

Summary

- Butterfly Lodge was set up in 2005 by Ellie Goff, a former FE college lecturer. It really got going in 2007 and now employs three part-time members of staff, plus occasional, additional employees.
- The care farm works with a range of clients – there are no limits.
- There is a focus on giving clients opportunities to get formal qualifications, or units towards them.

What is special about this care farm

Ellie brings a wide mix of skills and experience to the care farm: her love of animals (she grew up on a mixed livestock farm), teaching experience (she was formerly a FE college lecturer) and knowledge of social care (her father is an accredited counsellor).



Involving all members of the community in conservation and animal care.

Target market

Butterfly Lodge caters for several different clients and age groups, but there are no limits. Most of the clients (16 per week) are 14-19 years old, and most have learning disabilities, social/emotional issues. They mostly come with their own care workers, but this can be provided where necessary.

The care farm offers a range of courses in equine and animal care, and land-based studies: National Proficiency Test Certificates at Entry Levels 2 and 3 (it is an outreach centre for College of West Anglia), NVQs 1 and 2, and its own, tailor-made, Independent Work Skills Activity Programme (which includes units recognised by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance). Says Ellie: "It is important for clients to feel that they can get acknowledgement and recognition for their work."

Ellie praises the good working relationship she had with one of her first clients, Autism Anglia, of whom she says, "They were really inspiring and really supportive of my vision... and they turned a blind eye to early developmental glitches."

The bottom line

Butterfly Lodge's funding is entirely from public sector organisations (schools, FE departments and social services) that pay £50/per day per client. It does not receive any funding from charities, but does get some sponsorship in kind from local businesses (eg donation of materials for buildings).



In their own words

Motivation – Like many farms once used to, Ellie’s parents regularly invited known teenagers that were struggling at school or at home to stay on their farm, to help out during busy times of year such as hay making. It was this experience of ‘social farming’ that gave Ellie the idea for what she wanted to do, she says, and the conviction that “farming can do more than just produce crops and animals.”

Approach – Butterfly Lodge’s overall ethos is, ‘Tell me and I’ll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I’ll understand.’ Says the care farm’s website: ‘This sums up our dedication to active learning and the engagement of students in meaningful and worthwhile tasks, regardless of their experience.’ “It’s about potential, and developing people’s independence and life skills,” adds Ellie.

Benefits – The benefits to clients, says Ellie, come from working with and being around animals. “Animals give unconditional love and response,” she says. “They do not judge people by what label clothes they are wearing, or their makeup or mood.” The farm’s Shetland pony, for example, always gives people a lick and is pleased to see them, and clients report that, whatever their mood when they arrive, they go home with a smile on their face.

“It’s about giving people the opportunity who are locked up within themselves and their immediate environment,” says Ellie. While working at Butterfly Lodge, she explains, people can have a ‘personality transplant’ – from having limited communications skills to being quite chatty and working alongside others; and from being unable to go to the shops to doing errands on the farm.

Key challenges

Ellie says the main challenge has been ‘getting to know the system.’ “It’s one thing working as a teacher,” she says, “but I didn’t have the links with the educational administrative hierarchy, and getting to know the health and social care systems was a very scary, big black hole.”

On top of this, she says none of the departments/organisations she spoke to talked to each other, and agencies from different parts of the county had totally different funding regimes – both of which required her to start from scratch several times over.

Another challenge has been all the paperwork that goes with the job. But being a former teacher made it relatively easy for Ellie to cope – which she says also helped her ‘talk the talk’ with funding agencies and commissioners.

Tips for others

Be sure of what you are trying to provide, is Ellie’s principal advice. “You can find yourself tangled up in a web of contracts and commitments, and being asked to do more and more for as little money as possible,” she says. “It’s important to be able to say ‘No’ when appropriate, rather than saying ‘Yes’ all the time.”



20 year old Sam Capps has been attending BLE for 2 years.

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For more information

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