

Enter &
View

Oak Tree Farm
22nd February 2019



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Part of the Healthwatch Staffordshire remit is to carry out Enter and View Visits. Healthwatch Staffordshire Authorised Representatives will carry out these visits to health and social care premises to find out how they are being run and make recommendations where there are areas for improvement. The Health and Social Care Act allows Authorised Representatives to observe service delivery and talk to service users, their families and carers on premises such as hospitals, residential 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 Staffordshire 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 Staffordshire safeguarding policy, the service manager will be informed and the visit will end. The Local Authority Safeguarding Team will also be informed.

Provider Details

Provider: Oak Tree Farm Rural Project
Address: Sandon Road, Hilderstone, Staffordshire ST15 8RT
Service Type: Training and Support Service for Adults with Learning Difficulties
Date of Visit: 22nd February 2019

Authorised Representatives

This visit was made by two Authorised Representatives of Healthwatch Staffordshire Jackie Owen and Jo Hall.

Purpose of Visit

Healthwatch Staffordshire is making a series of visits to Day Services throughout the county in order to report on the range and quality of these services. Each service will have an individual report and an overview report on Day Services in Staffordshire will be compiled once the visits are completed.

A good service should...

1. Have strong, visible management
2. Have staff with time and skills to do their jobs
3. Have good knowledge of each individual client, their needs and how their needs may be changing.
4. Offer a varied programme of activities unless a specific service is offered.
5. Offer quality and choice to their clients around food and mealtimes, where applicable.
6. Accommodate clients personal, cultural and lifestyle needs.
7. Be an open environment where feedback is actively sought and used

The methodology to be used is to;

- Consider the care and services offered and whether this is delivered in a way that promotes dignity and independence.
- Consider staffing levels and the level of the care provided.
- Talk to people using the service, if they are happy and willing to do so to gain their views on the opportunities available to them.
- Talk to relatives, if they are available to ask if they are happy with the care provided to their relatives and whether they are aware and feel able to report any concerns/ complaints.
- Consider staff training and the support offered to enable staff to do their jobs well.
- Observe interaction at all levels between clients, staff, Manager, and visitors.

Physical Environment

External

Oak Tree Farm is a 15 acre smallholding located in the rural village of Hilderstone, near Stone. The farm is well signposted from the main road and is accessed by a long driveway to a car park that serves as access to both the farm and the café.

Oak Tree Farm was initially set up by a group of parents and others interested in providing another option to the more traditional day services for school leavers with a learning disabilities.

The farm buildings are set well back from the road offering a safe environment for Team Members to participate in the activities on offer at the farm and the café. The farm is made up of several buildings which are grouped around the old farm cottage. There is a conservation pond and attractive gardens which grow flowers and plants, vegetables. More plants and vegetables are grown in a range of greenhouses and polytunnels which are then sold to the public either on site at the shop or at external events throughout the year.

The farm itself has beef cattle, poultry, a pet goat, rabbits, ducks, guinea pigs and a tortoise. Pigs are kept for part of the year.

There is a fully equipped purpose-built pottery room which looked very well used and had a wide array of equipment for use in all aspects of pottery making. We were told that a pottery teacher attends weekly to undertake lessons with team members. We saw some of the pottery being made and spoke to team members who participated in this activity. They spoke of their enjoyment of this activity and told us about some of the things they had made. Last year team members were involved with making one thousand ceramic poppies to mark the centenary of the end of WW1 which were displayed in a church in Stone.

Other activities included a willow weaving shed and we were shown trays and plant pots that had been made by team members to a good quality.

There is also craft and work rooms, a woodworking workshop and a computer room.

All parts of the farm and facilities were accessible to staff, team members and visitors as was evidenced by a wheelchair user uninhibited in his movement around the farm.

The Oak Leaf Tea Room is open to the public 6 days a week serving morning coffee and lunch and whilst we were there was very busy with no available space. Team members work in the café alongside members of staff and although we did not manage to speak to any of the team members who worked in the tea room, we observed the service from the doorway and everyone seemed to be working well as a team.

Internal

Most of the activity at the farm takes place outside but there were a number of buildings which team members access to undertake a variety of activities. There were two buildings in which team members could relax to have lunch and refreshments, one which had a fridge and tea making facilities. The other room was used as a quiet room or small group activity room. In both rooms there was evidence of team member involvement including drawings and photographs on the wall depicting outings and activities previously undertaken. The rooms were bright and comfortable for team members to undertake internal activities and have lunch.

There was an accessible toilet, but most of the team members are mobile and physically able and do not require special changing facilities to meet their needs.

Client Numbers

Oak Tree Farm is set up for a maximum number of services users of 62 and currently have 59 people using the service.

Staff Numbers

The farm is staffed by 15 trained / qualified Activity Leaders.

There are 2 members of the Management team and one Administrator

In addition, there are 15 volunteers who attend the farm to help out with the running of it and with activities. There are no temporary or agency staff employed and these have never been required for the running of the service as the staff group is so stable.

Management

Management - A good service should have strong visible management.

The manager should be visible within the service, provide good leadership to staff and have the right experience for the job.

The Farm is managed by a General Manager who has been with the project from the beginning and has seen it grow and develop over a period of around 33 years. The Manager is at the heart of the centre ensuring it is run effectively and efficiently and that all team members are involved in all aspects of the running of the farm. Over the years the manager has taken opportunities through grant application, fundraising and income generation, to grow the service from one that was partly funded through the County Council of around 8 team members based mainly around plants and small animals to one that now has around 58 team members offering a wide range of activities on a much expanded site.

The Manager is very 'hands on' around the farm working alongside staff and team members on a daily basis as well as planning the work and dealing with compliance issues, fundraising etc. It was evident that team members all knew him and had a rapport with him as did the staff members.

Comments

There was strong evidence that the manager displayed strong and effective leadership on the farm and had good relationships with both staff and team members. The atmosphere was calm and relaxed and team members seemed to clearly enjoy being there and were fully engaged with the work that they did on the farm.

Staff Experiences and Observations

Quality Indicator 2 - Have the staff the time and skills to do their jobs

Staff should be well-trained, motivated and feel they have the resources to do their job properly.

Our findings

We were informed by the manager that there were 15 staff member and 15 volunteers.

Staff Mandatory training - MAPA, Health and Safety, Manual Handling.

Additional training available includes First Aid, Autism, seizures and Learning Disabilities and Food Hygiene.

We were informed that training is provided by a variety of internal and external trainers, and were given the details of which service provided which particular training.

Staff / Service user ratio can be 1:1 to 1:5 depending on Team Members, day, circumstances, activities, etc.

The Manager told us that although he did not have a training matrix at this time, this was on his list of things to do and was his intention to compile one. This would certainly be useful to track which staff have had what training going forward making sure training was up to date and relevant.

Staff we spoke to us were friendly, welcoming and open and clearly, from their demeanour, enjoyed working on the farm and with team members. Most of the staff have been there long term with those that leave generally leaving for retirement.

We observed staff with team members out on the site working, some 1:2:1 and some in groups and the rapport seemed easy and relaxed with everyone getting on with the tasks assigned to them supported by staff.

Staff we spoke to felt that it was a good working environment in which they felt supported by their manager and by each other. It was described as like 'being a family' such was the stability of both the staff group and the team member group. Good morale among staff was reported and team working was as the heart of this.

Comments

Staff told us that they felt adequately trained and supported by their manager. However, this was not evident in the written form of a training matrix and if this was an inspected service, this would be picked up by the regulators. However, this is something the manager intends to introduce and this will enable him to ensure that all staff are up to date with both mandatory training and vocational training and particularly any changes in legislation that may impact upon training.

Staff generally were observed as being friendly, and at ease with team members and ourselves throughout this visit and those we spoke to unreservedly thought it a 'good, supportive place to work'. Our impression was of a positive, caring and motivated staff group and a place that the Authorised Representative thought would be a good place to work.

Quality Indicator 3 - Do staff have good knowledge of each individual client, their needs and how their needs may be changing
Staff should be familiar with clients' histories and preferences and have processes in place for how to monitor any changes in wellbeing.

Our findings

We were informed that all team members have a care plan and when they first start at Oak Tree Farm they also have an individual risk assessment. These are reviewed on a regular basis through 1:2:1 meetings that also may include parents/carers and other providers if appropriate. The purpose of the review is to agree personal targets and assess progress of the current care plan. The care plan includes a section on the persons history, significant others, Interests and what they will be doing whilst on the farm.

Staff members are key workers to a number of team members and it is their responsibility to ensure that the care plans are up to date and relevant and reflect the team members current needs and aspirations.

Any change in health needs are discussed with parents/ carers through 1:2:1 reviews and reflected in the care plan. This is discussed at the daily team briefing which happens each morning before team members arrive. Also discussed is the plan for the day in terms of who will be doing what.

All staff have safeguarding training as mandatory and there are procedures in place to deal with any safeguarding issues. All staff are DBS checked.

Comments

The team appeared to be a tight knit team well led by the manager. Staff interacted easily with team members and with each other and this 'team spirit' seemed prevalent throughout. Team members spoke positively about the staff and commented that they felt safe in the knowledge that staff would deal with any problems that they had both at home and at the farm.

Activities

Quality Indicator 4 - Activities - Does the service offer a varied programme of activities?

Services should provide a wide range of activities and support clients to take part in activities, unless the service offers a specific type of service rather than a wider range of opportunities.

Our findings

Types of Activities on offer			
Indoor	Outdoor	Off-site External work in garden maintainance	Visits / trips out
Catering	Horticulture	Gardening	Annual trip
Pottery	Farming	Gardening services	Other trips
Craft	Animals	Animals	
Woodwork	Grounds maintenance	Various errands to make purchases.	

The farm offers a wide range of activities that team members can participate in both on the farm and externally. Ongoing informal training in all aspects of the activities is undertaken. Food Hygiene training is given to those who work in the café.

Team members are involved in all aspects of work on the farm whether this be in horticulture with team members growing and planting flowers, animal care, pottery, willow weaving to growing and maintaining vegetable patches, making hanging baskets etc. Many of these are sold to the public from the farm shop. Activities are allocated according to an individual's needs and ability and whether training or support can enable a team member to participate.

Team Members can gain work experience in Gardening and Grounds Maintenance and become part of the 'Acorn Garden Services Team' where workers have the opportunity to work in the community as part of the team doing gardening work. This is staffed by a team leader and has a core team plus additional workers who are involved each day to meet the business requirements. The team carry out work at a number of sites including Biddulph Grange, Swynnerton, Gratwich and Coates Heath Churches.

There is also a 'Branching out' team that undertakes work at Hilderstone Nursing Home, Sandon Hall Gardens and Hollywood Goat Farm.

Team members also work in the very busy tea room which sells an array of cakes and serves lunches. The shop also sells a wide range of items produced on the farm including terracotta and stoneware garden pots and other pottery, seasonal plants, flowers and produce, crafts and wooden garden items made on site.

Comments

The range of activities offered are wide and varied and have something for everyone with a range of abilities. We observed Team Members undertaking a range of activities and they appeared very engaged with what they were doing. Feedback from them indicated that they enjoyed the activities on offer and got a lot out of them. Many of the activities are designed to enable team members to improve and develop new skills as well as gain enjoyment from their attendance. Some Team Members have progressed onto the Acorn Project but we did not meet anyone who did not enjoy attending the farm, but if there was something that they were unhappy with they could discuss this with their key worker who they meet with on a regular basis.

Catering Services - where applicable

Quality Indicator 5 - Catering - Does the service offer quality, choice around food and mealtimes?

If relevant, Services should offer a range of meal choices and adequate support to help clients who may struggle to eat and drink and accommodate different preferences and needs around individual dietary requirements.

Our findings

The farm does not provide a catering service. Team members bring their own food with them and this seems to work quite well. There are facilities for lunch to be eaten in a room which has a fridge and drink making facilities as well as utensils that people can use if needed. This enables Team Members to socialise with each other if they want to. There are regular breaks for refreshment, and this is available to all throughout the day if they want it. There is also a quiet room that can be used as an alternative if Team Members want some quiet time.

Comments

The non-provision of catering does not seem to be an issue for team members as it has always been the case and people join the service on that basis.

Quality Indicator 6 - Does the service accommodate clients personal, cultural and lifestyle needs?

Services should be set up to meet residents cultural, religious and lifestyle needs as well as their care needs, and shouldn't make people feel uncomfortable if they are different or do things differently to other clients.

Our findings

Team Members that we observed are largely able bodied with no specific personal care needs but we did meet a volunteer who was a wheelchair user who seemed to get around the site relatively easily in his self-propelled wheelchair. The manager told us he was "a great bloke, he comes each Friday - He helps us a lot when we are considering access around the farm". The Team Members we spoke to felt that they received good support from staff and that their needs were being met. We observed interaction between staff and Team Members, and this was kind, friendly and respectful. Each Team Member has a personal care plan and activity plan tailored to their individual needs. These are regularly reviewed and changed as necessary in collaboration with Adult Social Care / carers / families and providers.

Transport to the service is not provided. Team Members make their own way using taxi's, family or public transport. Some Team Members share transport to reduce the costs.

Comments

There was no evidence to suggest that Team Members personal, cultural and lifestyle needs are not met within the bounds of what the service offers. Each individual plan reflects the needs and wishes of Team Members and appear to be catered for within the service. The service accommodates people with no or low physical care needs but can still manage with team members who need a wheelchair to get around.

Client Experiences and Observations

We spoke to around 5 Team Members who all spoke positively about their experiences of attending the farm. Most Team Members attend the service 2 days a week and some attend other services as well to meet different needs. Team Members spoke enthusiastically about the work that they do and showed us some of the results of their work such as pottery and weaved baskets. Each person seemed to know what their tasks were for the day and everyone was fully engaged with these when we arrived and throughout our visit. We observed the relationship with staff to be friendly and at ease and those Team Members we spoke to talked in positive terms about them. Some Team Members also use other day services on other days so get any additional needs met through these. Our Observations of Team Members on site going about their activities and interacting with us left us in little doubt that people enjoyed being on the farm and enjoyed the company of each other and the staff.

Family / Carers experiences (if available)

We did not see any carers on this visit. We were told that carers can attend the farm any time they want to speak to the manager, staff or the trustees. They are invited to reviews and have continuous access to the farm if they wanted to drop in to see the manager or staff. In the past Carers events have been arranged to try to involve them more but the take up has been so low that these were stopped. Carers are invited to reviews and are kept informed of any changes to the service or in relation to Team Members as appropriate.

Quality Indicator 7 - The service should be an open environment where feedback is actively sought and use.

There should be mechanisms in place for clients and relatives to influence what happens in the service, such as a Clients and Relatives Committee or regular meetings. The process for making comments or complaints should be clear and feedback should be welcomed and acted on.

Our findings

We were informed that team member feedback is included in everything that the service does and whilst there are not specific meetings or committees this is included in everyday discussion with Team Members who have informed many changes in the way the services is run and organised. The manager told us that the service is run as a collaborative project with team members and staff given equal status in relation to what activities take place.

There is a complaints procedure in place, and these would be dealt with by the manager. These however are very rare, and the manager could only think of one complaint received in a number of years and his description of this clearly indicated that he takes these very seriously and acts upon them appropriately.

Comments

Although we did not have sight of the complaints procedure we were assured that there was one in place and that these are dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner by the manager. These however are rare because the relationship between staff, Team Members and relatives is open, inclusive and collaborative.

Additional information

Oak Tree Farm hours for people using the services are 10.00 am to 3.00pm

Summary, Comments and Further Observations

From the outset of the visit we were made welcome by everyone and were encouraged to speak to team members about their experiences of attending the farm. This feedback was without exception positive and confirmed by our observations of Team Members going about their day. It was evident from the manager and staff we spoke to that each team member was highly valued. The service is well established having been in existence for many years and has evolved over that time to offer a varied programme of activities aimed at enhancing the skills and interests of team members.

The service is aimed primarily at people who have an interest in outdoor activity, particularly around the care of animals and growing and selling of plants/flowers and vegetables. Team Members need to be relatively independent and self-caring as there are not facilities for meeting high personal care needs. Two Team Members attend the farm with their own 1:2:1 support worker, but the majority of people are able to care for themselves independently whilst there. There is no public transport so people need support in some way to get to and from Oak Tree Farm and transport is generally provided by parents or carers, taxis with escorts, with a minimal number of people coming in taxis by themselves.

Each person has a role on the farm but can also participate in other activities such as pottery, weaving, woodwork etc. For those who are able, there are opportunities to undertake work experience on the Acorn Garden Services team or in the busy café which is open 6 days a week to the public. Everyone has a valued role and it was evident through our visit that the ethos of providing opportunity, support and encouragement for people to learn new skills and improve their existing ones runs through every activity on the farm.

Recommendations and Follow-Up Action

The only recommendation that we would make following this visit is to develop the training matrix for staff as this will ensure that all training and refresher training is up to date and will provide evidence should this ever be called upon should any sort of incident occur requiring this assurance.

Provider Feedback

The Manager of Oak Tree Farm said that it was good to meet the Healthwatch Staffordshire Representatives and to be able to show them what is done at the farm. The manager also added that they must complete a training plan as mentioned in the recommendations.

DISCLAIMER

Please note that this report only relates to findings we observe on the specific date of our visit. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all residents and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.



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