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YOUR WORKPLACE

Couple invite children to 'Bring Yer Wellies' and enjoy great outdoors

Melissa and Nigel Peter have transformed the former commercial Ricraft Nursery at Quaker Brook Lane in Hoghton, Preston, into an unique outdoor learning centre, where children can learn to respect the balance of the countryside and all it provides – and have wheelbarrow loads of fun!

Your workplace

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When Melissa and Nigel Peter met nine years ago at Hoghton

Tower, little did they know they would one day marry – and set up their own business!

Melissa was working at the tower as an events promoter, while Nigel was a contractor working in the tower gardens.

Melissa, 48, says: "We met while working at Hoghton Tower – like a modern day Jane Eyre story! He was working outside in the gardens and I was inside promoting the place to generate income."

After more than a decade at the tower, Melissa was made redundant earlier this year.

Together with Nigel came up with a plan to help revitalise his former business – Ricraft Nurseries of Hoghton.

The duo are now three months into making their vision to create a rural outdoor learning experience for children a reality. They have transformed the commercial nursery into 'Bring Yer Wellies' – a venture where children can gain a respect for plants, animals and nature.

Nigel, 50, inherited the nursery from his father, who bought the land in 1965.

At one stage they worked in its greenhouses together, but the business began to struggle due to the rise of large warehouse firms and supermarkets, and they closed in 2000.

He says: "The nursery has laid dormant for 12 years. It's great to restore the place back and get people up here again.



Maplewood House staff Liz Brear, Joanne Culshaw and Kate Aldous in the greenhouse with children at Ricraft Nurseries, Hoghton

"Melissa and I had experience of working together before, now we're just working together for ourselves. It's very rewarding."

Bring Yer Wellies aims to give children the same opportunities the couple's five-year-old son Fergus has enjoyed – outdoor learning and play, freedom and adventure.

Melissa says: "We always had this idea of sharing what we have here with Fergus with other children. It's great, our skills complement each other nicely. Nigel is very hands-on, he's a trained engineer. And with my background I'm able to bring an event together and entertain. We're able to share our knowledge with the children and their teachers."

This week the duo hosted children from Maplewood House in Bamber Bridge, which provides respite support for children with disabilities and their families.

Nigel has concreted a greenhouse for disabled access, fitted new glass throughout, replaced the roof, built toilets, created a sandy beach, dug out ponds and designed a vegetable garden.

The greenhouses provide indoor classroom facilities and the outdoor areas incorporate an amphibian pond, coniferous and deciduous woodland and a wildlife pond.

Each visit is tailor-made to suit the requirements of group, and the centre offers exclusivity and is open by appointment only.

Melissa says: "We enjoy every aspect of our jobs but it is particularly rewarding when we're welcoming children with special needs."

"The greenhouse environment provides them with endless sensory experiences.

"We always aim to be outdoors as much as possible, however we will be in

the greenhouses if it's a wild weather day.

"Everybody's visit is exclusive in a stimulating and natural environment."

Fergus enjoys being involved.

He spends quality time with Nigel learning about plants, and asking lots of questions, just like Nigel did with his father 45 years ago.

"As a result of diversification, the nursery can now continue to have a meaningful purpose and contribute to children's understanding and enjoyment of nature and the great outdoors."

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Liz Brear of Maplewood House shooting the ducks with Paul Heary and Kyle Campbell



Melissa and Nigel Peter with five-year-old Fergus



Anjuli Bainbridge and Joanne Culshaw, from Maplewood House, with Matthew Cookson on a treasure hunt



Nigel Peter doubles as the pirate during a treasure hunt