How Durlston Country Park is helping people

A coastal park is helping people overcome physical and social isolation as part of a project funded by the National Lottery.

On the Jurassic coast just near Swanage is Durlston Country Park, owned by Dorset Council. With a castle, pleasure grounds and wonderful wildlife, and views, the park is very popular with visitors.

However, enjoying the park is not easy for everyone.

As part of a National Lottery-funded restoration project, the Durlston Country Park team is working hard to break down barriers for people who find it challenging to get there or aren't able to get involved as much as they'd like.

Just a year into the project, they have introduced a community shed and a neighbourhood lift-sharing scheme.

Everyone needs a shed

The Shed is a community and volunteering space designed to be as welcoming and inclusive as possible.

It is open to everyone, particularly for people with dementia, disabilities or experiencing social isolation. People can take part in a wide range of gentle volunteering activities, from building bird boxes to looking after plants and no experience

is necessary. The Shed itself is fully accessible, including wheelchair spaces at the workbenches.

Importantly, taking part is completely flexible. There is no minimum time commitment or booking required. People are invited to come in groups or by themselves and are free to volunteer or simply spend time with others.

Ali Tuckey, project leader: “We think this is a great way to get an even wider range of people volunteering at Durlston, sharing skills and making friends.”

“Our friendly team of staff and ‘sheddies’ are looking forward to welcoming new volunteers, who can drop in and try something new in a social, relaxed woodland setting, whether to help look after this fantastic place or just join us for a cuppa and a chat!”

Neighbourcar and access for all

Durlston Neighbourcar is a lift-sharing scheme to get people in Swanage from their front door to the park at a time that suits them. The scheme operates every weekday and is open to everyone, including those with disabilities.

It aims to make the journey easier for those who find it challenging to make the walk uphill to the park or use public transport. It is also a great way to make friends as the drivers are volunteers themselves.

There is a set mileage rate, enabling users to know how much the trip will cost them in advance and once signed up, they will be able to call or email to book ahead, making the process simple and stress-free.

Let’s Talk Loneliness

This week (17-23 June) is Loneliness Awareness Week.

The government and many partners and organisations across the country have launched the Let’s Talk Loneliness campaign to tackle the stigma around loneliness and encourage people to talk about their experiences of one of the many emotions that come with being human.

Share your stories on social media #LetsTalkLoneliness