



Enter & View Report

Thrift Farm

January 2022



What was the project about?

Healthwatch Bucks wanted to find out about people's experiences of attending Thrift Farm community opportunities.

Why did we do the project?

In 2021-22 we are looking at Covid19 response and recovery in Health and Social Care. Together with our cross-cutting interest in lesser heard voices, we decided to visit locations where community opportunities are provided. These had to close in 2020 during the pandemic and then adapt to changing circumstances as they opened through 2020 and 2021.

We wanted to hear the from those who attend day care provision in Buckinghamshire. We wanted to hear what they gain from the experience and how it promotes well-being and self-reliance, one of the aims of [Our Ambition | Buckinghamshire Council \(buckscc.gov.uk\)](https://www.buckscc.gov.uk). In this, Buckinghamshire Council are looking to develop “meaningful and appropriate day and employment opportunities in the community to enable people to live fulfilling lives. We want to support a culture of choice for individuals rather than the current culture of dependency and having to fit in to services”.

We also wanted to identify good practice and ways to improve service delivery.

What did we do?

Our Enter & View visit to the service on 16th November was planned with the provider in advance. For more details on Healthwatch Enter and View and full details of the visit, including the names of our authorised representatives, please see Appendix 1.

We talked to 11 service users, 1 person providing one to one support and 4 members of staff. We also observed the interactions between these people, 5 other service users and 2 other staff members. Our authorised representatives used a set of questions to guide their conversation with service users. It covered topics such as:

- what did they like doing at Thrift Farm?
- what skills had they improved since attending?
- what would they like to change?
- how did they feel about the service?

What did we discover?

Set in 56 acres, Thrift Farm supports adults with mental health and learning difficulties. They do this through animal husbandry in the farm park, horticulture in large greenhouses and kitchen and front of house activities in the café. We were told by the manager they were hoping to develop a building into a shop soon.

How people were treated

We saw that service users were treated as equals. They were asked their opinion and invited, rather than told, to do something. We heard staff listening to service users and vice versa. All the service users have Thrift Farm uniforms which staff told us they were proud to wear.

We saw one service user working in the café kitchen. They took the cooked lunch for the service users and staff on a trolley from the café to the dining room. Then they brought all the dirty plates back and unstacked them to be washed. Although they were helped with the first delivery of food and plates, the rest they did on their own. Although some people had one to one support, many others worked autonomously; the key worker keeping an eye out for their team. We saw one person strimming grass slightly away from others, and another mucking out a pig on their own. Others worked in teams to clean out the goat enclosures or rake leaves. Service users were very cheerful, enthusiastic, and happy to engage with us and their work. We also heard one service user talking with members of the public as they looked at the animals.

We saw three people indoors doing Christmas craft. The key worker here allowed the service user to be creative with the task whilst ensuring the job was done well. One service user painted plant pots white and was very pleased with the finished result. Another was being helped to cut and place pieces of double-sided tape on card to make Christmas cards. Although there was no verbal communication from this service user, they clearly expressed, through gestures, what they wanted to do. The team leader praised them for their work. The Christmas cards were to be sold in the shop along with other produce made in the kitchen such as biscuits and marmalade, and the eggs laid in the hen house. The eggs are collected daily. One person confidently showed us how they cleaned, weighed and graded each egg before putting them into trays and boxes to be sold.

In a glasshouse, a staff member showed us rose cuttings which had been planted the day before. One person was weeding. When a staff member took a photo of them, they were very clear to ask their permission first. Three people were also patiently removing paint from an old wooden sleigh whilst two others eagerly painted a wooden planter outside. We were told by a member of staff that they had asked for a break from raking leaves.

In the area, next to the dining room, we saw Makaton / BSL signs up around the noticeboards. The latter were pictorial showing photos of all the service users and staff in that day. Photos of service users were then stuck to different areas of the board depending on the area of work or time of day. This enabled service users to find out what they were doing in the morning or afternoon without having to ask. The options for lunch were also displayed in a photo display as well as in a written menu on the wall.

What do you like doing?

We saw that one person, who said they liked all the options available at Thrift Farm, spent most of their time with the rabbits. Another, making two papier mâché structures told us they preferred mucking out the animals. Most people, however, were very keen to get involved in the jobs that needed to be done whatever the weather. “I don’t feel the cold anymore.” It didn’t seem to matter whether they had been coming to the service for a few months or many years. The majority really liked caring for the animals, many of whom were referred to by name. “Mary’s [a pig] going to have more babies.” “I like to keep everything clean and tidy.” Someone

else told us “I love the music” which is played in certain buildings where only staff (which includes service users) can access.

What have you got better at since coming here?

One person told us how they had learnt how to use garden machinery since coming to Thrift Farm. They, having been trained, could now use a lawnmower, strimmer, hedge cutter and leaf blower independently. Others told us they had never looked after farm animals before and now knew what to do. We saw service users independently clean pens and fill up water troughs. Another person told us how their confidence in themselves had increased because of the support and encouragement of the staff. They felt less anxious than they had in paid work. Others told us that the farm work made them physically “stronger”.

What could make your experience better?

We were told that two people had paid work at the weekends at Thrift Farm. One was a cleaner. Another person expressed a wish to have paid work there too. One person liked the idea of introducing zoo animals to the park as well as the farm animals.

How do you feel about the service?

Service users consistently told us how much they enjoyed their time spent at Thrift Farm. Many sounded very proud of the work they were doing. One told us that Thrift Farm was the best thing that had ever happened to them. They said they really appreciated the help and support provided by the staff. Another praised the manager and their key worker. “She’s done an amazing job.” “If I have anxieties, I tell them, and they can tell the other staff.” “I want Thrift Farm to get 5 [stars]”

Our recommendations

Based on what service users told us and our observations, we recommend Thrift Farm:

- continues to look for paid for opportunities for service users within Thrift Farm
- continues to engage services users with the public in areas such as the café and in the new shop when it opens.

Service Provider Response

We are very proud to have been part of the ‘Enter & View’ process which has clearly emphasised how our Thrift community is working together to create a service that is unique in every way. The staff team and Service users have embraced change beyond our expectations. The new owners have influenced every aspect of the farm and drawn each area to work together allowing even more opportunity for choice led work-based environments.

Recommendations

Recommendations you have given to continue to look for paid for opportunities for service users within Thrift Farm is something we have steadily been working towards. Having two service users be a part of this process already proves it is possible.

Recommendations to continue to engage service users with the public is always something we positively encourage and incorporate into our daily activities to help build confidence and communication skills.

We are excited for the future and the new opportunities we can bring to our Service users. We continuously review the care we provide and will always welcome Healthwatch into our Service.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Bucks would like to thank Thrift Farm service users and staff for their contributions to this Enter and View visit.

Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to findings observed on the specific date set out above. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all service users and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.

Appendix 1: Enter and View Background and Visit Details

Part of the local Healthwatch programme is to carry out Enter and View visits. Local Healthwatch representatives carry out these visits to health and social care services to find out how they are being run and make recommendations where there are areas for improvement.

The Health and Social Care Act allows local Healthwatch authorised representatives to watch how services are delivered and talk to service users, their families and carers on premises such as hospitals, care homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, optometrists and pharmacies. Enter and View visits can happen if people tell us there is a problem with a service but, equally, they can occur when services have a good reputation - so we can learn about and share examples of what they do well from the perspective of people who experience the service first hand.

Healthwatch Enter and View visits are not intended to specifically identify safeguarding issues, however, if safeguarding concerns arise during a visit they are reported in accordance with Healthwatch safeguarding policies. In addition, if any member of staff wishes to raise a safeguarding issue about their employer, they will be directed to the CQC where they are protected by legislation if they raise a concern.

Details of visit:	
Service Provider	Thrift Farm
Service Address	Buckingham Road Whaddon Milton Keynes MK17 0EQ
Date and Time	16 th November 2021 10am - 1pm
Authorised Representatives	Alison Holloway Kaye Walsh

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