

## Proactively making local links that pay



Densholme Care Farm operates as a social enterprise running alongside but separate from a commercial farm. The Care Farm has three directors, two employees and eight sessional workers and works with East Riding of Yorkshire Council, the local NHS, Natural England and as an alternative curriculum provider for local schools. Since its formation just under four years ago the farm has attracted £370,000 in funding and currently operates with an income of approximately £30,000 per annum from personal budgets. Here Denys Fell explains how he has proactively built up relationships with local funders and commissioners.

<http://densholmefarm-action.co.uk/>

***Would you mind explaining how it all kicked off? Where did your idea for a care farm first come from?***

I went to a conference five or six years ago and I came back and had a burning passion to share the farm and to use it to reach out. It started from there. It's a good job I did have a burning passion as there are so many things to stop you and discourage you from doing it!

***Things have happened remarkably quickly then?***

It has looking back but for three or four years it didn't seem to be moving at all.

***So how did you start off, you said you had a bit of funding and some publicity in the press?***

We did Open Farm Sunday. I remember a lady called Lesley phoned me from an organisation called Council for Dependency Problems; they work with people with drug issues. They were one of the first groups we dealt with, then through the Rotary Club we got in touch with the Tribune Trust, a charity that has supported us. It's a case of keeping your ear to the ground, seeing what's available. Someone from here also went to a conference, they came back and said that Natural



England will support you for a classroom. I rang up and the officer said "No, no we've never heard of anything like that before", but I persevered and got in touch with the head man at Leeds Natural England and that's how this classroom came about.

***For personalised budgets, did you approach the council or did someone approach you?***

I have a story on that! We approached the council, the head of Social Services went by here every day to work, the offices are only five mile away. We approached the council by letter, e-mail and visited them. A deafening silence! Then in April this year we launched the Changing Places facility and the Animal Therapy building. There was something special that day, the farm choir sang, I asked one of the lads with cerebral palsy to speak about his experiences at the farm. One of the volunteers who is a retired Doctor spoke too. We presented a fifth birthday cake to the care home who had been coming here for five years. One or two people went away saying they were inspired, I had an e-mail from one lady who said it was out of this world. Two weeks later the head of Social Services came to see me. For months we had been trying to get the ball rolling but it seems that day there was something special and there was a buzz going round Social Services about what happens on the farm. We are nearly full up now.

***Before the day in April did you have any people on personalised budgets?***

Yes, but only one or two. It has snowballed since the open day and Sally, our admin lady, has been really diligent in following up enquiries

***You also offer courses?***

We are accredited for the Open College Network, and that shows how we have grown. It has always been a policy to ask "How can we improve the farm for your group?", so when Rethink visited, a charity for people with severe mental illness, I asked them how can we improve for you? The group leader asked if we could become registered with some sort of educational set up, be it ever so basic, because the young people they bring to the farm have no access to any educational facilities, they can't pin a certificate on the wall. My daughter helped us to get accredited for the Open College Network.



***Was that difficult to do?***

I suppose for my daughter it wasn't as she is used to doing that sort of thing, but for me it would have been impossible. So that's how I think we have grown, asking visitors what would you like to put in place and how can we make it a better experience, rather than us thinking, "oh this would be good for that group". We have been asking visiting groups what they'd like.

***In terms of links with local businesses, am I right in thinking a local solicitors sponsored your new sensory garden. How did you go about that?***

Yes, they have a trust to support a community set up like ours. The lady who runs the trust came on the open day in April. Sally applied and we were successful, it was £1000 and it paid for everything. Another critically important input came from a charity called 'Seedbed', funded by a secret millionaire who funds people with a vision and a passion. The money supported a member of staff for one day a week for four years. The money was great but it was also the moral support. A local renewable energy company have also just agreed to sponsor us, £10k a year for 10 years.

***What would your message be for let's say a LNFYS host who wants to do a bit more, perhaps small access improvements or sponsorship to get a group out for 10 visits? I don't know anyone else who has been so proactive and been so successful.***

I would say it's a wonderfully inspiring work you intend to do and there's a lot of good will out there to support you in your venture.

Take your opportunities and be proactive. If someone expresses an interest in what you're doing don't be afraid to ask!

