

Creating Greater Opportunities for Accessibility, Teamwork, and Sustainability (GOATS) in a Rural Northern California Community  
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My project, Creating Greater Opportunities for Accessibility, Teamwork, and Sustainability (GOATS) in a Rural Northern California Community (GOATS@New Wellington Farm) seeks to create a space in our community that fulfills the need for accessible creativity through agricultural education. By making changes to the physical environment at New Wellington Farm, we hope to be able to host disabled participants and give them this opportunity.

As a disabled, autistic, and chronically ill person, accessibility is a very personal issue to me. Frequently I have found myself challenged in spaces that others enjoy, as they were not designed for how my body and mind function. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I had the opportunity to help with the animals on New Wellington Farm and it was a really meaningful experience. While New Wellington Farm was one of the most emotionally accessible experiences I have had, it lacked physical accessibility. Through this project, I am beginning the process of making this farm, which has been such an important place to me, accessible to other disabled community members. New Wellington Farm's owner, Suzanne Bardsley, has been a close family friend for most of my life. As the mother of a profoundly deaf son, she has been involved in advocacy for the disabled for almost 50 years and readily agreed to offer her space to this project. The main project team consisted of myself, Suzanne, and 3 volunteers who are all personally affected by disability. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we'd noticed that there had been a lack of opportunities for accessible creativity in our area. By listening to the needs of community members, we have been able to garner support from many locals who are excited to have the opportunity to visit this farm.. We were assisted throughout the project by friends and family who volunteered time and equipment to assist us with our tasks. Whenever possible, we chose to spend our grant locally.

Upon arriving at the site in May, I realized many factors complicated the theorized plan and timeline. First, it quickly became clear that the cost of putting in the planned bathroom would prohibit us from making many other changes. Because of this initial obstacle, as well as the increase in material cost since the grant was proposed, it became important to take more time to consider the best use of the funding. In response to this, I spent a lot of time working and becoming integrated into the farm so I would understand how to best create a farm space and educational program that was not only accessible but specifically designed to center disabled experiences. Through this work, it became apparent that as outlined, accessible pathways would be hugely important to making this space safer and welcoming. Additionally, safer fencing was needed to create a centralized zone on the farm that allowed some people to experience what the farm has to offer without having to move great distances while allowing others to enjoy exploring more of the farm. A huge part of the summer was consumed by removing old systems and creating the space for the changes we needed to occur. Throughout the season, we experienced many challenges including two wildfires with protracted evacuations, which slowed the process of the project. The high cost of materials meant that the majority of the physical labor was done by our core team in 95-100 degree heat.

Although we were not able to host participants in the way I had originally planned, I saw profound changes in the confidence levels of our core team. It was amazing to work with other disabled people who were empowered by creating a space centered around our needs, and it shows me the viability of the program long-term.

I did not engage in other fundraising opportunities, but I hope to do more work in this avenue as we continue the program.

I will continue to develop GOATS@New Wellington Farm onsite for the foreseeable future and hope to host our first participants soon. We are continuing to improve our facilities and intend to finish a wheelchair accessible garden and greenhouse. We also want to expand the design of the farm by building a new milking parlor and cheese make room with a glass wall so people can watch the cheesemaking process. We were able to connect with a local “makerspace” and help them consider what they can do to make their facility more accessible. They also plan to work with us in the future to create more opportunities for accessible creativity in our community.

### Reflection

For me, peace is about finding a space that helps me feel empowered and centered as the person I am with the body I have. I feel most at peace when I am cultivating a positive relationship with the earth and its creatures. I believe that a peaceful world is one where everyone can participate and no one is left out of their community by design.

On a short-term basis, this project allowed the 5 core volunteers (including myself), all of who are disabled, to find peace and purpose as we create this space for others. New Wellington Farm hopes to gain a Certified Humane certification and the infrastructural changes that have improved accessibility are also improving the animals' experience on this earth. This care for cooperative peace among humans, animals, and the earth is what we want to share with our community.

As a team of disabled individuals, there were times when we had to reconcile the ways in which accessibility looked different for us. We learned to work together through disability-informed linguistic barriers, and differences of opinion in order to come to peaceful solutions as a group. On a longer-term basis, programs like GOATS@New Wellington Farm represent a shift in the way our community thinks about accessible space. There is a movement to more deeply integrate educational enrichment opportunities for a wide range of individuals in our community, and we are proud to present the farm as an option. The grant was primarily used to change the physical landscape of the farm so participants would be able to experience a meaningful, educational, and enjoyable trip to a local farm.

Long-term, I hope to be able to share this work and process with other small farms that might be interested in doing something similar for their community. In short, I want to make accessibility more tangible. I hope that this program is able to grow and improve as the needs of our community grow and change.

As I live in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains, the landscape itself is very harsh. This summer temperatures were 95-100 days most days we were working. These conditions made doing the work very difficult and also forced me to consider weather and environment as serious accessibility challenges.

Through doing the work, I realized that this program would not currently be able to run in the summer due to dangerous environmental conditions. One of the challenges that was highlighted throughout the project was the individuality of disability. It is difficult to make a space accessible to people across the range of disabilities, as accessibility can be different and conflicting between certain types of disabilities. As I continue this work, I want to continue to get individual feedback and further research tried and true methods for making space accessible. Living in a world that is not designed to include disabled bodies and voices is exhausting and minimizing. As we continue the work we want to move beyond making things simply accessible, and instead design our space with disabled individuals, such as ourselves, in mind. It is essential when doing inclusive work to have disabled individuals on the team that is creating accessible spaces.

This project has made me feel more confident in myself and my ability to succeed, because I was able to outline and accomplish a very difficult task while being flexible to extenuating circumstances. This project has deepened my passion for accessibility and has empowered me to think about ways I can improve accessibility across my community. Throughout the summer, I had to deal with obstacles that were out of my control, and yet I was still able to achieve a lot and make the world closer to the one I want to live in. This project has pushed me to look past perfection and instead focus on improving and changing things that are in my control and letting go of what I can't improve. This was an extremely difficult project that pushed me to my physical and emotional limits at times. I was willing to persevere because of the positive impact I hope to see it have on my community. I am so thankful to Projects for Peace. I was given the opportunity to sit down, write a dream and see it actualized. The most amazing thing has been seeing how my vision for GOATS@New Wellington Farm has changed and shifted as it mixed with other people's dreams and realities. That cooperation allowed mere plans to become a living breathing thing that is in the world.

### Personal Statement

My project, Creating Greater Opportunities for Accessibility, Teamwork, and Sustainability (GOATS) in a Rural Northern California Community (GOATS@New Wellington Farm) seeks to create a space in our community that fulfills the need for accessible creativity through agricultural education. In order to do this, we made changes to the physical environment of the farm so it would be more accessible. Through this program, I solidified my belief in designing peaceful spaces for disabled people and access work that goes beyond accommodation.