow numerical value only]

**13. Between 1 April 2019 and February 2020, what was the average number of volunteers for each type of role you offered?**

If you are unsure, please give an estimate to this question.

Type of role	Average no. of volunteers
Café/catering	
Committee work, AGM, trustees	
Community outreach and communications	
Helping with raising funds (shop, events ...)	
Office support	
Outdoor and practical work	
Professional pro bono work (legal, IT, research)	
Shop/sales	
Support and care for vulnerable community members	
Training/teaching	
Other	

**14. If other, please describe**

[LIST OF BOXES – allow numerical value only]

**15. Between 1 April 2019 and February 2020, what was the average number of hours contributed each week for each type of role you offered?**

**If you are unsure, please give an estimate to this question.**

Type of role	Average no. of hours contributed each week by all volunteers in this type of role
Café/catering	
Committee work, AGM, trustees	
Community outreach and communications	
Helping with raising funds (shop, events ...)	
Office support	
Outdoor and practical work	
Professional pro bono work (legal, IT, research)	
Shop/sales	
Support and care for vulnerable community members	
Training/teaching	
Other(s), please describe	

[OPEN TEXT – comment box]

Any additional comments



## Page 8: Number of volunteers and average number of contributed hours

### During COVID-19: financial year 2020–21

This section focusses on how many volunteers and volunteer hours you have had since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and whether there have been any changes compared to the previous year.

[SINGLECODE]

#### **17. Did your community business engage any volunteers in the financial year 2020–21?**

- A. Yes (direct to page 9)
- B. No (direct to page 13)

## Page 9: Number of volunteers since 29 February 2020

This section focusses on how many volunteers you have had since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and whether there have been any changes compared to the previous year.

[SINGLECODE]

#### **18. Since 29 February 2020, have your volunteer numbers changed?**

- A. Increased (direct to page 10)
- B. Decreased (direct to page 10)
- C. Fluctuated (direct to page 10)
- D. No changes (direct to page 11)

## Page 10: Number of volunteers since 29 February 2020

[OPEN TEXT - number]

#### **19. If the number of volunteers has changed, how many volunteers in total do you have now?**

**20 If the number of volunteers has changed, what is the average number of volunteers you have for each type of role now?**

Type of role	Average no. of volunteers
Café/catering	
Committee work, AGM, trustees	
Community outreach and communications	
Helping with raising funds (shop, events ...)	
Office support	
Outdoor and practical work	
Professional pro bono work (legal, IT, research)	
Shop/sales	
Support and care for vulnerable community members	
Training/teaching	
Other(s), please describe	

[OPEN TEXT – comment box]

**21. Any additional comments**

**Page 11: Average number of contributed hours since 29 February 2020**

This section focusses on how many volunteer hours you have had since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and whether there have been any changes compared to the previous year.

[SINGLECODED]

**23. Since 29 February 2020, has the number of hours contributed by volunteers changed?**

- A. Increased (direct to page 12)
- B. Decreased (direct to page 12)
- C. Fluctuated (direct to page 12)
- D. No changes (direct to page 13)

## Page 12: Average number of contributed hours since 29 February 2020

[LIST OF BOXES – allow numerical value only]

**24. If the number of hours contributed has changed, how many hours do your volunteers contribute each week for each type of role now?**

Type of role	Average no. of hours contributed each week by all volunteers in this type of role
Café/catering	
Committee work, AGM, trustees	
Community outreach and communications	
Helping with raising funds (shop, events ...)	
Office support	
Outdoor and practical work	
Professional pro bono work (legal, IT, research)	
Shop/sales	
Support and care for vulnerable community members	
Training/teaching	
Other(s), please describe	

[OPEN TEXT – comment box]

Any additional comments

## Page 13: Demographic characteristics of volunteers

This section is about the demographic characteristics of your volunteers, before and since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. If you do not know the exact figures, please provide us with an estimate.

### Pre-COVID: financial year 2019–20

[LIST OF BOXES]

#### **2.5 Between 1 April 2019 and February 2020, please estimate what proportion of all your volunteers were:**

##### A. Gender

- Female?
- Male?
- Transgender or non-binary?

##### B. Ethnicity

- White?
- Mixed?
- Asian or Asian British?
- Black or Black British?
- Other ethnic group?

##### C. Disability

- Limited in their day-to-day activities because of a health problem or disability?  
This includes issues because of old age and also learning disabilities.
- Not limited in their day-to-day activities because of a health problem or disability?

##### D. Employment

- Employed?
- Unemployed?
- Retired?
- Pre-employment age?

##### E. Age

- Under 18
- 18–34
- 35–64
- 65+

[COMMENT BOX]

Any additional comments

## **Page 14: Demographic characteristics of volunteers**

**During COVID-19: financial year 2020–21**

[SINGLECODED]

**27. Since 29 February 2020, have the demographics (gender, ethnicity, disability, employment, age) of your volunteers changed?**

- A. Yes (direct to page 15)
- B. No (direct to page 16)

## **Page 15: Demographic characteristics of volunteers**

**During COVID-19: financial year 2020–21**

[LIST OF BOXES]

**28. If they have changed, currently what proportion of all your volunteers are:**

- A. Gender
  - Female?
  - Male?
  - Transgender or non-binary?
- B. Ethnicity
  - White?
  - Mixed?
  - Asian or Asian British?
  - Black or Black British?
  - Other ethnic group?
- C. Disability
  - Limited in their day-to-day activities because of a health problem or disability?  
This includes issues because of old age and also learning disabilities.
  - Not limited in their day-to-day activities because of a health problem or disability?

D. Employment

- Employed?
- Unemployed?
- Retired?
- Pre-employment age?

E. Age

- Under 18
- 18–34
- 35–64
- 65+

[COMMENT BOX]

Any additional comments

## **Page 16: Managing volunteers**

This section is looking to understand how your community business managed volunteers prior to COVID-19 and whether there have been any differences to volunteer management since the pandemic hit.

### **Pre-COVID: financial year 2019–20**

[MULTICODE]

**30. Between 1 April 2019 and February 2020, how did you recruit your volunteers? Tick all that apply.**

- A. Through volunteering services
- B. Advertising job description
- C. Friends of volunteers
- D. Word of mouth (e.g. in the community network, but not brought in by current volunteers)
- E. Recommended by an agency, government or otherwise
- F. On community service
- G. Other, please describe

[GRID]

**30. Between 1 April 2019 and February 2020, were your volunteers managed differently to paid members of staff? e.g. thinking about timetabling, coffee breaks, access to training ...**

H. Yes

I. No

[SINGLECODE]

**31. Between 1 April 2019 and February 2020, was it part of someone's role to manage your volunteers?**

J. Yes (direct to page 17)

K. No (direct to page 18)

## **Page 17: Managing volunteers**

**Pre-COVID: financial year 2019–20**

[OPEN TEXT – number]

**33. If yes, how many people in your community business managed volunteers?**

[OPEN TEXT – number]

**34. How many of those managing volunteers were paid members of staff (part-time or full-time)?**

[List of boxes – e.g. manager 1, manager 2 ... up to 10]

**35. Manager 1: What proportion of their role was dedicated to managing volunteers? e.g. 20% of their time ...**

[OPEN TEXT - number]

**36. Between 1 April 2019 and February 2020, on average how many hours of work each week do you think was spent on managing volunteers?**

## **Page 18: Managing volunteers**

**During COVID-19: financial year 2020–21**

[SINGLECODE]

**37. Since 29 February 2020, have there been any changes to how many people in your community business manage volunteers?**

L. Increased (direct to page 19)

M. Decreased (direct to page 19)

N. Fluctuated (direct to page 19)

O. No changes (direct to page 20)

## Page 19: Managing volunteers

### During COVID-19: financial year 2020–21

[OPEN TEXT – number]

**38. If the number has changed, how many people manage volunteers now?**

[OPEN TEXT – number]

**39. If the number has changed, how many of those managing volunteers are paid members of staff?**

[List of boxes]

**40. Manager 1: If the number has changed, what proportion of their role is dedicated to managing volunteers now? e.g. 20% ...**

[OPEN TEXT – number]

**41. Currently, on average how many hours of work each week do you think has been spent on managing volunteers?**

[SINGLECODE]

## Page 20: Managing volunteers

### During COVID-19: financial year 2020–21

[SINGLECODE]

**42. Has the way you manage volunteers compared to paid members of staff changed since pre-COVID-19? e.g. thinking about timetabling, coffee breaks, access to training ...**

P. Yes

Q. No

[SINGLECODE]

**43. Since 29 February 2020, has the way you recruit volunteers changed?**

R. Yes (direct to page 21)

S. No (direct to page 22)



## Page 21: Managing volunteers

### During COVID-19: financial year 2020–21

[MULTICODE]

**44. If yes, how do you recruit your volunteers today? Tick all that apply.**

- A. Through volunteering services
- B. Advertising job description
- C. Friends of volunteers
- D. Word of mouth (e.g. in the community network, but not brought in by current volunteers)
- E. Recommended by an agency, government or otherwise
- F. On community service
- Other, please describe

## Page 22: Final questions

### The future

[SINGLECODED]

**45. Do you think volunteers are going to become more or less essential to the running of your community business in the future?**

- A. More
- B. Less
- C. Don't know

[MULTICODE]

**46. What roles do you think will be more essential going forward? Please choose the three most important type of roles.**

- A. Café/catering
- B. Community outreach and communications
- C. Helping with raising funds (shop, events ...)
- D. Office support
- E. Outdoor and practical work
- F. Shop/sales
- G. Support and care for vulnerable community members
- H. Training/teaching
- i. Other, please describe

[SINGLECODE]

**47. Do you intend to try and engage more volunteers in the future?**

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Maybe
- D. Don't know

[COMMENT BOX]

**48. Anything else you would like to add?**

**Thank you for taking part. We look forward to our follow-up interview with you.  
Please press 'done' to complete the survey.**



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