

Harnessing radical thinking and some lambs, Jamie Feilden set about changing the way disadvantaged children are taught. He tells Ruth Lawrence about how Jamie's Farm was born and where they are today



# BE THE *Change*

**S**ocial and academic exclusion are the reality for many young people today. As a result those children are finding it difficult to discover their potential as adults and their wellbeing and employability suffer. So how can we stop this? Could farming be the answer?

Back in 2005, Jamie Feilden was teaching in a Croydon comprehensive; shocked by the lack of engagement he was witnessing, he decided to bring some lambs from his farm in Wiltshire into the school for pupils to look after.

It immediately became clear that the children with the greatest social difficulties benefited most from the sense of responsibility required in nurturing these young animals. He decided, along with his mother, Tish, who had 30 years of experience as a UKCP Registered Psychotherapist, to develop a method using farming, family and therapy to invite children to participate in during weeklong visits to the family home.

They gave the youngsters real jobs with real purpose, which, when combined with therapy and a loving framework of support, sparked

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powerful, long reaching results. Once thirty five pilot weeks had proved how successful their approach was, they realised they needed a farm converted specifically for purpose. The first 'Jamie's Farm' was launched near Bath in 2009 and remains the charity's HQ; ten years later there are four rural farms and a city farm in Waterloo, the most recent, here in Sussex, sits in





There will be practical conversations about how to succeed after they return; most of the young people are from urban areas and this is usually the first time they have experienced tending for animals in a rural environment. After their transformative time at the farm they are supported in re-engaging in their school and community with the help of their teachers. Their parents are sent a letter outlining

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beautiful countryside near Lewes.

I met Jamie at Allington Farm, a classic red brick Sussex house which oozes homeliness and hospitality, nestled among fields beneath the nearby rolling South Downs. Jamie explained how visiting children will be given responsible tasks on the 200 acre farm which will boost their self-esteem and, when combined with therapy and family life, will enable them to take what they have experienced back to their own lives across the south coast, Kent and South London.

their achievements and six weeks later, there is a review of how changes are being sustained. The results speak for themselves: after six months, 60% of the youngsters are no longer at risk of exclusion and 67% report improved self-esteem as a result of their stay at Jamie's Farm.

Allington Farm is a real working farm, stocked with 300 ewes, cows, goats, pigs and chickens for the youngsters to engage with. Eventually there will also be horses for equine therapy. The farm will be largely self

sufficient, growing its own food and raising meat and milk from its own herds, and will employ five full time and two part time staff.

Jamie's Farm has been named 2019 Charity of the Year for the South of England Agricultural Society and Jamie admits he has been overwhelmed by the positive response and welcome the team have had from the people of Sussex since putting down roots here. Setting up a concern as ambitious and far reaching as this needs funds and Jamie outlined the many practical requirements the farm will be seeking from people who would be able to

help. The farm still needs garden tools, pots, seeds and wheelbarrows, as well as regular volunteers to help create a garden brimming with herbs and vegetables for the children to harvest and cook. Monthly giving will support the costs of running visits here whilst their immediate need is raising funds towards a minibus.

I visited the farm when there was a group of young ‘ambassadors’ staying. These are children and young adults who have spent time at the other farms and developed in confidence to the point where they were helping to launch this project. I spoke to sixteen-year-old Georgie (which incidentally means ‘farmer’), a young man from London brimming with newly discovered potential, now keen to work

in farming or start his own business. He told me the Jamie’s Farm Ambassador programme has helped him work out that he enjoys being a leader as it gives him more responsibility and his suggestions are listened to. He explained how “everyone is very open, warm and loving here; you can be who you want to be and not be scrutinised which gives me the potential to be myself.” He appreciated the fact that “people listen to you like family and having one to one attention is a real bonus.” During his times on the farms Georgie told me he had come to discover that, “It’s easier to be myself after being here; I used to be antisocial and this has helped me come out of my shell and express how I feel.” He felt the experience has also given him

“respect for the food on my plate because you learn how much effort it takes to rear lamb.” He mentioned how living at the farm helped him create a second family which he wants to make as good as it can be.

Hearing how a young person like Georgie has benefited so much from



simply being listened to, being given responsibility and having a sense of cohesive interaction with others was humbling; testimonials like his are the proof that Jamie’s Farms are working brilliantly at what they set out to do. These farms are transforming young lives and the long term effects of their work are valuable beyond measure. Allington Farm will become a launch pad for the wellbeing of youngsters across the region to take part in creating a better society and a brighter future. ●

[www.jamiesfarm.org.uk](http://www.jamiesfarm.org.uk)

