

Successful open day in Glenville promotes social farming



Mairead Twohig, Cathleen O'Brien, Craig Heaney, Gerard Young and John Buckley of Cope Foundation, Mallow enjoying tea and a scone after a tour of Mary Cooke Connolly's Glenville Farm. (Photo: Katie Glavin)



ABOVE: Adam McCarthy, Brian Roche, Michael O'Connor and Mary Irwin of St Joseph's Foundation, pictured on Mary Cooke Connolly's farm in Glenville at the recent SFI Open Day. (Photo: Katie Glavin)

RIGHT: ENJOYING THEIR DAY OUT - James Begley and David O'Doherty from Buttevant pictured at Mary Cooke Connolly's farm in Glenville. (Photo: Katie Glavin)



KATIE GLAVIN

Glenville woman, Mary Cooke Connolly, opened her and her husband Tom's farm to the public recently for a Social Farming Ireland (SFI) Open Day.

Social farming offers people who are socially, physically, mentally or intellectually disadvantaged the opportunity to spend time on a family farm in a healthy, supportive and inclusive environment.

Mary, Tom and their four children have been participating in social farming for about five years now and have welcomed Mitchelstown locals from St Joseph's Foundation to their suckler farm which is also home to three dogs, chickens, ducks and a horse.

According to Mary, she was first introduced to social farming through St Joseph's Foundation, where she works. Now, once a week for a few hours, a group of three or four people visit the farm and help out with the daily farm activities.

"It's a win-win for us and the kids. We absolutely love social farming. Every Friday, the kids are asking 'are the lads here?' They can't wait to get out.

"We want to have a positive effect on people. Even if you don't do anything on a particular day, it's still nice to get out in the fresh air. We all have the ability to do something and we should all have the opportunity to," Mary said.

'NO ONE SIZE FITS ALL'
Helen Doherty, SFI National Coordinator, noted that the programme is a participant-led one, that includes about 140 var-

ied farms across the country ranging from a 1-acre growing farm to a 500-acre dairy farm.

"If you have a farm, then you can be a social farmer. Every farm is different and every farm offers something different. There is no one size fits all."

"We respond to whatever the participant wants. It is about opening up the farm to the participant," Helen said.

ALMOST PART OF THE FAMILY
Isabelle Sutton, a flower farmer from West Cork, had worked for eight years with a disability organisation and began farming flowers during a year-long sabbatical.

Each week, a 55-year-old and 30-year-old visit her farm for a few hours through Social Farming Ireland and they help out on the farm, picking, planting and caring for flowers.

"It's brilliant. I've gotten more out of it than the participants. The two guys who come to me, they are almost part of my family at this stage," Isabelle said.

For more information or to get in contact with Social Farming Ireland, simply visit www.socialfarmingireland.ie or call (086) 7905596.



THUMBS UP - Michael O'Connor, Adam McCarthy, Brian Roche and Mary Irwin of St Joseph's Foundation, pictured with social farmer Mary Cooke Connolly at her family's farm in Glenville. (Photo: Katie Glavin)



Eadaoin O'Connell, SFI Regional Development Officer for the South West, sharing information on social farming with some of those attending the SFI Open Day in Glenville. (Photo: Katie Glavin)



Helen Doherty SFI National Coordinator, social farmers Isabelle Sutton, Dearbhla Conlon Ahern and Tom Connolly, along with Eadaoin O'Connell, SFI Regional Development Officer for the South West at the SFI Open Day on Tom and Mary's farm in Glenville. (Photo: Katie Glavin)



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