

## Summary

- 13 acre mixed farm (Dexter beef cattle and traditional cherry orchard) which John Iles and his wife, Linda, took on seven years ago and have restored
- Small number of placements for three different client groups – people recovering from drug and alcohol addiction, adults with learning difficulties and people with dementia, who come under contract or have individual budgets with Worcestershire County Council
- Care Farming West Midlands have played a key role for the care farm – introducing Uncllys to commissioners in the council, as well as helping set up policies and accreditation
- The farm employs a farm manager and volunteer co-ordinator, and on two days per week has the support of around 10 volunteers.

## What is special about this care farm

Uncllys believes in giving all clients a meal and a hot drink when they arrive. “Their lifestyles are pretty chaotic,” says John. And after feeding the animals, they help with other farm duties – such as planting, fencing, hay making and apple picking – depending on the season.

John has set up the Wyre Community Land Trust based at Uncllys with other local landowners which manages nearly 300 acres of orchards, meadows and woodland. Although more commonly known as a way to provide affordable housing, this CLT, by pooling members’ experience and needs, provides an easier way for them to manage their land and secure HLS funding. It also provides a wide variety of work for the care farming helpers and the volunteers.

## Target market

Uncllys works with three main client groups. The principal one is people recovering from drugs (especially heroin) and alcohol addiction (up to six people attend once a week). The other two client groups are: adults with learning difficulties (who participate in the Worcestershire Woods green wood working activities each friday) and adults with dementia and other mental health needs – both of these being funded by personal budgets.

Total capacity is around six people per day, four days per week.

## The bottom line

Uncllys is in a relatively fortunate situation: it is in a contract with Worcestershire County Council’s Drug and Alcohol Action Team, DAAT, for its main client group, and John expects funding to continue despite the recent reductions in local authority budgets. He explains the latter by saying the coalition government are keener on funding the sort of recovery work that Uncllys does – getting people into work - rather than managing drug addiction.

The above contact came through an introduction made by Care Farming West Midlands, who have also assisted Uncllys to draw up policies, meet accreditation needs, and introduce John to other care farmers. “We are very blessed that we have this initiative at a regional level, which made the RDA see care farming as a win-win,” says John. However, there have been no other contracts forthcoming yet. He says: “There have been lots of nods and smiles from agencies from people like the mental health commissioners, but turning these into contracts is a huge challenge – and a slow process.”

Significant other funding has been received from two sources. Under a Higher Level Stewardship Special Project, Natural England provided £64,000 to convert a redundant building (the Ruskin Studio), as well as paying most of the capital costs to restore traditional orchards and meadows - “They have been tremendous supporters of what we do,” says John. And ‘Grow with Wyre’, a Heritage Lottery Funded landscape restoration project, has funded capital equipment used to bring the land back into use, as well as training courses and the volunteer coordinator activity.

The care farm also receives HLS income from hosting farm educational visits (up to 60 visits per year), selling timber for firewood, and hosting training courses, workshops and retreats in the Ruskin Studio.

### In their own words

**Motivation** – Both John and his wife, Linda, have a background in conservation. But as well as working in land management and regeneration, John has also worked extensively with volunteers, and has helped set up social enterprises. His grandfather was also a farmer.

**Approach** – John believes that working on the land can be a healing process for people, and he has seen its benefits first hand (see below) from when working for the British Conservation Trust for Volunteers. As a result, when he and his wife took on Unclyls Farm, they were happy to say ‘Yes’ when asked if they would provide opportunities for people with depression and other issues. But when an article about what he was doing featured in a local magazine, and someone telephoned to say, “I see you are doing care farming”, it was the first he had heard of the term.

**Benefits** – From his previous work, John is confident that working on the land can help people who are mentally ill. He says: “After three or four years they were completely transformed – having pride, and increased capacity.” Indeed, three of Unclyls’ former clients are now in paid employment.

### For more information

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### Key challenges

John cites three challenges to care farming:

First, finding enough variety to the daily tasks. Activities like orchard tree planting, he explains, have to be done at certain times of the year. “They might last several weeks – and you can’t buck the weather,” he says.

Cash flow is another issue, although in their case they have been assisted by the council’s payments being received in advance.

Working with people is the final challenge, but something John is used to after nearly 40 years’ experience.

### Tips for others

Go and visit several different care farms before you start, to see some of the different things being done

Don’t see care farming as your main source of income. Only do it if your heart is in it, not for the money. “You will be lucky if you break even,” says John.

Get yourself trained so that you are equipped to do the job – there is quite a bit of training out there that you can draw upon.



If you want to learn more about Care Farming UK please visit [www.carefarminguk.org](http://www.carefarminguk.org) or email [enquiries@carefarminguk.org](mailto:enquiries@carefarminguk.org)