

# Potsford Farm

## Suffolk

### Key facts

A diverse and busy care farm, Potsford employs more than 30 staff and works with around 25 clients per day.

The operators Nathan and Kevin are care farmers who have a background in mental health rather than farming. "It has been a key factor in our success," believes Nathan. "We have never really been short of referrals."

Potsford Farm meets the care farming Code of Practice

### Our story

Before 2010, Nathan and Kevin were both working as registered mental health nurses – one as a hospital ward manager the other as a care coordinator in the community. "And then, all of a sudden, Kevin had this hair-brain idea that we would start a care farm," says Nathan. "This was despite the fact that we had no farming or business experience," he adds. The idea came out of the blue.

However, by a strange quirk of fate, around the same time the farm where the two nurses kept horses came up for rent. The coincidences didn't stop there. When they wrote a letter to the owner, laying out their ideas for a care farm, they were met with open arms. For it turned out that the farmer and his wife both had health and social care backgrounds in their families, so they came on board with the project as equal partners.

That was many years ago now, in fact they are about to celebrate their 10th anniversary. "The care farm was meant to be," concludes Nathan. "It all just fell into place."

### What we do

Given their background, it follows that one of the major 'Co-farmer' groups at Potsford comprises



of adults with mental health issues (25%), with the remainder comprising of adults with learning disabilities (75%). The balance of funding received is consistent with this.

But in either case, the care farm's aim, says Nathan, is 'to promote Co-farmers' independence, self-esteem and self-confidence – so that they need less help from health and social care'.

The Co-farmers travel to the care farm either under their own transport, or on public transport to the local train/bus station, from where they are collected. They are referred from social services, local learning disability and mental health teams – and in some cases through self-referral and Direct Payments.

Being in a quiet and peaceful part of rural Suffolk, the care farm offers a diverse range of activities. Most centre around looking after and working with the long list of livestock; cattle, sheep, goats and chickens, as

well as horses, pigs and a donkey. There are similar opportunities on the commercial livery yard too.

Away from working with livestock, there is an allotment where Co-farmers are involved in the propagation of fruit and flowers, which are sold at local market stalls. Furniture restoration, and other woodwork projects such as making bird or bat-boxes take place in a barn on site. They can also go horse riding at a riding school next door - which in the future Nathan and Kevin hope to offer themselves.

The care farm staff are also involved in two additional activities that support service users. The first being a community support company, aiding people who need help at home which includes some of their own Co-farmers. The second is helping Co-farmers with their benefits, housing or similar issues. *"Once they are referred to us," says Nathan, "they often end up being discharged from the care of statutory services and have nobody else to pick up these issues for them."*

## Challenges and achievements

There have been two main challenges for Nathan and Kevin. Due to the fact that they have been operating for many years, some Co-farmers have been attending up to three times a week, for 5 or more years – so a challenge for Nathan and Kevin is to achieve a balance between keeping activities new, fresh and up-to-date whilst maintaining the stability and routine which is equally as important to many service users.

The second challenge is an even greater one of uncertainty around the future - what will be possible under the UK's new agricultural payment scheme, post Brexit?

Despite these challenges, the future is bright for Potsford Farm. Above all else, Nathan and Kevin's background and experience in mental health has won them support and trust from commissioners. They see their Co-farmers up to three times per week and have done so for several years. They offer multiple benefits to commissioners; monitoring people's ongoing health, spotting any problems that might arise, and diagnosing what kind of intervention is needed.

## What people say about us

*"The farm offers activities I am interested in and it also offers a friendly and relaxed environment with structured activities. It gets me out of the house and stimulates my mind."*

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### Co-farmer

*"Potsford Farm has saved my son's life, it has given him a reason to get up in the morning, he is a different person now. He hasn't self-harmed in over a year and a half now and his confidence has grown. Thank you for giving me my son back."*

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### Relative

*"I strongly believe that non-medical interventions that address people's problems with confidence and self-esteem are essential. The farm is a friendly non-threatening environment which can help ease people back into social work-related activities."*

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### Nurse

*"The clients I have referred have all benefited greatly from attending. Whenever I have visited, there is always a relaxed atmosphere but with a purpose. Those attending are treated with respect and allowed to be themselves."*

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### Social Worker

## For more details

Contact: **Nathan or Kevin, Directors**

Email: **[office@potsfordfarm.co.uk](mailto:office@potsfordfarm.co.uk)**

Tel: **01728 748322**

Website: **[www.potsfordfarm.co.uk](http://www.potsfordfarm.co.uk)**

Social Farms & Gardens, in partnership with Thrive, are delivering the Growing Care Farming project. See **[www.farmgarden.org.uk/GCF](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/GCF)** for more details.