

## Summary

- 30 acre livestock farm (including simmental cattle, sheep, goats, chickens and pigs), with horticulture and other features that can be used by members of the community.
- The main farm (run by Julie Plumley and her partner, James O'Brien) hosts the care farm project, Future Roots, a not for profit company run by Julie, and Keith Harrison, with the support of a few staff and volunteers.
- The care farm caters for young people who are challenged or disadvantaged, as well as providing opportunities for a few groups not able to access the countryside through their age, disability or opportunity.
- Julie has a background in mental health and social work. In 2007-08 she ran 'Farming 4 Life', a social enterprise that ran as a pilot for Future Roots, which she set up in 2008. Other staff are experienced youth workers.

## What is special about this care farm

All the care farm's programmes are designed around what people need – and the farm is adapted for this.

For example, both the small and large animals have been halter trained – even the cows – so that children can work with them. And the horticulture provides children with the chance to know how food is produced, and to feel what it is like to nurture something – they also love eating the tomatoes and peas from the greenhouse! The farm also has a river and small lake – everything is used.

Julie has a farming background and is convinced of what it can offer others. She and her team use the care farm to provide people with a better understanding of the countryside and greater self-awareness. Also, to help people enjoy themselves, and teach them practical skills and team-working. Says Julie: "They may not want to be a farmer, but they all learn employability and life skills that farmers have to have to survive."

At the time of writing, the care farm was about to start an enterprise for young people, 'Soups and Smoothies for Schools' – products that the children will grow, produce and sell themselves.

## Target market

The care farm's main target is young people who are challenged or disadvantaged in some way (around 50-80 attend each week).

It also takes anyone who is not able to come to a farm because of age, disability or opportunity. For example, it has made adaptations so that older people with dementia and Parkinson's disease can visit. And it hosts occasional group visits by people with mental health issues (1 group per month) and educational visits by pre- and primary school children (1 day per week during holidays and summer term). There are also after school clubs, holiday farm clubs, term-time NVQ1/enrichment lessons, and residential courses.

## The bottom line

After two years without any financial support, the care farm now attracts funding from three main sources: education grants, Social Services and more recently Natural England's Let Nature Feed Your Senses. The latter is a stepping-stone to securing HLS money for educational visits, and is available to a limited number of care farms.



*The lambing season is always a happy time at the farm.*



### **In their own words**

**Motivation** – Being brought up on a farm is one of Julie's motivations. She says: "Farming was such a fantastic life for me... when my dad retired I had this big hole in my heart."

But she also wanted to address something she witnessed as a social worker. "People were totally disconnected from the countryside and found it boring. Nobody had climbed a tree or walked through rivers, or experienced being hot, cold or tired – it wasn't just the children, it was whole families. Nobody teaches them about the countryside, farming, or anything – they stay on computers all day. I wanted them to experience what I was lucky enough to have, and give them the opportunity to see if they liked it."

**Approach** – Julie describes the care farm's approach as 'person-centered', ie flexible for whoever wants to come. She says: "We have developed programmes for those who are anxious, angry, scared, want to learn... whatever their level, age and ability, we cater for them."

Social work and youth work principles influence the care farm's approach – respecting people's differences, offering equal opportunities, and believing that everyone can learn in the right environment.

**Benefits** – The benefits of the care farm are evident from several different perspectives:

Parents of children with Asperger's have written to say things like: 'This is fantastic – I have seen my children happy for the first time', and 'All that they talk about is going back to the farm.'

Teachers attribute the positive changes in the young people's behaviour and attitude to the care farm

Young people say they enjoy coming, even if they did not look forward to it at the start. They have gained qualifications and talk of difference the care farm has made to them. Some return to visit, or say they will visit the countryside again.

### **For more information**

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Members of the wider community deliver training in rural crafts, and other farmers do demonstrations at their farms.

In Julie's view: "Most of the young people do not know what being part of a community is, or how to work together – unless they are sports minded... when the young people leave here they will have developed qualities and skills that they will need in work or at home – even basic skills like using a hammer safely, and not losing their temper. She also points out that the farm provides somewhere where a 15-year old stroppey lad can nurture an animal, ie express their gentle side without being made fun of.

### **Key challenges**

Julie says that in the beginning she took on all aspects of the care farm – everything from farmer, project co-ordinator and promoter to admin worker and cleaner. She says: "I wanted to do everything myself. It got so big so quickly that it was really tiring – and I had a full-time job initially." A key challenge has therefore been letting go – trusting other people to come in and do things, some of whom may have skills that she lacks.

Like other care farms, finance has also been a challenge. "The money side of things has been awful," says Julie. "A care farm was my dream for over 10 years, so we didn't want to wait any longer – we pushed the boat out and went ahead on our own, building up the farm and the project. We would have been better off if we had waited and looked for help from grants... Planning was not easy either – it took a year before we got permission to convert the barn."

### **Tips for others**

Don't rush in without first checking if any help is available, says Julie. In her view, the bureaucracy of grants puts people off, but there are lots of opportunities out there and people that will help – you just need to have time and patience.

She also recommends people consider doing the Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme (CEVAS), which she says can provide help in preparing farm visits and working with children and schools.

Finally, don't have all your eggs in one basket. Have your eyes open to new opportunities, and talk with other farmers so that you can work together.

If you want to learn more about Care Farming UK please visit [www.carefarminguk.org](http://www.carefarminguk.org) or email [enquiries@carefarminguk.org](mailto:enquiries@carefarminguk.org)