
CHARITY BOX: JAMIE'S FARM

What is Jamie's Farm? It's best explained like this: founder Jamie Feilden was a teacher in Croydon. One day he took two lambs to his school, giving the pupils the responsibility of looking after them. It had a big positive impact on the atmosphere in



the playground. So he decided to take a group of his pupils to his smallholding in Wiltshire. Here they were immersed in agricultural life and given opportunities to reflect on challenges back home and in school that may be affecting their behaviour. With his mum Tish, a trained psychotherapist, they developed the founding principles for a five-day residential, built around 'farming, family & therapy'. 2009 saw the launch of Jamie's Farm Bath, followed by Hereford in 2015, Monmouth in 2018, and now this one in Lewes. Since we started, 6000-plus young people have benefitted; Lewes will cater for 450-plus a year.

What sort of farm is it? Jamie's Lewes [situated between Plumpton and Cooksbridge] was, until last year, largely an arable farm, but we've taken it back to grazing. It's a fully working farm, with 150 ewes (currently lambing), four pigs, 13 piglets, a herd of Aberdeen Angus cattle, five goats and 30 chickens.

And you get the kids to do all the work?

They do a lot of it, under the supervision of Eddie, the Farm Manager. There's a daily round of feeding, and cleaning out, and animal care. And there are also more demanding jobs. Last week a

group of pupils arrived on Monday at 2pm, and within an hour, one had delivered a lamb!

What sort of children come to the farm?

The pupils, aged 11-16, come for the week in groups of twelve, along with their teachers. Each group of pupils comes from the same school. They are chosen

due to poor mental well-being and self-esteem, or poor behaviour and engagement, which often manifests itself as low attendance or attainment. Our job is to make them realise that, by completing real jobs with tangible outcomes, and by getting involved with group and one-to-one reflective sessions, they can develop positive patterns to carry back into their daily lives. It works!

I guess you have to be strict... We set boundaries. For example, they have no phones while they are here and they are put on a virtually no-sugar diet. They soon adapt, because we keep them busy! Beyond the farm work there is cooking to do, communal meal-times, a daily walk, the reflective sessions, woodcrafts and horticulture. There is no TV.

Can you tell how much the kids benefit? We have follow-up visits to the schools afterwards. Here's a statistic we're very proud of: 58% of those who were at risk of exclusion when they visited the farm were, six months later, no longer at risk. It's incredible to see the change in these kids. *Alex Leith interviewed Education Manager Toby Meanwell*

If you would like to be a volunteer at Jamie's Farm, check out jamiesfarm.org.uk