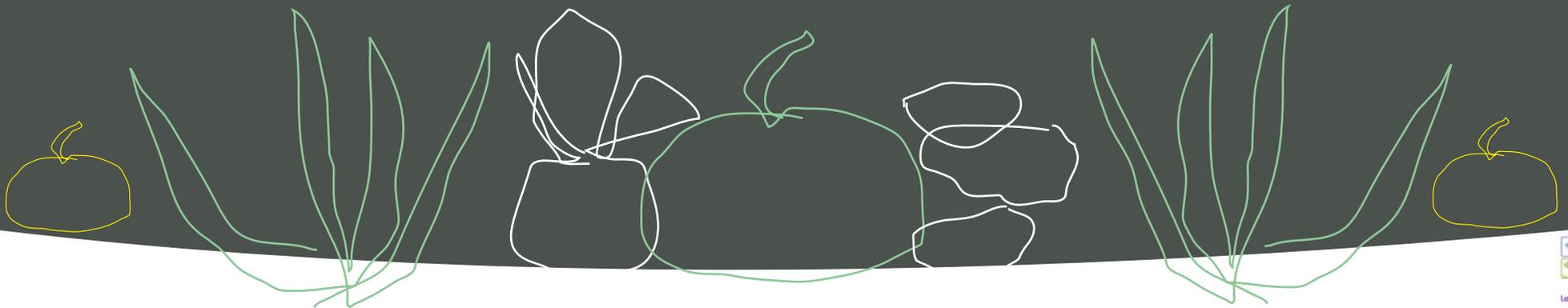


# Care Farming Case Studies



# Introduction

Care farms combine ‘care of the land with care of people’ (National Care Farming Initiative). Based on models developed in the Netherlands, a small but growing number of UK farmers are beginning to provide therapeutic and educational experiences for a wide range of vulnerable groups. The case studies in this document highlight care farms that are working with young people on the margins of our education system – those who have been excluded, those who are under-achieving or not attending, and those with various kinds of special educational needs. Based on interviews with the care farmers themselves, the case studies illustrate the wealth of care farming that is available to schools and the benefits it can bring for young people.

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## Care Farming Case Studies

**Participants** Some 25 young people (14-20 years) come to the farm each week for anything from a few hours up to three full days each week. They are referred individually by schools and statutory support agencies, and have a wide range of abilities and needs (special educational needs, learning difficulties and/or emotional and behavioural difficulties).

**Activities** Students get involved in the full range of farm activities – helping out with livestock, growing and harvesting vegetables, preparing and cooking food and maintaining farm buildings. There's a strong emphasis on social integration and life skills development through individualised programmes and flexible approaches. There are also opportunities to complete accredited courses such as Animal Care NVQ or various AQA Unit Awards.

"It's all about doing meaningful work in a nurturing environment."

Ellie Gosh, Owner  
Butterfly Lodge

**Benefits** Through carrying out meaningful practical tasks, students start to develop valuable new skills (cooking, communicating) along with an ability to set goals and boundaries. Working in groups with very different kinds of learners makes them more aware of themselves and others. To quote from the reflections of a 16 year old female student who came to Butterfly Lodge after being placed in emergency housing:

*"I love working with the animals, and the staff at Butterfly Lodge are great – they understand what everyone is going through and if people go there in a bad mood then they go home with a smile on their face. You get to meet new people and you get to work with animals and people you've never worked with before... like people with Autism and Down's Syndrome."*

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## Butterfly Lodge

### Nurturing individuals in the farm environment

Butterfly Lodge is a mixed livestock farm and dairy unit near Colchester in Essex. As a care farm, it seeks to be 'a unique training centre for the development of practical knowledge and understanding of animal husbandry and countryside management'.

Its educational work began in 2005 when Ellie Goff, the farm owner and qualified teacher, started hosting a student from a nearby residential unit for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. With time the number and range of clients have increased and Butterfly Lodge is now offering a range of individualised courses and qualifications.

## Case Study



## Care Farming Case Studies

**Participants** Each week at least three classes of 6-16 year olds from Severndale School come to the farm to do various growing and farm-based activities. Links with the school have deepened over time, with the aim that every child in the school will come at least twice during the year. Tickwood and Severndale now offer a City and Guilds in Horticulture for students who have enjoyed their experiences at Tickwood and new work is developing around specific curriculum subjects (maths, history, geography, art).

**Activities** Helped by having school rooms and wheelchair accessible paths through the woods, gardens and ponds, virtually all of the farm's activities are now available to Severndale students. Working in the walled garden is a key focus, with students doing everything from preparing the ground to helping seeds germinate, weeding and watering, harvesting and finally selling the produce at a local farmer's market. The environment at Tickwood also provides opportunities for many other experiences such as nature trails, lambing, crayfishing, fossil hunting, coppicing, hedging and building open fires.

"It's about children finding something that 'turns their light on'."

Edward & Anna Dugdale,  
Owners Tickwood Farm

**Benefits** Teachers and parents have commented on the changes they have seen in the students working at Tickwood – less reserved, happier and more attentive. Individuals who started out very quiet and seemingly unmotivated become, after a few sessions, much more chatty and willing to get involved practically. Not only are they outside and using their hands, but they're also having completely new experiences and taking ownership of processes from start to finish.

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## Tickwood Farm

### A sanctuary for children with learning difficulties

Tickwood is a 400 acre hill farm in Shropshire with pedigree Hereford cows and Buehler sheep, a walled garden and over 250 acres of woodlands. As a care farm, Tickwood's goal is to provide 'a sanctuary where children and adults can find and be themselves'. In particular, they want to 'create a haven for children with learning difficulties'.

Since 2005, Edward and Anna Dugdale have been developing a range of care farming activities: coppicing for adults with various needs; woodland management for prolific offenders; and forest school for primary/pre-school children. They have also established strong links with Severndale School, a local special school for children with profound, severe or moderate learning difficulties.

Case Study



## Care Farming Case Studies

**Participants** Students come to Top Barn usually one day per week for one or two years. Referred by their local authority or school/ PRU, these are young people who cannot cope with the mainstream curriculum and often have very challenging behaviour and disturbed backgrounds. Activities at the farm are carried out in small groups of 3-6 students.

**Activities** Heavier building projects have been found to work particularly well with Top Barn trainees. For example laying concrete paths, constructing new wooden shelters, making green-wood chairs and coppicing and pruning. Students also help with ongoing work on the farm (livestock feeding, tree planting, lambing etc.) and spend time growing, harvesting and cooking food to eat and sell through the farm shop. From time to time, students will also go off-site in order to help with work on other local care farms.

“Through practical projects students quickly see what they can achieve.”

Noelle Wilson, co-founder  
Top Barn Farm Training

**Benefits** Tutors have seen real improvements in students’ interactions with peers and adults during their time at Top Barn. There have been powerful cases of dramatic turn arounds in responses to peers and siblings. As Noelle Wilson explains: “Their practical achievements help them to re-shape their behaviour and self perceptions.” Some learners clearly begin to think about what they might like to do in the future and there are several examples of individuals who have gone on to successfully complete agricultural college courses.

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## Top Barn Farm

### Practical training in a therapeutic environment

Top Barn Farm is a 300 hectare mixed farm on the banks of the River Severn in Worcestershire. Its vision is to be a therapeutic and supportive environment for young people with disabilities and learning difficulties.

The care farming work began in 1999 when Noelle Wilson, an agricultural college tutor, and the farm owner, David Harper, sat down and planned the development of a unique training centre for rural skills. Top Barn Training now provides training, education and therapeutic opportunities for young people from many local schools, colleges and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

Case Study



## Care Farming Case Studies

**Participants** Each year 32 groups of up to 12 secondary school students come to live and work on the farm for 5 days at a time. They come from schools in London and other cities, and are selected because of their low self esteem, challenging behaviour, difficult relations with peers and poor attendance.

**Activities** Students experience a mixture of practical farm activities and therapeutic personal development, all within a warm family atmosphere. Feeding animals, mucking out, moving stock and tending vegetables happens alongside group discussions, individual psychotherapy and art, music and drama sessions. For all of these activities, there is a strong emphasis on success and positive praise.

"Students have the chance to recreate themselves."

Jamie Feilden  
CEO

## Jamie's Farm

### Activity and therapy for vulnerable teenagers

Jamie's Farm is a traditional mixed working farm near to the city of Bath that welcomes groups of inner-city students who are at risk of social exclusion. Its mission is 'to support the development of vulnerable young people by providing opportunities for achievement, wellbeing and sustainable change in an agricultural setting'.

It was set up in 2008 by Jamie Feilden in response to his experiences of teaching in a south London secondary school. Struck by the students' poor behaviour and lack of access to countryside and physical activity, he started taking small groups to visit his family farm near Bath. The success of these early visits provided the impetus for the establishment of Jamie's Farm as it is today.

## Case Study

**Benefits** The progress of all young people who visit the farm is tracked through staff and student evaluations before, during and after the Jamie's Farm experience. Feedback on visits to date has highlighted important benefits for individuals and schools: increased motivation to learn, improved relationships with staff and reduced levels of truancy and exclusion. The testimonial below from a female Year 10 student is illustrative of the kinds of positive impacts that have been reported:

*"From the minute I left your home my life started. I now have a whole new outlook on life and found the whole experience uplifting. I am so proud of myself for everything I did on the trip. I have learnt to share my problems and not let them stress me out."*

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## Care Farming Case Studies

**Participants** Up to thirty 14-16 year olds come to Highfields for one to three days per week. These are students (often boys) who have been excluded or who are at risk of exclusion. They may have been bullied, been bullies themselves, have difficult home lives and/or learning difficulties. Coordinated by the local authority, most students stay at Highfields for at least three months and some for a full two years.

**Activities** The students help out with all aspects of the farm's work – looking after the hens and cleaning the chicken sheds, collecting, counting and packing eggs, planting vegetables and harvesting crops, checking the sheep and maintaining fences/machinery, making hanging baskets and working in the farm shop. The varied activities enable tasks to be matched to students' interests and allow learners to work towards Open College Network qualifications.

"We need more people like Roger who are willing to give people second chances."

Chante Smith  
ex-young offender

# Highfields Happy Hens

## From angry hands to gentle hands

Highfields Happy Hens is a south Derbyshire poultry farm with 24,000 free range hens and a small market garden and open farm/animal area. As a Christian farming enterprise, though, its most important production process is turning around the lives of troubled young people.

Highfields was started in the 1980s by Roger and Beryl Hosking, who were running an open home for homeless youngsters on their farm and wanted something positive for them to do. It is now a recognised alternative education provider with a well-established reputation for keeping young people out of trouble and within education.

## Case Study

**Benefits** All of the activities have educational dimensions with participants learning to read and write, count, handle money and customers, and show respect for the animals, for other people and for themselves. As Roger Hoskins explained, simple practical tasks can have powerful effects:

*"We have children who can't read or write and may take out their frustrations on the eggs we produce. But with perseverance we see angry hands become gentle hands, collecting and, eventually, learning to count the eggs they have gathered".*

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**W** www.highfieldshappyhens.co.uk



## Care Farming Case Studies

**Participants** Small numbers (8-12 typically) of 14-16 year old boys and girls come to Carlshead between one and five days per week. They are referred by the local authority following exclusion from school, and usually have a mixture of learning and/or behavioural difficulties and special educational needs. Courses at the farm last between one and two years which is essential as “it takes these students time to settle in and sort out the pecking order before they can start to achieve”.

**Activities** Students get the chance to do a whole range of practical activities: animal care, riding and training horses, servicing and driving tractors, art, photography, web design, cooking, woodworking, horticulture and coarse fishing. All of these activities are part of courses accredited through the Open College Network (Level 1 or 2). There is a strong emphasis on Carlshead being a working environment and activities being for personal development.

“We’re reconnecting students with what’s important – nature, food and working together.”

Gareth Gaunt,  
Carlshead Farm Manager

**Benefits** The focus early on is on helping students to engage and have fun, with skills development and thinking about future directions coming later. The most significant benefits come through students achieving something for the first time in their lives and finding something that they really enjoy. As Brian Firth, head of Education Other Than at School for the local authority, described: “What they get is that they start to achieve for the first time [...] and it makes them look at the world differently.” On leaving, many students go on to further education courses connected to activities and interests they’ve discovered at Carlshead.

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## Carlshead Farm

### Re-engaging teenagers through practical training

Carlshead is an alternative educational training project, based on a 500-acre mixed farm in the Lower Wharfedale Valley, near Wetherby in Yorkshire. It provides an educational last resort for teenagers who have been excluded from schools in and around Leeds.

Started in 2004, Carlshead’s care farming is motivated by a combination of economic realities and social needs. As Gareth Gaunt, the Farm Manager, explained: “Firstly, it’s about getting farms back on their feet and giving them a good income. Secondly, it’s about trying to solve some of the problems that we have in this country through other methods”.

Case Study



## Care Farming Case Studies

**Participants** Twenty 14–16 year olds on Solutions 4, a local-authority-funded programme, come to the wood for five days per week for two years. All these students have been excluded from school – usually for behavioural issues – and some also have learning difficulties.

Hill Holt also runs an Entry to Employment (E2E) programme for a similar number of young people aged 16 to 18. The participants are referred by Connexions and often have a history of homelessness, school exclusion, offending and mental health.

**Activities** The woodland environment is used for a wide range of real-life practical learning activities. Typically students might be helping to construct the on-site eco-village, making metal ornaments and tools at the forge or growing vegetables in the organic garden.

“Somehow we have forgotten that there are people who are more content to work outdoors.”

Nigel Lowthrop,  
Owner Hill Holt Wood

**Benefits** Learners benefit from: staff who can draw on rich life experiences and skills to support them; real activities where the onus is on student ownership of the process rather than perfect end products; and an environment where there is space to spread out from others if people are feeling stressed or angry. Through a mixture of outdoor and classroom-based learning, students develop not only practical countryside skills (traditional woodcraft, horticulture) but also process skills (team work, communication) and core skills (reading, writing, mathematics and ICT). As noted by Hill Holt’s most recent OFSTED inspection report:

*“The standard of learners’ practical work, as well as development of skills, is exceptionally high. [...] Learners gain appropriate qualifications and find employment in the local community”*

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## Hill Holt Wood

### Vocational learning in a beautiful woodland

Hill Holt Wood is a small (34 acres) deciduous woodland on the border of Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire. Run as a social enterprise, Hill Holt is a living wood that provides vocational training for excluded, at risk or unemployed young people.

Owned by Karen and Nigel Lowthrop, Hill Holt employs 21 people working on a variety of social and educational activities and is used extensively by the local community. Key to all of its work is ‘proving the value of ancient woodland in the 21st century’ in terms of the development of young people, the generation of valuable products and the creation of sustainable living spaces and wildlife habitats.

Case Study



## Care Farming Case Studies

**Participants** The 'Hands-On Project' (a partnership with Wellgate Community Farm) consists of two main programmes. The 'Re-engagement' programme aims to re-engage young people who are not in education, employment or training. It caters for 27 young people who, for 36 weeks, spend one day per week at Lambourne End and Wellgate Farm. Meanwhile, the 'Raising Attainment' programme focuses on young people who are still in the school system but are not achieving to their potential. Currently this involves 24 Year 10 and 11 students who come to the centre from various schools one day per week for two years.

**Activities** The 'Re-engagement' students get involved in a wealth of activities – bushcraft, mountain biking, farm maintenance, estate management, animal husbandry – to achieve qualifications such as the City and Guilds' Profile of Achievement. Those on the 'Raising Attainment' course use the outdoor classroom for practical learning, achieve their BTEC First Certificate/Diploma in Animal Care and develop team work and confidence.

"It's a completely different style of learning - the only time they have to sit down is at break and lunch!"

Rob Gayler  
Chief Executive

**Benefits** The key for both groups is raising their self-esteem and confidence. What helps to achieve this is the combination of active learning, often in teams, and practical tasks that have a real purpose, such as feeding animals. Also very significant is the chance to become part of something and develop a sense of belonging. Many of the students get involved in volunteering at the centre in their holidays.

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## Lambourne End Centre

### Raising self esteem in the outdoor classroom

Lambourne End Centre for Outdoor Learning near Chigwell in Essex offers a combination of outdoor adventure, farm work and environmental conservation. A wide range of school and community groups use the centre, but two longer-term projects focus on young people who are not engaged in any education/training or who are in education but are under-achieving.

Started on the site of an original small holding that was left in 1926 for outdoor recreation and camping, it now provides outdoor learning opportunities for young people from east and north London, Essex and Hertfordshire.

Case Study