

Farm initiative now helping older people



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<http://www.thisisdorset.co.uk/news/Farm-initiative-helping-older-people/article-2400663-detail/article.html>

A therapeutic farm initiative set up to help troubled young people is now opening its doors to the older generation.

Julie Plumley, a joint director of Rylands Farm at Holnest near Sherborne in Dorset, is extending an open invitation to the older age group to visit as part of initiative *Let Nature Feed Your Senses*.

Ryland's Farm opens its doors to schools, youth groups and other support services providing programmes to help young people who have support needs.

Passionate about the therapeutic benefits of the countryside, Julie believes sufferers of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's Disease can be helped by spending time on the farm. She wants care and residential homes to let their residents take part.

Julie said: "Years ago, I used to work with dementia sufferers and my father, a former farmer, suffers from Parkinson's Disease. The initiative aims to keep not just their minds active but their bodies as well.

"For example, by getting someone with something like Parkinson's to work with wood, making a walking stick, they would be using their hands. Rubbing down hazel coppiced from the woods to turn into a walking stick would be something useful. A smell, sight or sound could trigger off a memory for someone with Alzheimer's who might have worked on a farm and that has to be good.

"We are trying to make Rylands Farm as accessible as we can and fill in the inter-generational gap between young and older people and bring a sense of community."

Julie and her co-director [Keith Harrison](#) have already invested in an old corn mill and aim to bring in other memorabilia.

She said: "If someone cannot talk they can still feel, see, touch and taste the countryside and get something from it.

"Every day, there is something new happening on a farm or something strange that will make you feel good."

Let Nature Feed Your Senses aims to make farming and the countryside accessible to all, but particularly those with disability issues, elderly people and the disadvantaged. The project is a joint one run by Leaf (Linking Environment and Farming) and the Sensory Trust, and is funded by Access to Nature a programme run by Natural England and the [Big Lottery Fund](#)'s Changing Spaces programme.

To take part in the initiative farms have to have tackled mobility issues and provided facilities for disabled visitors.

Regional organiser Sue Padfield, is passionate about encouraging a love of nature through food, farming and a farmer's everyday life.

Her family farm at Stratton-on-the Fosse plays host to educational visits and is always open to the public on Open Farm Sunday.

She said: "We want to encourage the over-65s, young people and people with disabilities to experience the way a farm and the countryside contributes to their lives.

"We want to give them a lovely day out in the countryside that is rich in its appeal to the senses so they can experience where their food comes from. A chance to get up close to the farm and the farming life at a much gentler, more slower and meaningful pace.

"I paid a visit to the Magdalen Project near Chard and spent half an hour with one child who picked up an egg laid by a hen that was still warm and the look on his face said it all. It's this sort of experience and feeling we want to create for all our visitors. We want them to go home with a happy heart."

www.letnaturefeedyoursenses.org