

Trustee annual report 2023

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The aim of the farm is to provide a safe and friendly environment for local people to come and meet up with other local residents using the animals and vegetable plots as enticing features for all our visitors and volunteers.

St James community farm conducted a series of surveys around the local community and amongst visitors to ascertain the reasons for visiting, volunteering and participating in programmes.

We identified many issues particularly amongst our older residents and visitors the main point being loneliness and lack of services we also identified that mental health and wellbeing was an issue across all ages.

Quarter one. Jan-March

We met with local people to help us with preparation of our vegetable plots many of the men and women were over the age of 60 and had experience of some sort of gardening or growing vegetables. We had 2 men and 8 women, who dug up plots, sowed seeds gutted the polytunnel, made hanging baskets and window boxes. They advertised for old pots and hanging baskets to be recycled and reused. The results of their labour was a harvest market at the farm which attracted 100s of visitors attending and digging up potatoes and other vegetables while purchasing sunflowers, window boxes and hanging baskets. During this period we had a St Patricks Day event with shamrocks grown by the gardeners face painters and Irish dancing was provided by our younger volunteers.

Quarter two April-June

April kicked off with a brilliant easter event attended by 150 children and around 200 parents hosted by the volunteers. The children took part in a fun filled treasure hunt searching for easter eggs. Our volunteers young and old dressed up in bunny outfits, face painting and other easter crafts.

Ongoing in this period was vegetable plot maintenance by our 10 volunteers who explained to visiting groups the importance of growing vegetables and healthy eating. This period seen a large increase in visiting groups from local schools, creches and youth groups. Our volunteers host the groups letting them pet the smaller animals such as rabbits, hedgehog,

tortoise and feed the larger animals such as goats and sheep. They can also help groom the pony and donkey.

Ongoing throughout the year is the farm maintenance carried out by our 30 volunteers, cleaning pens and doing feeds every morning and coming back in the evenings to put the animals to bed and lock up. Our volunteers range from aged 6 to 70 years old

Quarter three July -sept

The period was very busy with visiting summer schemes all summer along with walk ins from the general public our volunteers meeting and greeting all visitors supplying feed tubs to children for the animals and supplying tea and coffee to parents and youth group leaders.

We hosted several events during this period alongside our summer market we hosted the NI Falconry and owl people down to do amazing demonstrations for a appreciative crowd.

16 of our staff volunteers completed a day long first aid and defibrillator training course which was themed around farm working. Two others completed animal care course and two completed equine management course.

Quarter four Oct-Dec

This quarter we held several events over the Halloween and Christmas period. Our volunteers organised three events for the young people these included a fright line for teenagers aged 14-17 a scary assault course was built by the volunteers and 52 teenagers turned up and had a brilliant time.

We held a fancy dress disco for aged 8+ attended by around 100 children volunteers dressed up and distributed party bags and prizes.

Our final Halloween events was a pumpkin patch for 150 children who had great fun gathering up the pumpkins and searching for Halloween treats.

Our Christmas events brought hundreds of visitors to our farm to see Santa in our Christmas experience. All of our volunteers participated in the experience, firstly our youngest volunteers dressed up as elves and welcomed children into the elves workshop. Children then visited Santa, Mrs Claus and more of his elves for a gift. Lastly the children were then led

to baby Jesus and the wise men with Mary and Joseph in our stables with our donkey and pony.

Our teenage volunteers, young elves and adults were brilliant over four nights and 200 children and parents attended. This was all preceded by a brilliant big switch on of our 30 foot Christmas tree and 10,000 lights. We invited 2 local choirs down from the church to sing at the events.

We held Christmas bingo for our older visitors which really took off and they suggested we keep the bingo on after Christmas. It is still running 7 months on. Some of these ladies then took on vegetable plots and volunteering at markets. Two have become cleaners at the farm and many of the bingo group have also become regular walkers with walking group in the evening.