

Name of project/group
Dads on the Farm (part of the National Trust's (NT's) Family Places Project)
Type of project
Community empowerment
Location
Killerton Estate, South West
What was involved
<p>'Dads on the Farm' is part of the Family Places project, a partnership between the National Trust and Devon Family Learning, funded for three years from January 2009 by the Big Lottery Fund. As part of the project, groups of dads and their children have been able to learn together outdoors on the National Trust's Killerton Estate.</p> <p>An initial taster session featuring environmental games was run at Martinsfield Farm (a NT tenant farm on the estate) for 12 families in June 2009. The participants were from Wynstream School in Exeter, an inner city school in an area of need. The response to this was so positive that a wider Family Learning course was set up at the farm. A converted farm building was established as a base for the group, who visited weekly for six weeks after school in the autumn term. The course was a success, and a second course run with a new group in 2010. A third course is taking place in 2011.</p> <p>The course aims to engage adults in learning with the hope that they will take advantage of more opportunities being planned at school. Activities were devised to help families discover more about food production and the conservation and management of the countryside, in particular how the farmers and National Trust rangers encourage wildlife to thrive on the estate. Activities have included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm walks and trails; • A visit to Clyston Mill (also National Trust) to see traditional flour milling; • Making bat boxes and putting them in the woodland on the farm; • A visit to Killerton forest yard and orchard to help harvest apples and watch cider pressing; • Environmental games to enhance understanding of the countryside; • Surveying a hedgerow for bio-diversity; • Planting a shelter belt of native trees.

Achievements
A Dad's group had already been established at the school, so was looking for suitable activities

as a focus for the group. The farm course gave the group a chance to bond and gave families the opportunity to progress to other Family Learning courses. The course allowed Family Learning to become established at the school and courses are now run there on a regular basis.

The first group of participants have shown remarkable progress. Several of them have continued learning, doing further courses at the school and becoming more involved in its community. For example, one granddad was elected a school governor. Some of the group volunteered again at Killerton, to test a new play trail with their children. They have inspired other men to take part in Family Learning at the school.

After seeing the orchard on the farm, the group asked for help to establish one of their own in the school grounds. With the project officer, tutor and Trust rangers, they researched local apple varieties and learnt how to plant and care for their trees.

The project has also given the farmer the opportunity and experience to develop further programmes of learning at the farm and improve the facilities and resources for other groups there.

The learners' responses show the project's value:

'I would tell everybody to do this course because it's really great'

'My son understands more now and asks me more questions on the countryside'

'This course was well worth doing. So much to do and you learn a lot about the wildlife and about this farm'

'Got me a lot closer to my daughter'

'I learnt new skills and about wild plants'

'Enjoyed the course – keen to do something else involving a group where you can chat with other adults'

'My child takes a total new look out in life now'

'Acquired knowledge about what animals live on a farm which produces'.

The teacher commented;

'We had a really positive experience attending this course, which will include memories that will last forever. It was also great to give local families the opportunity to visit a fantastic resource on their doorstep that they have not been to and never would have been to.'

Future plans

To make the project sustainable, the Family Learning co-ordinator (Devon County Council) and Family learning Officer (NT) have ensured that contact between the farmer, NT staff and the school is well established and can be maintained independently. For example other groups from the school have since visited. The farmer, who is an experienced teacher and has worked with Family Learning before, has produced clear guidelines for teachers and tutors planning visits to her farm. This has involved providing:

- training for tutors in the use of the outdoors with vulnerable Family Learning groups;
- resources such as maps, trails and session plans linked to the farm, which is now being used regularly as a visit for Family Learning groups from other learning communities. These will be available electronically to tutors and Trust staff when the project funding ends.

The nearby mill is also being used and further resources have been developed for use by groups. Links between all partners involved in this project have been consolidated by carefully evaluating

the project and making next steps for all involved clear.

When asked in a survey for his response to the project, the mill custodian commented:

'More of the same for us. Return visits by course members would be welcomed. We always appreciate family visits - particularly when the parents are enthusiastic and get reactions from their children.'



Lessons learnt

- Benefits from taster sessions: Initially, there was concern from all involved that there would not be enough interest and commitment from the families in signing up for a 6 week course away from the school and after school hours. To overcome this, a taster session was run for families to show them the farm, and introduce them to the type of activities they could do there. Over half the families involved in this expressed an interest in returning and signed up for the course in the autumn.
- Enthusiasm and word of mouth: Since then, recruiting for the course has often been by word of mouth. The commitment and enthusiasm of the teacher to this project has also played a key role in ensuring learners complete the course and progress to new ones. Now another school in Exeter has asked for a similar course to be run for their families this autumn and a taster session for this is was run in June.

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