



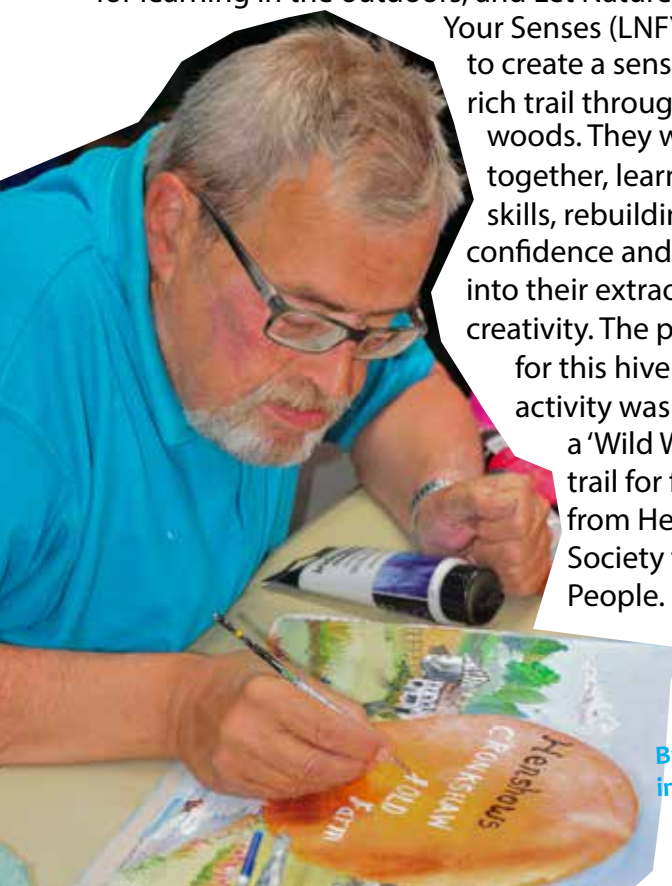
Let Nature Feed Your Senses

Creative collaborations on farms

The Vision

Rubicon, an organisation set up by people of Rossendale who suffer or who have suffered from depression, anxiety and similar problems, partnered with Cronkshaw Fold Farm, an educational charity for learning in the outdoors, and Let Nature Feed Your Senses (LNFYS)

to create a sensory-rich trail through the woods. They worked together, learning new skills, rebuilding their confidence and tapping into their extraordinary creativity. The purpose for this hive of activity was to create a 'Wild Walk' trail for families from Henshaws Society for Blind People.



In 2013 Joy McCarthy of Cronkshaw Fold Farm, NW England, was one of eight LNFYS host farmers to participate in a season of action research with the goal of getting a deeper understanding of the impact of the visits on visitors' health and well-being and what elements of visits contribute to this impact. A variety of feedback techniques would also be explored with the groups involved.

On a snowy day in February 2013 Rubicon, Cronkshaw Fold Farm and LNFYS got together to brainstorm the possibilities for a creative collaboration. The idea for a sensory trail through the farm's fledgling woods was born. And importantly so was the trail's purpose - it would be for another group that had visited the farm previously - children and their parents, many of whom have partial sight or are blind - to have the opportunity to enjoy exploring nature, safely.

This is the story of their adventure.

Bryan from Rubicon paints what was important to him about the project.

Hands on, meeting the farm...

New experiences!

"I feel so happy and pleased that I've stroked something that's usually wild."

"It was a new experience to be so close to the lambs and it was very exciting to actually feed them."

"I really liked feeding the lambs and stroking their soft fur."



and the farmers

The first visit to the farm was during lambing. Many of the Rubicon group had never been close to sheep and had never held a lamb, let alone fed one! It was a memorable experience.



Standing in someone else's shoes...

Before designing the sensory trail Lorraine Hall, Enablement Officer from Henshaws Society for Blind People, gave the group the chance to walk the proposed trail wearing Sim Specs. This helped the group gain an insight into what it would be like for someone with partial sight to walk uphill across rough ground, in the open air. They did some simple everyday tasks like pouring water from a jug in the classroom to orient themselves to how different an experience it is to have partial sight. They then helped each other to walk through the field. This was a powerful learning experience for everyone and one that was frequently referred to in the feedback from the group. One gentleman who has diabetes said it was an eye opener for him about the eyesight deterioration he might one day experience himself.



"It opened my eyes to how people see. Made me feel like you have to be careful about walking eg. uneven ground and low hanging branches."



"Putting the goggles on brings home how precious your eyesight is, it must be really difficult to not be able to see. It's inspired me to give something back."



Design and making

Experiencing the farm from the perspective of someone with partial sight ignited a huge amount of creativity in the Rubicon group. The group gathered at the farm for an ideas session for the sensory aspect of the trail, and to discuss what would be of practical use in guiding people through the trees and over uneven surfaces.

Joy, their host farmer, was surprised at how quickly the ideas flowed. She said, "I expected to be feeding ideas and showing them some basic skills. I was totally wrong, as soon as they began to feel welcome and at home on the farm I became overwhelmed by their ideas and creativity."

They set to work putting their ideas into action that day and on the visits to come. These included wind chimes, knitted insects, bird feeders, crunchy gravel and soft mulch to mark the path changes, composing poetry and embossed interpretation boards. The chimes were made from wood from the farm, many of the group had to learn new knots to make them. The group were relaxed and absorbed in their handicrafts, joking amongst themselves and clearly enjoying being on the farm.

"The mornings I'm coming to the farm I know that I'm going to achieve something worthwhile that day."



Making with our hands is particularly important as moving our hands activates larger areas of the brain (cortex) than any other parts of the body. This type of deep pleasure and satisfaction through action is called by neuroscientists 'effort-driven rewards'. These provide not just a sense of emotional well-being but also an increased feeling that we can control our surroundings, which leads to more positive emotions.

Lifting Depression – A Neuroscientist's Hands-On Approach to Activating Your Brain's Healing Power. Kelly Lambert





New skills for big ideas

Twiggy, a local greenwood worker, was engaged for one of the longer sessions at the farm. The group were keen to extend their skills and were interested in working with wood. They set to making hedgehogs and two almost life sized deer. They used a variety of tools, many for the first time. It was an incredibly satisfying day and the group relaxed and got into the flow of engrossing work. By the end of the day they had produced a row of hedgehogs and two deer and were feeling very proud of a creative, hard days work.



"Knowing that I've produced something that others will enjoy gives me a sense of achievement – it's very rewarding. Thank you!"

It takes teamwork to build a trail!



Most of the Rubicon group said they wanted to get more exercise in their daily lives. Digging holes, carrying poles, shovelling mulch and pebbles on the steepish hillside provided them with that and more! Sometimes too much, and extra help was needed as some of the work was too heavy for people unaccustomed to building trails. Work experience students pitched in and were rightly proud of their achievements.

“I have loved that so many people have contributed to this project and that the Rubicon team have welcomed the input from other groups. Students doing work experience at the farm have felt really proud and empowered to have been part of the trail too.” Cia



“Everyone was important to the team, and there was something for everybody... everyone has different skills, but when you put them all together you get something really special...everybody supported each other. And everything came together for the trail.” Bryan

Inspiration flourishing

Christine's knitting skills exploded creatively as she came up with hundreds of ideas for what she could knit for the trail and put most of them into action!

Her five favourite things about coming to the farm were:

- 1 The challenge of trying to create sensory things eg knitting and the wood deer for trail.
- 2 So many different things to see and do - the variety.
- 3 Everyone being so friendly.
- 4 Teamwork - if someone is struggling with an idea then someone else helps out.
- 5 Having a laugh.

"The farm has inspired me to knit with twines and plastic, and try the big needles, it's given me the confidence to try new things. I've felt contented when the job's done."

"Rubicon members are talented and artistic and possess lots of great skills that I'm sure others would like to learn. Lots of people have been wowed by their knitting skills!"



Rekindling passions



“Coming to the farm has inspired me to take up poetry again. It has been one of my favourite things.”

From greenwood to greenwords...

Paul wrote a poem inspired by his time on the farm. It was a special moment when he came to share it with the group (for him and his friends) and obviously one of significance for him. Designing and printing it (on waterproof fabric) so it could be come part of the trail was paramount. On the day the families came to walk the trail Bryan read the poem out with a dash of theatrics, (it was actually a bit scary for a while). It was a very proud moment.

Taking it all in

Easy to do on the wide, open hillsides of Cronkshaw Fold



I like listening to...

"Birds singing, the sound of the wind in our ears, the sound of the stream, rustling of the grass and the sound of calmness. Being one with everything."

"Wind rustling through the trees."

"The sound of everyone chatting and laughing as they work together."

"The trickling water over the pathway."

"The sound of the birds, it's very relaxing."

An important part of coming to the farm is soaking up the peace and calm of the scenery and the quietitude. At times the group would collectively stop and do nothing but listen. This focussing 'exercise' surprised everyone with how peaceful it made them feel and how many subtle sounds there are to hear in the quiet of the countryside.

"I enjoyed spending time in the Yurt. So peaceful inside – a nice resting place after walking up the hill."

Lynne really enjoyed making a sound map of what she could hear.



The day we shared the trail...

The day we shared the trail with Henshaws we felt...
“touched by the reaction of the children and parents,
and by how grateful Henshaws were for somebody
creating something for them, and what a difference
small gestures/ideas can make.”

“Seeing the children’s little faces
made all the work and effort
worthwhile – reward enough!”



“My special moment was the sense of ownership
when the Rubicon members took over the trail
and watching how proud they were showing
Henshaws around. Awesome. Very inspiring.”



"I enjoyed seeing the children awestruck at our ideas."



"Finding a tiny baby frog on the trail was really special. We couldn't believe how tiny, yet perfect, it was."



Creating together



“When the children from Henshaws took the knitting ‘hot off’ Christine’s needles and wove it straight into the earth loom – it was fantastic to see how engaged they were and how much they were enjoying themselves.”

“My first thought on preparing the materials prior to coming to the farm for the day’s activities was one of amusement that we were going to be creative with materials that most farmers would consider rubbish and a nuisance to get rid of! It was only once I got the plastic from the hay bales spread out on my kitchen worktop that I realised how evocative the smells were that clung to the plastic ... it made me acutely aware that many of the smells on farms are not just the animal smells (and I don’t just mean the manure but the smell of the animals themselves). I’d certainly not realised how the hay and the feedstuffs all added to the heady mix that is ‘farm’.

“Those smells combined to make me imagine a farm and all that it encompasses far greater than any photo ever has, and yet they say a picture paints a thousand words, if that is the case how many pictures do those smells conjure up?

“As if the smells weren’t rich enough the colours and textures were the icing on the cake, the rough prickly grass against the shiny black plastic, plastic that stuck together like industrial strength black cling film, and the feed bags, bright coloured pictures of poultry with a slight dustiness left over from the feed...Cronkshaw Fold Farm was truly in my kitchen that day, whetting my appetite for the weaving that was to come.

“And who would have ever imagined that the weaving would bring forth an impromptu singing about weaving? All of these things combined to make a truly memorable experience that will live with me for a long time, especially when I saw how members of Rubicon grew from having needs of their own to people who would show such confidence, competence and compassion when caring for the children from Henshaws, especially when it came to sharing the trail, and all of the lovely objects along it, with such deserved pride.”

Pat Smith, community artist, led the weaving activity on Cronkshaw Fold Farm



“When the baby from Henshaws was taking hold of the large knitting needles and trying to join in with the big knitting it was just lovely!”

Understanding the impact

A range of methods were used for understanding what impact the visits had on health and well being, relationships with nature and what aspects of the visits were valued. Some of these techniques were trialled for the first time. There were six visits by Rubicon to Cronkshaw Fold Farm and a seventh followup session. Visits were generally held from 11.00am to 3.00pm and included a shared meal.

The visits ran on the following dates in 2013:

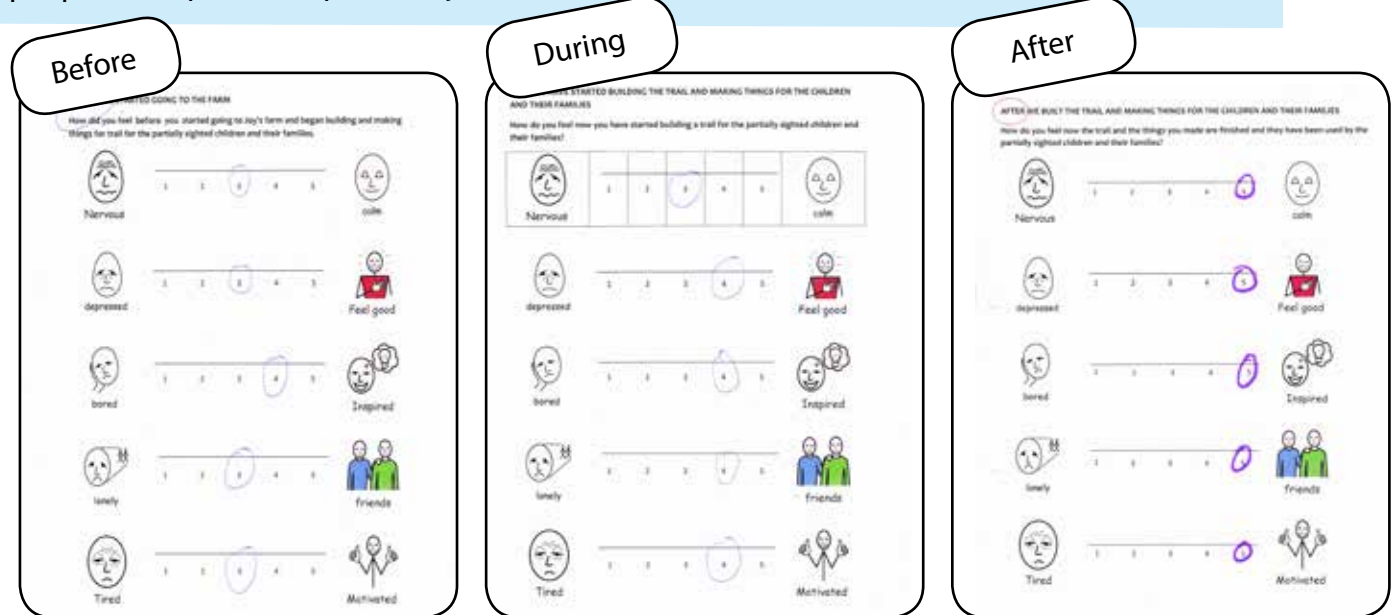
1. Monday April 28th
2. Wednesday May 1st
3. Wednesday May 7th
4. Wednesday May 15th
5. Wednesday May 29th
6. Monday June 10th
7. Wednesday September 18th (followup)

Information was collected by:

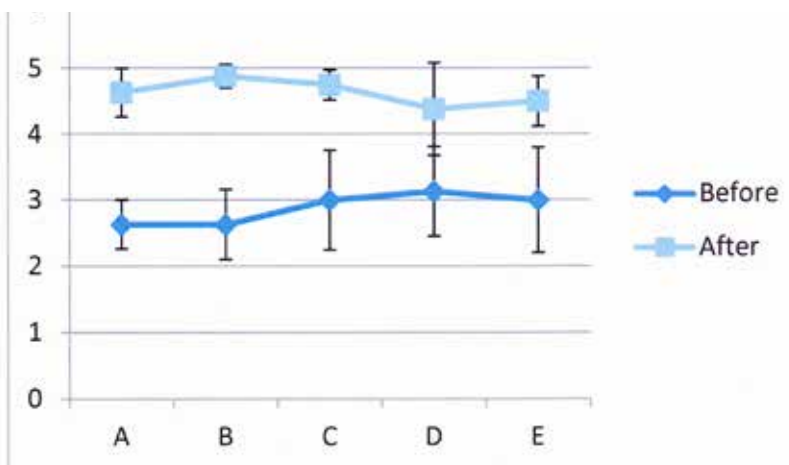
- Observation note taking at each visit
- Individual surveys at Visit 3 and Visit 7 (**19 week gap to establish what benefits had sustained**)
- Group feedback exercise Visit 6
- Debriefing by group leaders
- Photographs at each session
- Additional stakeholders feedback e.g. Henshaw's families and group leader

Wellbeing - Before and After

We designed a wellbeing scale that used symbols to represent emotions to help determine what impact the visits had on peoples' feelings of wellbeing. We used this format to enable people to respond independently and to make the scale more friendly.



Significant improvements in wellbeing



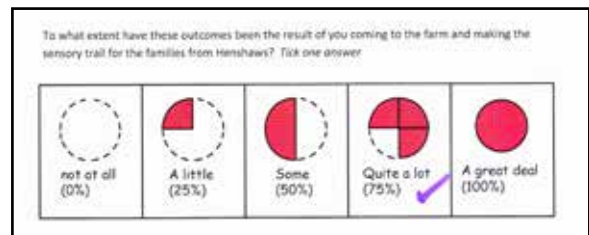
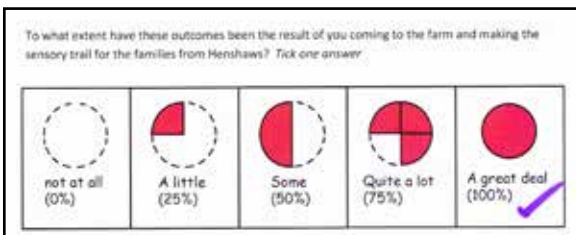
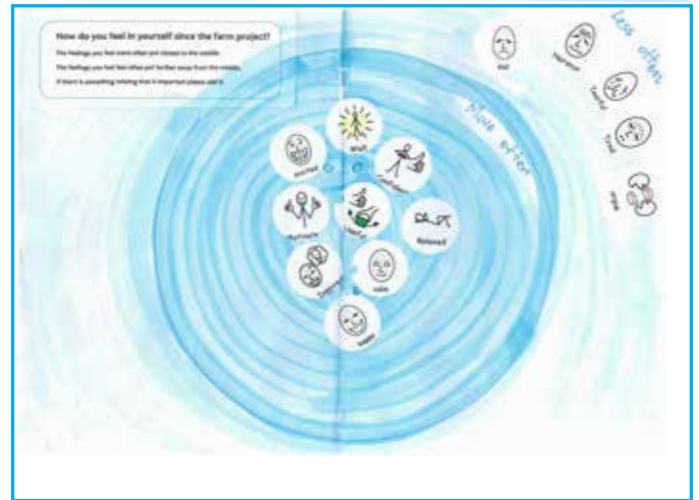
The graph represents the changes in feelings of farm visitors before the visits began and 19 weeks after their last farm visit (showing standard deviation bars). The questions were based on five-point scales illustrated with Widgits (see examples above):

- A) Nervous (1)-Calm (5);
- B) Depressed (1)-Feel Good (5);
- C) Bored (1)-Inspired (5);
- D) Lonely (1)-Friends (5);
- E) Tired (1)-Motivated (5).

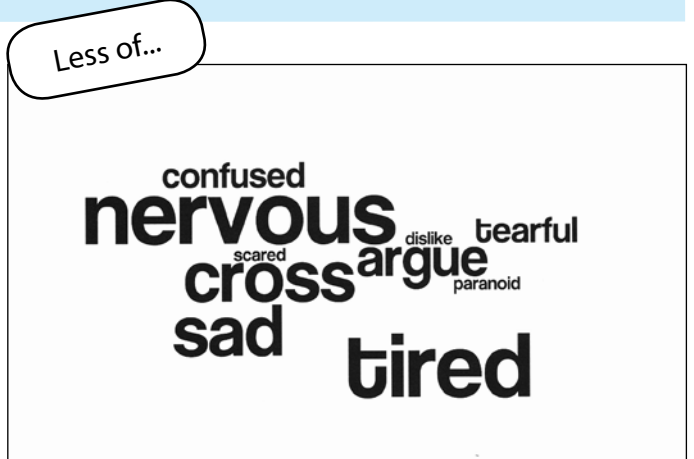
Wellbeing

What feelings do you experience more often and less often?

At the followup visit in September - (which was nineteen weeks after their final farm visit) we asked people to identify what they felt more often and less often since the farm project. They could choose from a set of positive and negative widgeits, write or use a combination. In the same survey we asked people to attribute how much of the changes were from building the sensory trail. The examples below are typical responses to the impact of the visits on people's feelings (moods). Half of the group attributed their experiences on the farms causing 100% of the changes and the remaining half 75%.



Significant improvements in mood attributed to the visits



These word clouds were made from the combined responses of the core group of eight farm visitors from Rubicon. The more often a word was used the larger it appears. They show the positive impact the visits have had on individual's moods several weeks after the farm visits.

"I feel more motivated, cheerful, loved and safe, it has helped me feel better in myself."

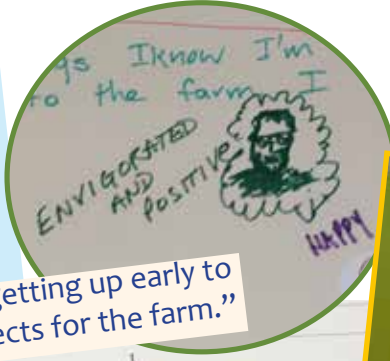
Sharing positive experiences

Towards the end of the last visit to the farm in late June the group enjoyed creating two wall banners composed of their feedback about the visits. They took about an hour to move around the room adding their thoughts, feelings and drawings to a series of questions spaced along two lengths of wallpaper lining. There was a banner for feelings and a banner for the farm to make it straightforward. For visitors with little literacy, a support worker scribed their responses and of course they could use widgits. By now people were familiar with widgits and they felt relaxed and under no pressure to contribute in any way other than what was appropriate for them. As they warmed to the task they revisited the banners several times, building a rich, creative tapestry of responses. Sharing experiences expands and reinforces the positive and can boost the emotional impact.

Feelings

The mornings I know I'm coming to the farm I feel...
The day we shared the trail with Henshaws we felt...
Working as a team...
Would you like to be part of a team on another project? If yes what kinds of things would you like to be part of?

"I have been getting up early to finish the projects for the farm."



Changes
depression
into
inter-action
into feelings
of Well being
Bryan

"Loved that everyone was important to the team, and there was something for everybody... And everything came together for the trail"
Christine

Working as a team...

PRODUCING INTERESTING WOODEN ANIMALS WITH BEEHIVE WAS TERRIFIC. WE ALL HAD A GREAT TIME, LAUGHED ALOT & IN THE END PRODUCED SOME BRILLIANT SCULPTURES. WE ALL WENT AWAY FEELING THAT WE HAD ACHIEVED SOMETHING WORTHWHILE FOR OURSELVES & FOR OUR...

"The interaction between the groups and the positive experiences of all the varied abilities and teamwork was wonderfully uplifting." Bryan

"Everybody supported each other."



The day we shared the trail with the families from Henshaws we felt...

PROUD AND HAPPY THAT THEY ENJOYED IT SO MUCH

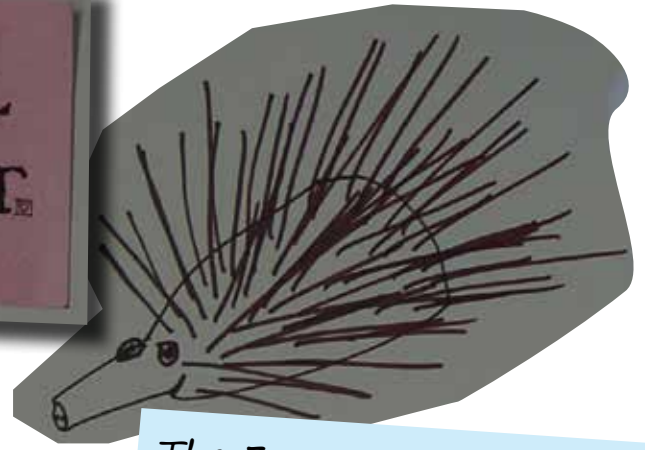


by how grateful Henshaws were for somebody creating something for them + what a difference small gestures/ideas can make

"We all had a great time, laughed a lot and in the end produced some brilliant sculptures. We all went away feeling like we had achieved something worthwhile for others and for ourselves." John



“Seeing the children playing on the deer we made.”



“Seeing everyone’s faces light up. Especially if they’ve been down in the dumps!”

“Seeing my poem printed out and displayed.”

“Feeding the baby lambs: a new experience to be so close to the lambs and it was very exciting to actually feed them.”

The Farm

- What did you enjoy?
- What did you learn?
- What do you love about the farm?
- At the farm it is...
- I liked listening to...
- Special moments...

“I have enjoyed working with lots of different people.”

“Knowing that I’ve produced something that others will enjoy gives me a sense of achievement – it’s very rewarding. Thank you!”

“Working on the project to help others is very rewarding and enjoyable.”

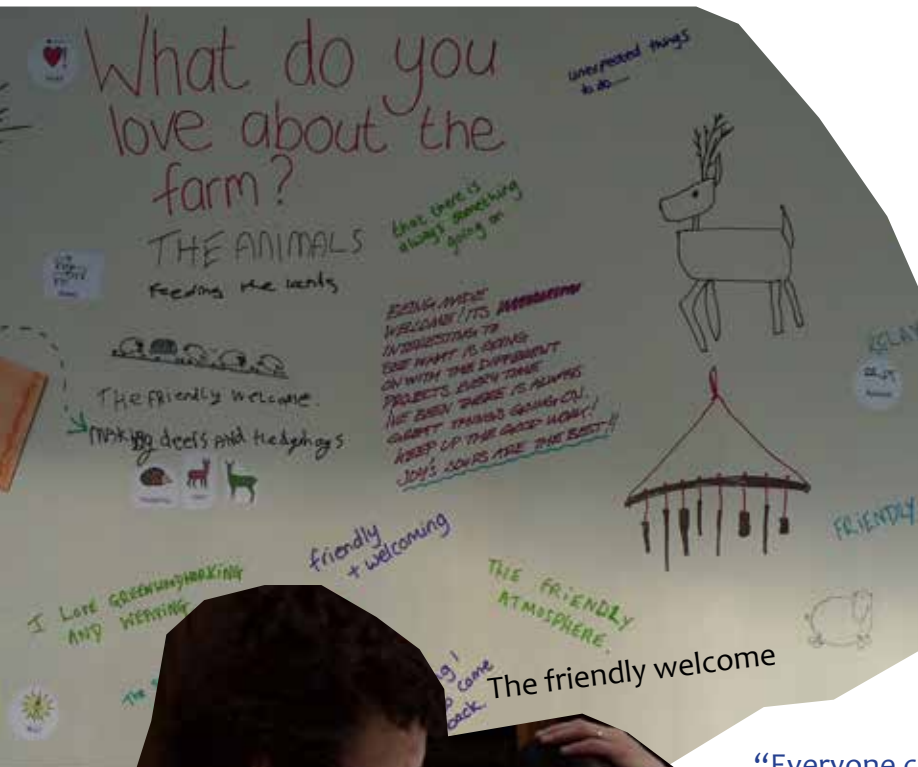
“Everyone coming together at lunch time; Henshaws, Rubicon and everyone from Cronkshaw Fold enjoying lunch together after walking the trail completed for the first time was my special moment.”

“It’s inspired me to do stuff.”

“Learning new skills.”

‘My favourite thing has been the results.’

“It makes me feel useful that I am helping others.”



“Building the sensory trail for the families is making me feel good I’m doing something for someone who doesn’t have good eyesight and for them to get pleasure out of it.”

What impact did the 'Wild Walk' have on the families?

Shahida's feedback

"It was a truly amazing few hours and Hana and Zara have been buzzing about it since coming back. I was initially anxious as the girls are not huge animal lovers. However today's trip was fantastic in every sense.

"We all loved the sensory walk and the hands on experience, it was fabulous to see what can be made from everyday materials that would normally be chucked in the bin or recycled. The group of volunteers have done an amazing job to make the walk so varied and hands on, it was a lovely atmosphere with all them around and they were so child friendly their enthusiasm and passion was delightful to see. My girls and I loved touching the items made, they are still talking about the hedgehogs, what a great idea. My particular favourites were the sun house and the fabrics on the post, what unusual but effective ideas. We just wanted it to go on and on.

"Then the home made lunch was delicious, the girls were excited about the fact that most of the ingredients had come from the farm, it really gets their imagination going, such a great idea. To finish off Hana and Zara really enjoyed the weaving activity, looking at choosing material and then having the chance to weave. I enjoyed looking at the knitted fruit and vegetables. The talented ladies were actually working on them whilst we were there, the butterfly in progress was lovely to see.

"A huge thank you to Joy, her daughter Dot, and all the other volunteers who have created a unique hands on experience and taking their time and love for the great outdoors and sharing it with us. We can't wait to come again."

Shahida, mother

Lorraine's feedback

"These sessions have provided unique, sensory-rich experiences for our

service-users in a new, safe and private environment. Our service-users have appreciated the warmth and understanding of the staff at Cronkshaw Fold Farm. They were warmly welcomed to explore tactile materials, animals and craft items. Particularly with the partnership with Rubicon group, our service-users felt empowered and quite overwhelmed by another group taking the time to understand visual-impairment and then build an appropriate Wild Walk for them to explore together."

Lorraine Hall, Enablement Officer, Henshaws Society for Blind People

"...felt empowered and quite overwhelmed by another group taking the time to understand visual-impairment and then build an appropriate Wild Walk for them to explore together."

It's more than getting into the outdoors

The benefits of getting outdoors and experiencing nature is widely accepted and researched and there is a move by medical professions (in the UK and USA for example) to prescribe the 'outdoors' for its powerful effect on people's health. This unique collaborative project on Cronkshaw Fold Farm has yielded many health and wellbeing benefits for all the participants but these did not all flow from the wonderful scenery, fresh air, animals and green environment of the farm. The building of the wild walk was a lively, creative, social experience that involved making things, sharing meals, conversations, contributions, all within the context of doing something that would give someone else (perceived as 'less fortunate') joy and pleasure. The session at the beginning with Lorraine (walking and doing tasks wearing the Sim Specs) kindled and informed the group's empathy for who they would be making the trail for, children and adults with partial sight. All of the Rubicon group expressed how much they looked forward to the day they would share the trail with the Henshaw families, the anticipation of that day was motivating and important to people's self esteem. When the families expressed their pleasure and gratitude for the wild walk and the group's creations, the pride and satisfaction of a 'job well done' was palpable and moving.

What would we put on this 'green plus+' prescription?

green plus+

Experience regularly

- Standing in someone else's shoes
- Collaborating groups with a shared purpose
- Purposeful tasks, using the hands, that include chatting and problem solving and produce something that will benefit someone else!
- Contributing skills and creativity and learning new ones
- A safe and gently challenging environment (physically and emotionally)
- Encouraging and resourceful leaders
- Sharing meals
- Humour

Do all of the above in nature

Are there benefits for the health system?

New Economics Foundation (Consulting) undertook an analysis of the feedback from the Rubicon group to determine what the benefits of this series of visits on individuals' health and wellbeing would mean regarding monetary savings to the NHS. They established that for a 'typical' group member there would be savings to the NHS in three areas: avoided prescription costs, avoided medical consultation costs, avoided NHS costs of physical inactivity. A one year period for one individual would = £1,296.68. Based on NEF's methodology the saving to the NHS from the benefits of the Rubicon group of eight people for the seven visits to Cronkshaw Fold Farm would = £10,373.44 over a one year period

From little things big things grow

The Rubicon group went on to build a community garden in their local town. They enjoyed the physical activity, creativity, raising funds and interacting with their local community. One of the group now volunteers regularly at the farm and is on her way to no longer needing her disability allowance. She has a spring in her step!

Rubicon and Cronkshaw Fold Farm would like to collaborate again in 2014. They are currently seeking funding to do so and all offers and suggestions would be appreciated!



“When the children from Henshaws sat upon the wooden deer, that we had made – their faces were a picture that I’ll remember for a long time. Thank you, thank you, thank you. “

Let Nature Feed Your Senses is a partnership between Sensory Trust and LEAF, supported by Natural England’s Big Lottery funded Access to Nature programme. For more information www.letnaturefeedyoursenses.org

