

Senior Support Workers Annual Report April 2005 to March 2006.

During the year to March 2006, the team members of MFT have undertaken a variety of new skills and experiences, while continuing to improve our existing skills and opportunities.

On the farming front, a joint decision was made not to grow potatoes at Rede in 2005, but to concentrate on cleaning the land of thistles and docks which had become a serious problem. This was painstakingly carried out by the team using hand tools which proved reasonably successful. The land was mucked and ploughed by Alan & Alex with Ian's able assistance in November 2005 and the winter weather helped considerably in making a useful tilth for late spring sowing of potatoes and onions. An additional area was covered in compost and fenced for late spring/early summer sowing of raspberries, strawberries, beetroot and lettuce. Sam's increasing skills in raising celeriac plants, plus rabbit fencing led to a good crop in Autumn 2005 and what looks very promising for this year. Over the winter, various sizes of protective cages were made by the team. Using wood and rabbit netting to protect plants from damage by the birds and rabbits.

Developments in other areas for both support workers and farm workers have continued with the increasing use of facilities at Rede workshop.

These include basic skills training by Penny Hodgkinson enabling farm workers to understand instructions on seed packets, use of graduated trowels for planting depths and use of calendars for planning time use. The St Johns Ambulance Brigade gave us a very successful first aid day in January 2006. This proved very valuable for all concerned in showing hidden and not so hidden dangers on the farm.

Successful visits were made to Jimmy's farm, Bury fire station and our annual bag packing day by kind permission of Sainsbury's where we raised over £500.00.

We continued to visit Nowton Park and Hardwick Heath on Tuesday, Volunteering to help the rangers with coppicing, clearing paths, making small foot bridges, plus a lengthy spell removing old rabbit fencing and tree guards.

Work at old Hall continued on Fridays and I am sure Ian will enlighten you on progress later.

On the personnel front, support worker Marisa retired in December 2005 and Alan Watson returned to work in Scotland in November 2005 and Alex George took leave of absence in February 2006 to try new experiences. The support workers were joined by Doug at Rede in November and Heather at Old hall during summer 2005.

At this point I would like to ask the farm workers to relate some of their working experiences.

Finally as an update since April 2006 potatoes were planted in May and we held a very successful volunteer day with KPMG. We were joined by 30-40 volunteers who helped erect rabbit fencing, created fruit cages, installed an irrigation system. Made a second work bench and found ways of communicating to the farm workers, the value of money in a work environment. The dry period during the summer meant extra trips to water the crops, but this has been repaid by useful yields of potatoes, onions, celeriac and beetroot.

Looking forward to 2007, we intend to grow potatoes, beetroot, onions, celeriac, some salad crops, runner beans and dwarf beans also soft fruit such as raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries, loganberries. We also hope to improve our tractor driving and engineering skills at Rede and further livestock instruction at old Hall and with Doug's sheep flock at Troston.