

Summary

- 160 acre working farm catering mainly for disadvantaged young people not in education, employment or training
- The farm was gifted to the Methodist Church by a private donation over 20 years ago. It is not run by the church but held in trust by them. The current director is Deacon Lorraine Brown
- The farm employs 14 paid staff (full-time and part time) and has 160 volunteers.

What is special about this care farm

The farm's size and long history make it stand out from other care farms. 21 years brings knowledge and experience among staff and volunteers, and confidence/trust among local authority clients in referring young people to the farm, explains Lorraine.

Another distinguishing characteristic, says Lorraine, is the strong sense of community that exists. "We are a community that has a passion for the farm, and work together as a community. This means several different client groups working alongside each other. People who on the street might not get along."

Looking ahead, the farm plans to further develop animal assisted learning, and has recently made an application to Children in Need to support this.



Target market

The main client group are 13-16 year olds (boys and girls) not attending school for various reasons (up to 18 attend per day). Lorraine summarises them as people who need extra help or support – people "having difficulties in life."

Also on the farm is a Pupil Referral Unit (30 attend per day) run by the local education authority, and two projects for adults with learning disabilities – one an organic gardening project, the other a co-operative that does silk screen printing (each has up to a dozen people per day).

The main referrers are education, social services, and youth offending teams.

The farm also caters for school trips (maximum one 72 seater bus per day), hosts 'team days' for corporate organisations, and is open to the public free of charge 365 days a year.

The bottom line

The farm makes a charge of £50 per day for each young person it looks after, which covers about half of the costs of working with them.

Other money comes from charities (the first large scale grant came from a local benefactor), voluntary donations and the farm's own fundraising activities – recent activities include a parachute jump and long-distance cycle ride.

The annual budget is around £550,000. "Finances are a difficulty," says Lorraine. "We rely on a lot of good will."

The Visitor Centre offers welcoming hospitality for visitors to the care farm.



In their own words

Motivation – Lorraine has a long background in nursing and adolescent development, gained in the NHS and Barnardos.

Approach – The farm uses fun and work based activities to encourage young people to participate, learn new skills and develop their potential. Programmes are tailored individually for each client – a combination of farm, vocational and life skills. Says Lorraine: “We are an intervention system: we help them get on track, to lead their lives safely.”

In addition to skill development, young people are given help as needed with: counselling, substance and alcohol misuse, and assistance with ‘moving on’ to college, work or their next step.

Benefits – When the young people arrive at the farm they are not generally in education, employment or training. However, a recent evaluation found that 82% went into these avenues on their departure. Most young people leave with Open College Network Qualifications (OCN), Duke of Edinburgh Awards or increased literacy, numeracy or IT skills.

We enable our guests to learn real skills that they can take into their future lives.

For more information

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Key challenges

Lorraine says there have been two main challenges for the Amelia Trust. As with many other care farms, funding is the main one. Says Lorraine: “You have got to stay 1-3 steps ahead of the funding programme – and keep informed of what is out there.”

The other challenge has been persuading referrers that it is worth sending young people, for the cost that the care farm charges. Part of the problem is the farm’s remoteness/distance for many of its clients, which imposes additional transport costs on the client, on top of the care farm’s own fees. Says Lorraine: “We are not easily accessible, so young people have to be transported, sometimes 50 miles each way. The taxi bill is sometimes higher than ours – hence the need for more evidence of outcomes and good practice.”

Tips for others

Don’t do care farming alone, draw on people who can support you

It can’t be done without a passion for it – it’s not a 9-5 job

Individual care farms need to be professional in what they do. They also need to develop a knowledge base and evidence-based practice – as does the overall care farming movement.



If you want to learn more about Care Farming UK please visit www.carefarminguk.org or email enquiries@carefarminguk.org