

My Experiences at the Ark

By



Situated in the lovely Westcountry countryside, the Ark for me has come to be a haven for finding peace of mind and escaping from the stresses of everyday life.

Before I started coming to the Ark regularly, I was living at home with my family. I felt confined in such a stifling environment, not helped by the effects of the pandemic we're still feeling today. Luckily, through my Mum's friend, I found out about the Ark. When I went for a taster day, I wasn't really sure what was expected of me, since I assumed that being a volunteer would mean me doing work. But I was surprised then when Simon explained to me that if I went there nothing would be expected of me. I could turn up when I wanted and only help out with jobs (feeding the animals, working in the garden etc.) if I felt like it.

This has been a huge relief to my mental health. As someone with Asperger's Syndrome, I have always felt like I'm expected to perform in a specific way or slot into a defined role. At the Ark I feel no such pressure. If I want to, I can just wander around the field, lost in my own thoughts until the cows come home. Or I can take part in one of the Ark's craft sessions. I've been painting, felting and willow weaving.

But by far my favourite activity has been the fortnightly lunch club hosted by the Ark at Merriott village hall. Every other Tuesday I join a group of Ark volunteers to set up the hall where we cook lunch for the elderly people of Merriott. This one is very near and dear to my heart because I feel at my most useful when I'm helping the local community.

Furthermore, I think that's what Ark has given me above all, a sense of community. It's somewhere where I am always welcome, where I can let all of my anxieties go and be the most helpful, valuable version of myself I can be.