

Enter and View Visit Report

Provider Name	Shropshire Council
Location of Service	Station Road, Ditton Priors, Bridgnorth, WV16 6SS
Name of Service	Oak Farm

Type of Service	The farm, run by Shropshire Council, provides a day service for adults with learning disabilities in south Shropshire.
CQC Registration Details	n/a
NHS Choices Service Webpage	n/a

Date of Enter and View Visit	03/03/2014
Time and Duration of Visit	11.00 - 13.30
Authorised Representatives in Visit Team	1. Rita Hester
	2. Julia Davies
	3. Kate Prescott (Volunteer and Involvement Officer)
Type of Visit	Announced

Purpose of Visit	To explore how the individual's dignity is respected in this care setting, and to identify good practice
Stand-alone visit or Part of a programme of visits	<i>Pilot Visit:</i> A series of visits testing Healthwatch Shropshire's newly developed systems for Enter and View visits, and to build the volunteers' confidence and expertise. Pilot visits are not based on intelligence.

Aims
The aim of the visit was to speak with service users about their experiences of Oak Farm and to make observations about how the service respected the dignity of the service users.



We aimed to speak to services users and make observations around:

- Promoting independence
- Choice: availability and facilitation
- Treating service users as individuals
- Levels of inclusion
- Respect

Outline of Visit

We timed our arrival to coincide with the service's break-time. Upon entering the main building, where service users were having their break, we were greeted by the service users and staff, and then by the service manager. We were invited to join the staff and service users in the break, during which time we were invited to introduce ourselves and explain why we were there.

Two service users agreed to provide us with a tour around the site during which time they talked about the site, the farm's achievements, and answered any questions we had. We had an opportunity to make observations of the service in action and speak to additional service users as we progressed around.

The farm consists of a smallholding with fields, buildings and outbuildings including: a car park by the entrance, a main demountable building with a kitchen and tables where breaks are held, a permanent building with toilets, a meeting room, offices and a front garden - at the time of our visit one room was given over to housing a brood of puppies. There is also a set of stables to hold larger animals, such as the alpacas and the Shetland pony, converted spaces for storing items such as bikes and work tools: part of one of these spaces is converted into a workshop. There is a barn that also houses the chickens, multiple fields with alpacas, pigs, sheep and rabbits, two poly-tunnels for growing vegetables, multiple greenhouses, uncovered vegetable and soft fruit patches, fruit bushes and a pond. Additionally there is a community allotment area, an orchard with a Shetland pony in it and two buildings at the far side of the smallholding by the road that have previously been shops and a café: both are currently unused. The site had recently received a small demountable building as a donation that they are converting into a 'jam hut'.

Following the tour we spoke with the service manager before returning to the break room where we spoke with service users in small groups ranging from 2-6, and as individuals.

There were between 22 and 30 service users present at the service on the day and overall we spoke to approximately 15 during the course of the visit. We also spoke with one carer who was there as support. We spoke to 3 staff in passing in addition to the service manager.



Findings

Promoting independence

A staff member asked one service user to share the delivery on a job with another service user. The first service user was reluctant because they knew the job and the other didn't, so staff explained it was an opportunity for the service user to help another and to share their skills by supporting someone else to learn the task.

We observed a staff member explaining a job to a service user. They explained the job using clear instructions and encouraged the service user to have the confidence to undertake the job. As before, staff verbally encouraged service users to learn from each other through support and observation.

Our tour of the site was conducted by two service users. Before starting out, a staff member asked the service users what route they were going to take us on. When the service users couldn't tell them the route, the staff member asked if they could make a suggestion. When the service users said yes, they suggested a route then asked the service users if they liked that as a route.

One service user talked about how they had been supervised by staff to learn to use the strimmer and could now use it.

We observed that the service users who gave us the tour were proud of Oak Farm. They were clearly also proud of themselves when talking about the activities they undertook at Oak Farm. This was indicated by their tone of voice, such as when one service user pointed out the helmet they use for cycling. With a different service user their pride was indicated by the care they took with their task and they told us they liked the job when asked.

It was observed that there were meeting minutes on the notice board that had been taken by a service user.

Choice: availability and facilitation

When two service users were asked, they explained that jobs around the farm are given to service users on a rota basis so that everyone participates in the different jobs.

Many service users were able to articulate a favourite job when asked but no service users highlighted any jobs they didn't like, although as a group they described clearing out the chickens as a smelly job.

We were struck by the range of activities that were available at Oak Farm. There was a wide range of activities directly related to the work of the farm that we saw in action, such as pruning the soft fruit, cleaning the eggs ready for sale, clearing the chickens out and tidying the muck heap, but there was also evidence of many extra



activities that were not directly related to the running of the farm. On a large computer display screen in the main hut there was a slide show of pictures running (when asked, service users said they took pictures all the time with a camera on site that go up on the slide show): service users and staff joined in to talk about the different activities they depicted including pictures of a party and a cycling course held in Shrewsbury. Staff explained that the course had led to the purchase of some bikes and the starting up of a cycling group; a service user showed us the bikes and helmets as part of the tour. Service users also told us about the following activities:

- Annual dog show
- Marquee hire and a wedding that took place that used the hire service
- Making bird boxes in the workshop
- Fruit picking
- Jam making
- Attending shows to sell the jam and other produce
- Cookery classes
- Christmas dinner event
- Small animal care course (which staff informed us hasn't run for a number of years since the funding ceased)
- Working in the shop in the past
- Working in the café in the past

The service manager explained that the service was always looking for new activities to provide a stimulating and changing environment.

Two service users talked about how they had gone to France a few years ago on a holiday organised by Oak Farm. When asked, two service users said they were interested in going on the holiday that was in the process of being organised for this year, and another two service users said they weren't going because they didn't want to go.

Some of the service users described the different ways they carry out fundraising on behalf of the farm and its services. One service user, with staff prompting, explained that they attend the annual dog show with their family. One other service user joked with a member of staff about taking part in a sponsored walk. Another service user explained they contribute to the farm business by taking eggs the chickens at the farm produce and selling them on (this money goes into the farm's trading account).

We observed that when a service user wanted to enter the meeting room when a meeting was in progress, a staff member stopped the meeting, showed the service user the room and explained that the room was in use. Another staff member asked the service user if they would mind leaving the meeting room because of the meeting and join them in the main hut instead.

During our tour one service user came and joined our tour briefly leaving the task they had been doing behind. The staff member overseeing the task simply carried on doing



the job with the other three service users doing that task - there was not the attitude that the service user had done anything wrong by leaving the task.

One service user told us that they had particularly enjoyed an activity that was no longer available. Unprompted, the service user asked two different members of staff, including the service manager, whether the activity would return, explaining that they were disappointed it hadn't so far. The staff explained it had been a one-off activity.

Treating service users as individuals

One service user had their own mug that they had brought along to the service. The service was happy with them doing so. The visit team felt this showed respect for the service user's individuality.

One service user was quiet and withdrawn from the small group that was talking to one of the visit team. A staff member came and spoke with them, inviting them to join her on a task. The staff member made good use of eye contact and the service user reacted positively - with a smile - to her interaction.

On all occasions staff referred to service users by their first names and service users did the same with staff.

Levels of inclusion

Individual Level

We observed a group of service users working as a team with a member of staff to load a wheelbarrow with straw. When one service user made to move the wheelbarrow away believing it to be full, the staff member negotiated with the service user to have another armful of straw added. The staff member explained to the whole group how their roles fitted together to make the task possible.

During a task we observed we saw a staff member carefully include a withdrawn member of the group, providing them with words of encouragement and highlighting a job well done.

We observed a service member who appeared to be slightly overwhelmed by our presence initially withdraw to the side of the room. A staff member went and sat in their vicinity - not directly with them but close enough to have a reassuring presence - until the service user relaxed and within a short period of time the service user felt comfortable enough to come up and greet us.

When asked what they liked about Oak Farm, three service users said they liked seeing their friends.

When one person spoke very quietly in a small group setting, a staff member asked the rest of the group to not talk over them and apologised to the service user, asking them to repeat themselves.



Community Level

A service user explained that the local school comes and uses part of the farm land in a forest school initiative.

A service user showed us the allotments that Oak Farm has arranged with the parish council to host on an unused patch of land. The service manager explained that the service users maintain the areas between the allotment patches and there is a very long waiting list from the local area for the allotments now.

The service manager told us about a number of ways that the farm integrates with the local community:

- Annual dog show
- Marquee hire
- Parish Council meetings are held at the farm
- Composting scheme

The service manager explained that the farm joined with the local school to share funding for a poly-tunnel on the site. He explained that one of the reasons he was pleased with this was that it helped combat discrimination towards people with learning disabilities in the next generation.

Upon arrival around ten of the service users greeted us with handshakes whilst they introduced themselves. The service manager later expressed delight when we told him this as he explained the staff had spent a long time encouraging the service users to greet others with handshakes instead of hugs to help them integrate and interact with the wider community.

Respect

It was noticed by the visit team that there were good, respectful relations between the staff and service users in their interactions. This included:

- Use of eye contact and body language
- Use of first names

Staff and service users shared their break and lunch times during the visit. Staff were sitting amongst the service users rather than sitting separately.

One group of five service users articulated that they liked the staff, especially the service manager as he, in the words of one service user, “doesn’t tell us what to do. He always asks”.

The service manager explained that although all the current staff have an agricultural background he values people’s attitudes to the service users more.

Additional Findings

- The service manager said they have not had any new referrals come through to the farm for two years.



- The service manager explained that in the last twelve months two service users who previously attended Oak Farm have had their funding reevaluated and are no longer able to attend.
- The service manager explained that Oak Farm has started the Oak Farm Friends Association (OFFA) to assist with funding in order to supplement what comes in from Shropshire Council. He highlighted that the lack of funding requires the service to be highly inventive with identifying new income and funding streams. This pressure has been the original lead into schemes such as the marquee hire.
- The service manager said that the holidays to France (both the one that happened a few years ago and the one planned for this year) although lots of work, was an opportunity not just for the service users to have a different sort of experience: it enables the service users' families to have a break from their caring responsibilities and, as such, helps 25+ people, not just the 8 or so who go on the holiday. Additionally the manager said he feels it gives staff who take part in the holiday "an insight into what a tremendous commitment caring for someone with a learning disability is and therefore hopefully as a staff team gives us a little more understanding."
- At the time of the visit the farm had a litter of puppies on site that had been bred to be guide-dogs and future breeders. When a picture of the puppies came up on the slideshow, a staff member asked the group if they remembered why they had decided to have the puppies, prompting them that it was because everyone had wanted to do something for other people; the service users verbally agreed with this statement.
- It was noticed by the visit team that the majority of service users were visibly enjoying the day.

Key Findings

The staff were very encouraging with the service users about their skills and their abilities. The method of asking service users to share their skills with each other, and to learn from each other - and not just rely on staff - recognised the skill base that the experienced service user had, encouraged sharing, and encouraged service users to pass on their knowledge to others. Staff had also used technology to help service users reflect on past experiences. This encouragement indicates a strong promotion of independence and capabilities.



The visit team was impressed with the philosophy that underpinned how Oak Farm operates that was articulated by the service manager. There was a strong emphasis on making links to the wider community because of the benefits it can bring the service users. These include increased opportunities for activities and greater integration leading to reduced discrimination and removal of some of the stigma around learning disabilities. The range of activities that was available, or had previously taken place, demonstrated that there are passionate and imaginative staff who work hard to overcome the financial barriers they face.

Although Oak Farm is popular, with many people attending currently, there is potentially a question mark regarding its future. Currently a steering group are working on behalf of the community and Oak Farm to establish a Community Land Trust. This will give parish residents an opportunity to become further involved with Oak Farm. The land will hopefully be transferred in the next few months from Shropshire Council to the Community Land Trust.

Recommendations

We hope that it will be possible for Oak Farm to continue to provide present standards of care and respect for people's dignity in both the short and long term.

Provider Response

Thank you very much for your report, it is really positive and I've now had the opportunity to share it with all the team and the service user group. Most of the people here have seen it and are very happy with the content.

There weren't any comments from the service user group. The staff team said that they were pleased with all your comments as the report demonstrated to the public what their role is and that there was recognition for their work.

