

CASE STUDY

The Houghton Project, Herefordshire

National Care Farming Initiative (UK)



A breath of fresh air

Background

The Houghton Project is a farm providing an educational service for people of all ages. Students visiting the farm experience at first hand a range of agriculture related activities, including animal care, food production, building maintenance, fencing, hedge laying, coppicing, woodland maintenance and wildlife habitat management. In addition to the opportunities of working on the farm and in the vegetable garden, students have access to craft workshops and 15 acres of woodland, providing a resource for forest management skills. A farm is a busy place at all times of the year, the tasks changing with the seasons. Students are fully involved in a range of tasks thus promoting an awareness of sustainability, conservation, and wildlife.

The Houghton Project is based within a 200-acre working farm in Bodenham, Herefordshire. The farm is located equidistant between Hereford, Leominster and Bromyard. It is ideally situated to meet the needs of those living within the Hereford and north Herefordshire district. It is run as a mixed farm allowing us facilities to provide training and experience in both animal and horticultural production.

Our Philosophy

Central to all aspects of the training, education and work opportunities that are offered at the Houghton Project is the principle of social inclusion, aiming that service users engage in an active role within their local community. Working along side other farms and farm staff, volunteers, members of the public, local community shops, farmers markets and conservation agencies we aim to provide a wide ranging opportunity of community networks within our local community.

The Houghton Project developed out of an initiative to provide a unique and modernised service to enable people who use the service to lead full and purposeful lives within their community. The Houghton Project builds upon the principle of creating an individualised and flexible service that will promote social inclusion or independence for service users through the provision of community education and training.





With access to a classroom, a number of outbuildings and toilet facilities, we have the resources within which to develop student's skills, interests and training requirements.

We provide opportunities for service users to play an active role within our:

- Established commercial sheep unit
- Horticultural training facilities
- Organic vegetable production
- Animal care
- Conservation of woodlands & wetland area
- Orchards
- Poultry
- Recycling
- Composting
- Egg, meat and cheese production

There are many on going projects that focus specifically upon opportunities that promote and encourage social inclusion:

- The manufacture and retail of wormeries
- Staffing a produce stall at Farmers Markets
- Delivering farm produce and taking orders from local shops
- Working alongside community volunteers
- Working alongside other job seekers from the New Deal Initiative.



Horticultural training

“One of our key activities and very useful for a care farm. The more labour intensive nature of horticulture can allow a farmer to develop their care capacity fairly quickly. Low-tech activities reduce high health and safety needs associated with machinery or dangerous equipment. Low-tech also allows the whole group to engage, without anybody feeling excluded”.



These projects will also assist an appreciable number of service users who may need help accessing education, training and supported work experience. As a progressive service we recognise the importance of meeting the learning needs of service users through a person centred approach and in conjunction with relevant statutory services and carers. We are able to provide a needs led service provision that addresses all aspects of our service users learning requirements.

The Houghton Project recognises that employment is an important route to social inclusion. Although paid employment will not be a realistic option for all, much of our work centres on the need for service users to receive training and preparation for employment. The development of a range of occupational activities, to maximise social participation, enhances self-esteem and also improves clinical outcomes.

We appreciate that the social and occupational aspects of daily living are often central to a successful and comprehensive package of care. We can offer a viable opportunity to assist service users with social skills and social networks and address the social isolation often experienced by people who use the service.



Coming to terms with all aspects of the food chain

“Supplying food to the local community (e.g. schools) from the farm really helps us spread goodwill for what we do”.



Integrated working on the farm

“Allows people from different backgrounds to engage with each other”.

Houghton Court aims:

- to develop practical, creative and social skills, working within small teaching groups or on individual programmes in a non-school supportive environment.
- the opportunity to allow service users to develop their capacity to form friendships and relationships with a wider range of people.
- to increase confidence and self esteem by recognition of achievement.
- to encourage responsible, tolerant attitudes, courtesy and kindness.
- to develop the students' understanding of themselves and others, enabling them to become confident, independent and active adults.
- to help all students to recognise their own skills and abilities so that they can think positively about themselves.
- to foster and promote students' curiosity, initiative and endeavour.
- to help students think clearly, work actively and be in control of their emotional responses.
- an Alternative Curriculum based on vocational training and work experience, bridging the gap between school and work and enhancing employability.
- a motivating, supportive and caring working environment that is far less threatening than the conventional classroom.
- an opportunity for students to work at a pace, and ability level that will stimulate and challenge them to use their own skills to achieve in new areas, appreciate their success and raise self esteem.
- input to a range of National Curriculum subject areas including PSHE, Citizenship, Numeracy, Literacy etc.
- access to the governments 'Every Child Matters' initiative, covering the 5 outcomes: staying healthy, enjoying and achieving, keeping safe, contributing to the community, social and economic wellbeing.
- a work experience reference for the students' progress file.
- work that can be used back in school towards a variety of qualifications including OCR, OCN, ASDAN and NSP.
- specialised / tailor made curriculum for disaffected pupils and those who are underachieving.
- the teaching of specific subject areas if requested by the school.

Therapeutic working

Our aim at Houghton is to encourage service user's involvement in the process of planning and assuring the delivery of care. We provide, in partnership with potential service users, a full assessment of their learning needs. We appreciate that a holistic assessment comprises the most well informed starting point for future intervention or non-intervention.



The Houghton Project aims to provide service users the training, qualifications and experience for progression into Further Education and employment. Individual training programmes are devised to meet each student's specific needs. Programmes are developed through consultation with students, carers and key workers. Input from all concerned parties is integrated into a framework for training that caters to the student's requirements and interests. The assessment process also identifies their previously acquired skills and knowledge in order that these can be consolidated and built upon.



The nature and purpose of our needs assessment has evolved from an understanding that need is defined as 'the requirements of individuals to enable them to achieve, maintain or restore an acceptable level of social independence or quality of life' (SSI para10, 1991). This concept and understanding of need underpins the philosophy behind Houghton Projects service provision. We acknowledge the importance of close working alongside carers and other agencies that play a contributing part in all aspects of an individual service users life. Further more we understand the importance of the relationship between us as professionals at Houghton and our users as a significant vehicle for the successful delivery of care in which people who use the service can progress and develop.

The structure and choice that is offered at the Houghton Project rests on the assumption that rather than teaching people ever more sophisticated formulations of their problems, we will be placing an emphasis on helping people learn to recognise and appreciate their strengths. Focusing on strengths is a significant strategy for enabling individuals to reclaim some personal power in their lives.

Making hurdles

"The variety of skills that can be taught and experienced in a farm setting are extensive. Few other contexts can provide this breadth of experience".

All training takes place in a supportive and therapeutic environment, where progression is determined by individual rates of skills and knowledge acquisition. A range of courses is on offer, providing a choice of study and vocational areas to enable students to satisfy their individual interests.

The Houghton Project offers courses in the following vocational areas:

- Preparing for Work
- Horticulture
- Agricultural Animals
- Poultry
- Conservation
- Animal Care
- Retail



Participation is at all levels

"It may not be fixing it up, but holding something up can be very helpful too".

As technological as we get

"Many clients live in a very supported living situation and therefore may not have the experience of being in control of something. Giving a person the experience of being in control of a machine like this can be extremely empowering and confidence building".



Throughout training, student's ongoing assessments allow us to monitor and evaluate the way in which their needs are being fulfilled. An accommodating and flexible approach to training allows us to respond promptly and effectively to any changes that students may require in their learning. To accompany this we have the following support facilities available:

- Sheltered work placements
- Individual study support
- Counselling
- Specialist staff experienced in all aspects of training provision

As well as providing training in a context that is conducive to the ways in which our students learn, we offer an environment and inclusive policy in which people can:

- Promote the development of interpersonal skills and teamwork by working alongside other farm staff and dealing with customers.
- Develop personal motivation.
- Understand the basic principles of industrial practice through work involvement.
- Develop basic and key skills.
- Gain an understanding of health, safety and appropriate behaviour in a variety of work and social contexts.

Students

We can provide new opportunities for young people who display developmental delay or difficulties. This may take the form of learning difficulties, disaffected and challenging behaviour, childhood neglect or social sensitivities. Many of our students

have experienced frustration in their previous attempts to learn. However, with regular attention from a tutor and an emphasis on practical and physical skills, students tend to learn willingly and experience success. We can provide training for both small groups and one-to-one for individual students.

Small groups

Staff can work with small groups of people of all ages on projects that demand shared responsibility without the threatening and competitive element that students may experience in a larger group. However, working within a small group also demands that the students nurture interpersonal skills. Individual attention is always available.

Individual programmes

We can also provide individual programmes for students who have experienced difficulty within mainstream educational settings and conventional curriculum models, and who find working in a group too distracting for a positive learning environment. In

the past we have provided this service for several local schools and it has proved remarkably effective in terms of attendance, engagement and outcomes for the students that were referred.



Animal assisted therapy

“Close contact with animals is superb for some clients”.



Risk assessment is about management

“Everything we do has risk – driving to and from site is probably the most risky thing these people do all day! Good management of risk allows people to expand their horizons and boundaries”.

Transport

A mini bus service will be available for students to and from the project. Transport can be arranged to best suit students and carers wherever possible. Transport routes will be planned and provided after consultation with users and pick-up points and times will be agreed in the same way.

The staff

The staff involved in delivering the training and services at the Houghton Project have a wealth and diversity of experience that informs their commitment to providing a holistic and inclusive training programme. They are equally committed to creating a training centre where learning takes place in a supportive and empathetic context, where potential and ability can be realised by high quality training provision to meet student's individual learning requirements.

Tim Moore is a qualified teacher and training assessor who has been involved in vocational training for seventeen years. He started his teaching career in Kenya, teaching Agriculture in a secondary school. Since then he has taught Organic Gardening and Horticulture at the City of Bristol College. For ten years he worked on a small farm, which provided training for people with learning disabilities and mental health issues in animal care, horticulture and agriculture. Trainees fully participated in the production of meat, eggs, milk and cheese.

This experience has focused his approach on the importance of inclusive training for service users, and sustains his commitment to providing training that is centred around their specific learning needs.

Jennifer Haste is a qualified social worker and has worked within the field of Mental Health and Services for Disabled Adults for twelve years. Upon graduating in 1991 she worked in a variety of voluntary and statutory agencies before going on to study Social Work at Bristol University. Since attaining her Diploma in Social Work she has worked within the field of Mental Health, Sensory Services (in particular with Deaf Service users) and as a Discharge Coordinator for the National Health Service. This has provided her with an in-depth knowledge of care management and assessment skills.

She has acquired a sound working knowledge of community care legislation and a wealth of experience of working alongside service users with complex needs. Her experience has given her an understanding of issues that face disabled adults, service users with sensory impairments and/or Mental Health issues. Jennifer is committed to her personal development and continued education and has continued to study British Sign Language, practice teacher training and is currently working towards attaining her D32/33 assessment qualifications and PQ1 in Social Work.

Practical experience has allowed our staff to develop an understanding of people who face issues of poverty, stigma and discrimination on the grounds of their age, gender, race, sexuality and/or disability. They are fully committed to the principles of empowerment and their practice centres around a process that focuses on the individual's strengths for effecting change.

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