

Co-operative movement offers hope to the next generation

Submitted by: Co-operatives UK

Tuesday, 4 January 2022

Some of the top issues occupying the minds of young people have co-operative solutions claims trade body Co-operatives UK in a new YouGov survey(1) released today.

Mental health, job security, career prospects, a lack of control over their working lives, climate change and worries about how their personal data is being used are causing stress in young people, but there are co-operative solutions, says Co-operatives UK CEO Rose Marley.

Two out of three (66%) 16 to 25 year olds feel there are not enough good jobs for young people and 61% feel that the gig economy treats them unfairly. Almost one in three young people have personally experienced or know a friend that has experienced a lack of job security (32%), having no control over working life (30%) and poor career prospects (28%), according to the YouGov poll.

“Co-operatives are common in countries such as The Netherlands, Finland and France, which incidentally all rank in the top ten for child wellbeing and happiness(2). There are six times as many co-operatives in France than in the UK and 90% of people in Finland are a member of a co-op(3). But here in the UK, even though co-ops are worth 40bn pounds to the UK economy, it’s a little-known business secret that can transform the lives of young people and provide hope and solutions at a time when it’s most needed,” says Rose.

“Awareness of the co-operative model is really low amongst young people; over half could not name a single co-operative(4), but two out of three(5) of them are looking for an ethical employer who treat customers and staff fairly. It’s time to reintroduce them to the concept of joining co-operatives, as a way of having a say in where they work, live and shop.”

Ivan Gonzalez, Lucy King, Max Gerber and Noga Enbar began working as a collective of freelancers after meeting through London’s tech co-op community and formed In Fact Digital Co-op – an agency creating apps, websites and digital tools. “We are convinced that co-op working is the future. We probably didn’t ever consider setting up any other way. We wanted to be in control of our own destinies,” says Lucy King.

Wings platform co-op in the Finsbury Park area of London was formed in July 2021 to provide an ethical alternative to existing food delivery apps, giving delivery riders fair pay and conditions. “I want every rider currently getting a bad deal in the gig economy to eventually have the option of a proper, dignified job with decent pay,” says Rich Mason, co-founder of Wings.

Almost half of young people are worried about how their personal data is used (49%), while 41% are also concerned that technology is being controlled by a few companies or individuals. But again, there is a co-operative way to tackle this.

Platform co-ops are tech platforms owned and controlled by the users and people who provide the services. Whilst co-ops like Open Data Services are dedicated to providing open and transparent data, guided by strong values and ethics, working with organisations including the World Bank.

High street retail co-ops such as The Co-op Group are taking steps to tackle the top issue worrying young people, mental health, with two out of three (68%) having first-hand experience of mental health issues, either through personal experience or through knowing a friend with mental health issues. The Co-op's partnership with Mind has seen them pledge 8 million pounds for the mental health charity, with 5.5 million pounds raised to date.

Research published in Nature(6) earlier this year revealed that climate anxiety is common in children and young people across the world but again it's an area where the co-operative movement can offer hope. Two thirds of member-owned businesses are taking action to reduce carbon emissions, and of those taking action one in five have already published net zero targets.

"Young people are at the heart of our new strategy, which focuses on inspiring and supporting the next generation of co-operative members and embracing and influencing the ethical ownership of technology and data to enable a fairer future for us all," continue Rose. "We're holding a young people's summit later in the year to help raise awareness of the co-operative solutions available to them. This is the first step in our ambition to encourage more young people to join co-operatives."

Notes to editors:

For more information, case studies or to interview Rose Marley contact Wendy Carter wendy.carter@uk.coop / 07946 314038

Data sources

1. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2016 UK 16-25 year olds online. Fieldwork was undertaken between 3rd - 12th December 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK 16-25 year olds online.
2. UNICEF Innocenti Report Card reports on child wellbeing health and happiness (September 2020)
3. Co-operatives Europe National Report: Finland (September 2020)
4. 54% of respondents could not name a single co-operative
5. 66% of respondents said that when thinking about what type of an employer they would like to work for, behaving fairly (ie being ethical to staff and customers) was important to them.
6. Young people's climate anxiety revealed in landmark survey (Nature September 2021)

Case studies

Young people who aren't currently members of co-ops but are interested in finding out more:

Annabelle Cook is an A level student studying French, History, English Literature and English Language at Cardinal Langley Sixth Form College, Rochdale and is looking forward to being the first member of her family to go to University. Belle currently works as a GCSE English Tutor and is also a volunteer Performing Arts coach for the North West Youth Theatre, a community charity based in Moston that works

with young children to make theatre arts accessible to all.

Liam Scholes is a young Manchester based actor who has appeared in Coronation Street and Peaky Blinders. He is involved in Our Pass, a scheme to make public transport accessible to young people in Manchester, funded by Mayor Andy Burnham. Our Pass is exploring becoming a co-operative, led by the young people who use it.

Co-ops led by young people

InFact Digital Co-op are a small London based digital and creative agency owned and controlled by the workers. They believe in the power of technology and design to act as a force for social good.

<https://www.infactcoop.com/>

Wings is an ethical food delivery co-operative which sprung up out of the Covid pandemic as a group of volunteers came together to provide free food deliveries to those in need. This sparked an idea to provide an ethical alternative to existing food delivery apps, to give delivery riders fair pay and conditions. <https://www.wings.coop/>

About Co-operatives UK

As the voice of the UK's co-operative movement, we empower and support co-operative enterprise with specialised knowledge and expertise, to grow the co-operative economy and create a fairer society.

From football clubs and farms, to convenience stores and pubs, there are more than 7,000 co-operatives in the UK, each owned and controlled by their members and based on a set of shared principles and values.

By promoting shared wealth through member ownership, we are committed to enable anyone in the UK to form, or join, thriving and sustainable co-ops. www.uk.coop