

Creating Greater Opportunities for Accessibility, Teamwork, and Sustainability (GOATS) In a Rural Northern California Community

United States

Scripps College

Sarah Meadows

Background:

Nevada County is a rural county in Northern California. As the total population of the county is less than 100,000 people, often marginalized individuals, especially disabled people, do not receive the institutional support that we need. Simply put, there is a lack of recreational activities that consider both physical and emotional accessibility needs.¹ After the Independence trail, the US's first wheelchair-accessible trail, partially burned down in 2020 with no concrete plans to rebuild, community members have had to drive to other counties entirely in search of 'wheelchair accessible' parks; these parks are oftentimes not even ADA compliant themselves. Deprived of physical space to exist in public, the local disability community is further marginalized. Some local organizations create opportunities for disabled community members, such as the Neighborhood Center of the Arts, which seeks to support developmentally disabled and intellectually challenged adults by granting them access to art spaces, supplies, and other enrichment opportunities. However, since the beginning of the current pandemic, their capacity to do this community work has greatly decreased. With limited options, disabled residents of Nevada County, who have already been hit especially hard by the pandemic, find themselves and their needs overlooked by the rest of the community.

The Project:

I hope to create a space in our community that fulfills this need for accessible creativity. I am working directly in partnership with Suzanne Bardsley of New Wellington Farms, a small goat farm committed to creating a sustainable and peaceful relationship between their animals and the environment. New Wellington Farms is home to both LaMancha and Mini LaMancha goat breeds as well as two horses and a large garden. There are already so few opportunities for disabled people to interact with a farm environment because most farms are both physically and emotionally inaccessible. However, the farm seeks to provide opportunities for outdoor enrichment, engagement with animals and horticulture, scientific education, teamwork, and the ability to learn practical skills. In partnership, we hope to become an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible farm by building an ADA compliant restroom and pathways, providing meaningful opportunities for community engagement and Animal Assisted Intervention. Animal Assisted Intervention is a strategy that involves creating meaningful relationships between disabled people and animals as a form of therapy and play.²

To ensure careful attention to the needs of our participants, as a part of GOATS at New Wellington Farms, we are committed to creating an individualized creative plan (ICP) for each participant in our program. Participants will be able to choose how they wish to engage in any range of activities including, but not limited to, socializing kids (aka cuddling baby goats), grooming goats, milking goats, planting gardens, making soap, doing artwork, as well as spending time in peace outdoors. This choice of theirs in guiding their own ICP is critical, as this program is foundationally based upon listening to marginalized voices about their own needs. I will work with individuals and care providers to make sure each ICP allows the participant to gain both a voice in our community and a valuable opportunity for productive learning and play, all while centering their inner peace and fun.

¹ Emotional accessibility refers to both the way in which spaces approach working with people with all disabilities and the way in which cognitive disabilities are considered when creating accessible spaces

² Zhi, eh Xian et al. "Introducing Animal-Assisted Intervention for Special Education in Integrated Farming System." (2020).

We hope to see the farm itself become a hub for disability activism and activity in Nevada County. We plan to offer our space to enable greater collaboration among Nevada County disability organizations. For example, as a part of this project, I have reached out to other organizations that already serve members of the disabled community, such as RidgeLine Pediatrics, an organization that provides skilled nursing daycare services for disabled children and adults. We are committed to making our space available for RidgeLine field trips, which would be ideal for them as the vast outdoor space would allow them to be able to safely take high-risk clients on much-needed excursions for the first time in years. We also plan to hold community events in partnership with the Neighborhood Center of the Arts, providing them with our farm as a space for art and community enrichment so they can continue to provide opportunities for the 65 disabled artists they work with. Moreover, Casa del Colores, a welcoming home for severely disabled members of our community, has already committed to populating the program.

Outside these important partnerships, we hope to offer free community days to anyone regardless of disability status. This allows people with mixed levels of ability to participate together and builds a stronger bond between communities that unfortunately do not interact in physical space that much as of late, especially given the pandemic.

Timeline:

If we are honored with this grant, our first step will be to further extend the breadth of our partnerships with other disability organizations and engage in further community outreach to find other participants for GOATS at New Wellington Farm. We will begin to advertise our plan for the partnered programs and community days to the broader Nevada County community to draw in a broad base, undoubtedly creating ICPs along the way. We hope to complete the infrastructural installation of bathrooms and pathways by the end of June. During the month of June, I will also work with our partner organizations to create a comprehensive shared calendar that allows all our partners to have access to the space. Naturally, I will also begin to write the ICPs for the confirmed members of the GOATS program. From the start of July through mid-August we will begin enacting the ICPs as well as facilitate RidgeLine Pediatric field trips. We plan to hold community days twice a month for the month of July and August for four in total. From mid-August to the end of August, I will reach out to other farms nationwide and talk to them about what we did in our project and see in what ways they can implement the values of the GOATS program in their farms and communities.

Funds from the Project for Peace grant would mainly be used to create the infrastructure that will allow our working farm to be more accessible and ADA compliant.

Outcomes and sustainability:

Through this project, we hope to cultivate a sense of inner peace in all those who interact with our farm by promoting the values of accessibility, teamwork, and sustainability. New Wellington Farms has committed to hold community days at least once a month for the next year and hopes to maintain lasting relationships with our partner organizations to continue to serve the disabled community of the greater Nevada County area. By actively sharing the program with farms nationwide and offering my services to these farms in brainstorming for this kind of program, I hope to spread the work to as many communities as possible. The farm is already self-sustaining and will continue to be after this initial investment towards ADA compliance, ensuring this project's sustainability.

About me:

I am a graduating Chemistry major at Scripps College. As an autistic and chronically-ill adult, I believe that the best way to amplify disabled voices is to create projects by disabled people for disabled people. I had the opportunity to work at New Wellington Farm while Scripps did remote learning and I want to share this opportunity with our community!