

Social Farming withPeople with Intellectual Disabilities



Benefits and outcomes that social farming can deliver (and which you can support people in achieving)

- A sense of achievement and purpose from making a contribution and having a important role on the farm.
- A bigger social circle and the opportunity to make new friends and connections.
- The opportunity to 'care for' rather than be cared for.
- Improvements in mental health and sense of well-being from spending time in nature, and working with plants and animals.
- Improved physical health, fitness, and vitality from being naturally active on the farm
- Opportunities for people to be — and to discover things about themselves — in a lively, real-world environment.
- Can help create new paths to voluntary work, training, employment.
- Can help build participants' ability to live independently and well in their own homes and communities.

Definition & Understanding of Intellectual Disability (ID)

- Intellectual disability is a term used when there are limits to a person's ability to learn and to function at an expected level in daily life. With the right opportunities and supports, people with intellectual disabilities can live full and meaningful lives and continue to grow and develop as people.
- ID is typically identified during the developmental years (0-18) but there are some life-long implications for an individual's capacity and their development across multiple areas of their lives. It can often occur alongside other conditions like cerebral palsy ADHD & autism spectrum disorder and with mental health challenges (known as dual diagnosis). People with intellectual disabilities will often have additional health issues such as vision and hearing impairment and poor levels of physical activity, fitness and agility.
- There are **varying levels of severity** of intellectual disability from mild to profound which will help determine the ability of participants to take part in activities on the farm, the ability to understand and follow instructions, motor skills, social skills and the ability to communicate. As with anyone, other factors such as someone's individual personality, skills and motivation and the attitudes of the people supporting them also come into play.

There is almost certainly a place for everyone—they just need the right supports on the right farm



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Which Activities?

Ordinary, recurring farm tasks

The basic, necessary farm tasks - the things that *need* to be done – should form the core of the time on the farm; checking livestock, feeding animals, weeding, sowing, harvesting, sweeping, tidying, etc. On a farm, **activities don't need to be invented**. The level of complexity should vary according to individual capacity.

Structured activities with clear outputs/results

Activities which have a clear, even visual output are very important in building people's sense of motivation and achievement. People should be able to say 'I/we collected those eggs' or 'I/we power-hosed that yard'

Activities which are connected to one another

It is important to create a chain of connected activities — to get people to contribute to the full cycle in a way they may not otherwise get to do. So for example they sow the seeds, weed and tend to the vegetables, harvest the vegetables and then help to cook, prepare then finally eat the vegetables. **Projects** completed over a period of time, such as building raised beds or restoring an old tractor are also good.

Providing real access to animals and nature

Real and up-close interaction with and care for animals may be one of the most important and valuable aspects of people's time on the farm and it should be facilitated and encouraged where possible. This may include supporting people to overcome any fears they might have .

Activities with a strong social dimension

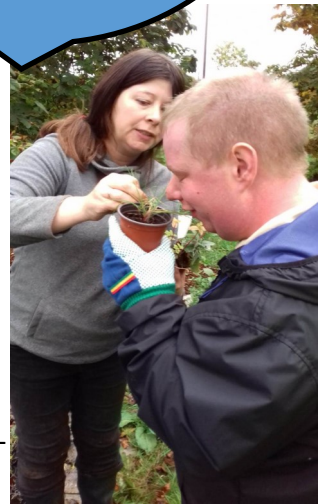
Social farming should always provide plenty of opportunities for conversation, story-telling and **fun** while carrying out activities, while sharing meals and when relaxing in between times.

Activities which connect with the world outside the farm

It is good to include opportunities to be out there in the world, both observing and being part of commercial activities of the farm, going for supplies, going to events in the local community like markets, cattle marts, festivals, etc.

*"They especially like going to forest and working there... In the forest they also like it because it is full of action, we often burn branches there and that is what they like. Well, especially our male clients....They need the outdoor work, the exercise. They don't want to stay in the room and always sit and do the same work for weeks and months."**

*"For the clients, working on a care farm means contributing to something greater. Everything they do has a meaning. It makes them feel important, useful and needed."**



Activities which allow for positive risk-taking

The daily lives of people with ID are often characterised by a culture of risk minimisation and paternalism. In contrast, the live environment of the farm is one where people should be supported to enjoy the **sense of freedom and space**, to take risks, to extend themselves beyond what they thought they could do.

Activities which encourage natural physical movements of all types

This should be an everyday part of social farming - walking to feed the animals, walking up and down hills and on uneven surfaces, bending, stretching, digging, lifting, etc. Small changes can make a big difference!

It all starts with the individual.....

This target group encompasses people with a very wide range of abilities, needs, challenges and potential. Treating each person who arrives at the farm as an individual is the foundation of providing supports which will deliver a good experience and positive outcomes for each person.

Allow plenty of opportunities for people to develop and grow on the farm

People come to social farming with their own knowledge and experience. It is important that participants are given the opportunity to **contribute their ideas** and to become involved across many aspects of the farm according to their strengths, talents and preferences, increasing the level of responsibility over time. Growth may also involve doing some things which people do not enjoy or which they find boring or difficult: that is all part of normal life.

*"Generally, it is the same as with all other people. The difference is, that everything is more intense. It is more open, it is actually also more honest, not hidden, but problems come to light relatively openly. Nothing is concealed."**

Be genuine, 'real' and open

Any tendency to condescend to people or treat them as children needs to be avoided. Farmers should also cultivate the ability to manage and respond themselves with openness to the openness of many participants with intellectual disabilities, who may have fewer social boundaries in terms of saying what they think and feel.

Create a relaxed and homely atmosphere

In addition to creating lots of space and time for social interaction, you need to be in tune with people's **moods and wishes** on a given day and work around them. Participants should not be put in excessively pressurised situations. But they can of course be challenged to push themselves beyond what they might *think* they can do.

SoFarTEAM - Social Work in Farming

Which Approach?

Have patience

Patience is fundamental to social farming: patience in getting to know people, patience in carrying out activities alongside participants, patience in dealing with the **slower pace** which may be needed when working with this target group.

*"Patience, kindness, gentleness. You are not trying to shape anybody into what they aren't. Intuition is very important."**

Be very clear and always demonstrate

It is really important to offer very clear instructions, to break tasks down into smaller chunks and to repeat and clarify instructions as often as necessary. It is also crucial to **show** how things are done, to work alongside people in carrying out tasks. Goals should be clear and tasks should have an end point where people can see and know for themselves that the task is complete and done well (e.g. that's that that drill of potatoes picked, that calf pen cleaned out, etc.)

Remain firmly in control...

The social farmer is ultimately the **leader of the group**, responsible for ensuring the safety and welfare of all of the people on the farm and that tasks are completed adequately. A balance constantly needs to be struck where people experience the farm as a place of warmth and friendship but also of necessary work, of positive-risk taking but also of potential dangers.



**All quotations are from interviews with experienced social farmers carried out as part of the SoFarTEAM Project.*

Possible challenges....and how to manage them.

<p>Differences in ability between individual participants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Emphasise common ground in social interactions and in working at more generic tasks where everyone can participate, even if at a different pace (e.g. painting a gate or picking up sticks). ⇒ Have people sometimes work at separate activities where they can shine and/or work comfortably and without comparisons. ⇒ Overall, the level of supervision should correspond to the task and the individual completing it. For people who might have significant impairments or who are working at a much slower pace, the farmer should stay close and work in tandem while allowing others to work more independently.
<p>Changes in mood which can be swift</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Remain alert and sensitive to the potential for this so that things can be dealt with in an appropriate way and in many cases, problems averted before they arise: this ability to ‘read people’ will increase as the relationship develops. ⇒ Don’t be afraid of the situation, stay calm and in control. ⇒ Respond in a way that ensures the safety and the quality of the experience for everybody on the farm, if necessary separating people out temporarily.
<p>Lack of motivation and drive. This can become especially problematic when carrying out activities which people may think of as boring or tedious.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Don't panic about it or take it personally. You may need to lower expectations of what will be achieved on any given day and adapt to people's moods and energy levels. ⇒ Break tasks up into small chunks and don’t stay too long on ones that people are not enjoying—but don’t avoid them altogether. ⇒ Distribute any unpopular tasks fairly and balance them with breaks and switches to more agreeable tasks. ⇒ Work alongside people and thereby encourage them to continue. ⇒ Making sure that people are working in groups where they get on and otherwise enjoy working together. ⇒ Accept that as with any group undertaking tasks, a certain level of grumbling is normal, human and even unavoidable! Humour can have a role to play in defusing complaints.
<p>Conflict or lack of connection between individual participants. This may be accompanied by a limited or diminished capacity to resolve conflict.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ People are much more likely to get on with each other when you create a harmonious atmosphere overall, minimise stressful scenarios and use the space and variety of the farm environment to ‘mix things up’ . ⇒ Accept that as in any setting, conflict between participants or a simple ability to get on or enjoy one another’s company can still arise. It is no ones fault! ⇒ Remain calm and neutral if/when scenarios do arise ⇒ Where appropriate or possible, separate people and assign them to different tasks. ⇒ Allow people the time and space to vent their frustration separate to one another.