



ROSE HILL FARM

An All-Ireland approach to
Alternative Respite with Equine,
Nature & Movement Therapies

A NOTE FROM SAMANTHA LESLIE

Since childhood, I have always been fascinated by how the human brain processes information. Even now, we are only starting to understand how they process information and feelings and what effects our brain, both positively and negatively.

Having struggled through nine schools by the age of fifteen, and watched my older brother being moved from one mental health facility to another, horses were my refuge and my rescuers. They are natural healers, kind and emotionally intelligent creatures whose movement has such an effect on our brain, that I always recognised, but never understood.

The pursuit of knowledge has been a life-long passion of mine. My aim has always been to help people. There is enormous value in helping someone learn the life skills which allow them to live their best life and process the traumas of their past which have negatively impacted their lives and those around them.

Through these years of research I came across the amazing work of Rupert Isaacson. Rowan, his son, was diagnosed autistic at the age of two and a half. The charming, animated child had ceased speaking. He retreated into himself for hours at a time, screamed inconsolably for no apparent reason, flapped his arms and babbled. Today, Rowan, now in his early twenties, lives independently and has made significant improvements in his verbal communication skills. All this as a result of equine assisted therapy.

Rupert has since introduced me to David Doyle, an Irish entrepreneur who sold his printing business, and joined St. Josephs Foundation to help them improve the facilities used by his autistic daughter Caroline. His centre in Liskennett has produced some outstanding results and is at full capacity, with a growing wait list. No doubt his second centre, in Kanturk, will do the same.

Over the last 18 months, I have visited the therapy centres in Liskennett, Child Vision in Dublin, Stewart's Care in Kilcloon and the Middletown Centre for Autism support. I have met with Northern Irish organisations including One Equine and collaborated on a proposal for Boom Hall in Derry.

I have travelled to Singapore to see the ground-breaking Enabling Village and their makers shop. I have also attended medical conferences at the Eastern Virginia Medical School led by Temple Grandin.

Every six months, I host an overnight think tank session for key people in the space to identify gaps and explore how we fill them. This is how the idea to create a ground-breaking centre at Castle Leslie came about. It will be a place to meet the needs not just of service users, but also parents, siblings and carers. It will focus on training, specifically for trainers in the field and the horses used in the therapies across the country. Another central pillar of the centre will be an open-source research centre.

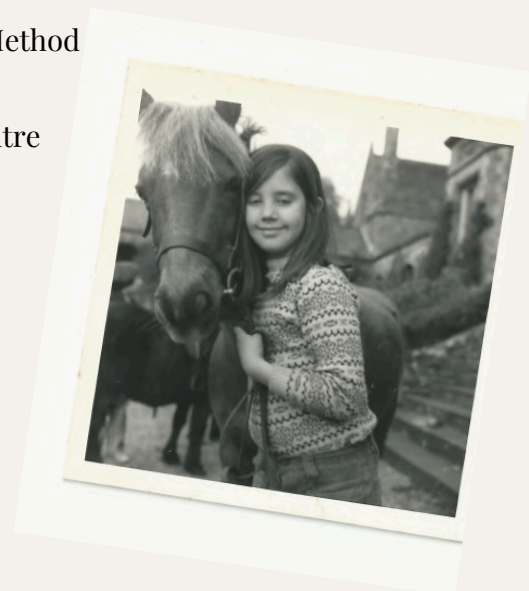
More widely, recent studies have shown the positive effects of equine, nature and movement therapies on people with PTSD. In the border counties of Ireland there are considerable legacy issues from the 30 years of the Troubles. There is also emerging research into the positive impacts of un-mounted therapies on survivors of domestic violence and those suffering from associated stress disorders and addictions.

There is a global movement growing for Equine Assisted, Movement Method and nature-based therapies, and we could to be a key part of this.

Now is the time to put words in to action and deliver a new type of centre for Equine Assisted and Movement therapies, with multiple outcomes.



SAMANTHA LESLIE
PROJECT INNOVATOR & CURRENT
CUSTODIAN OF CASTLE LESLIE





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AN ALL-IRELAND APPROACH TO ALTERNATIVE RESPITE

As developed by St Joseph's Foundation at Liskennett
Equine Assisted Activity Centre



A New Model of Service

- Centred around the individual and family
- Enabling children and adults with autism and/or intellectual disability to meet, learn, play and express themselves
- In inclusive and accessible natural environments managed for biodiversity

Creating a property profile

- A diverse range of services which can be carefully curated for individual needs
- Proven life-changing activities for autistic people and those with intellectual disability through the adoption of the Horse Boy Method of equine therapy
- Crucial respite opportunities for family members.
- Sector organisations networking and sharing ideas together across regions in the a whole-of-Ireland approach
- Potential for future satellite hub developments in each region to scale and increase service capacity over time



This new model of service would be adopted and further developed at centres strategically located across the country:

- St Joseph's Foundation, Charleville, Co. Cork
- Liskennett Equine Assisted Activity Centre, Co. Limerick
- Stewarts Care, Kilcloon, Co. Meath
- Rose Hill Farm, Glaslough, Co. Monaghan
- Ability West, Toghermore House, Tuam, Co. Galway
- Kanturk Equine Assisted Activity Centre, Kanturk, Co. Cork

All-Ireland Approach to Alternative Respite

as developed by St. Joseph's Foundation at Liskennett
Equine Assisted Activity Centre



St. Joseph's Foundation
Baker's Road, Charleville,
Co. Cork

Liskennett Equine Assisted
Activity Centre, Granagh, Co.
Limerick

Stewarts Care
Kilcloon, Co Meath

Rose Hill Farm,
Glaslough, Co. Monaghan

Ability West
Toghermore House,
Tuam, Co. Galway

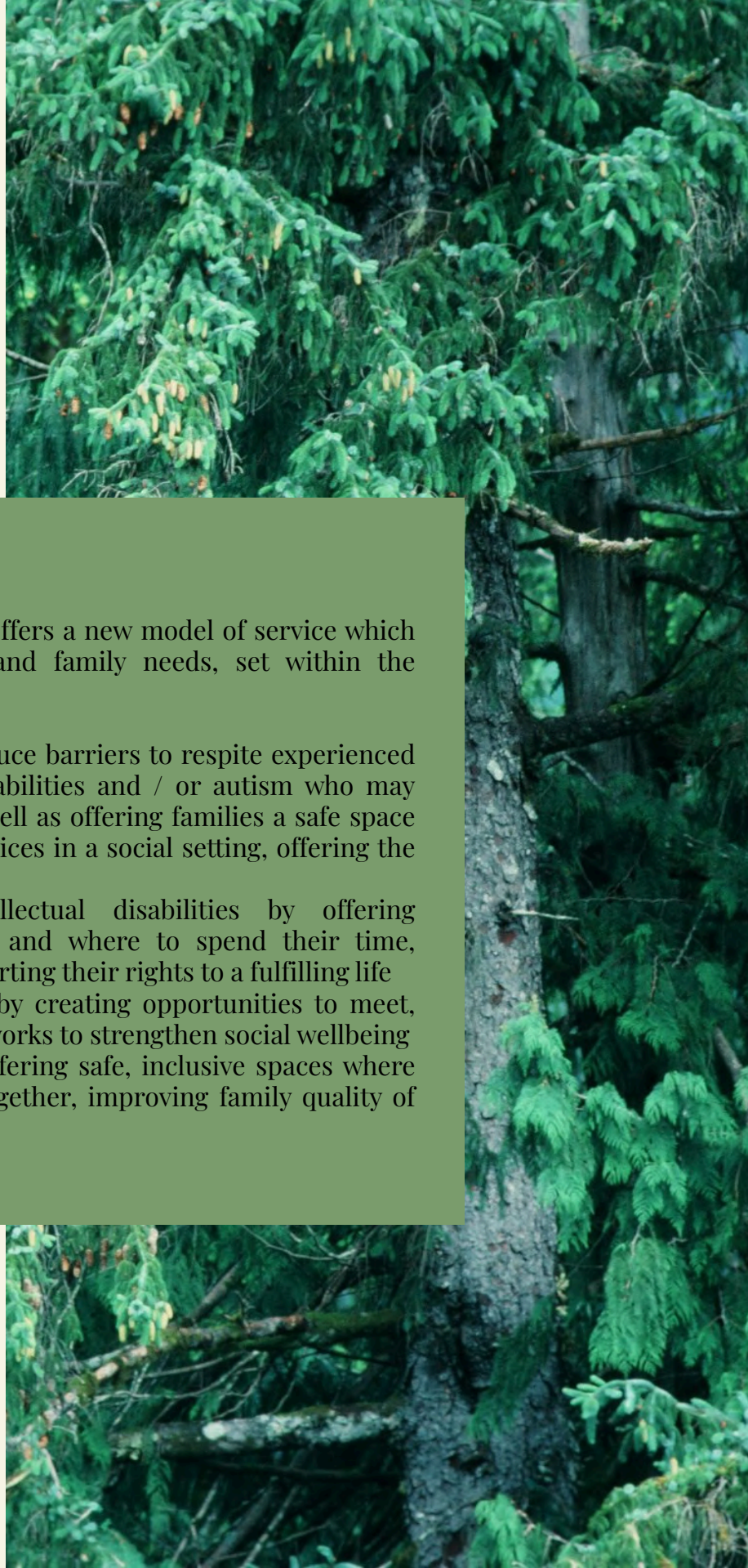
Kanturk Equine Assisted
Activity Centre
Kanturk, Co. Cork



Introduction

We plan to offer services across four central respite projects to optimise the use of available spaces, delivering a wide range of recreational and therapeutic opportunities to people with intellectual disabilities and / or autism and their families.

Each respite project is underpinned by a body of evidence, with key benefits summarised below. A full list of references is available on request.



Family respite

The family respite at Rose Hill Farm offers a new model of service which will be centred around individual and family needs, set within the stunning landscape of the Estate.

Offering whole-family respite will reduce barriers to respite experienced by some people with intellectual disabilities and / or autism who may prefer not to leave their families, as well as offering families a safe space to engage with a holistic range of services in a social setting, offering the following benefits:

- Empowering people with intellectual disabilities by offering meaningful choices around how and where to spend their time, improving quality of life and supporting their rights to a fulfilling life
- Building community for families by creating opportunities to meet, connect, and form supportive networks to strengthen social wellbeing
- Supporting family wellbeing by offering safe, inclusive spaces where families can enjoy quality time together, improving family quality of life

BENEFITS OF NATURE

Humans have an innate connection to nature which shapes our experiences of space and place, with natural sights and sounds proven to accelerate recovery from stress.

The spaces at Rose Hill Farm will be integrated with the natural landscape, designed using restorative design principles to enhance wellbeing, attention and learning.

Access to nature, carefully crafted spaces, and holistic nature-based services will support outcomes such as:

- Improving sensory comfort for people with differences in sensory processing through integrating design elements with improved indoor environmental control
- Promoting learning through enhanced attention, memory, and cognitive performance as well as reducing stress
- Facilitating social inclusion through the development of community and family spaces co-created using evidence-based design for inclusivity

EQUINE ASSISTED THERAPIES

Equine assisted services offer experiential learning for clients through activities with horses supported by skilled facilitators. The strengths-based culture of equine assisted services can support clients with a wide range of needs, including intellectual disabilities and autism.

Equine-assisted therapies can offer a variety of benefits - from ground-based services which help improve emotional regulation and recovery from PTSD, to the Horse Boy Method, which is designed to calm the nervous system and enhance learning through the rhythmic hip rocking motion of riding. Other outcomes of equine assisted services include:

- Improving motivation to engage with activities of daily living, such as self-care and healthy eating, as well as improved long-term health outcomes
- Developing verbal and non-verbal communication skills and self-advocacy
- Accelerating results from mainstream therapies, e.g., Speech and Language therapy

SOCIAL FARMING

Social farming integrates health and social care within agricultural environments, working with the land in a variety of ways to support human health and wellbeing as well as delivering ecological benefits. Activities can include integrating animal care into therapeutic practices, partnerships with health and social care providers and therapeutic horticulture.

Social farming can support a range of outcomes for children and adults with intellectual disabilities and / or autism, including:

- Acting as enabling spaces for inclusion and empowerment, offering skills development in a hands-on outdoors setting
- Reducing fussy eating for children with autism through interactive programs to support learning and engagement with healthy food choices
- Offering a wide range of vocational activities which can reduce barriers to training and meaningful employment for people with disabilities, improving physical health and reducing social isolation



WHY ROSE HILL FARM?

"A place of innovation, inspiration and healing"



Castle Leslie is a historic Estate and guardian of more than 10,000 years of shared heritage since the great ice sheets melted. The current custodian is Samantha Leslie whose family have been responsible for the land since the seventeenth century. It lies in County Monaghan in the ROI on the border with NI. The demesne is approximately 1,000 acres and includes lakes, pasture and ancient woodland.

The Castle and Lodge form the core of a thriving hospitality business offering accommodation, dining, horse riding and hosting events in a heritage landscape setting. As outlined in their 100-year Manifesto, currently under local consultation, the business is transitioning from a leading hospitality enterprise to a wider, working estate that places nature recovery and wellbeing at the heart of what it does.

Through their inspiring landscape, heritage estate and partnerships with organisations across the Republic of Ireland, Castle Leslie is well-placed to lead an All-Ireland initiative to make equine assisted, nature-based and movement therapies available to more people than ever before, in line with the government plan to deliver a step-change in building a progressive society for all and building capacity to address service gaps for people with disabilities.

After decades of community-led activity, Sammy Leslie and the team at Castle Leslie have been working to restore the Estate so it will stand ready to serve the community for generations to come. With a thriving tourism offering, world class equestrian centre and 1,000 acres of pristine land, the Estate has all the advantages needed to make this vital project a success.



Mission Statement

At Rose Hill Farm, our mission is to empower people with disabilities and mental health conditions through the power of equine-assisted therapy and to provide alternative respite alongside developing innovative therapies and approaches which support people to build resilience skills and unlock the potential of children, teenagers, adults and families across our shared Island.

We are dedicated to fostering connection, emotional wellbeing and growth by creating inclusive environments where participants can build confidence, develop life skills and experience healing through meaningful interactions with horses and nature.

Our programs are grounded in collaboration, respect, and the belief that every person has the potential to thrive.



Vision Statement

CL Innovations and the Leslie Foundation have proposed the development of a world-class, All-Ireland centre for equine and nature-based therapies. This will become a hub for developing excellence in the equine assisted services through the training of horses, trainers and facilitators in expert-led methodologies which deliver evidence-based therapies and alternative respite led by the needs of service users.

Equine assisted services (EAS) have been shown to be effective for reducing domestic violence, reducing anxiety in adolescents, and improving outcomes for young people with neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism and ADHD.



EAS at the new Rose Hill Farm will include ridden and movement interventions to provide targeted support for young people with autism, disabilities and mental health problems as well as facilitating further research to scale impact. In addition to EAS, a programme of nature-based therapies will be developed, working with the natural landscape, extensive woodland areas and sustainable land use of the Estate. Respite accommodation will be designed to embrace the full benefits of being surrounded by nature, using natural materials incorporating evidence-based learnings from others and input from a wide range of service users and their families.

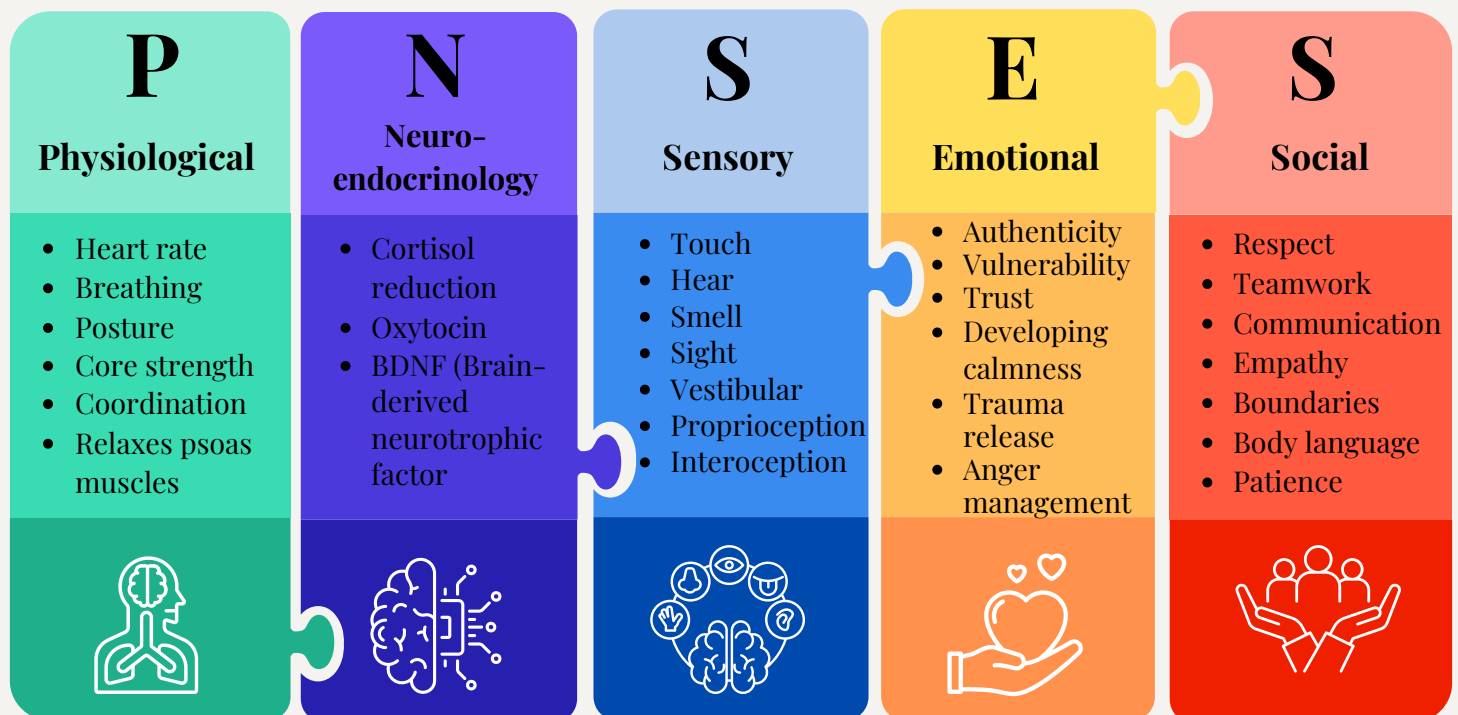
We will use well-researched and well-tested expert-led **methodology** to underpin our work.

We will capitalise on our expertise and **industry excellence** to develop the skills of both horses and trainers – not only for our own service users, but for the benefit of the growing national network of therapy centres, trainers and researchers committed to this work.

Sitting at the heart of this national network, we will develop ever stronger **partnerships** with those who share our mission and ideals. We will act as a central resource – for training, research, and collaboration – for the committed experts, volunteers and families who give so much of their time and effort to support those with additional needs.

Finally, with our resources secure and our expertise established, we will seek to make our therapy services available to as wide a user-base as possible, recognising the importance of **needs-led therapy** for people with PTSD and survivors of domestic abuse.

The Horse/Human interaction explained



Equine-assisted therapies work across a range of human systems to support wellbeing, acting across physiological, neuroendocrine, sensory, emotional and social levels.

By supporting people at the level of their need, whether that's by developing physical strength through core stabilisation during riding, developing a practical understanding of social skills such as personal space and boundaries during unmounted work, or providing a safe space for reflecting on emotional events, equine assisted therapy allows practitioners to meet people where they're at, supporting them on their journey towards wellbeing.



PROJECT NEED

There is currently a mental health crisis for young people in Ireland with around 25% of children in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) having experienced a mental health disorder and 1 in 8 adults meeting the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), 40% of whom have chronic symptoms. Autistic children are six times more likely to be excluded from school than their peers without autism, negatively impacting life opportunities and wellbeing. People with disabilities are also at greater risk of developing mental health challenges, often facing barriers to inclusion such as limited access to services and a lack of inclusive social spaces.



Increasing need for services set against high vacancy rates of over 50% in key providers such as the Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) are impacting access to early intervention. A report commissioned by CL Innovations and the Leslie Foundation in December 2024 found long waiting times for CDNT services of up to 5 years, which risks missing critical developmental periods for young people with complex needs. There is an urgent need for additional and innovative programs to provide interim services which support the mental health and wellbeing of people with disabilities and/or mental health conditions in Monaghan, Cavan and Louth.



As part of an All-Ireland approach to Alternative Respite, the proposed developments at Castle Leslie will increase capacity for people and their families to access evidence-based services, offering early support and interim services with effective interventions in a timely manner. The facilities will foster inclusion of people with neurodiversity by providing community spaces for wellbeing alongside targeted support programs.

In addition, there will be opportunities for inclusive apprenticeships and vocational experience on-site, developing pathways for people with disabilities and mental health problems to progress from having need of services to providing services. This could potentially open routes to employment as part of Castle Leslie's place-based approach to addressing inequalities and supporting a healthier society.

REFERRAL CRITERIA

“A persons needs are best met by people whose needs are met.”

David Doyle, *St Joseph's Foundation*

Rose Hill Farm aims to address the clear service need in Monaghan, Cavan, North & South Louth and the border region.

Target population:

The services are designed for children (ages 4–18 years) and adults (18+) with autism, intellectual disabilities and mental health challenges.

Geographic location:

This hub will serve Monaghan, Cavan, North & South Louth and the wider border region.

Referral sources:

Referrals can be made through various channels:

- Community Disability Network Teams (CDNT)
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Schools
- Private Clinics
- GP services





AN ALTERNATIVE RESPITE CO-DESIGNED WITH USERS & NATURE

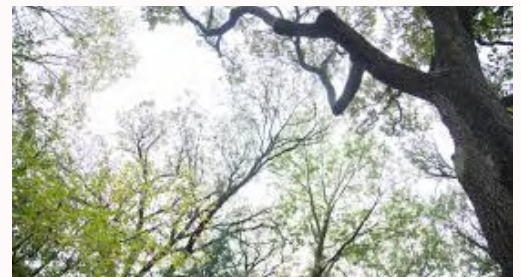
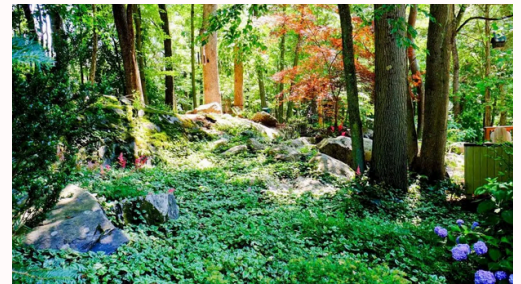
Nature plays a vital role in providing respite and promoting wellbeing, particularly for individuals with autism and other forms of neurodivergence.

Time spent in nature has been shown to reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance emotional regulation.

Biophilic design integrates natural elements into built environments, supporting people by creating calming, sensory-friendly spaces that reflect the therapeutic qualities of nature. When these environments are thoughtfully tailored to accommodate sensory sensitivities—such as using gentle lighting and natural materials – we foster inclusivity and comfort.

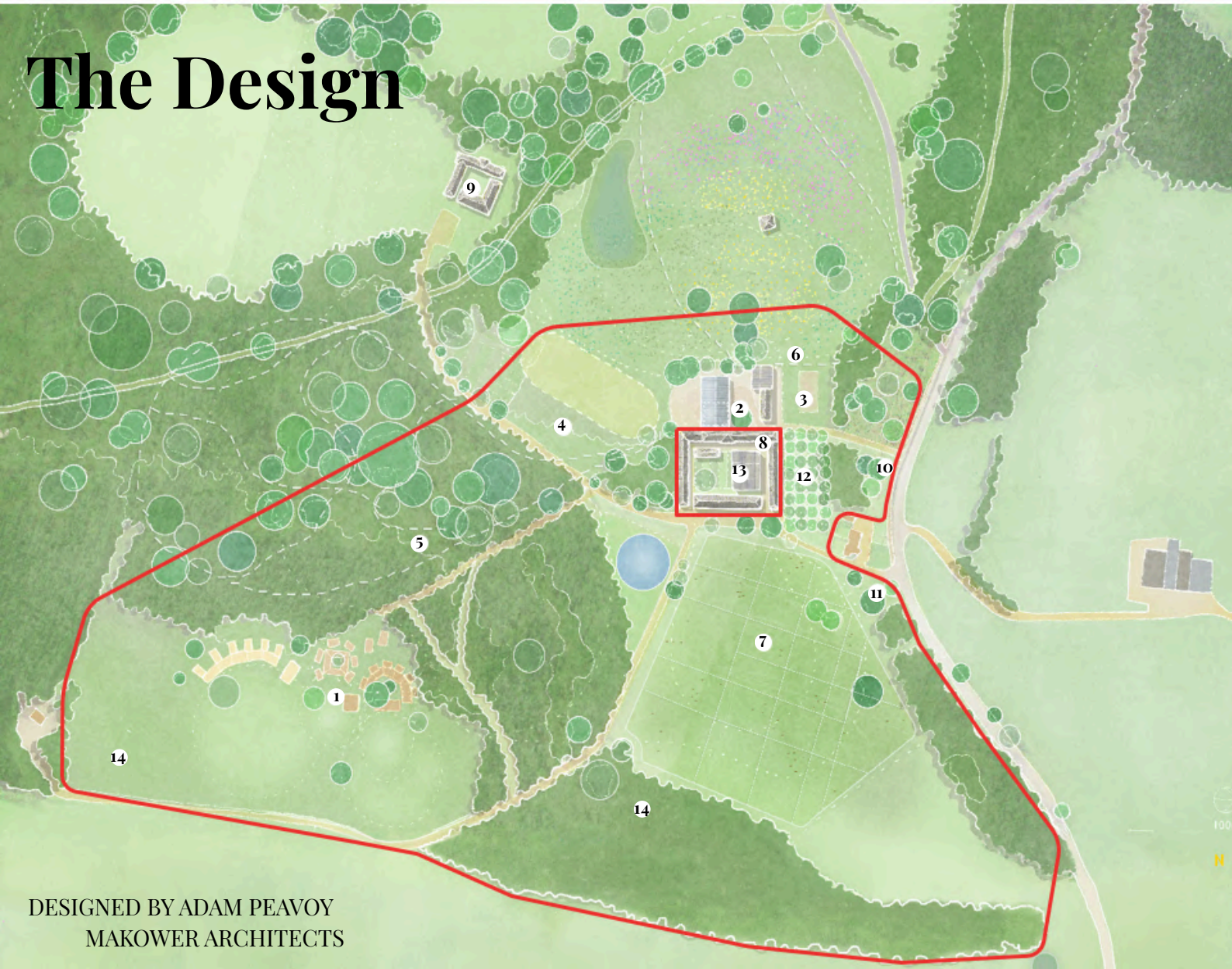
In doing so, we not only support people with a wide range of needs, but also promote ecological sustainability through a deeper connection with the natural world.

The proposed Rose Hill Farm site includes 10 acres for accommodation with woodland.



Rose Hill Farm will be co-designed with service users and nature. From selection of materials such as lighting and finishes, to the shared spaces and gathering areas, the needs of the users and interactions with nature will be at the fore.

The Design



DESIGNED BY ADAM PEAVOY
MAKOWER ARCHITECTS

LEGEND:

1. Potential future cabins for alternative respite accommodation
2. Horseboy & Equine Therapy facilities
3. 'The Banks' play fields
4. Sensory walk created around Rose Hill field
5. Sensory trails and paths in woodland
6. Inclusive playground
7. Horse paddocks
8. Research facilities and teaching spaces
9. Existing self-catering in the Old Stables
10. New access road
11. Existing access point
12. Carpark
13. Future traditional skills centre in old model farm
14. Care/Social farm

The Ask – Phase One



We are seeking funding from organisations who share our vision and want to be part of a movement which centres inclusion, diversity, climate justice and equality in all its guises, anchored deeply in an appreciation of the value of our natural world. By infusing our work with these values to create an alternative respite and Centre for Excellence in equine-assisted and nature-based therapies, we will inspire and support others across our Shared Island to adopt a holistic, person-centred approach that truly honours each individual's potential.

Phase One includes the site surveys and design through planning to tender, it does not include the build.

OUR EXPERTS

We have already assembled an expert team of experienced individuals who have begun to develop the plans to make this vision a reality. This includes experienced practitioners of Equine Therapy interventions, published researchers in the field of Equine Assisted Services, Charity experts on delivering strong impact and good governance plus more.

SAMMY LESLIE -PROJECT INNOVATOR & B.H.S.I.I.



Sammy is the current custodian of Castle Leslie, spending most of her adult life committed to the restoration and advancement of the Estate. Through her partnership working, community focus and sheer determination, the Estate has flourished, and now stands ready to serve the community through the Leslie Foundation.

Having been through 9 schools before the age of 15, B.H.S training with horses was her saviour. Sammy was diagnosed with dyslexia at 24, leading to a fascination with human and equine learning. She has seen first hand the remarkable effect they can have on wellbeing, especially for those who have additional needs.

PETRA INGRAM - PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR



Petra Ingram is an experienced charity sector leader. Having worked in the commercial sector, she moved to the charity sector in 2003 working with Sightsavers and then becoming CEO at Brooke, an international charity responsible for improving the welfare of working horses, donkeys and mules across the world.

In 2020 she joined HorseWorld, working on the HorseWorld Discovery Programme which sought to evidence the value of equine assisted learning on the lives of young people.

KEZIA SULLIVAN - EAS RESEARCHER



Kezia Sullivan is a researcher working with Professor Ann Hemingway of Bournemouth University to develop the understanding of efficacy and mechanisms of action for equine assisted services and nature-based interventions.

She holds an MSc from UCL in Social Cognition: Research and Applications, has presented research findings both internationally and across the UK, and supports equine assisted organisations to integrate empirical evaluation for evidence-based practice.

DAVID DOYLE - LISKENNETT FARM - EQUINE ASSISTED ACTIVITY CENTRE



David Doyle entered the Health Sector in 2000 having worked as an entrepreneur for 20 years. This move came about after his 5 year old daughter was diagnosed with autism.

Recognising the long and challenging road ahead for Caroline and the family, David has devoted himself to providing children and adults with Autism and those with Intellectual Disabilities with services that suits their individual needs.

Liskennett: In 1968 a local Medical Doctor – Dr Martin O'Donnell recognised the need for supports for children and adults with Intellectual Disability in the North Cork area. From a modest start of 38 Children attending, the now named St. Joseph's Foundation caters for 1300 Children and 530 Adults with Intellectual Disability and or Autism.

For the last 56 years the Foundation not only provided services to the sector but also became a visionary for the Intellectual Disability Sector. Continuously examining and challenging the way we provide services and pathways for same.



Sammy Leslie

Email: sammy@castleleslie.com

Phone: +353-87-2502300

Detailed research bibliography
available on request