

The Fairer Futures Programme

A collaboration between



The Midcounties
Co-operative

**Miss
Macaroon**
BAKING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Creating Fairer Futures

Update report 2024/25



Introduction

In collaboration with our members, we created an award-winning sustainability strategy outlining our key social responsibility areas of focus as a values-driven business. One of the strategy's three pillars is Fairer, which centres on driving social mobility and creating meaningful opportunities.

We have three initiatives that support this strategic pillar – our work with Bright Future Co-operative to support modern slavery survivors, the Fairer Access to Work scheme which is helping those facing challenges return to the workplace and the Fairer Futures Programme.

This report centres on our flagship Fairer Futures Programme, which launched in May 2023 and is based at our Walsall Town Centre food store. Created in collaboration with one of our local suppliers, Birmingham-based social enterprise Miss Macaroon, the programme helps disadvantaged young people

regain their confidence and find meaningful employment through a 12-week training scheme.

This report celebrates the difference this programme has made so far, the recognition it has received and looks ahead at what's to come as we work to create a fairer, more sustainable, and ethical future.



Tarra Simmons
Head of Community and Democratic Engagement

Working in partnership with...

Miss Macaroon

Miss Macaroon is a social enterprise based in Birmingham creating employment opportunities for young people in need. Established in 2011 with just one team member and a small kitchen space, the enterprise has now supported over 270 young people.

We stock Miss Macaroon's products in our West Midlands stores and found our values aligned with those of founder, Rosie Ginday MBE, leading to us forming a partnership. Rosie has been instrumental in shaping the Fairer Futures Programme, drawing on her experience in supporting young people into work.





Why we set up this programme

As a co-operative, everything we do is for the good of our members and our actions are based on the co-operative values and principles established in 1844.

Social responsibility is one of four core values that guides everything we do along with our mission statement: “Through the power of co-operation, we’re building a fairer, more sustainable, and ethical future.”

The Fairer Futures Programme is a crucial way we are tackling social inequality in one of our most established trading heartlands to help improve the lives of our members locally.

Why Walsall?

As of spring 2023, government data showed that more than 526,000 people aged 16-24 were unemployed in the UK, an increase of 154,000 on the previous year.

In Walsall – where Midcounties has traded since 1886 – the situation was even more concerning:

- Almost 6% of the population were claiming unemployment benefits, rising to 9% among 18–24-year-olds – nearly triple the national average.
- 22.4% of 16–64-year-olds were classed as economically inactive.
- Walsall ranks among the top 10% most deprived local authorities in England (17th overall), with nearly 30% of children living in low-income families, versus a 20% national average.
- The Black Country also experiences 7.4% higher depression rates than the national average and 20% of all A&E admissions are linked to mental health issues.
- Looking at 2025 figures, 1 in 4 working age people in Walsall are economically inactive, particularly young people, and the borough has the 6th highest rate of youth inactivity in the UK.

Breaking cycles

By providing meaningful employment opportunities for young people aged 19–30 facing significant barriers such as disability and social anxiety we believe we can help break cycles of generational unemployment and deprivation.

Did you know?

£140,000 is the present value of lifetime economic gains from a person aged 20-24 being moved out of the NEET (not in education or employment) category.*

Did you know?

More than half of those entering the Fairer Futures Programme have never had a paid role before and **two thirds** reported having multiple issues or mental health problems.


Creating fairer futures for young people

The 12-week Fairer Futures Programme provides a unique and robust blend of tailored mentoring, counselling, work experience, leadership skills, access to further education, support with job applications and six months of follow-up help for graduates.

This combination addresses skills gaps, some of the worries holding participants back and practical support in gaining employment.

Input	Delivery and work experience teams, a dedicated training space and high-quality learning resources.
Activities	In-class training programme, work experience, wellbeing workshops, job club and counselling.
Output	Training certificates: BTEC Level I and Food Hygiene Level II, employment (permanent and fixed term) and increased confidence.
Outcome	More clarity around goals, increased employability, better wellbeing and new industry-relevant skills.
Impact	Sustained employment, financial independence and long-term community growth.

We track the performance of the programme against these indicators through our training hours dashboard, graduate questionnaires and feedback.

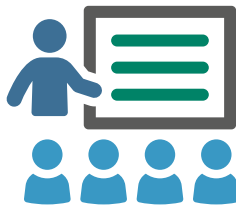


“Ultimately, emotional wellbeing positively enhances life experience, and we consistently hear from our graduates that the connections, friendships and confidence they’ve developed have changed their life.”

Rosie Ginday MBE
CEO, Miss Macaroon

Achievements so far*

65 graduates



2,159
hours of classroom
training delivered

68%
of graduates in
sustained employment



2,525
hours of work experience delivered

116
hours of wellbeing workshops and
1:1 counselling delivered



The programme has already exceeded its three-year goal of helping 36 young people into work, with 44 securing employment in **two and a half years**.

Feedback from graduates

- 82% said their confidence had increased significantly since joining the programme
- 68% said they now have clear goals and feel they are making progress
- 100% of participants said they found the programme useful

People in Retail Award

The programme received the Community Engagement Programme of the Year Award at the People in Retail Awards 2024.



The People in Retail award judges commended Fairer Futures, saying: "The dedication of The Midcounties Co-operative team, who went above and beyond to mentor, train and offer real-life work experiences, has been incredibly inspiring. This initiative doesn't just offer jobs – it offers hope, confidence, and the chance for young people to transform their lives."

Grocer Gold Award

Fairer Futures was also a core part of our submission for the prestigious Grocer Gold Awards.



The Society's member-led sustainability strategy was awarded Sustainability Initiative of the Year at the Grocer Gold Awards 2025, commended for achieving a "whole new level" of impact by judges.

Upon receiving the award, Midcounties' Head of Community and Democratic Engagement Tarra Simmons said: "This award proves that co-operatives can lead the way in creating a fairer, more sustainable society, one where business success is measured not just by profit, but by positive impact."

*results as of October 2025

The difference it's making

Our graduates have seen tangible improvements in their lives as a result of the Fairer Futures programme and that is exactly why we do what we do. Hear from some of them here.

"If it wasn't for this programme, I still wouldn't be happy and wouldn't know which direction to go in. Jobcentres suggest so many jobs, but this programme really takes into account your needs."
Zachary, Fairer Futures graduate

"When I joined, I had low self-esteem and was used to speaking negatively about myself. I was scared to ask for help but my colleagues made me feel comfortable and able to ask for help. It felt like a really big progression from the training room to the shop floor, but it was so gradual that it felt manageable. The programme has really built my confidence and I have learnt so much."
Chloe, Fairer Futures graduate

Case study

Luke Jordan

"Before I started the program, I didn't really know what to do with my career or my life in general. I struggled with social anxiety and just dealing with things on a daily basis. But whatever fears or struggles I had began to fade through the program.

"It just takes time, and what makes the difference is having the right platform to grow. Everyone is genuinely trying to help you as much as possible, and now I try to give back whenever I can.

"I think about people like Jonathan [a Fairer Futures graduate]. I saw him on his first day, and I've seen how far he's come. I'm proud of him because people like him just need a chance. I see a lot of myself in him – we're both quite quiet – and I want him to succeed just as much as I want to succeed myself.

"That's the biggest thing I can say about the program: everyone's in the same boat, supporting one another and chipping in to help each other grow.

"Since finishing the program and being employed by the Society I have increased my hours and I am now a responsible Customer Service Assistant, which means I manage the store in my manager's absence. My confidence has grown outside of work also; this year I have travelled to Germany as a solo traveller which is something I would never have done previously."



Please [watch this video](#) and [visit this webpage](#) for more Fairer Futures impact stories.

Involving members and colleagues

Colleague engagement

Colleagues at Walsall Town Centre store are fully invested in this programme, with many receiving additional training in disability and mental health awareness, safeguarding and trauma informed practice to enable them to fully support trainees.

Customer service assistants act as role models, work buddies and trainers for those on the programme, broadening their skillset and boosting their own self confidence as well as the confidence of those on the programme.

As part of the programme, colleagues from across Midcounties also provide added value workshops where they help participants with their CVs, run mock interviews and teach other crucial employability skills.

In response to one of these sessions, colleague Karen received a letter from participant Luke saying: "I really needed to hear a lot of what you spoke about especially pushing forward and stepping outside of your comfort zone. On Tuesday I started to question myself, so your talk happened at the perfect time for me and it definitely gave me the boost I needed."



Emma, a colleague trainer at the store, said: "It is really rewarding to be able to take them under your wing and see them grow in confidence and just transform into a different person from someone who first came in and was very shy and quiet and quite unsure into someone who suddenly has all this confidence."

Member feedback

All of the members we surveyed about the Fairer Futures Programme believed it to be valuable to their local community.

Walsall-based member Susan gave her thoughts at our celebratory Fairer Futures event, saying:

"I think the scheme is very good as there are lots of teenagers out there who can't get jobs due to having autism or ADHD as they often find face-to-face contact difficult in interviews. This is a great opportunity for children leaving school when they don't know what to do – please keep supporting it."

One member said:

"It gives people who want to work but are finding it difficult an opportunity that they may not otherwise get." Another commented: "Vulnerable members of society are often overlooked, so this will help them a lot."

A Fairer Futures manager said:

"We have regular customers who come into the coffee shop at the Walsall store every day and they have been so supportive of our learners. They know all about the programme and show a real interest in how they're getting on. They are so kind and will tell them not to worry if it takes them a bit longer to bring them their order. I think it gives them a sense of pride to be a part of it."

Future plans

Continued support

Fairer Futures continues to change lives, welcoming a new cohort every 12 weeks.

It is firmly embedded as one of the key ways we are addressing both the Fairer pillar of our sustainability strategy and the Sustainable Impact element of our TRUST measures. We recognise the significant impact it has had, and continues to have, on the young people we work with, our colleagues and our members.

The model we are using to deliver Fairer Futures is unique, combining counselling with education, hands-on work experience and learning core skills from those in business. This innovative blend is delivering award-winning impacts and making real difference to those involved.

Creating further change

Midcounties is using the Fairer Futures concept to inform and develop its fledgling Fairer Access to Work scheme.

Developed in partnership with charity Aspire and hosted across two Midcounties stores in Oxfordshire, Fairer Access to Work offers work experience and mentoring for adults who have experienced homelessness, displacement or other adverse conditions. Since its 2024 launch, it has already supported 16 people into employment – exceeding its target of 11 per year.

Sharing best practice

By joining forces with other retailers, co-operatives and local businesses, we hope to inspire wider change.

Midcounties has worked with Business in the Community (BITC) and has attended round tables to encourage local businesses to undertake similar schemes, including hosting a BITC West Midlands board meeting to showcase Fairer Futures. We are enthusiastic about sharing what we've learnt through the scheme with others, cementing our role as Thought Leading Pioneers.

Upon receiving the People in Retail Community Engagement Programme of the Year Award, Midcounties CEO Phil Ponsonby said: "It absolutely goes to show that taking the leap and investing in projects like this is so important and we hope The Fairer Futures Programme inspires other businesses to launch similar projects to widen the support for unemployed young people."

"I suffer with severe anxiety but being on this course has given me confidence. It's one of the best things I've done."

Catherine, Fairer Futures graduate

"Support at work helped me grow. The programme has taught me to have more belief in myself, and it's changed my life in so many ways."

Azhar, Fairer Futures graduate

[Read more about Fairer Futures](#)





Creating Fairer Futures

By providing meaningful employment
opportunities for young people aged 19–30

The **Fairer Futures** Programme

A collaboration between



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