

CASE STUDY

Carlshead Farm , North Yorkshire



National Care Farming Initiative (UK)

Introduction

Carlshead is an alternative educational training project, based on a working farm near Wetherby. Founded in 2004, the farm offers facilities for students aged between 14 and 16 with a range of different needs, including learning or behavioural difficulties, those who are not attending school or are at risk. There is a strong emphasis on personal development.

Carlshead offers students a broad curriculum that includes green woodwork, furniture making, art, cooking, tractor mechanics, restoration and driving, coarse fishing, small animal care, and an equine course that teaches the basics of horse care, stable management, psychology, and groundwork training of young horses. Students are also given the opportunity to ride at Hillcroft Riding Stables, which adjoins the farm.

Students work in small group sizes towards accreditations from the Open College Network, and relevant section 96 courses. The courses we offer are mostly practical with a small amount of written and photographic evidencing. Tuition takes place within a complex of beautifully converted stone barns.



Carlshead staff and students learning to drive their Massey Ferguson 35 restoration project: "Students spend a year on the tractor mechanics course learning all about servicing, restoring and driving a diesel-engine tractor".



Site

Carlshead Farms comprise 500 acres of varied farmland, which is used for a variety of agricultural purposes. The farm is a family owned and run partnership that includes sheep farming, the growing of Short Rotation Coppice willow for renewable electricity and heat, eco office lets, and horse breeding. Some of the land is planted with arable crops, and a neighbouring farmer keeps cattle on the land. In addition, the farm is in a Countryside Stewardship Scheme, which involves high levels of wildlife conservation and the renewal of hedgerows and fences on the farm. The Stewardship Scheme has become an integral part of on-farm learning projects, allowing a hands-on approach to conservation.

There are four woodlands on the farm and a derelict walled garden. Future educational projects will include woodland management and the restoration of the garden. Facilities that are directly related to Carlshead are located in the converted sheep barns.

Carlshead Ltd

“Located on a 500 acre mixed farm in a beautiful part of Lower Wharfedale, Yorkshire”.



Client Group

Our students are referred to us by the Local Education Authority once they have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion from mainstream schools. They are generally within the 14-16 age range, split fairly evenly between male and female, with learning and/or behavioural difficulties. Some of the students may also be special needs. Students attend courses at Carlshead between one and five days a week, from 9.30am to 2.30pm.

Structure

Carlshead is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. Its board comprises the four family members, which meets regularly to oversee the direction and management of the project. The farm buildings and land are owned and run by the same family members as a partnership. Relevant buildings and land are then rented to the care farm for a fair market rent (for example, the school buildings could have been rented for office space and are therefore rented at around £12sqft). We chose this particular structure because it gave us the freedom to develop a Care Farming business model, fully integrating the care farm with our farming business but at the same time avoiding management by committee while offering transparent financial motives and legal ring-fencing of the business. Carlshead Ltd is VAT registered as a training facility, it is NOT a school. This was vital if we were not to be at a 17.5% disadvantage as rent charged by the farm is VAT-able and comprises a large part of our expenses.

Sheep barns at Carlshead

“Converted into fully equipped workshops, classrooms, IT room, Art room, kitchen, canteen, office and toilets, all insulated with sheep’s wool and heated with a biomass boiler. Other facilities include the animal and horse care barn (fitted with stables, training arena and small animal housing), the fishing lakes and lodge, the woodland roundhouse for green woodworking, and the walled garden for horticulture”.



Carlshead staff and students

“Perfecting their green woodworking in the woods”.

Start Up

Having taken inspiration from Hill Holt Wood, a Care Farming project in Lincolnshire, we set up an introductory seminar in January 2004 for interested parties. Education Leeds were immediately enthusiastic about our idea and wished to send the first students in September 2004. We investigated the possibilities of DEFRA funding through the Rural Enterprise Scheme (RES), but the time frame was too short for them and we decided to go it alone. The farm borrowed £450,000 from the bank with the business plan we had created (but no contract with Education Leeds), and started converting barns and building new livestock accommodation. We began our first courses from a portakabin in September as planned. In 2005 we were successful in getting a quick RES grant of £15,000 to help us finish the green oak cloistering of the school buildings and installing a 40kw Baxi Biomass boiler to heat the farmhouse and school. The project is entirely self-funding and has not (apart from the small RES grant) received any funding to help with start up.

Courses

We offer a range of courses, including animal care, horse care, riding and training, tractor restoration, servicing and driving, art, photography, web design, cooking, woodworking, horticulture and coarse fishing. All our courses are accredited through the Open College Network at level 1 (some level 2) to give the students GCSE equivalent points. Many of our leavers go on to further education colleges such as Park Lane, Thomas Danby, Askham Bryan and the Doncaster Racing College. Group sizes are small to give a teacher to student ratio of 1:4, there is also a Mentor for every group of 4 students.



“Students on our OCN Angling and the Environment course, supported by the Environment Agency”.

Staff and Mentors

Our staff are carefully selected for their communication skills and job skills. Most of our staff work on a part-time basis so that they can still continue their trades. They are for the most part not qualified teachers, but motivated self starters. For example, our mechanic works for us one day a week and runs his own mobile agricultural engineering company the rest of the week. This ensures the teaching experience is more akin to an apprenticeship than a classroom.

The mentors are employed by Education Leeds and take responsibility for discipline and counselling. They also carry much of the paperwork burden normally associated with educational facilities, to leave us to do what we do best. Our staff file twice a term reports on each student, and are responsible for making sure each student achieves the qualifications intended.



Gaining confidence with horses

"We run 3 OCN accredited units on this course, plus a weekly session at the local riding school".

Policies and procedures

Health and safety and risk assessments are the responsibility of Carlshead staff and management, but is overseen and facilitated by Mentor Services (Natwest/RBS). Our employment is also facilitated and overseen by Mentor, we get full legal advice and support from this excellent service (and peace of mind!). As a provider to Education Leeds, we also have a Child Protection Policy in place.



Developing skills

"Putting the finishing touches to a group woodland project".

The Future

Care Farming has huge potential in the UK, especially for peri-urban farmers, but several important points must be addressed before we are going to persuade more farmers to do this. Care farming mostly hinges on some sort of agricultural activity (the means), to provide training or therapy (the end). To gain the support of farmers, the agricultural status of facilities used by the Care Farm must be retained - this will mean zero rating and full inheritance tax relief (both essential if this kind of business is going to thrive).

Funding Care Farming is a nightmare! Probably a very commonly held view amongst NCFI members. We are expecting the Education Authority to fund our young people 100%, is this fair? Many of our young people have serious health, social, and law and order problems as well as special educational needs (for which many have not received a Statement of Special Needs). Could the Health Service and Home Office not help with the cost? Could funding be centralised and standardised through our provider (that sends us the young people and employs the mentors), it would free us from the burden of searching for funding for each student and leave us to do what we do best.