



Jamie's Farm

Ian Waller visits a wonderful working farm near Bath that helps children dealing with challenges in their school and homelife

For 13 year old Hope, it was the time with the horses that had made the greatest impact. "They're beautiful and just amazing to be with," she said, as a smile beamed across her face. "They respond to how you're feeling, so if you're anxious, they're anxious too, and this means you have to be relaxed and calm with them. It's a great feeling that you can then take with you for the rest of the day."

Hope was the one of a group of 12 Year 13 children from a school in North London spending five days at Jamie's Farm in Box, near Bath, a working farm which also helps vulnerable children struggling at school or at home to find ways to cope.

Throughout their week at the farm, the children, their teachers and the team at Jamie's Farm work together across four core themes of farming, family, therapy and legacy to help them engage more both within their educational settings, and their personal and families lives outside.

"During their time with us, the children shed their negative labels, which see them marked down as troublesome, difficult or

challenging, to see themselves in a new light," said Molly, one of the team at Jamie's Farm.

"For most of these children, Jamie's is the first time they've been out of London, visited the countryside, seen a live chicken and actually worked with animals."

Molly explained that Jamie's Farm was started back in 2009 when Jamie Fielden was working as a teacher in Croydon and realised that some children were really struggling to cope in mainstream education.

Having been raised on a farm, he brought lambs into the school and saw that the children immediately came alive and wanted to take part in a nurturing role.

He then combined this with his mum's expertise from 30 years as a psychotherapist by taking children back to the family farm in Wiltshire to see the impact it would have on the children. This led to Jamie and his mum Tish buying the first Jamie's Farm in 2009 just outside of Bath, which has now grown to a nationally significant charity, running four residential farms and one city farm.

Now the farms receive requests for pupil visits from schools and organisations right across England, with the cost of the visits covered partly by the school and the rest by Jamie's Farm themselves.

Once they arrive at the farm, the children are asked to hand over all mobile phones and snack foods to enable them to fully engage in farm life. To help out, the teachers and staff taking part all also asked not to use their phones - each visit is very much about being a team, with everyone asked to get involved.

"There are real jobs that need doing on the farm, like moving a herd of cows and shepherding the pigs," explains Molly. "The children - and their teachers are involved with every part of it. This is a great way to help children build





enjoy the fun side of farm life, with evenings playing games around the fire, long walks, a projector for movie night, homemade pizzas cooked outside and even swimming in the river during the summer.

"Early on the children might find it a struggle to sleep, but as the week goes by it gets better," said Molly. "Children can call home if they need to or there's a particular concern. It's all about compassion and understanding."

Once the visit comes to an end, a report is sent back to the children's school for all of the teachers to appreciate the work of what has taken place. "Six weeks after the visit we go back to the schools with a certificate and postcard to remind the children of everything that they achieved," added Molly. "We also keep in touch, with some of the children returning and the farm becoming a safe place."

Jamie's Farm is a gem of a place, a wonderful venue for children to rediscover what makes them special and to become part of a community. Chatting with some of the children, it's just great to see how they deal with the new challenges they encounter and hear how positive they have found the whole experience. ■



self esteem, confidence, self belief, while also having a respite from home and school. 40% of the young people have to deal with some level of depression and just to be here and to handle the challenges is a huge achievement for them.

"It also allows the children to see what they are capable of – if you can clean out the pigs at eight in the morning, you can do anything."

"It's during the walks with the cows or perhaps when baking a cake, that the therapeutic one-to-one sessions can take place, with the feedback used to help the children once they return to school.

Each day, the children are asked how they feel 1-10, as well as to give a shout out to another member of the group. "This style of meeting is something that can be taken back to the schools and used in their every day schedules," said Molly.

In the months leading up to his visit to Jamie's Farm, 13 year old Abid had almost constantly worn his Covid mask as a way to avoid communicating with his classmates and teachers, an outward sign of the anxiety he felt on a daily



basis. Within two days of being at the farm, the mask had gone and he was enjoying the process of becoming part of the group and the activities on offer.

For Abid, the stand out moment had been herding 150 sheep for three miles along the local lanes. "It's been exciting and fun, and while it can be hesitant to try a new lifestyle, we all did it. It wasn't all easy – I wasn't good in the kitchen but helped to make a curry and it was a good experience.

"Over the week, we're living, eating and cooking together the whole time, which means a lot of compromise. There will always be conflict but we learn to work together and care for each other."

Alongside the work, there's plenty of opportunities for the children to

To find out more about Jamie's Farm, go to jamiesfarm.org.uk

Larkhall Butchers

Meat and produce from Jamie's Farm is supplied to shops across the Bath region, including Larkhall Butchers in Bath. "We have worked with Jamie and the team since 2016," said Peter Milton from Larkhall Butchers. "The farm, its ethics and support network it provides to children is just incredible. The fact that they are a few miles from our shop and produce some of the finest produce is a bonus!"

larkhallbutchers.co.uk