



Stonebridge City Farm Coronavirus Response Volunteer Outcomes 2020 Report

In March 2020 a government imposed lockdown was brought into force in order to control the spread of the worldwide virus COVID 19. During this pandemic, Stonebridge City Farm was forced to close its doors and respond with action to support over 140 volunteers with a wide range of needs, to reduce isolation and boost health and well-being.

The following report, based on questionnaire feedback from volunteers and data collected throughout, illustrates the response outcomes.

The Volunteer Story

Over 140 volunteers access Stonebridge City Farm on a weekly basis. Many volunteers face differing challenges, including learning disabilities, special educational needs or mental health issues.

The following is feedback received from volunteers January – June 2020

What brings you to Stonebridge City Farm as a volunteer?

Volunteers stated that they had been affected by a range of issues:

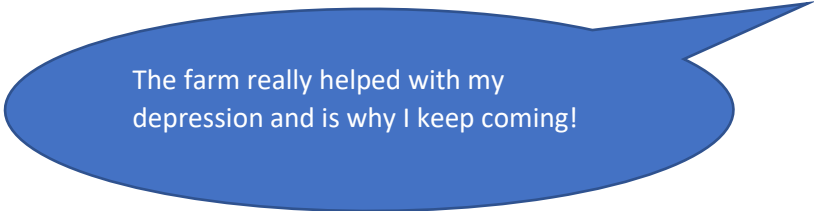
Mental Health, depression, anxiety

Confidence

Wanting to contribute to society

Homelessness

The following quotes are just a small picture of the range of experiences volunteers told us about:



The farm really helped with my depression and is why I keep coming!

‘My depression, I wanted to build confidence, I felt I wasn’t contributing to society and wanted to help others and help animals. This opportunity helped me to come out of depression. SCF has become a big close supportive family. Everyone has hardships, but we all help each other – everyone is kind and friendly. Being outdoors and with animals is a nice place to be. And we all have banter with the barnies.’

‘3 years ago, when I had issues with my mental health, a nurse recommended joining SCF, and I stayed ever since. At first, I was shy, quiet, anxious, wouldn’t speak to people as much. I would only chat for a short time, and not have full conversations. SCF brought the confidence out in me. At first, I had no social life, now I socialise with others.’

‘I had a break down, wasn’t taking my medication. I was homeless, and had separated from my mum. My support worker reunited me with my family then introduced me to SCF after asking me what I enjoy and I told her I love animals. They supported me to complete the application form. I have volunteered at SCF since then.’

'I like animals and I wanted to do volunteering. My key worker got in touch for me, and from there I was accepted. I keep coming because of the people you support. I like being able to speak with new people and make new friends. The farm really helped with my depression and is why I keep coming!'

'I love the combination of working with different types of people and with the animals. It is therapeutic.'

What is your favourite part of working at Stonebridge city Farm?

Helping people, the animals, seeing smiles on people's faces.

Everything

I love working in barn, it's given me a purpose in life, all the volunteers are very welcoming, and the staff are amazing. The staff all work to my needs. Working with the public has been great - communicating and having a role in society. SCF has helped me in building my skills.

Working with animals, you never know what will happen, every day is different, I really enjoy interacting with the public and teaching them about the farm

Hosting animal handling sessions for the public

I love working with the people in the farm and in the barn. Social reasons and feel good about playing my bit.

Interacting with the animals

I love gardening and being outdoors

Stonebridge City Farm has offered volunteers a range of support, in line with the organisation's Social Outcomes:

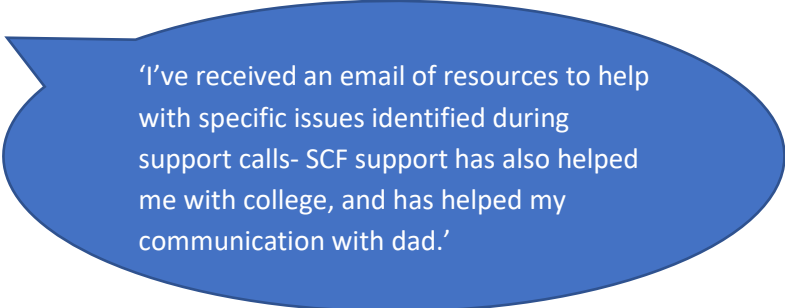
- **Improving Health and Wellbeing**
- **Reduction in Social Isolation**
- **Increasing Social Inclusion**
- **Increasing Independence**
- **Realising Potential (and skills development)**

Support Action Plans and Keyworkers were targeted for volunteers with the following identified needs:

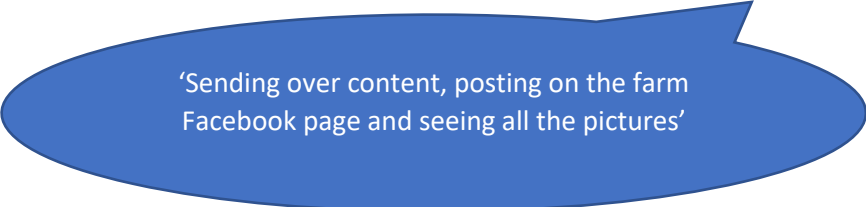
Does not live with parents or another family member
Lives in homeless accommodation
Lives in alternative accommodation (such as supported housing)
Lives alone (on own in accommodation or self-contained flat)
Mental health is at risk
Known self-harm (including suicide risk)
Physical health is at risk (have underlying health conditions)
Self-neglect due to mental health/ learning disability
Independent living support required
Poverty or deprivation (financial difficulties)
Eating concerns / poor access to food
Requires medication / basic essentials
Other challenging life circumstances not listed above

Remotely, keyworkers and volunteers offered the following:


Regular phone call / text / email / whatsapp
Someone to talk to – a weekly 'Keeping in Touch Call'
Weekly resources, activities and farm news
An activity pack by email
An activity pack in the post – for volunteers who have limited IT access
Access to the Staff and Volunteer Facebook Closed Group
Mental Health Awareness Week – campaign and activities around the theme 'Kindness'
Zoom Workshops




'I've received an email of resources to help with specific issues identified during support calls- SCF support has also helped me with college, and has helped my communication with dad.'



'Sending over content, posting on the farm Facebook page and seeing all the pictures'



'The emails have been brilliant'



'Hearing from other volunteers on the Facebook group and sharing what we are doing'

What it is like in lockdown with mental health

'Living with mental health problems can be very difficult at the best of times but during the lockdown it has become a lot harder to deal with if you have got yourself into a set routine like going somewhere that you have been going to for a long time. For me the place that is my safe haven is Stonebridge City Farm and whilst on lockdown I have not been able to go to the farm and being stuck indoors all day has really knocked me back with my mental health.

Stonebridge City Farm have helped me a great deal with my mental health and it has given me a space where I can feel safe and not feel judged. I can feel valued for everything I do for them and that makes me feel valued and I have not felt like that for a very long time.

Whilst on lockdown I get a weekly call to check to see how I am coping with all this and it makes me feel a little better as I am still getting that communication, yes it's not as much as I am used to when I go to the farm but still it gives me some sort of communication.'

Anonymous piece, kindly written by a current volunteer during Mental Health Awareness Week 2020

Mental Health Awareness Week – Kindness Workshops summary

Total number of participants: 7

Dates: 18th May 2020, 20th May 2020

Number of workshops: 2

Outcomes:

Reduction in social isolation – All volunteers that joined the kindness workshop were under social restrictions issued by the Government. Therefore, hosting a virtual workshop enabled volunteers to have a platform to socialise at such difficult times.

As a direct result of the workshop, it was evident that volunteers were enjoying the concept of bringing the farm to them during lockdown. Some volunteers met for the first time as a result of joining the workshop and stated:

“I am so glad to have joined, it is amazing meeting people who attend the farm but on different days” ... “if it was not for the lockdown nor the Facebook page, I would not have met you (with regards to the other volunteer)”.

Another participant stated that “it’s actually nice to speak to everyone at the farm, and if it was not for the Facebook group and doing this kindness workshop, I would not be doing much”.

Health and Wellbeing – Hosting the workshop online was decided due to the current circumstances with regards to the national social restrictions. Splitting online groups into lower numbers enabled those who joined to feel somewhat at ease – particularly those who had additional needs and anxiety.

One volunteer stated:

“Even doing this workshop is an act of kindness, as it has made me feel warm meeting people”

During the workshop, volunteers were able to conquer confidence barriers - demonstrating the ability to overcome challenges.

Independence – Volunteers were able to independently follow instructions to gain access to the Zoom app for the virtual workshop.

In addition to this, the activities in the session gave volunteers a sense of independence by allowing them to voice their opinions regarding kindness and mental health awareness.

Empowering volunteers to design their own poster contents enabled volunteers to express their personal opinions about acts of kindness. At the end of the session, volunteers were asked to think of 5 acts of kindness and then action them for a loved one.

Realising Potential – The workshop supported volunteers to develop their soft skills – including communication and body language.

Creating a list of acts of kindness and following these up allowed for volunteers to overcome confidence issues.

Posters produced by volunteers as a result of Kindness Workshops





Support provided during the Coronavirus lockdown

Volunteers were asked to rate statements regarding remote support provided by Stonebridge City Farm on a scale of 1 – 10

A score of 1 would indicate 'Strongly Disagree' up to a score of 10, which would indicate 'Strongly agree

During the Coronavirus lockdown, how supported by Stonebridge City Farm have you felt?

Average score response = 9.45, indicating 'Strongly supported'

I have felt very supported - the weekly email has been great'

During the Coronavirus lockdown, I have had resources and activities provided to me through Stonebridge City Farm

Average score response = 9.36, indicating 'Strongly agree'

During the Coronavirus lockdown I feel like I am part of Stonebridge City Farm community

Average score response = 9.73, indicating 'Strongly agree'

During the Coronavirus lockdown Stonebridge City Farm have helped me feel less alone

Average score response = 9.55, indicating 'Strongly agree'

'SCF has helped me feel less alone -without SCF I would only be speaking to my sister throughout lockdown.'

During the Coronavirus lockdown I know who I can contact at the farm if I feel I need to someone to talk to

Average score response = 9.64, indicating 'Strongly agree'

At Stonebridge City Farm I have a sense of belonging...

Average score response = 9.91, indicating 'Strongly agree'

During the Coronavirus lockdown Stonebridge City Farm have provided me with positive coping strategies

Average score response = 9, indicating 'Strongly agree'

During the Coronavirus lockdown I have been encouraged to create a routine or a weekly planner by Stonebridge City Farm

Average score response = 8.55, indicating 'Strongly agree'

'SCF have been supporting me to learn about the little things needed in routine such as getting up, opening curtains, washing, drinking water, taking medication i.e. how to create more energy'

'SCF have helped me to stick with a daily medication routine' 'Staff have introduced me to new apps – such as learning a new language, meditation etc'

The team at SCF have all been advising on coping strategies and keeping me busy with activities'

During the Coronavirus lockdown Stonebridge City Farm has encouraged me to try an activity or learn a new skill

Average score response = 9.27, indicating 'Strongly agree'

"I have received packs, emails, and activities to do over the phone.'

Do you think that there is anything that Stonebridge City Farm can improve on to support?

'You're all doing a wonderful job, not much else can be done to improve. SCF are doing everything they can.'

'Nothing can be done to improve'

'Everything is in place, all the support I need is there'

'Would be great to communicate with more people – encouraging groups of volunteers to chat online together'

'It has given me 150% now and I am pleased with the work that you are doing for me and others'

'I think it is all really good as it is.'

'Maybe a zoom call for volunteers to communicate with others.'

Volunteers offered the following feedback:

'You're all awesome'

'I'm really grateful for everything, thank you very much, I don't think I would have coped without you''

'Keep up what you're doing, keep up the good work. The support provided has been really helpful, and things such as the website have been reassuring to know everyone is safe at the farm'

'Great quizzes, website has been reassuring to know the animals are being looked after with updates, and talking to someone has reassured me that volunteering will go back to normal after lockdown'

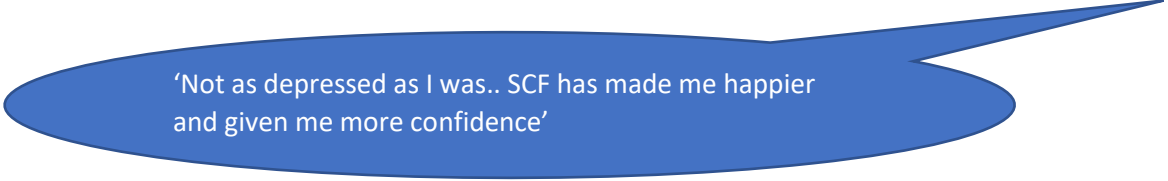
'Keep doing what you are doing'

'Keep up with the resources and the surveys as it can help with learning of new ways in which we can help people.'

What difference has volunteering at Stonebridge City Farm made to your life?



'I can always talk to the staff and they are brilliant.'



'Not as depressed as I was.. SCF has made me happier and given me more confidence'

'It has helped me to socialise, built my confidence, and provided me with something to look forward to. Has improved my skills, encouraged me to learn even more skills and pushed me out of my comfort zone, such as working in the shop.'

'Helped a great deal with my mental health, I've completed qualifications I never thought I could get, made new connections and friendships, working with animals'

'Not as depressed as I was, not as shy and nervous and not as anxious as I used to be. SCF has made me happier and given me more confidence'

'It has given me a routine – having somewhere to go. SCF has definitely helped me in my life and given me purpose'

'I have gained more confidence in talking to people. I have gained the courage to talk to more people, before I came to the farm I was nervous'

'Gaining a purpose, putting theory into practice, with regards to my college work. I thoroughly enjoy coming onto the farm.'

'The farm helps me to get out and I was severely depressed. Being introduced to the farm allowed me to make friends and speak to new people. I can always talk to the staff and they are brilliant.'

'I started 10 years ago. It has given me more confidence. I have made some really close friends, even ex-volunteers who no longer attend. I have now achieved the Animal Care Level 2 qualification due to being inspired by the farm and volunteering.'

'I have met new people and learnt new skills in gardening'

'Allows me to learn about how to look after animals – I love it'

'Given me team work skills and improved my communication skills for the better.'