

Commissioning care farming

Dementia support

Key facts

Social worker Mary Thompson has been working with Justin Mazzotta of Beetle Bank Social Farm in North Yorkshire for three years. Thanks to the partnership, people living with a range of complex mental and physical health needs like dementia are improving their daily lives by spending time outdoors and being close to nature.

Our partnership

Mary has seen how care farming can help her clients first-hand. "Being at a care farm brings people to life and creates different peer experiences. Being outside in the open is valuable and actually working and being physically active is a key thing about the opportunity."

In her role with City of York Council, Mary helps facilitate referrals to care farms and believes that they offer a valuable alternative to traditional day care. "Normalising care and creating opportunities to live a normal life is important," she said.

"We are working hard as a profession to draw more on a strength-based approach with an emphasis on the individual and linking them better into their community.

"We need to look for opportunities beyond the traditional, such as care farms and support them. It is about finding out about opportunities and matching them with a person's individual interests."



Mary, who has a specific interest in dementia care, started working with Beetle Bank Social Farm after attending an open day. It was then that she realised just how profoundly the farm could transform the lives of her clients.

"Care farming fits with the philosophy of person-centred care which addresses people's needs, such as the need to be occupied which is really important," she said.

"I think that care farming optimises the need for meaningful occupation and the care farming approach answers that."

Beetle Bank is run by Justin Mazzotta, who also has a background of working in dementia care. After three years the partnership has gone from strength to strength.

"Mary has also been an advocate of our service since the launch event, championing it to her colleagues in Adult Social Care," said Justin.

“She also volunteered for us with a fundraising agenda for a while and was also a great motivational support during difficult times.

“The commissioning team within City of York council are aware of us and this is in part to do with Mary’s commitment to our service.”

The referral process

“As a social worker, Mary assesses adults over the age of 18 who are eligible under the Care Act. She works with older people, people living with dementia, people with mental health issues and those living with a whole range of complex mental and physical health needs and their carers.

A referral is facilitated by Mary, and then a rolling service contract is signed between a service user or their family and Beetle Bank, the care provider.

Places are funded via ‘Direct Payments’ setup as part of the agreed care and support plan with the person. This agreed amount includes transport where needed. The person then enters the arrangement directly with the care farm and pays for it from their Direct Payment.

People who are not eligible for Direct Payments can still be introduced to the care farm and private arrangements can be made directly.

Challenges

Day care has traditionally been the focus says Mary, but things are changing. “There can be a tendency to look at traditional day care, not necessarily beyond that, often carers or other professionals are aware of this type of setting and therefore ask for this type of support.



“Commissioners need to be proactive in looking around at what is available for people. We can look at how a service such as care farming is person centred and how it fulfils the aims of the Care Act.”

Achievements

Explaining why care farming has been so successful for her clients, Mary says that it gives people a genuine chance to work and do something meaningful.

“I have observed various positive outcomes for people living with dementia attending care farms including getting out of the house and finding enjoyment at the farm.

“There is the opportunity to do something each week and to feel valued. Taking part in work and something useful contributes to that.”

“The social side of the service and chatting with peers is important for many clients. Positive mental health and wellbeing is enhanced from the service, which feeds into the wellbeing agenda as does getting close to nature and the benefits of that.”

Support from a social worker has been a very successful link between Beetle Bank Social Farm and care farm clients, explains Justin.

“The statutory role of social workers means that they support service users to access the service who would not have been able to afford it had they not received a personal budget.

"There is a thoroughness to their referral process which helps identify appropriate referrals and supports them into our service."

What people say

The partnership is certainly having a positive impact on local service users and their families. *Names have been changed.

“It has helped me knowing that John* is happy and enjoying life and given me time out from caring which enables me to be a little less stressed and able to cope.”

Feedback from family member

"What can I say about this service, it is priceless!! Not just time out for me as a carer, but that it offers Ted* a purposeful and meaningful day, rather than sitting in a day centre setting. He absolutely loves it, being outside, helping and being seen as useful is so valuable!"

Feedback from family member



More information

Growing Care Farming is part of the Government's Children & Nature programme and is delivered by Social Farms & Gardens, in partnership with Thrive.

GCF will transform the scale of the care farming sector across England through the provision of advocacy, training and resources to create more opportunities for children and adults with a defined need to benefit from the bespoke health, care and educational services provided on care farms.

See www.farmgarden.org.uk/GCF for more details.



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