



Turtle Dove Cambridge: 10 Years of Achievements and Impact

Turtle Dove Cambridge began with a simple belief: every young woman deserves to feel valued, heard, and empowered.

Ten years ago, Turtle Dove Cambridge was invited to join the Social Incubator East programme (now Cambridge Social Ventures). That turning point in 2015 gave us the structure, training, and investment readiness needed to lay the foundations of the organisation. From there, we built a model that has received local and national funding and recognition: providing a safe, women-only space where young women grow in confidence, skills and networks through real responsibility in work-like environments.

Young Women at the Centre

In the past decade, over 160 young women have taken part in Turtle Dove programmes:

- 100 through our referral route
- 14 through our Alternative Education programme
- 50 through our Young Women's Conference

Alongside this, we've delivered more than 300 community and corporate events, gaining real-world responsibility, confidence, and transferable skills.

These hands-on opportunities have included:

- 56 intergenerational events
- 25 corporate events
- 15 weddings
- And much more

These experiences don't just build CVs, they create confidence, a sense of belonging, and supportive networks that help young women step into education, training, or work.

We've also, more recently, invested 486 hours of Young Women's Development work which has enabled:

- 45 Peer Support and Training sessions
- 1:1 support around issues such as mental health and housing
- 140+ certificates gained in topics such as food safety and time management
- 19 cooking and catering sessions

Our Journey of Impact and Resilience (2013–2025)

2013–2014 - Piloting the Model

Before we became a CIC, we ran pilots averaging 20 events a year and working with around 17 young women annually. These early years proved the model could work: when given responsibility in real-world settings, young women's confidence grew rapidly.

2015 - A Turning Point

Joining Social Incubator East (now Cambridge Social Ventures) provided vital support to put in place the systems and foundations needed for long-term sustainability. This is why 2015 marks the true beginning of Turtle Dove's 10-year journey. To date Kate had managed all aspects of the business, with huge thanks to the sessional staff who made it all possible!

Overview:

- Joined Social Incubator East.
- Received training, mentoring, access to loan-finance and business support.
- Laid foundations for long-term sustainability.

2018 - Building Foundations

30 young women engaged with Turtle Dove, contributing to 28 community events and 6 intergenerational projects. A fundraising and campaigning group gave 13 young women the chance to plan and deliver events while learning about global issues affecting young women such as human trafficking. Stakeholder feedback highlighted the need for more 1:1 and peer support as well as an Alternative Education strand.

Overview:

- 30 young women engaged.
- 28 events delivered (6 intergenerational).
- 13 young women formed a fundraising and campaigning group on global issues affecting young women (e.g. human trafficking).
- Stakeholders identified the need for Alternative Education and further 1:1 and peer support.

2019 - Expanding Opportunities

22 young women gained experience through 25 events. Turtle Dove provided its first Business and Enterprise placement and hired an Emotional Support Worker. We also developed a pilot Alternative Education programme in response to stakeholder demand.

Overview:

- 22 young women engaged.
- 25 events delivered (3 intergenerational).
- 32 fundraising and campaigning sessions involving 23 young women.
- First Business & Enterprise placement.
- Hired Emotional Support Worker.
- Started developing a pilot Alternative Education Programme in consultation with the Institute of Hospitality.

2020 - Adapting Through Crisis and Resilience and Recovery

Between May 2019 and March 2020, we supported 31 young women, delivering 30 events and 5 fundraising initiatives. Then the pandemic hit. Events were cancelled, schools closed, and staff were furloughed. At one point closure was imminent. Yet Turtle Dove kept going; developing the Friends network, hired out our van to Food Hubs and Charities in need, and developed new partnerships for the Alternative Education Programme due to the instability of the hospitality industry. We also gained Quality Assurance for our Alternative Education Programme from the Cambridgeshire County Council, laying the groundwork for recovery.

Overview:

- 31 young women supported between May 2019–March 2020.
- 30 events and 5 fundraising initiatives.
- 24 young women received 400+ hours of 1:1 emotional and peer support.
- 500+ hours of training and placements delivered.
- Alternative Education Programme passed Cambridgeshire County Council Quality Assurance, gained Level 4 rating.
- Pandemic forced closure, cancellations, furloughs.
- Developed Friends network, hired the (new) van out to food banks and other Charities in need, and developed new alternative education partnerships.

2021 - Reopening Despite Near Closure

In June 2021 we re-opened with restrictions in place – working a 30 people wedding. By the end of 2021, the pieces were in place to reopen fully.

Overview:

- Reopened under restrictions (e.g., 30-person wedding).
- Maintained safeguarding, wellbeing signposting, and 1:1 contact.
- Alternative Education programme fully endorsed by the Institute of Hospitality.
- Groundwork laid for relaunch.

2022 - Rebuilding Impact

30 young women engaged in programmes, with a mere 10 events hosted, 200+ hours of emotional support delivered, and new training in food safety, customer service, and barista skills. Outcomes included:

Overview:

- 30 young women engaged, 10 events hosted.
- 200+ hours of emotional support delivered to 28 young women.
- Training in Food Safety, Customer Service, and Barista Skills.
- Monthly peer support and training sessions introduced.
- Partnerships with Cambridge University Colleges, restaurants, and other businesses developed.
- Outcomes: 75% gained CV-ready experience, 63% more likely to apply for jobs, 88% felt more confident, 50% moved into education/training/work.

2023 - Deepening Support

In May 2023, we launched an accredited online platform (CPL Learning), endorsed by the Institute of Hospitality, offering access to over 80 certified courses. For the first time, young women could gain formal certificates for training. The record so far belongs to an Alternative Education student, aged just 14, achieving 17 certificates. 20 young women engaged through 27 events and 54 Alternative Education sessions, gaining qualifications in Food Safety, Allergen Awareness, Resilience in the workplace and more.

Overview:

- 20 young women engaged.
- 27 events and 54 Alternative Education sessions delivered.
- First formal certificates achieved through the launch of CPL Learning platform (80+ certified courses).
- Qualifications in Food Safety, Allergen Awareness, Resilience in the Workplace and more.
- The Alternative Education Programme expanded to three cohorts.

2024 - 2025 - Strengthening the Model

19 young women engaged, 30 events and 54 Alternative Education sessions hosted. While numbers have dipped, the depth and quality of support has increased.

In May 2024, we employed a Young Women's Development Worker, formalising the Young Women's Development Programme:

- 12 weeks of structured peer support and training
- 1:1 support
- A tiered work experience pathway (community events → customer-facing events → corporate events and weddings)

This structure has proven particularly effective for highly anxious young women, who gain ownership and recognition at every stage. We also celebrated employing a former participant as a Chef and Apprentice Youth Worker, bringing lived experience and a catering offer into our team.

We hosted our first Young Women's Conference in partnership with the City Council, Anglia Ruskin University, Bidwells and 26 local businesses and women from diverse career backgrounds.

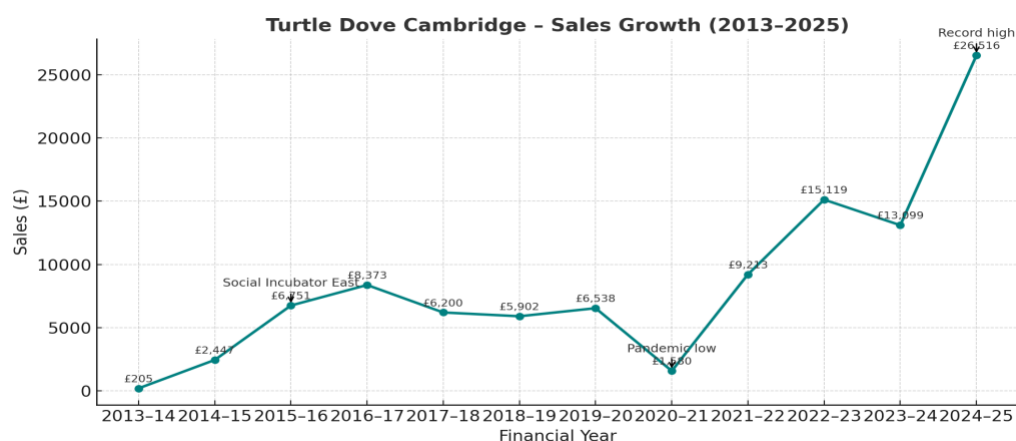
Our social enterprise reached new heights in 2024–25 with a record 38 event and catering bookings, alongside structured community partnerships of intergenerational teas with the City Council's Independent Living Service and community lunches with Downing Place URC. We have also started a new weekly pop-up café in September 2025 in collaboration with Cotton Hall in Girton.

Overview:

- 19 young women engaged.
- 38 events and 43 Alternative Education sessions.
- Consistent partners for our community events.
- 45 peer support and training sessions delivered.
- All participants reported improved confidence, communication, and job readiness.
- Young Women's Development Worker hired, formalising 12-week structured pathway.
- Tiered work experience pathway for work experience at events: community → customer-facing → corporate/weddings.
- Former participant employed as Chef & Apprentice Youth Worker.
- Young Women's Conference "Getting into the Workplace and Business" hosted with approximately 100 attendees.
- Pop Up Café started.

Our Resilience in Numbers: Sales Growth

When the pandemic struck, at 5 years old, Turtle Dove was still a young organisation in development. Sales collapsed in 2020, and closure was a real risk. But resilience and innovation allowed us to recover and grow stronger than ever. By 2025, we recorded £26,516 in sales income—the highest to date.



Sales now account for 25% of total income, with a goal of reaching a sustainable balance of 50% sales and 50% grants/donations in the coming years.

Infographics and Visual Data

Visualising our journey helps funders and partners quickly understand the scale, resilience, and outcomes of Turtle Dove’s work.

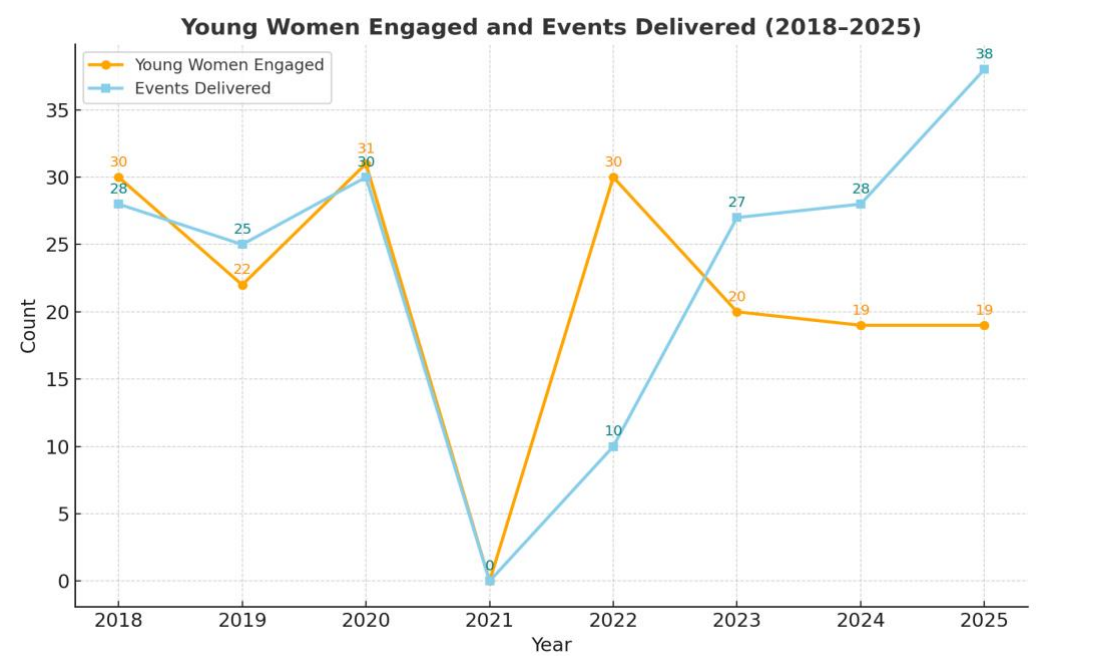


Figure 1: Young Women Engaged and Events Delivered (2018–2025).

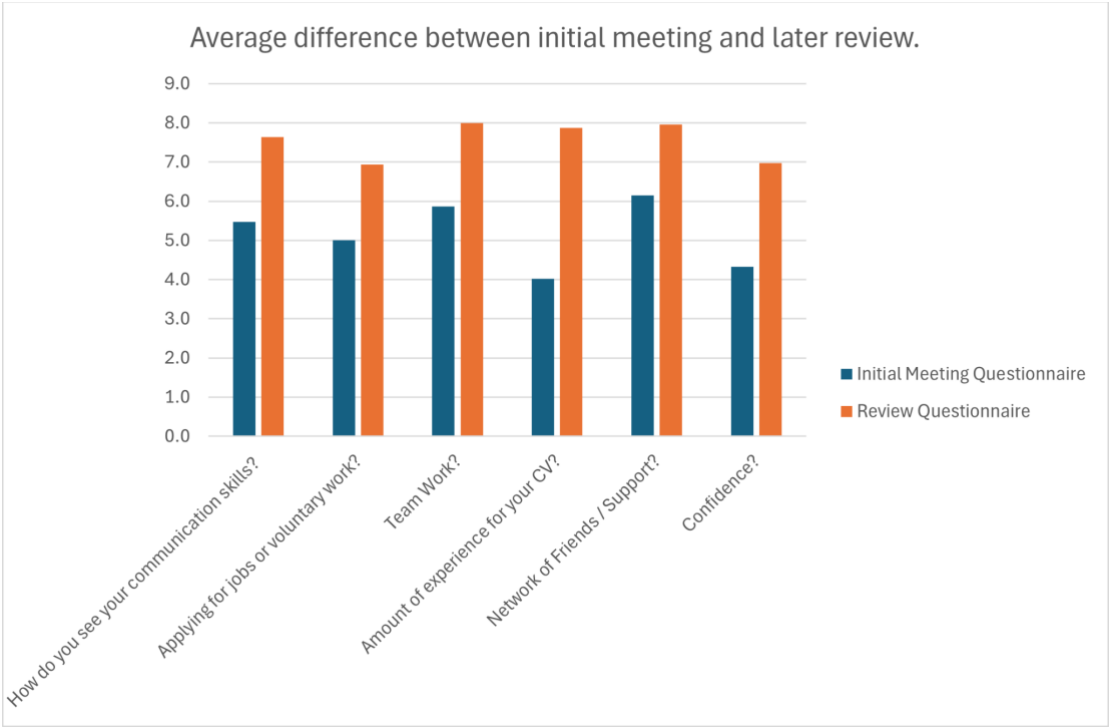
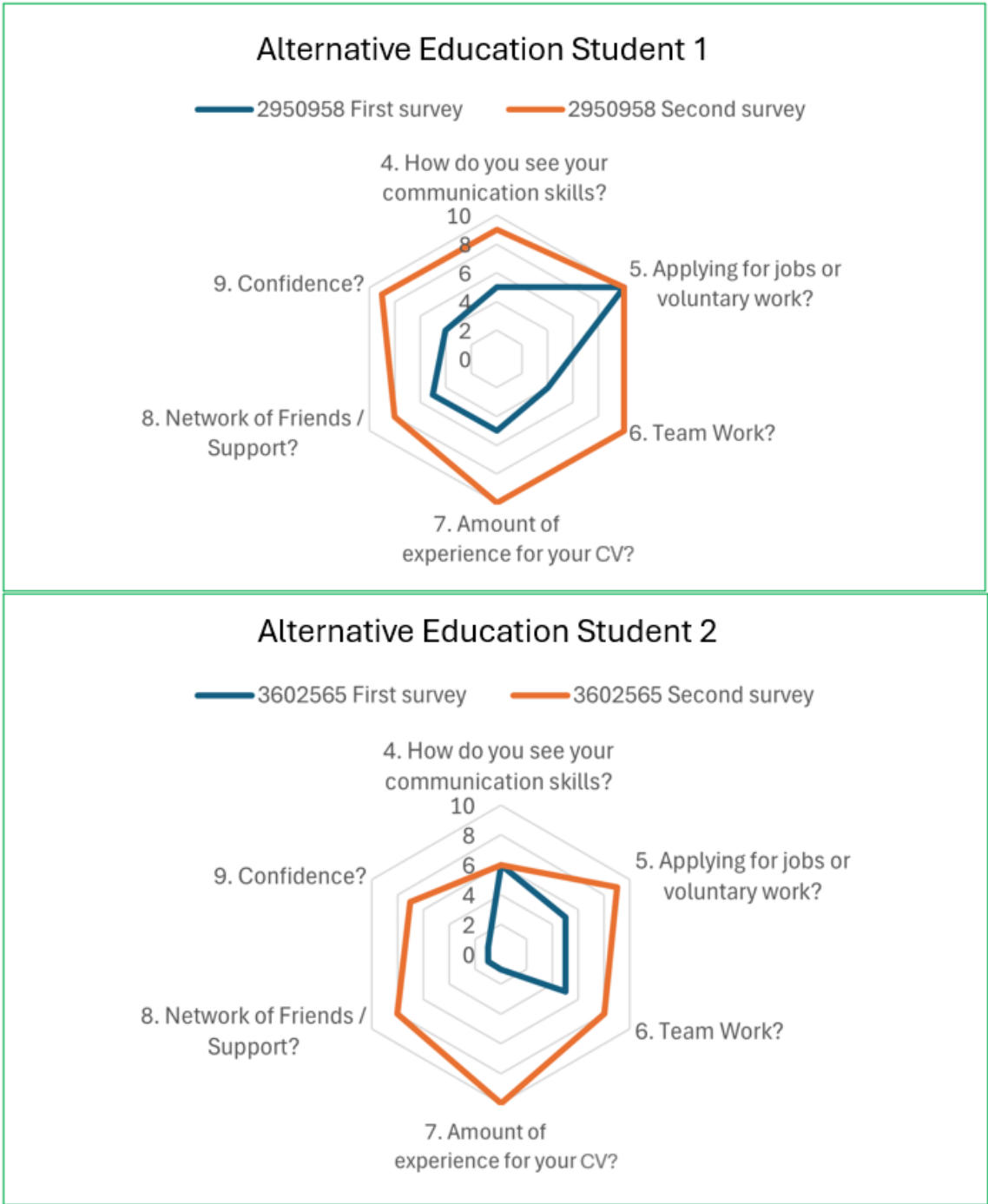


Figure 2: Participant Outcomes (average distance travelled from a sample of 38 young women).

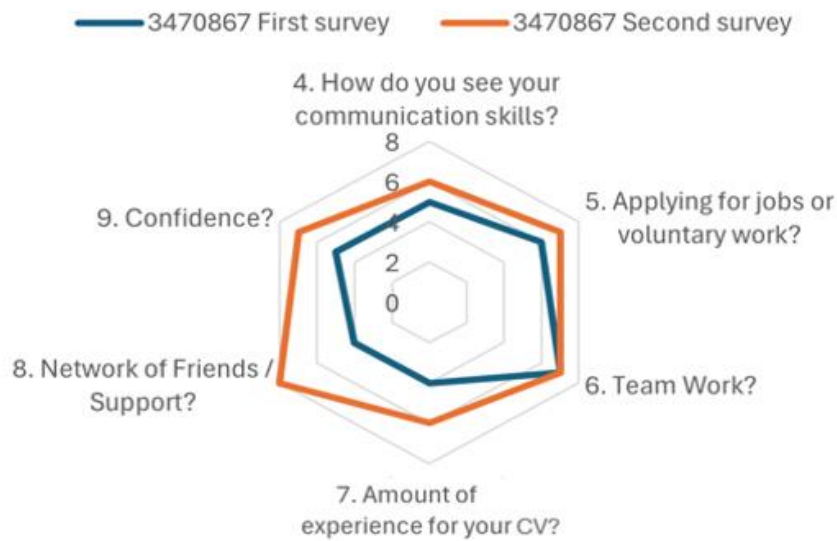
Individual Impact: Examples



Young Women's Development Participant 1



Young Women's Development Participant 2



Why Turtle Dove Is Needed Now More Than Ever

The challenges facing young women are escalating:

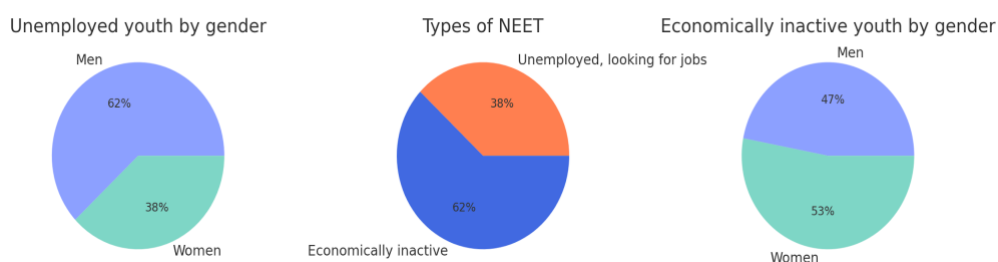
- Nearly 1 in 8 young people (16–24) are NEET, with young women now the majority of those inactive.
- Severe absenteeism in education among girls has risen by 257% since 2017.
- The gap between boys' and girls' severe absenteeism has narrowed significantly from 21% to 0% showing this is a growing issue for girls.
- Violence against women and girls has been declared a national emergency.
- Mental health disorders are twice as high among young women compared with young men, with rising rates of anxiety and eating disorders.

Turtle Dove exists to change this story—providing accredited learning, structured progression of work experience, mental health support and supportive networks that give young women ownership of their future.

The challenges facing young women are escalating:

- NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training): Almost 1 in 8 young people (16–24) are NEET, with 62% economically inactive. For the first time, young women are the majority (53%) of inactive NEETs (ONS, 2025).
- Education: Severe absenteeism among girls has risen 257% since 2018 (Agenda Alliance, 2025).
- Violence: Violence against women and girls has been declared a national emergency (Unison, 2025).
- Mental Health:
 - Probable mental disorder rates are twice as high in young women (17–25) compared with young men.
 - Young women aged 17–23 are less optimistic about money (38.5% vs 60.5% for men) and health (51.4% vs 67.8%).
 - In 2023, 20.8% of young women (17–19) had an eating disorder, compared with 5.1% of young men.
 - Among women aged 16–34, 17% report a mental health condition, compared with 11% of men (Health Foundation, 2024).

Understanding NEET in young people (16–24) - UK, April-June 2025 (ONS)



Looking Ahead

As we celebrate 10 years, we are proud of our resilience and impact, but we also see the challenges and increased need ahead. Our focus for the next decade is to:

- Ensure our Alternative Education Programme is being accessed (there have been multiple barriers to referrals including a lack of budget in education, schools being in crisis and changes in Local Authority processes).
- Embed peer support formally through a mentoring programme to enable a smooth transition from Alternative Education/on initial referral to the Young Women's Development Programme.
- Grow the Young Women's Development Programme through adding on catering courses, hopefully securing our own kitchen unit and increasing the staff base - namely partnering with a Cordon Bleu baker.
- Increase sales and fundraising events for further income to strengthen sustainability.
- Continue to partner with the business community through our Young Women's Conference and, together, develop a steering committee to plan and deliver a mentoring programme for young women graduating from our support.

All to ensure **every** young woman who joins Turtle Dove gains confidence, skills, a sense of belonging and consequently has a hope and purpose filled future.