

Social Farming Across Borders Pilot Farm Profile:

Section 1 – Your Details

<p>Name: Joan Woods</p> 	<p>Address: Bangor Co Down</p>
<p>Contact to be made via the Social Farming Across Borders office: Laird House Drumshanbo Leitrim</p>	<p>+353 (0)71 964 1772 socialfarming@ldco.ie www.socialfarmingacrossborders.org</p>

Section 2 – Your Farm

About my Farm:

The Farm is 100 acres of grazing land with woodland and community growing space. We rent 80 acres to local dairy farmers.

Our family has been here since 1890. My father was born on the farm in 1908 and he saw a lot of changes to agriculture over the years like the use of tractors instead of horses. We keep a variety of the old farm machinery that has been used over the years and still have his Massey Ferguson 135.



Before it was a farm, our land was a quarry which produced the slate for roofs in our area. The Quarry was last used in 1840 when the quarry machinery cut into an underground spring and the quarry filled with water. Over the last 170 years the quarry has been left to nature and a mature woodland has self seeded there with ponds. The area now supports a wide variety of wildlife including badgers, foxes, hedgehogs, heron, pheasants, buzzards, frogs and ducks.

On Site Provision:

- T Barn with comfy sofas and a kitchen area with a fridge and cooker.
- Hand washing facilities in the farm yard and by the large poly-tunnel
- Electricity and lighting
- Tree bogs (compost toilets) one has 5 steps up to it and the other is accessible on one level
- Surfaced farm lane with a car park
- Two poly tunnels and 4 sheds available to work in under cover in bad weather
- Farm paths are muddy and uneven



Farm Activities offered to the Participants:

Woodland management: Maintaining 3 acres of mature woodland, ponds, streams and 10 acres of newly planted trees. Turning the woodland into somewhere that will support our wildlife and where we can have fun.

This includes

- making and maintaining pathways,
- Making bird and bat boxes and duck islands
- Putting up shelters
- Maintaining our woodland roundhouse
- Collecting and cutting firewood
- Planting hedges and stock fencing
- Making signs out of wood and slate
- Slate painting
- Making sculptures out of recycled materials



Horticulture: helping to grow in our community garden and poly-tunnels

This includes

- sowing, growing, weeding
- harvesting vegetables and flowers
- composting
- Cooking our vegetables

Preferred days of the week;

Monday, Thursday, Friday

Projects on-going at the moment:

We are working in the woodland, clearing trees of ivy and making pathways and areas where we can do activities in the outdoors. We will be using these areas for our own participants and also other groups to come and use, including the Forest School group on Saturdays.



Maintaining the farm equipment: sanding down and oiling the old farm machinery. We are preparing these to be used as part of an agricultural reminiscence project. Where people over 50 will be sharing their experiences with young people under 25.

Section 3 – Your Locality & Community

Nearest Services:

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: A & E minor injuries Newtownards, Major injuries Dundonald.

- Bangor is nearest town with GPs, job centre, library, swimming pool.
- Bloomfield shopping centre has shops, opticians, garage, fast food and pharmacist and is a short walk from farm.
- Ashbury

Nearest town: Bangor, Newtownards

Nearest public transport or rural transport initiative:

- Bus from Bangor
- Bus from Newtownards

My locality and community interests :

Our farm participants become members of Growing Connections NI – a charity based on our farm. The group's vision is to develop a programme of activities and resources in the natural environment in order to promote health and well being for all. They have a core of 40 members, many of whom are marginalised and living with disability in our local community.

They meet on Mondays and Fridays for community growing and woodland activities. They also run a Saturday group for families and members who have work or caring responsibilities during the week. They grow food, look after the farm animals and the woodland and run activity days for our local community and other disadvantaged groups: for example young people at risk or with learning disability: adults with mental health issues or acquired brain injury.

The activities give the opportunity for their members to mix with others and increase their skills and confidence.

In the last year over 500 people benefited from activities on the farm

Farm connections with local community groups and organisations through networking and activities on the farm



- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• North Down Community Network• Public Health Agency community of interest• Six Road Ends Village Renewal Group• Giant Hero's Cross Border Young people at risk scheme• TCV – conservation volunteers• FCFCG• Local estates, e.g. Kilcooley, Bloomfield, Breezemount, Rathgill, Bangor Harbour Ward• Co Down Traction Engine Club• Mencap• Larche• South Belfast Quakers• Cedar Foundation• Ballygrainey Presbyterian Church• Ballygrainey Rural Development Assoc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• AMH• NIAMH• SE Health Trust• Mindwise• FASA• Praxis• North Down Community Network• North Down Borough Council• YMCA• Age NI• Root Soup• Ballygrainey Boys and Girls Brigades• FSND – Fybromyalgia support group• Age North Down and Ards• GIY Bangor – Grow It Yourself group• Volunteer Now |
|--|---|

Section 4 – You, the Farmer

Me and my Farm:

In 2009 my partner Tina, brother Peter and myself started a self help group, Growing Connections (GCNI), on our farm as we felt isolated. Our target group were adults experiencing marginalisation and isolation due to mental health issues. The group's aim is to bring together people and empower them to promote their own well being by engaging them as a team, creating something worthwhile and experiencing the outdoors together.

My partner and I have personal experience of mental ill health and are carers for my brother who has a severe and enduring mental ill health diagnosis. We have training in Anger Management, ASSIST, Mental Health First Aid, the Recovery Model, care and support, advice and guidance.

Our voluntary work with GCNI demonstrates our skill to plan and deliver activities in order to enable individuals to explore and celebrate their abilities and reduce the emphasis on their 'perceived' deficiencies.

Our key values: We combine the 'Five Ways to Well Being' to direct our activities so that individuals can see how to empower themselves and take control of their own health and well being.



We aim is to develop social connection between people and to demonstrate environmental and social sustainability through social therapeutic horticulture and social forestry.

We have an ethos of compassionate farming, practical self-sufficiency and perma-culture.

Joan - has thirty years experience of community networking, facilitating, training, management and art practice. She is qualified as a generalist adviser and trainer for adults. She has specialist experience of working with vulnerable adults with mental health issues.

She is non-judgmental and can empathize and communicate effectively with people who are marginalized and vulnerable. She effectively encourages a mix of participants to work as a team, avoiding institutionalizing and encouraging social inclusion.

If Joan was a stick of rock you would find 'inclusivity' written all the way down her middle.

Tina - has worked for over ten years with people with severe learning disability in a residential setting. In the past she has been involved in setting up community networks and support groups for women feeling isolated in rural and urban communities. She has experience in fundraising, planning and implementing a community garden for people with learning disability. She has co-ordinated work teams with the Princes Trust and on our farm. She is currently training as a Forest School Practitioner.

Tina has a good sense of humour and makes the sessions fun for participants. She is a keen photographer and writes the social media for the community group.



Statements from our participants

Man with diagnosis of Bi - Polar - "When I first came I was afraid of people thinking I was not good enough. Now I can sleep through the night, I do tours of the farm and I am looking forward to leading a team of my own."

Man who is long term unemployed and over weight - " I have lost 2 stone volunteering on the farm, become a team leader and feel great!"

Woman with mental health issues who is a carer for someone with a severe mental health diagnosis - " The first day I came to the farm I was feeling very low and I was not sure if I could go on. Now I have a place I can be relaxed and accepted and I know that things can be better. I am a different person and able to cope much better with the stress at home."

STATEMENT FROM JOHN KERR - Employment Support Worker Action Mental Health (AMH) - "Our clients are recovering from mental health problems and are planning their futures. Having watched my clients grow and develop within Growing Connections, I have no hesitation in saying that participating at the farm does make an invaluable contribution to their lives."



Other information:

We plan our week so that there are days with small groups working on farm and other days with larger groups for participants who have developed their confidence working in large groups.

If you go to the following links you will get a flavour for activities on our farm by looking at our pictures and videos

Website: www.growingconnectionsproject.org.uk

blog: <http://growingconnectionsni.wordpress.com/>

Short video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yhw4kvQ5xm0>

Compost toilet activity: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37svfHC6sWg>

