

Using the Care Farming code

Support for care farmers

Key facts

Special needs teacher Jo Dudek wanted to help young people by sharing her love of outdoor learning, animals and wildlife.

Starting a care farm was both rewarding and challenging, but Jo found support in Social Farms & Garden's care farming Code of Practice.

The Fields and farms story

Taking a brave step, Jo left her teaching job and volunteered at a local farm to bring her outdoor learning idea to life.

"Having always had an interest in farming and knowing the benefits of being outside and with animals, I decided to gain some experience," said Jo.

"I found a local farm willing to let me help out and the fantastic farmer and his wife allowed me to be fully immersed. I did everything from driving the JCB, giving basic medication, feeding, bedding down and shearing sheep."

With this new knowledge behind her, Jo became more determined than ever to share the benefits of being outdoors with the young people she had been teaching.

"I loved every minute and knew that I needed to combine it with my passion for supporting, nurturing and teaching children and young people with additional needs. I needed to make it my full-time job."



Jo founded **Fields and Farms**, an Alternative Education provision for children and young people with additional needs aged between 11-18 and young adults aged 18-25.

Challenges and achievements

Starting Fields and Farms brought together Jo's love of outdoor learning with her expertise as a special needs teacher, but like any new business, it was a challenge.

Jo explained: "It took a lot of hard work to get the provision off the ground. I was offered a small paddock to rent at the same farm that I volunteered on. I quickly put in for planning permission for a cabin and toilet facilities, and then had to sit and wait and get stuck into the paperwork side."

As Fields and Farms came to life, Jo discovered the care farming Code of Practice, a clear set of guidelines designed to meet the requirements of commissioners, referral agencies and service users.

As Jo began to work towards achieving the Code, she realised how useful it was for the business.

“The Code of Practice was such a great tool,” said Jo. The layout is easy to use and the different sections mean you can work on one area of the business at a time without it being too overwhelming.

“The Code gave me the structure and rigour I needed to ensure I had thought about everything. There was definitely more to consider than I originally thought!”

Jo also undertook **CEVAS training - the ‘Therapeutic route’** - which worked well alongside the Code. Jo said: “It gave me plenty of information and it was great to network with other care farmers. The course highlighted the Code of Practice and the support was excellent. Feedback was clear and constructive, and email communication was quick and helpful too.”

Now Jo’s dream is a reality, and Fields and Farms fulfils an important role in her Leicestershire community. Children and young people take part in activities such as animal care, horticulture, agriculture and art and design, depending on their individual interests and needs.

Being awarded the Code of Practice has helped Fields and Farms on the road to success. “It has taken a while, but we now have plenty on the paddock to keep everyone busy,” said Jo.



“Once I had been awarded the Code of Practice, I definitely had more confidence in my business and how we work. This was great when meeting new schools and clients.”

More information

Growing Care Farming is part of the Government’s Children & Nature programme and is delivered by Social Farms & Gardens, in partnership with Thrive.

GCF will transform the scale of the care farming sector across England through the provision of advocacy, training and resources to create more opportunities for children and adults with a defined need to benefit from the bespoke health, care and educational services provided on care farms.

See www.farmgarden.org.uk/GCF for more details.

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