

# Developing care farming services

## Dementia support

### About the care farm

Scrubditch Care Farm provides therapeutic farm-based activities for adults and young people.

In 2016, Scrubditch Care Farm Manager Gerry Fouracres began exploring the idea of providing experiences for people living with dementia.

Scrubditch care farm now runs a weekly programme called 'Feel Good Farming – Dementia Days' so that people living with dementia can benefit from the outdoors.

### Dementia training

Both Gerry and the farm's founder, Emma Costley-White, had personal experience of outdoor activities helping someone with a dementia diagnosis.

Through a collaboration by Social Farms & Gardens and Dementia Adventure, Scrubditch was selected for dementia training and support. The initiative, called 'Dementia Adventure in a box', was funded by the Community Lottery Fund.

The programme took them through the steps needed to be able to offer dementia support. It included dementia knowledge and communication skills, auditing and preparing a facility, and promoting and reaching people in the community.



Although care farm staff are experienced with risk assessments, the training highlighted specific needs for people living with dementia.

For example, how dementia may affect the senses with changes to a person's depth and visual perception and processing information.

After Dementia Adventure training, the team were able to make practical changes to the farm including steps, signs, surfaces, toilets and seating.

**"This is really worth doing and there's lots of support, information and training out there. If you are planning to start some dementia support sessions it's really worth visiting a farm that is up and running."**

**Gerry Fouracres**

## Dementia provision

The programme launched in 2018, offering free supported time on the farm for people living with dementia and a family member or companion.

It soon became clear that care farming was important to the family and carers as well as the person living with dementia.

To keep the service free, every person with dementia is accompanied by a family member or someone they know well. A free service means that the farm can bring care farming benefits to more people and apply for grant support programmes.

Scrubditch secures funding for the programme on an ongoing basis. Grant funding supports two staff, refreshments and running costs for the sessions.

Group size ranges from 12 -16 people and are supported by two staff members. Sessions run for three hours, and attendees can drop in or out during this time.

Each week visitors care for the animals combined with doing seasonal tasks and activities on the care farm, followed by tea and cake. Many of the visitors grow fond of the animals and the weekly routine of animal care, like egg collecting or feeding, provides familiarity and builds confidence.

**“Attending our sessions as a couple, a family or as companions, provides a weekly shared activity that both individuals can take part in as equals, free from worry and responsibility - sharing new experiences and enjoying happy moments.”**

**Gerry Fouracres**



## Challenges and achievements

Understandably, one of the main concerns potential visitors have about the programme is knowing what to expect. Common questions include ‘Will someone feel safe and comfortable?’ or ‘Is it right for me?’

Scrubditch offers new visitors a chat on the phone and a one-to-one visit to get to know the site. This allows the team to learn more about the person’s interests and find out what type of support might make them feel most comfortable.

The team have worked hard to make activities like animal feeding inclusive and accessible for everyone. Communication is slowed down, and pictures and objects are also used to help understanding. Staff are mindful of avoiding noisy and overstimulating situations.

To help a less mobile person enjoy more of the farm, staff have a lightweight chair on hand for instant seating. Or they might bring an animal to a person, rather than the person having to go to the pens.

Transport and funding are a challenge, but as the farm is four miles from the nearest town taxis are an option. Scrubditch has secured funds for staffing and running costs from several national and local charities.

Through its work, the farm has developed contacts in the care sector. They work particularly closely with Cotswold Frailty Service and their local Alzheimer's Society Dementia Advisor.

**“Having someone who recognises the value of what you do and to link you in is key.”**

### **Gerry Fouracres**

Scrubditch promotes services through local media channels, both on and offline. They network at farm events and also rely on word of mouth. The dementia sessions mean that the farm is now more widely known in the community because so many people know someone living with the condition.

Service users themselves have become an important part of the farm and join in with open days and produce sales. Visiting family members are also able to build new memories and share experiences.

The team now have plans to develop access to two existing farm woodlands and create paths, steps and seating.

“We had an idea and created a brand-new service,” said Gerry. We can really see the benefits it brings. What we offer now is as vital, if not more so than the other services we provide.”



### **Service user story - Elsie & Laura**

Elsie regularly visits the care farm with her daughter Laura.

Speaking about the service, Laura said: “Coming to Scrubditch Care Farm with other people living with dementia and their carers is the highlight of our week.

“Mum loves the interaction with the animals on the farm as they bring back memories of her youth. It gives her the opportunity of telling her stories to fresh ears. She is stimulated by meeting a new group of friends that she sees on a regular basis.

**“It’s equally valuable for family carers as it removes the loneliness of caring for a few hours. We laugh and joke with each other and share our lives with people in the same situation. There is a lot of love and gentleness in the atmosphere.”**

**Laura, Family carer**

## Service user story - Donna & Simon

Donna visits the care farm with her husband and carer Simon.

"What is important for me personally is the group, meeting with other carers," said Simon.

"I have found caring for my Donna a very isolating experience, impacting on my own mental wellbeing and I do not believe this is just because of the Covid lockdown.

"Our weekly visits are an invaluable link to a normal life. It's a chance to have a conversation with staff and carers about life - not just caring - when you are caring for another that cannot converse with you. Many thanks for all that and your staff do for us, including the delicious cakes!

**"I am only at the start of what may be a long road and the availability and accessibility of Scrubditch Care Farm in my local area is priceless."**

**Simon, Family carer**



## More information

This case study is one of three produced by Dementia Adventure and Social Farms & Gardens to highlight the development of care farming services for people living with dementia. The case studies feature different funding and support approaches.

Between 2017-2020 Dementia Adventure received funding from the Community Lottery Fund to deliver funding and support called **Dementia Adventure in a Box**. The three-year partnership project gave people living with dementia the opportunity to access supported nature and outdoor experiences.

Research shows that regularly spending time in nature can slow progression of the disease. It can also improve sleep, concentration, appetite and communication skills. There are very few opportunities for people living with dementia to join outdoor activities compared to joining indoor activities and support groups. This means that people living with dementia and family carers are much less able to gain the health and well-being benefits from time spent outdoors.



Tailored training and support covered the steps needed to make a care farm inclusive to people living with dementia.

This included:

- Understanding dementia and strategies to support individuals
- Risk benefit assessment and site audits
- Partnership working, connecting social care provision with care farms
- Practical exercises to increase staff skills & confidence for engagement and using nature and the outdoors
- How to build co-production and lived experience into care farm programme
- Bringing together people from the social care sector as well as other care farms to share practice and learning



Scrubditch care farm provides therapeutic farm based activities for vulnerable people.

[www.scrubditchcarefarm.org.uk](http://www.scrubditchcarefarm.org.uk)

Dementia Adventure helps people to think differently about dementia and retain a sense of adventure by connecting to nature, the outdoors, themselves and their community.

[dementiaadventure.co.uk](http://dementiaadventure.co.uk)

Social Farms & Gardens is a UK wide charity supporting communities to farm, garden and grow together.

[farmgarden.org.uk](http://farmgarden.org.uk)