

Bridging communities: farmers and adults living with disabilities

Building the Nature Buddies Network – Farm Visits

August 2023 – March 2025



Overview

About the project

The Stepping into Nature team, led by the Dorset National Landscape Partnership, was awarded £102,606 through the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme to deliver an 18-month project from August 2023 to March 2025 working with farmers and community health groups to facilitate farm visits for people facing barriers to accessing the natural working environment.

Who This Report Is For

This report is for anyone interested in what was done, how it was done, and whether it made a difference. It will be especially useful for organisations that play a coordinating role—bringing together consultants, farmers, and community groups to deliver inclusive nature-based activities.



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Introduction & Aims



Provide meaningful, engaging, and accessible farm-based experiences for adults with disabilities—helping them build a stronger connection with nature and agriculture.



Train and support farmers to confidently host inclusive events, creating a diverse range of farm experiences across Dorset.



Develop a coordinated model for delivering supportive nature-based programmes through the Nature Buddies initiative—designed for people who face barriers to accessing the outdoors.



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What was done and how?

The project can be broken down into 2 key deliverables:



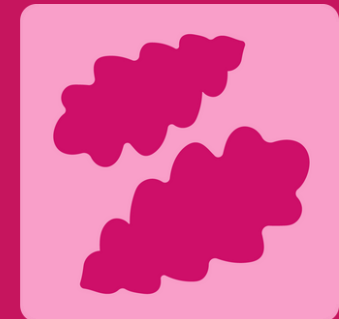
Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme (CEVAS)

Farmer Training and Support

- ❖ The project funded **LEAF** to deliver a tailored **CEVAS course** in Dorset, equipping farmers with tools to plan safe, engaging visits and manage risks effectively.
- ❖ After training, farmers received **three days of one-to-one support**, including help with portfolios, promoting their farm to schools, and attending their first visit.
- ❖ Each farmer was **paid for their first hosted visit** (at the Countryside Stewardship rate), enabling them to offer a **fully funded experience** to new schools or community groups.



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CEVAS - Key Outputs

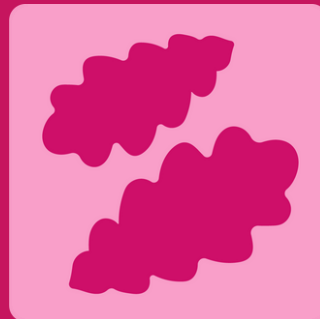
A CEVAS course was delivered to 13 farmers and 1 project lead, all of whom successfully completed their farm portfolios and gained accreditation. Participants had varying levels of prior experience—from those who had hosted occasional visits to those completely new to welcoming people onto their farms.

Most farmers accessed three days of follow-up support, which proved especially valuable for those new to hosting. This helped them apply their learning in practical ways.

11 out of the 13 farms went on to host a visit within the year. Two were unable to do so due to time constraints.



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“I really enjoyed giving this opportunity to groups that are normally disadvantaged in some ways beyond their control” farmer quote



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Facilitating adults with disabilities to organise and attend farms visits.

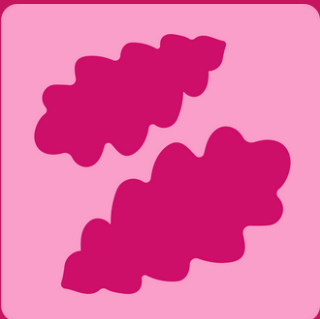
The project lead worked closely with community group leaders—and often group members themselves—to understand barriers to farm visits and identify activities of interest. Groups were then matched with suitable farms.

A pre-visit was arranged with the project lead, group leader, and farmer to assess the farm's accessibility, agree on appropriate activities, and discuss how best to support individual needs.

Once a visit date was set, any additional support—such as interpreters, transport, or support workers—was arranged. A shared risk assessment and checklist ensured everyone was prepared.



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Farm Visits - Key Outputs

In total 10 community groups were taken on farm visits for a total number of 24 farm visits. The total number of people that attended the visits, including repeat visits, were 192 number.

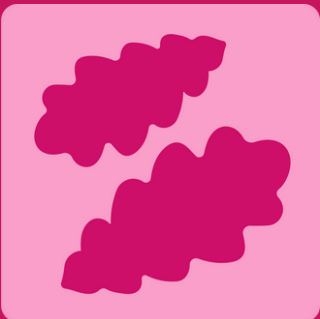
The disabilities of the groups varied such as those living with profound deafness, sight impairments, mental health issues, learning disabilities and neurodivergence such as Autism.

There were 5 farms across Dorset that were involved in taking on these visits.

The farm visit was led by the farmer, with the group leader completing an evaluation afterward..



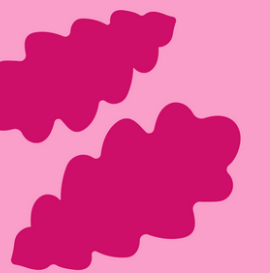
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I am so grateful to your organisation for providing my group of adults with learning disabilities with the opportunity to experience something completely out of their usual comfort zone and for developing their interest in rural Dorset. - Vitality



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What difference have we made -for farmers?

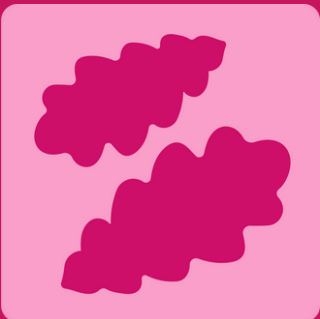
Built the foundations and opened opportunities for farmers to go on and host more farm visits. For some this has kick started a new income stream and for others it was about an aspiration to share their good fortune and piece of Dorset with others

Increased awareness, understanding and attitudes of people different to them. Farmers came away with a sense of admiration towards the positive, enthusiastic and can-do attitude of the group, often challenging their own pre-conceived ideas of what they were capable of.

*'It has set of my
education business off in
a great way' farmer
quote*



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For adults living with disabilities

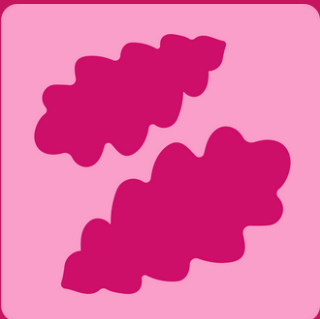
Provided opportunities to understand, access and enjoy the countryside and learn about practicalities of farming and farming heritage with no barriers.



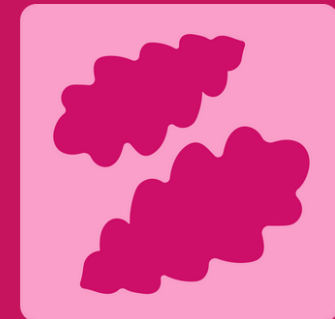
'The group were very enthusiastic which was great to witness. One of the members said after our meeting that Deafness is invisible which makes them invisible and that they are without a voice. What you are offering and the other projects they are involved with could go some way to overcome this.'



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For organisations and volunteers supporting groups of adults with disabilities



Empowering Group Leaders

Group leaders were supported to organise and lead farm outings—many for the first time. This experience broadened their understanding of what's possible and what their groups are capable of. A few groups have since expressed interest in arranging future visits independently, using their own funding.

"The opportunity to do something different was wonderful. Connections were made between food production and diet"



For the Dorset National Landscape

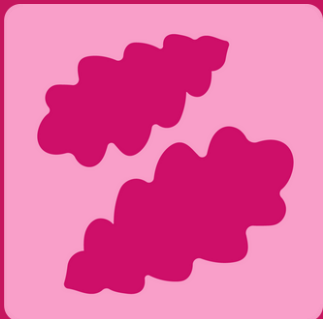
Building New Connections

The project created stronger links with community groups from diverse backgrounds and abilities—many of whom had not previously engaged with Dorset National Landscape. These new relationships have raised awareness of the organisation's work and offer a strong foundation for future collaboration, including the development of a new management plan

Improved and created new relationships with farmers across the Dorset National Landscape, increasing relationships for future collaborative work



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Challenges and learning opportunities?



Finding suitable farms was initially difficult—many were concerned about risks. A mix of experienced hosts and newly trained CEVAS-accredited farmers helped overcome this.

Formal training on health awareness was less effective than informal conversations with group leaders. Flexibility and openness from farmers proved more impactful on the day.

Seasonal timing was a challenge—cold weather and group needs meant most visits were concentrated between April and October.



Resources that may help other people facilitate people with disabilities engage with farming.

[Go to Access to Farms:](#)

Access To Farms (ATF) brings together agricultural organisations that support farmers to provide opportunities for people to experience farming, and offers training to farmers who host visits from school parties or vulnerable groups.

[Go to Countryside Classroom:](#)

Connecting schools with food, farming and natural environment. Has resources for teachers.

[Linking Environmental Access and Farming:](#)

LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) - the leading organisation delivering more sustainable food and farming.

[Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme course:](#)

CEVAS training courses enable you to confidently welcome young people to your farm. Delivered by LEAF.

[Risk Management Tool for Farm Events:](#)

Checklists, Risk Assessments and Industry Code of Practise aimed at farmers.



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Appendix I – Groups Visits Feedback

1. Activities and Experiences

Participants took part in a wide range of hands-on and sensory activities, including:

- Exploring crops and learning about their end products
- Touring fields and observing crop growth
- Watching calves rejoin the herd
- Taking trailer rides and sitting in tractors
- Feeding and petting sheep
- Learning about grain storage and animal care
- Engaging in weaving, salad picking, and seasonal lunches

2. Participant Feedback

- Activities were described as fun, varied, and informative
- “The trailer ride was brilliant and, of course, feeding the sheep!”
- Participants felt welcomed and included throughout the visits

3. Impact and Outcomes

- Overall Experience:** 5/5 from all participants
- Likelihood to Recommend:** 5/5
- Visits were praised for their educational value and social benefits
- “Everyone had a fantastic time and learnt loads.”

4. Comments and Suggestions

Positive Highlights:

- Friendly, engaging hosts
- Inspiring and informative experiences
- Interest in returning or volunteering

Suggestions for Improvement:

- More practical tasks (e.g. weeding)
- Better time management and clearer walk info
- More toilets and comfier seating

“I’m not used to travelling... but everyone was so friendly and supportive. I’m glad I went.”



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Appendix ii – Final Feedback

Final feedback was requested at the end of the farm visits delivery to explore how the visits work for the groups, what overall impact it had had and what barriers they may face to delivering farm visits independently through the following questions.

“As we wrap up this round of funding, we’re in the process of evaluating the program. Your feedback is incredibly valuable to us, and we’d love to hear your thoughts on the visits. This will help us understand what worked well, identify areas for improvement and understand the barriers you may face in running such visits independently. Additionally, your insights could support us in securing further funding for future visits.”

Looking at the programme as a whole, please share your final thoughts on the following:

1. Successes: What aspects of the visits worked well

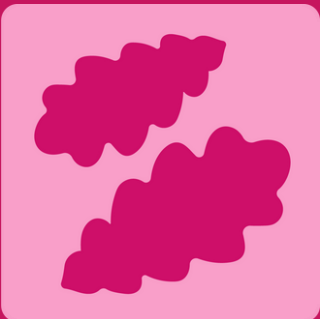
- a) from the point of view of your organisation
- b) from the point of view of the group

2. Areas to Improve: Were there any parts of the visits that could be enhanced?

3. Barriers: What challenges does your organisation face in running such trips independently?



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Successes for the Organizations:

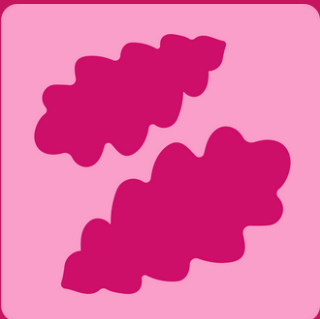
- **Planning and Preparation:** The pre-visit planning, including prior visits to ensure venue suitability and communication with farmers, was highly appreciated. This preparation helped address language barriers and made the visits more accessible.
- **Engagement and Enjoyment:** Participants showed great interest and engagement, particularly visits where they learned about crop harvesting and processing.
- **Transport:** The availability of a minibus was crucial for many participants who otherwise would not have been able to attend due to lack of transport or the stress of traveling to new places.
- **Staff Support:** The staff were praised for their openness and warmth, which helped build participants' confidence.
- **Social Interaction:** The visits provided valuable social interaction, boosting self-confidence and well-being.

Successes for the Groups:

- **Sensory Experiences:** Participants enjoyed various sensory experiences, such as handling different grains and wool, and learning about farming and wildlife.
- **Therapeutic Benefits:** The visits had therapeutic benefits, including animal handling and being outdoors in nature.
- **Educational Value:** Participants learned about food production, diet, and farming processes.



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Areas to Improve:

- **Hands-On Opportunities:** There was a suggestion to offer more hands-on opportunities in future visits, as these were particularly successful and engaging.
- **Cooking Activities:** Adding cooking activities to the program was suggested as a potential improvement.

Barriers to Hosting Independently:

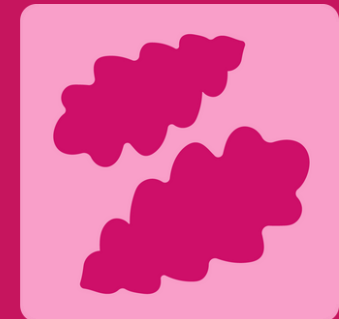
- **Language Barriers:** Deaf participants face significant challenges due to language barriers, making it difficult to organize visits independently.
- **Funding and Logistics:** Many organizations lack the funding and logistical support to organize such trips on their own. The support from Dorset National Landscape was crucial in making these visits possible.

Overall Theme

The overall theme of the evaluation is the **positive impact of well-organized, accessible farm visits** on various groups, particularly those with disabilities or other barriers. The visits provided valuable educational, social, and therapeutic benefits, highlighting the importance of thorough planning, transport support, and the dedication of staff. The feedback underscores the need for continued support and funding to make such enriching experiences accessible to all.



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Farmers Feedback

We ask a similar question of farmers and although only receiving 2 replies they both echoed certain elements as follows.

What aspects of the project worked well

Pre – visit. - Good communication about number of visitors and any special needs, the pre-visit form was the perfect guide for us

During the visit. - The engagement from all the visitors and leaders was brilliant, people were able to feel comfortable asking questions and walking around the farm.

What aspects of the could be improved –

Pre-visit. - I think everything worked well and as long as the communication is consistent and clear.

During the visit. - Ensure everyone is happy with the activity that is planned

Any learning or highlights you would like to share with us.

As a business we have learnt so much from these visits and has helped us change and shape the way we run the farm. We are gearing up to do more visits for communities, schools and other groups as we feel strongly that talking to and educating people about what goes on farms and how we produce food is the key to food security in this country.

I really enjoyed giving this opportunity to groups that are normally disadvantaged in some ways beyond their control



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**A big thank you to
everyone involved**

