

Benefits of Care Farms: a Brief Review

What is a Care Farm?

Snapshot: Legitimate alternative non-clinical therapies for both physical and mental health

Providing:

- structured nature-based activities that use person-centered approaches to support an individual
- structured approaches for people traditionally in marginalized and vulnerable populations; working with agencies focused on people with intellectual and/or developmental differences, anxiety, mental health challenges, addiction history, and others, promoting physical activity
- a mix of nature-based activities that promote health more generally
- provide green care such as animal-assisted therapy and therapeutic horticulture

Typically care farms provide **structured nature-based activities that use person-centered approaches to support an individual**. Significantly, care farms are able to provide such structured approaches for people with learning disabilities, anxiety, mental health disorders and can help promote physical activity. They can also provide a mix of nature-based activities that promote health more generally, and green care, which includes ‘complex interventions,’ such as **animal-assisted therapy, therapeutic horticulture**, and others (Sempik et al. 2010).

Therapies involving interacting with and caring for animals have been **demonstrated to improved depression and anxiety, self-efficacy and other aspects of health both in adults and children** (Mallon, 1994; Pedersen, Martinsen, Berget, and Braastad, 2012; Pedersen, Nordaunet, Martinsen, Berget, and Braastad, 2011; Scholl et al., 2008).

[Pedersen, Martinsen, Berget and Braastad (2012)] study indicates that farm-based interventions can have a positive effect on treating depression in some individuals and that, even after exiting this kind of care, they can still benefit from their experience.

[An] analyses indicated that self-esteem and vigor were significantly increased, with significant decreases in anger, confusion, depression, fatigue and tension.

This community effort can benefit varying subsets of the community, and bring citizens together toward the common goal of success in health, education, and farm care.

Participants with addiction indicated that the farm offered them a routine, a rhythm, and something to take their mind off of their affliction. Individuals spoke of increased levels of self-respect and self-esteem, along with a feeling of overall equality due to their time of the farm.

The unique qualities of care farming, including its emphasis on self-empowerment, personal strengths, and community involvement, make it applicable for a wide variety of populations, each of which may identify different benefits from the experience (Hassink, et al., 2010).

What does Sanctuary One do in relation to care farms?

Sanctuary One's mission is to provide a refuge for animals and a healing place for people while promoting environmental stewardship. People visit the farm through various ways: field trips, public tours, individual volunteerism, internships, and through our service learning partnerships. While all people visiting the farm may have various levels of mental and physical health benefits through Sanctuary One's care farm model, our service learning partnerships in particular are set up with the intentionality of focusing on non-clinical therapy work.

Who benefits from being a Service Learning Partner at Sanctuary One?

Veterans, youth agencies (Boys & Girls Club, Maslow Project, etc), addiction recovery agencies, mental health agencies, and community justice agencies are either current partners or have partnered in the recent past with Sanctuary One.

At Sanctuary One service learning partnerships are uniquely crafted to a specific group's needs. Groups visits may vary from once a month to once a week and options in-between.

Identified benefits of a Care Farm:

Direct Health & Community Benefits

- Benefit of physical activity on physical and mental health

Connections to People

- New friendship networks
- Building cross-generational networks
- Reduced social isolation and loneliness

Connection to Place

- Increased sense of community and cohesion
- New connection to lived environment

Connection to Opportunity

- Skills learning and course

Volunteer opportunities and return-to-work experience