



*It's amazing... It is hard work and it is demanding and they are out of their comfort zone, but you can see them change as they go on. :*

# Fresh fields for rural lessons

Vulnerable children are benefiting from hands-on learning down on the farm. Sally Clifford went along to find out more about giving young people transferable skills for life. Pictures by Simon Hulme

**M**EATBALL making and mural painting may not be skills you associate with learning on the land. Cooking and crafts are among a range of hands-on activities equipping young people with transferable skills for life. For 14-year-old Charlie, who comes from a farming background, working hard on the land and being out in the fresh air is familiar territory – unlike the kitchen where, today, he is learning how to prepare a meal. Charlie's skill is walling – handling stones to help build the dry stone boundaries familiar in the landscapes around Settle, and Skipton where we meet, is in contrast to the mince and onions he is manipulating into balls on the kitchen table. The meat used in today's shared meal Char-

lie, along with his peers, are helping to prepare is sourced from the local butchers, demonstrating the importance of shopping local and reducing those all important food miles. Respecting and supporting the environment, and nurturing and caring for the animals and habitat within, are among the important lessons Charlie and his peers are learning as they take one day a week out of the classroom at Settle College for a six weeks hands-on learning experience down on Jamie's Farm. Launched in Bath in 2009, this national charity combines 'Farming, Family and Therapy' for children and teenagers who might otherwise be at risk of social or academic exclusion at school through its five day residential programme. Operating from six farms around the country, Skipton is the latest location to benefit from the programme.

Working alongside his peers who are busy prepping lunch and stirring tomato sauce on the hob, Charlie talks about some of the benefits the experience brings. "Working and being out and seeing new people," he says. Catherine Witt, a sessional worker at Jamie's Farm, Skipton, challenges the young people to work out how much pasta will be needed for lunch. Mathematics and reasoning – but not as you know it. The retired social worker discovered the project through her niece. "It's amazing. It is the opportunities that the children have out of mainstream education and in an environment which is incredibly healing and supportive. It is hard work and it is demanding and they are out of their comfort zone, but you can see them change as they go on. They become more

**PASTURES NEW:** Clockwise from left, husband and wife team Mark and Emily Carnie and baby Harvey at Jamie's Farm with with Elliot and Josh; Catherine Witt helps Charlie in the kitchen; Lexii and Dan paint a mural; and Jamie's Farm co-founder and CEO Jamie Feilden.

confident learning new skills. I haven't seen any young people not enjoy it. It's phenomenal." Working in small groups enables staff to get to know the young people and encourages teamwork. "It is a very wholesome, caring and kind environment and it teaches people about farming and how important it is. The regenerative farming at Jamie's Farm is really important. It teaches adults and children alike the importance of sustainability and the environment." Beekeeper Catherine is also encouraged by the planting of hedgerows and wildflowers on the farm – it's all about laying down roots for the future. Run by husband and wife, Mark and Emily Carnie who re-located to Yorkshire from Hereford with their young family, Jamie's Farm, Skipton, welcomes primary and secondary school pupils from across Yorkshire, who are

selected to spend a day a week for six weeks undertaking tasks around the 245 acre farm. Since opening last year, 264 young people have benefited from day visits at Skipton where there are plans in place to expand the young people's experience by converting some of the buildings on site to offer residential. Caring for the animals, Highland cows, a suckler herd, North Country Mules and gimmer lambs, pigs and chickens, building walls, chopping wood and forestry are among the tasks they undertake, during their time on the farm, with the support of staff. Digging out thistles along the hedge line to prevent it spreading, and levelling out mulch are some of the outside jobs keeping 12-year-old Josh and 11-year-old Elliott busy. It's hard work but according to the boys it's also good fun. It also demonstrates how effective this project is at encouraging



teamwork within a safe and supportive environment.

In the barn, 13-year-old Lexii paints a chicken on the mural she is working on with her fellow peers. Earlier, Lexii and her peers had been catching chickens and feeding pigs.

Of course, it's not all work and no play. Long walks and hikes give the young people the chance to explore the surrounding landscape without distractions.

Amanda Jennings, Head of Years nine and 10 at Settle College, explains: "The phones are taken off them before they leave school and put in a secure place so they don't have the distraction which was unpopular in the first week but they are getting used to it now. It has been a brilliant experience." Says Mark: "Phones are all encompassing, they take over your life, unless you are careful, but they haven't got that to distract them." The digital detox is among a range of well-being benefits this experience brings.

Charlotte Watson, teaching assistant at Settle College, says: "A lot of them are quite shy at school. They are coming out of their shells, getting involved and it is great for their confidence.

"They are learning things they will take away for life and I think that is a real benefit for them. We always say we don't set them up to fail. We give them jobs they may feel they cannot do, but we know they can. We give them a real sense of purpose, that is why we have a commercial farm, we are not just going to stroke guinea pigs, you are coming to a farm and helping to look after the animals. We have 400 sheep here and lambs, and also a small herd of Blue-Greys and Highland cattle plus calves and we also bed and breakfast cattle – we have up to 100 extra cattle in the sheds which is a source of income – but it gives these young people real purposeful jobs, helping each other and it helps



**HOME GROUND:** Left, Mark and Emily Carnie on Jamie's Farm at Skipton; below, Elliot and Josh at work on the farm. Mark Carnie says: 'It's incredibly rewarding. It brings all the things I enjoy in life together in a beautiful environment.'



other farmers out who are struggling with space and food," says Mark, for whom farming comes naturally having grown up on the family farm, a commercial farm near Bath with 1,500 sheep, run by his father.

Farming introduced Mark to Jamie's Farm co-founder and CEO, Jamie Feilden. Jamie's idea to take farming into school came when he introduced three sheep into a pen in the playground to engage pupils by encouraging them to care for the animals while teaching at a comprehensive in Croydon. After seeing the transformative effects, Jamie and his mother, Tish, a psychotherapist, began a trial in 2005 inviting teenagers to the family's smallholding near Bath.

The success led to the launch of the Jamie's Farm charity in 2009 on a 60-acre farm in Bath. In 2020 Jamie won the Outstanding Contribution to British Agriculture at the British Farming Awards. In the same year Tish published her first book, 'Creating Change for Vulnerable Teens' with a foreword written by Jonathan Dimbleby. Her Majesty The Queen, is one of the charity's Patrons. Since the original farm set up, more than 14,500 young people have benefitted from their experience at Jamie's Farm. Results show that 64 per cent of young people with concerning school attendances are no longer of concern six months after visiting one of the charity's farms.

"Farming has so many different dynamics and elements and can support them and help them achieve," says Mark.

"It's incredibly rewarding. It brings all the things I enjoy in life together in a beautiful environment and allows everyone to flourish, the young people, members of staff and myself."

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