

# Working with Willowdene

West Mercia Probation Trust's partnership with Willowdene Farm goes from strength to strength with the development of new and exciting initiatives this year. Including a Social Enterprise to develop day care provision, a Residential Intervention Programme and plans to work with women offenders in a residential and day care capacity.

**RITE Social Enterprise**

Willowdene has established RITE (Relational, Inspiring, Trusting, Engaging) Social Enterprise which provides day care provision such as the new Specified Activity Requirement and Adult Attendance Centre (see page 3). Students are actively involved on the farm growing, harvesting and retailing produce and the proceeds subsidise future initiatives, thus ensuring its long term sustainability.

**Specified Activity Requirement**

A new Specified Activity Requirement called the 'Care Farm Skills Training Programme' has been developed. The aim of the programme is to get offenders 'work ready'. It offers a range of learning opportunities including mechanics, animal welfare, forestry operations and welding. Offenders spend 25 days at the farm spread over a 14 week period and should achieve at least two qualifications by the end of the programme. It also provides a therapeutic input and engagement in job search and training opportunities together with work experience in a 'real world' setting.



The results have been excellent. Since it began in May, eight groups have gone through the programme. From a total of 50 offenders that started the programme 80% have successfully completed it. Many of these have now gone into employment, training and further education.



Matt Home, Director, Willowdene said: "Not only is this a deprivation of the students' time but it is hard work. They have to come along and get stuck into every qualification on offer, getting the most out of the experience and getting that work ethic. We hope that this is the end of their offending lives and we want to help give them the skills to move into a purposeful lifestyle".

**Residential Intervention Programme**

A new Residential Intervention Programme has been developed using funding from Shropshire, Telford and Worcestershire Local Authority Drug and Alcohol Teams. Together they fund a total of 15 six week residential placements at the farm.

The programme taps into the success of Willowdene's residential rehabilitation programme, albeit in a much shorter format. It is available to individuals who have been on day placements at the farm and have been identified as needing extra help to ensure a long lasting change to their lives.

**Women Offenders**

Advanced plans are in place to create a Women's Residential Programme. Funding is being sought through the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) to pay for placements which represent a significant saving on a prison place. The aim is to reduce the use of custody for women by 50%.

In addition, a pilot for a day care programme for women, through the AIM partnership is underway. This is a voluntary 10 week placement for two days a week specifically designed to get women ready for work and achieve qualifications.



**Graduation**

At the end of each Care Farm Skills Training Programme a special graduation ceremony is held to recognise the students achievements. Tricia Bradbury, JP and Chair of the Bromsgrove and Redditch Bench, attended a presentation, she said: "I have used the Specified Activity in court so it is really good to come along and see the place and meet the people. As a Magistrate, protecting the public is our primary concern but we also want to sentence the individual to something that is going to achieve the biggest success so that we don't see them in court again. Coming here today it is so evident that this new initiative is working well".

**Tom's Story**

Tom left an unhappy home life aged 16. For the next few years he stayed with relatives and friends and had nowhere to call home. He was in and out of jobs and didn't stick at anything. He felt he had no real purpose in life and spent most of his time and money on drinking and drugs. He started off on cannabis but as he began to feel more and more low he took amphetamines too and his drinking continued to escalate.

Aged 22, Tom had two convictions for burglary and he decided it was time to change. He talks about how his current sentence has helped him to do this.

"I got a Community Order with a Specified Activity at Willowdene. During my time there I was offered the Residential Intervention Programme where I would live at the farm for six weeks and get help. I knew this was my chance to make changes to my life, but I was worried I wasn't strong enough to do it.

I was wrong, it has been the best thing I could have done. Everyone has been great here and really supportive, it felt like a family. I couldn't believe how friendly the people are here compared to what I knew and they are willing to help you. It has given me routine and set tasks and goals and proper food for a change. The therapy has helped me look at my issues and understand what I am all about.

I have cried here, something I never thought I would do in this situation, but it has been a relief and it has set me free inside. I got a real feel-good factor and the highs I felt on the farm replaced the highs of the drugs.

I have finished at the farm now and have left with a different attitude. I have a CV and some qualifications and have discovered I am quite good in the kitchen. I am living with my Nan for a while until I get somewhere to live. My probation officer has put me in touch with people to help sort this and help with finding work or training. I am much more motivated and positive about the future now and would really like to go to college to do construction or cooking and maybe some voluntary work to keep me busy".