

IN TOUCH

LOCKDOWN SPECIAL ISSUE

June 2020



In Touch June 2020



FROM THE CEO

Anyone feeling understandably bemused or upset by the events of the last few months would do well to flick through the following pages. This edition aims to create a 'celebration' of life at COT during the lockdown period. We hope it offers a little beacon of light in the current turbulent times. On seeing the images for the first time, I was struck by a number of things. Firstly, I saw the resilience and dignity of our service users. Despite missing their usual activities, being apart from loved-ones or – in some cases – having birthday plans scuppered, they have risen to the challenge in a way that has humbled us all.

Then I saw the amazing compassion, commitment and creativity of the staff, which has surpassed even their normal very high standards. Despite their own inevitable fear and uncertainty, they have worked tirelessly to minimise the stress for our service users, many of whom absolutely rely on structure and routine in their lives. The many relaxed and happy faces herein are testament to their success. The on-line life skills programme – which has been crucial in the fight against boredom and mental health decline – has far outstripped our initial hopes for just 'a few update videos'. The ingenuity of the staff involved has been wonderful and it is lovely that we have been able to capture some screen shots of all the fun. The photos of life on the farm remind us all of the efforts of the core RBC team, who have valiantly kept the animals fed, brought lots of baby sheep and goats into the world (often in the middle of the night) and kept the Highlands Farm homes stocked with beautiful home-grown flowers and vegetables. Whilst they may not feature in the pictures, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our furloughed staff, who have not been able to make a physical contribution during this time but have been a constant source of support and kind wishes. We know they cannot wait to join us again. We've also been keeping our many volunteers in our thoughts and our friends at Hitrade. With the shop closed currently the tireless volunteers have been sprucing up the shop interior in readiness for a safe time to reopen.

And finally, the lovely photos of the Bluebell Cream Team and Ballgown Lockdown event remind me of our wonderful supporters who have arranged events, bought gifts from our Amazon Wishlist, sent donations or posted us letters of encouragement and thanks. All those acts of kindness have supplied the fuel to keep us going. We are certainly not out of the woods yet, of course, so now is not the time to be complacent. And when we look back on 2020 from a happier and safer future, we will inevitably do so with a fair degree of sadness and regret. But I, for one, will take out this edition of 'In Touch' and smile, because it will remind me what it felt like to be in the midst of humanity at its best.



FROM THE CHAIR

During our regular updates, Jo and I often discuss how we can continue to improve COT into the future. For the last two months, this has been an especially important topic, as we seek to capture the positive developments of recent times and ensure they aren't forgotten when the lockdown ends. Staff at all levels have talked about how good it has been to have a chance to be creative and 'forget' the normal rules for a while.

Out of that has come some truly innovative work and undoubted improvements in the care we provide. In addition to the challenge of keeping our service users and staff safe while trying to re-establish services, we must also avoid sliding back into the habits of 'pre-Coronavirus' times. It will certainly not be easy but the gains will be worth the effort, I am sure. I echo Jo's thanks to our service users, staff, supporters, volunteers and also add my gratitude for all our families and friends, who have been so patient and supportive of the measures we have had to put in place. The passion we all share for keeping our service users safe and well is the glue that binds us all, and it has been stronger than ever these last 12 weeks.

Long may that continue, too.

Living and skills

We're incredibly proud of how well everyone has adapted to the sudden and hugely disruptive change to our lives. It's been especially difficult to be separated from family and friends and to spend long periods at home with limited access to many daily activities - such as life skills training, shopping, community events and clubs. Together we've all tried to keep positive and to be really creative in finding things we can enjoy - like spa days, special meals together, playing games and enjoying our gardens.



Living and skills

With the Rare Breeds Centre closed to visitors we've been exploring the farm, visiting our animals and making the most of the wonderful weather. Whilst at home we've been keeping active with our various hobbies and, of course, the house chores still need to be done! Some new skills are being honed too - and we've discovered quite a few talented bakers! A future COT "bake off" is needed perhaps?!



Living and skills

With access to the outdoors limited during the lockdown we've made full use of our daily exercise and, as restrictions eased a little, challenged ourselves to a few bigger walks - one intrepid lot even made it from Rye to Camber one day! Outdoor garden games and board games have been a great way to add a bit of competition, some fun and to share a few laughs together.



Living and skills

We've enjoyed spending time together and organising activities to do both indoors and outdoors. Just before lockdown we helped with litter picking at the beach one day - it really was fun honestly! Craft items donated through our wishlist have helped us stay creative and we've kept up with our hobbies too - even finding time for some bike maintenance!



Living and skills

There have been lots of opportunities to get together in the sunshine and we've really made the most of our gardens and outdoor spaces. Although it's not always been easy, these difficult times have really brought out the very best in some of us and we've all tried to take extra care of each other - providing support, help, encouragement and space when it's needed.



Living and skills

We all live such busy lives so having extra time at home together has been very special and we've created many great memories. Some people have spent lockdown at their family home - but we've all kept in touch with photos, emails, phone calls, online and through our remote life skills sessions too!



Living and skills

We've had quite a few lockdown Birthday celebrations! There's been lots of home baking going on resulting in some delicious cakes! We've been celebrating our wonderful key workers every Thursday too!



In addition to our hard working senior team and fabulous life skills and care staff continuing to work through the lockdown, there's a few lovely folks who have been working away in the background to support us all - caring for our animals, liaising with our services, responding to on-site emergencies, cleaning, dealing with finance, social media, keeping our IT going etc. Here are just a few that we pinned down long enough to take a photo!



Living and skills

We had a fantastic weekend of celebrations to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of VE Day.



We had a morning delivery of fruit and vegetables from Plants & Produce including the first courgettes of the season! Some of us dressed up in 40's style clothes and enjoyed home cooked food with old time favorites like corned beef and spam!





Living and skills



Living and skills

Our popular Life Skills training programmes are an important part of people's daily lives – to learn, to socialise and to keep active both physically and mentally. So with lockdown making it impossible for us to get together in the usual way we wanted to ensure we could continue to bring our project teams together.



To ensure everyone could continue their learning, and to provide a valuable daily activity, we created our 'virtual' life skills programme - delivering our training online to students in their homes. Sessions include: Granary cookery lessons, Plants and Produce tutorials, MYLIFE Skills Academy sessions, Art at the Farm workshops, music & dance and Poulton Wood activities.



We have developed resources to help people to understand why our lives are different at the moment - and to help them deal with some difficult changes.



Most of our students have adapted really well to the remote sessions – some drawing upon IT skills learned within the MYLIFE Skills Academy! Numeracy and literacy lessons are popular - one story telling session tested understanding, memory and listening skills followed by questions and a lively group discussion.



We've been holding our very own Strictly Come Dancing sessions online with music and dance classes every Thursday and Friday. We've been learning the cucaracha to some great salsa music and there's usually a few oldies but goldies too like "The Birdie Song" and "Agadoo". We even fit in a bit of line dancing sometimes and to get everyone really moving - a Merengue!



Living and skills

Our life skills teams have been incredibly creative in adapting our curriculum to enable us to deliver it online during planned morning and afternoon sessions throughout the week. Our online programme has been hugely popular with some sessions reaching over 30 students.



Our Granary Restaurant is a very busy training programme and cooking is a very sociable activity. It's hard for the team to be apart at the moment – but our online sessions are really helping to encourage people to keep cooking whilst at home. Lessons focus on the importance of cooking and eating healthily, different types of food and where our food comes from. One session involved a “what's the fruit or vegetable” quiz with cryptic clues to help us guess - and extra points if we had the fruit or vegetable at home!



Our Art at the Farm sessions cover a wide range of activities with a full programme to help inspire people to keep creative. Our tutors have produced workbooks to encourage artists to undertake projects at home and to then present back to the group during sessions. One lesson discussed colours and textures and we've even explored making our own ink using an ancient recipe!



Living and skills

A hugely important part of our life skills training programmes is the tremendous sense of community within the project teams so every session usually begins with lots of "hellos!" and a good catch-up with everyone - with lots of the usual banter of course!



Through our Plants and Produce sessions we've been encouraging students to use their horticultural skills to get growing at home. We're keeping students connected with tours around the nursery and the farm. Everyone is really missing the animals and so sometimes we have a few of extra visitors in the potting shed – Mini the Shetland pony joins us sometimes! We make sure everyone catches up with all the happenings around the farm – with lots of new lambs, goats and calves arriving. Our nursery has been keeping some of our homes stocked with fresh fruit & vegetables and deliveries of flowers – most recently some beautiful sweetpeas!



Living and skills

All of our life skills training programmes make use of the surrounding environment to encourage people to express themselves, to develop their own particular skills, to work as part of a team, to take more responsibility and build confidence.

Poutlon Wood provides a very special environment for our Rangers and the team have a tremendous sense of ownership and responsibility for the woodland. The Rangers are always very keen to see how the woodland and its residents are doing. Our online sessions often begin with a tour of the yard and woods - which gives lots of opportunities to test knowledge of the flowers and the wildlife we can see on the screen. We hold quizzes and craft activities in our classroom and our cameras and detectors keep us up to date on our wildlife like tadpoles, bats and blue tits.



We've held lots of mixed sessions - in just one week covering bat facts, pond studies, charcoal burning, woodland wildlife and how to make Elderflower cordial!



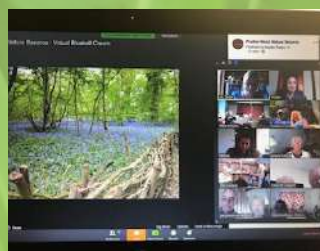
Living and skills

We held a Poulton Wood Virtual Bluebell Cream Tea on the 25th April 2020. Everyone who joined us online helped to create wonderful memories of this year's "virtual" event and we raised over £1,400! We hosted virtual tours so we could enjoy the beautiful carpet of Bluebells within our woodland. We asked people to join in at home by creating their own cream tea to enjoy during the tours - we really loved seeing everyone's fabulous photos!

You can see more of the photos of the woodland taken this year (with thanks to Jax Tanner's amazing photography) on the Poulton Wood Facebook page.



Living and skills



Our supporters

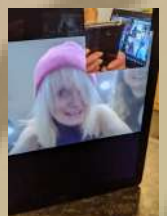
When our Amazon wish list started last year we didn't know about the difficult times ahead - and just how vital the list would be for us during lockdown. With such a significant change to our routines and many of our usual activities stopped or limited we know it would be difficult for people to stay healthy - both physically and mentally. So we reached out through the list for lots of activities, games and craft items to help us through the long periods at home ahead. The donated items have been invaluable in reducing anxiety and stress and in helping people to keep busy, to have some fun and to laugh together! Our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has bought a gift from the list - our supporters, family and the Friends of COT. Our special thanks go to our truly wonderful supporter Christina Martin for creating the list for us.



Our supporters

Thank you to everyone who took part and who donated to our Ballgown Lockdown event held online on 4th April - together you raised an astounding £1,000 for COT! Thank you to our supporter and fabulous host for the evening Coral Boyne for her inspiration and for getting so many people on board. "Ballgown Lockdown" is Coral's brilliant idea to encourage people to get together for a party online, to have some fun and donate to our charity. Party goers sent us their photos and their stories - we had all 7 people in one house dress up, an online treasure hunt between 6 families, photos all the way from Florida and even some family pooches got involved!

If you couldn't join in on the night there's still time to host your own "Ballgown Lockdown" online party! Create some lasting memories with your friends and family during these difficult times and raise some cheer and funds for us. Send us your party photos and we'll add them to our Facebook album!



We'd like to say a huge thank you for the many messages of support we have received from families, friends and supporters. We thought we'd share just a few with you here...

Julie Cook: Thank you for looking after my brother - you are truly wonderful people x

Margaret Sinden: Looks like you had a wonderful time. Thank you for looking after everyone so well. Thank you for looking after my daughter.

Ken & Deborah Chappell: Fantastic ... the energy the staff put into everything to make such a memorable day for everyone is truly wonderful You have brought us (Debbie, myself, plus Chris' sister, Julie) to tears with the latest update on the absolutely wonderful care that you are providing for Chris and his many friends. The staff, at all levels, are doing some truly amazing things to keep them active, happy and - most of all - well. When you hear of the horror stories of homes throughout the country, we can only feel blessed to have the wonderful Joanne and everyone who is caring so magnificently for our off-spring through these unbelievable times. THANK YOU ALL from the bottom of our hearts.

Sylvia Boyne: Thank you so much for all you do for the residents, you are truly great people.

Derek Stevenson: As a parent of one of the people that is fortunate enough to be in your care (and I mean that sincerely, our young man is very fortunate to be in your care) I would like to express our heartfelt thanks for everything that the trust is doing to keep everybody safe. I hope you understand just how comforting to us it is to know just how lucky we are not to have to worry about our young man's care and wellbeing. From day one the communication and actions taken have been the right ones. Thank you, you are all heroes in our eyes. Stay well and stay safe.

Tina Reed: For everyone at Canterbury Oast Trust (COT), but particularly those at Beaver Lodge. Thank you.

Nicola Bonner: I would like to thank all the careers, but particularly those at Old School House, as that's where my daughter is. I have nothing but praise for them. It can never be an easy job, but now it must be even more testing, but whenever I phone, there's nothing but good vibes coming from both the carers and the residents. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for keeping them not only safe, but happy in these stressful times. We owe you a deep debt of gratitude

Martin & Sandra Bieri: Well done all the staff at the Mariners. Amazingly our son is coping so very well. It can only be down to patience and ingenuity.

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