

# Developing care farming services

## Dementia support

### About the care farm

Mount Lodge Farm in Kent works with young people and adults with learning disabilities. The 30-acre family farm began care farm provision in 2015. Services are for young people and adults with additional needs, people living with dementia and young people in local authority care.

Farm activities include animal care, woodwork, vegetable and plant production, walking, cooking, photography and rural crafts. Up to 15 people attend between Monday-Thursday with a Young Farmers Club of up to 15 people on Saturdays.

Farm Manager Helen Stow was keen to set up dementia provision having had personal experience of the benefits it can bring to someone living with the disease. The farm's new service has led to a better quality of life for local people living with dementia.

### Dementia training

To make the service a reality, Helen drew on her rural background and experience of working with adults with additional needs.

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



The training gave staff and volunteers a better understanding of dementia and provided strategies and support.

Training delivered onsite meant that the team could prepare the farm specifically for people with dementia. This included changes to signing, surfaces and colour contrast in tasks and facilities. During the Covid-19 lockdown, access to farm toilets and a workshop area were improved and a new kitchen area was built.

Two Dementia Adventure advocates also gave the team critical insight into living with the disease.

**“Dementia Adventure’s encouragement and support was invaluable and built our confidence as we took our new service forward.”**

**Helen Stow**

## Dementia provision

Mount Lodge offered its first service to a person living with dementia and their family carer in 2019.

The service soon grew into half or full day experiences. The team developed one-to-one respite sessions which enable regular carers to take a break. Everyone is fully supported by the trained farm team and people can participate in activities if they wish to.

Focusing on the interests and skills of an individual, the service is about what people can do rather than what they can't. Before someone joins a session, the team find out what people like to do and what support might be needed. A cross-generational mix of older people and young farmers works well, and tasks and people are matched so that everyone can benefit.

One or two people a week also join the farm's existing farmers group. This tends to be people who have a young onset diagnosis under the age of 65.

**“The objective with a service for people with additional support needs is often to improve social and practical skills over time. However, because dementia is a progressive disease, the skills of the individual can be declining over time.**

**“This may be slow and subtle. People experience good and bad days. Staff and volunteer support needs to focus on how a person is managing their day.”**

**Helen Stow**



Mount Lodge staff are well prepared to support the specific difficulties faced by people with the disease. It could be help with depth perception if using tools, or with lifting if someone is less able to judge weight. All communication is also slowed down to help understanding. The aim is for everyone to enjoy farm activities and experiences.

The care farm links in with the local dementia café, who provide opportunities for groups of up to 10 people to visit the farm. Mount Lodge also works with Kent County Council social services through their support of young people and adults.

Word of mouth plays an important part in promoting the service throughout the community. Before Covid-19, Mount Lodge built relationships with other day service and local education providers through open farm events and visits.

## Challenges and achievements

Expanding services has been challenging at times, but ultimately Helen's vision has brought vital dementia support to her community.

"Introducing a new element to the farm feels like taking a big risk because you don't know if it will work out," said Helen.

"There's always a temptation to expand, because expansion can mean success.

**"We have discovered over the past few years that for us, keeping the project manageable and person-centred means we are able to keep our services individual and special."**

Usually, the power of care farming is found in the outdoors and meaningful activity, but it's also about people and relationships.

The farm recently supported one of its regular visitors through Covid-19 lockdowns when they couldn't come out to the farm. It's a poignant reminder of just how valuable care farming can be to people living with the disease.

**"A diagnosis of dementia is such a difficult thing to go through. Even if you are only helping one or two people or families, you make a difference to them and bring benefits into their lives. It is so worthwhile."**

**Helen Stow**



## Service user story - Chris

Chris has visited the care farm with his wife for 18 months.

Speaking about the service, Chris's wife said: "Finding somewhere where he could go, where he had a purpose and it had nothing to do with dementia was really important.

"He loves the animals and spending time with everyone at the farm. He comes home uplifted."

Chris said: "It's the animals and it's the staff!"

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**Please note that this case study was produced before the Covid-19 pandemic and dementia services at Mount Lodge have been affected by the disruption.**

## 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

Mount Lodge Farm offers the opportunity for young people and adults with additional needs to engage in fully supervised farming related activities.

[kentcarefarming.co.uk](http://kentcarefarming.co.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. Find out more at

[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)