Let’s talk about Co-op
The Co-op has been doing amazing things for the past 175 years. And we’ve been doing it together. The clue’s in our name. Co-operate: it’s what we do.

We’re proud that we make a positive difference - both close to home and around the globe. This weekend, we started talking to customers about those Co-op differences in a new way, so they know that when they choose Co-op it does good. Our new ads bring to life the connection between our Co-op and the community and show the difference co-operation can make to people’s lives.

And the brilliant people who work here are always at the heart of that difference. We know you care passionately about the world we share and the things Co-op does, so we asked a few of our colleagues to tell their stories about why they’re proud to work here.

We hope you love their stories! Why not take a few minutes to chat to your colleagues and find out theirs?

Co-op. It’s what we do.
We gave £19 million to community causes in 2018.

“\textit{I think it’s amazing that members can choose to support things they care about and make a difference, without even trying.}”

I’ve been at Co-op for 33 years. I’ve seen lots change over that time, but the one thing that hasn’t changed is the commitment Co-op shows to local communities.

I know so many people here who really care and do everything they can to support others in our depot and area. It makes me feel so proud to know that it’s not just us who care: we’re part of an organisation that does too.
“I think it’s amazing that members can choose to support things they care about and make a difference, without even trying.”

Doing good doesn’t have to be hard. We’ve proved that by giving our members a way of donating to local causes, just by shopping with us.*

I think it’s amazing that members can choose to support things they care about and make a difference, without even trying. We’ve given over £40 million** to more than 16,000 local causes over the last three years; that’s staggering. Most businesses wouldn’t give away their profits that easily, but then Co-op’s different to most businesses.

*Whenever a member buys Co-op products, 1% goes towards our Local Community Fund

**Includes the levy from carrier bag sales
I believe everyone’s got a right to a decent education. No matter where you live, you should have opportunities to learn and grow; where places don’t have those opportunities, they deserve support. I want to help make a difference, which is why I decided to get involved and sign up as a governor at the Co-op’s North Manchester Academy.

When Co-op took over the school three years ago, it had never scored higher than ‘improvement needed’ in an Ofsted rating. But this year, that changed, and it was such a great moment for us all when we were rated ‘good’. The whole community can now say, with pride, that their kids go to a good school.
“Getting involved as a governor means you make a proper difference to these young people – and that’s incredibly exciting.”

The positive impact is clear to see, and far more important than the rating. Everything we do stems from our values; we want our students to believe in themselves and to make the most of their potential.

I see this happen when we welcome them into the business for work experience. I've seen it light a spark in so many children as they put their skills into practice and see the possibilities that are open to them. Seeing our students come away inspired and excited for their future inspires me too.

Owain Whittaker
Business Improvement Manager, Food
“I feel like I’m helping to make a real difference for the whole community.”

I’ve loved every minute of being a Member Pioneer. A lot of people don’t really know what the role actually is; I always say it’s about being a catalyst for action. My job is to help make sure we’re working with our local communities to make a difference.

Every Co-op business in my area is so busy and local causes often need support understanding how they fit into our community, so I bring them together. I keep them all updated on what’s going on everywhere else and how we can make a difference, both with the Local Community Fund and outside of that.
I get stuck into a whole host of things, and I’m always shocked by how many people don’t know how much of a difference being a member with us can make. I’m sure everyone in the country should know by now, I go on about it so much!

I feel at the heart of it all; I’m connecting our members, causes and communities, all the while meeting fantastic people. I feel like I’m helping to make a real difference in my area, and it’s the best thing I’ve ever done.

“**I feel like I’m helping to make a real difference for the whole community.**”

Karen Driver
Risk Support Officer and Member Pioneer
It means a lot to me to work for a business that genuinely wants to do the right thing.

I grew up spending lots of time on my uncle’s dairy farm, so I’ve always been very passionate about where our food comes from. Some of the milk from the farm went to Cadbury’s, and, at Christmas, the family used to get a big hamper of chocolate. It was so exciting and a great way for me, as a kid, to understand the whole process of making food.

As well as using 100% British meat and free-range eggs in Co-op products, we stock loads of amazing produce from British farms. And buying from local producers has a knock-on effect; it enables them to support their community of suppliers and workers too.

It means a lot to me to work for a business that genuinely wants to do the right thing and make a positive difference to our farming communities. Even though I’m part of Funeralcare, it makes me proud that Co-op as a whole cares about where its produce comes from.
“It means a lot to me to work for a business that genuinely wants to do the right thing.”

It’s amazing to be able to guarantee great-quality produce from our British farmers. But what’s important to me is knowing that when we buy from them, we’re keeping our farming communities alive.

Of course, it’s important to me to support local farmers, but it’s really about quality. You just know that British farmers are going to have great standards and that their animals are well cared-for. That’s what makes me proud.
“What is a responsible business? It’s about leading by example: at the Co-op, we get stuck in and encourage others to step up.”

The fact that slavery still happens today is scandalous. Five years ago I found this out, and I was completely shocked; I still can’t believe it’s happening here in the UK, right now. I’m so proud I’m able to help change that.

My job is to raise awareness and increase understanding of the reality of slavery in our world. It’s really tough a lot of the time, but I know it’s the right thing to do.

Alison Scowen
Senior Campaigns and Public Affairs Manager

other businesses and counting are joining our commitment
“What is a responsible business?
It’s about **leading by example**: at the Co-op, we get stuck in and encourage others to step up.”

When I started campaigning, I saw that our members, colleagues and customers cared too. That’s been a huge inspiration and has kept me going.

By introducing the Bright Future programme, we’re changing people’s lives. We’re providing survivors of modern slavery with employment opportunities, taking them from a situation of utter desperation and helping them to see the brightness of their own futures.

Alison Scowen
Senior Campaigns and Public Affairs Manager
We all have the right to be respected, valued and given equal opportunities to develop.

We called our black and Asian colleague network Rise because we want colleagues from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds to grow and succeed. All our differences should be recognised and celebrated, and we’ve now got a voice so we can speak up when this isn’t happening.

We launched Rise in May 2018. It’s still early days, and most of our activity takes place in 1 Angel Square, but we really want to reach all colleagues, no matter where they are. We all have the right to be respected, valued and given equal opportunities to develop.

Eram Akram
Customer Insight, Insurance
“We all have the right to be respected, valued and given equal opportunities to develop.”

Studies show that companies with an ethnically diverse workforce and leadership perform better. It’s proven to be good for business; bringing different backgrounds and viewpoints to the table leads to better decision-making and profits, as well as increasing colleague engagement.

At the Co-op, we’re proud to have a diverse workforce, but there aren’t many people of black or ethnic minority backgrounds in leadership positions. We don’t really know why this is, so we’re working with the business to figure it out and then change it. It makes me proud to be part of a business that wants to work out its problems so it can solve them.

To find out more about Rise, email rise@coop.co.uk or visit facebook.com/groups/cooprise

Eram Akram
Customer Insight, Insurance
“I feel the **caring spirit of Co-op** every day, in and out of work.”

My partner, Donna, and I met 10 years ago, when we both worked in our local Co-op. Donna had to stop working about five years ago because she’s got a genetic disorder known as Huntington’s disease. Since then, her condition’s deteriorated and, unfortunately, she’s now at a stage where she needs round-the-clock care. I balance that with working full-time.

It’s a lot to deal with and, at first, I thought being a carer would take career progression off the table. But thanks to my supportive colleagues, it hasn’t stood in the way.
I work with people who know me, who care, who’ll swap shifts when I need it and who’d step in if ever there was an emergency. Being surrounded by such amazing people gave me so much flexibility and confidence that, when the chance came, I felt ready and able to become a store manager.

Recently, my area manager started a fundraising campaign to buy Donna a new powered wheelchair. In just three months, our community raised an unbelievable £4,100. It’s dramatically improved life for us, but it’s also been so inspiring to see how much people will do for other people. I feel the caring spirit of Co-op every day, in and out of work.
“I only ever wanted to work for an ethical business.”

When I say Fairtrade has been a lifelong passion, I really mean it. When I was at school, I started a Fairtrade group. I took a gap year before university, volunteering in Tanzania, and also working at Traidcraft, the UK’s first Fairtrade pioneers. I only ever wanted to work for an ethical business, and that brought me to Co-op seven years ago and my dream job in the Food Policy team.

My job is about making a difference; I get to do things like visit the Ivory Coast to see how we support workers by committing to buy products at a fair price.

100% of Co-op branded coffee, tea and chocolate is Fairtrade
“I only ever wanted to work for an ethical business.”

Here in the UK, you see the Fairtrade logo on food and drink, but in the Ivory Coast I saw it on everything from water pumps to school signs. What’s just a picture on a packet to us is a way of life to other people.

We choose to pay more because we’re about more than just money. Trade is about people as well as products; it means more than just numbers on a screen. Most businesses measure success by finances alone; I’m proud to be part of something different: an organisation that remembers the value of every single person.
“We’re doing what’s right for the world, and we’re sharing it so we can make that go even further.”

It’s only a compostable carrier bag but it sums up why I’m so proud to be part of Co-op. For anyone who hasn’t heard about it, last year we became the first retailer in the UK to launch a biodegradable plastic carrier bag. That’s brilliant on its own.

But then, instead of keeping that technology to ourselves, we made it available to everyone – including all our competitors. We’ve developed the technology and we’re sharing it wider so everyone can benefit and contribute to doing something good for the planet.
“We’re doing what’s right for the world, and we’re sharing it so we can make that go even further.”

The whole thing excites me! We’re doing what’s right for the world, and we’re sharing it so we can make that go even further. Making a profit is important, but it’s more about being able to keep making a difference. Having values and standing by them means making a difference everywhere you can, not just where it benefits you directly.

We’re thinking beyond that bottom line. Of course, it’s more than compostable carrier bags. So much of what we do is about making our positive impact stretch as far as we can. Our determination to think about the greater good makes me excited about working at the Co-op.
Putting people before profit

“Losing a child is utterly heartbreaking. Families deserve compassion and support from those around them.”

I began my career as an apprentice Funeral Director when I was 20. Because I was so young when I started my job, families suffering the loss of a child have often found my age relatable. I can still remember how difficult my first infant funeral was and, supporting a different family each time, it doesn’t get much easier.

Losing a child is utterly heartbreaking. Families deserve compassion and support from those around them, so it seems absolutely right to me that we don’t take a fee at a time like that. Seeing how touched parents are when we tell them we won’t be charging them for our special services is complete proof of that.*

Annabel Davies
Funeral Director

* All standard funeral costs are covered. Some exclusions apply.
“Losing a child is utterly heartbreaking. Families deserve compassion and support from those around them.”

Our funeral home is central to the community, so it’s our responsibility to show we understand and care and to encourage others to do the same. I’m really proud that other local businesses – including crematoriums and ministers – have joined us and started offering their services either free or at a reduced rate.

Every day, my colleagues show the community that doing the right thing is more important than just profit, and that makes me really proud. On top of that, seeing the community join us to make a difference – that’s the biggest reward.

Annabel Davies
Funeral Director
In some places, water’s a luxury, and in others, it’s unheard of.

In the UK, we take clean, fresh water for granted. During Ramadan, I couldn’t drink anything between 3am and 9pm; there are people who experience thirst worse than that, all the time. Co-op’s trying to change that.

We work with Water Unite and One Foundation, two charities committed to ending water poverty. For every bottle of water we sell, we donate to water projects around the world.*

* We donate 3p for every litre of own brand water, and 1p for every litre of branded water.
Fighting water poverty

“In some places, water’s a luxury, and in others, it’s unheard of.”

That really hit home when I travelled to Pakistan recently. I walked into a house that was just a mud hut; three children were living there without basic essentials like water. It was incredibly sad to see and it’s an image that’s stayed with me.

People shouldn’t struggle to access something so fundamental to a healthy life. We’ve already raised over £10 million to fund projects that literally save lives. That makes me proud to say I work for Co-op.
“I love that Co-op values people and does the right thing, even when no one’s watching.”

I’m really proud of the fact that, at Co-op, carbon offsetting is about much more than planting trees. When new customers buy car or home insurance from us, we offset 10% of their carbon emissions for the first year.

A few months ago, we decided to find out more about the people whose lives are being transformed by the results of that offset. I was incredibly lucky that, as part of my job, I got to travel to Ghana to find out about our cleaner cooking stove project.
“I love that Co-op values people and does the right thing, even when no one’s watching.”

Project leaders train local people to manufacture the stoves from recycled metal, make the ceramic liners and then sell them to retailers at a fair price. I think it’s brilliant because it’s not charity: it’s a project that helps people establish businesses and get jobs at the same time.

It’s so important to me that I work for a business with ethics that I share. I love that Co-op values people and does the right thing, even when no one’s watching. We’re not always going to see the benefit on this year’s accounts, but that’s not the only thing that drives our business.

Debbie Aspery
Social Media Specialist, Insurance
“We do things that make a real impact because we care about the world we share.”

Working for Co-op inspires me every day – it’s a very different business to others. We do things that make a real impact because we care about the world we share.

We’re a business that puts doing the right thing ahead of maximising profit. A business that’s inclusive, with more women than men on its Executive team. A business that cares about the planet, and looks for ways to protect it for future generations. Where every community and every individual really matters. These things make me proud of what we achieve together.

Steve Murrells
CEO
Every day, I’m more convinced that co-operation is the way to tackle so many of the things that are dividing our society and making life feel plain unfair for so many people. And because co-operating is what we do, it makes our Co-op more relevant than ever.

That’s why these colleagues’ stories have inspired me so much. Each of them has a special connection to at least one of the things that make Co-op different. To deliver for our members, we need brilliant colleagues. And that’s what we have at the Co-op.

“We do things that make a real impact because we care about the world we share.”

Co-operation in action

Steve Murrells
CEO
“We do things that make a real impact because we care about the world we share.”

Yes growth, sales and profit are important to us because they mean we can do more good. But they’re not our only focus. Our goals are bigger. We want our impact on the world to be positive - and we want Co-op to be a great place to work.

Our Co-op is full of amazing people with inspirational Co-op stories to tell.

These are just a few. What's yours?

#BeingCoop