

CASE STUDY

Gamelea Farm, Derbyshire

National Care Farming Initiative (UK)



Gamelea: A Gateway to Pastures New

Introduction

Gamelea Farm is set in 215 acres of glorious Derbyshire countryside on the Chatsworth Estate in the Peak District. Gamelea Farm is a beautiful location for an innovative, agricultural-based initiative combining care, training and meaningful activity for people in need. *Gamelea seeks to enable expression.*

Gamelea Countryside Training Trust (GCTT) was set-up as a Company Limited by Guarantee and Registered Charity in 1999 and is dedicated to helping people with learning disabilities gain vocational skills, learn about work and to move into employment. Our students are given a genuine opportunity to gain employment and for many it is the first time in their lives that they have been given responsibility.

We offer horticulture, agriculture, woodcrafts, mechanics/metal craft, horse care, small animal care, pottery and I.T. We also have a varied selection of animals including rare breed pigs, cattle, fancy fowls, ducks and geese, ferrets, 500 free range hens, stables and dog kennels with six farm dogs.

In our safe environment we are often astounded by the development of the students and have seen so many successes – and we want them to continue.

Elizabeth and Edward Hill founded and manage Gamelea. Prior to starting Gamelea, Elizabeth had a background as a teacher of Rural Science and experience of working with people with special needs. She was very aware of a lack of opportunities for people with learning disabilities after main stream education and thought the farming environment would provide a perfect setting to address this.



Growing success

Enjoying working as a team looking after the organic vegetables growing in raised beds...



Putting the wheels back on:
....not just the tractor!

Up until 1999 the farm was a thriving dairy farm with a hundred pedigree Holstein cattle. Our children did not want to farm, so Edward modified his farming practices with care farming in mind and changed from intensive dairy production to a more extensive system, working towards organic status. The farm nowadays is still very much a commercial farm, but becoming a care farm gave us the opportunity to become more traditional as more labour intensive activity can be very suitable for care farming. We now have eighty Aberdeen Angus beef cattle, fifty rare breed pigs and a flock of about seventy primitive sheep, not forgetting a free range egg enterprise.

Edward loves the country way of life, being close to nature and living closely with wild animals and birds. Changing the farming policy to include care farming has given us the best of both worlds. Having other people here to share it with us is wonderful and it combats the loneliness and isolation farmers can sometimes feel.

By having such a diverse range of animals each with their own needs, we have a wide variety of jobs which our clients can get involved with. Be aware that if your care farm does not take clients on a weekend or holidays, or if there is snow, then this work will need to be done by the family that live on the farm!

We also grow our own vegetables. Recently we set up a training kitchen with a tea room attached and so our clients not only produce food but also learn to cook and eat healthily too. They also have the opportunity to work in the tea room, gaining valuable skills for working life.

The people who come here not only gain from being in the countryside and fresh air, but they also learn about food provenance. They realise that farmers care about their animals and that on the whole they have a good life before they make the trip to the butchers.



Breadth of options:
Real work experience in the recently established training kitchen.



People who come to Gamelea Farm

A new social enterprise has been formed based on the farm called Rural Life Skills. This provides enjoyable meaningful work for a wide range of people. These people may be:

- **People with mental health problems**
- **Young people excluded or in danger of exclusion**
- **Looked after children**
- **Young offenders**
- **Veterans**

Gamelea has found that the careful mixing of people with different needs can help to magnify the positive therapeutic experience of being on the farm. By having such a diverse mix of people we are not excluding people or isolating others, we are recreating real life.



Engaging work:
Young people enjoying their learning at Gamelea.





Activities and training offered at Gamelea Farm

We seek to provide a wide ranging mix of opportunities and activities at Gamelea Farm with traditional farming skills and knowledge providing the bedrock. In addition to these qualifications and rural skills training, students are able to develop confidence and communication through retail opportunities in the small farm shop, nursery, free range egg unit and at local farmers markets' and agricultural shows.



Former student, now an employee –
Gary keeping the hens well looked after.



Colourful activity:
Using dressmaking skills to make aprons for other students to wear for pottery and cooking. Various items such as aprons are sold to provide income for GCTT.



Sunny days:
Enjoying each other's company.



Building bridges:
Learning through practical experience in the natural environment.

OCN qualifications and work opportunities include:

- Ornamental plants and trees
- Organic vegetable production
- Blacksmithing/fabrication
- Equine Therapy
- Agriculture
- Garden furniture
- Pottery
- Craft
- Small animal hotel
- Conservation
- Horticulture
- Catering in tea room
- Music Technology
- Animal Care
- Woodwork
- Animal housing
- ICT
- Free range egg production
- Dry Stonewalling
- Horse/Donkey Care



Grading eggs by touch:

Faye comes to Gamelea four days a week and tells her family she is coming to work. Faye has very little sight, is profoundly deaf and cannot speak – all staff members have had to learn some sign language in order to communicate with her. Faye has a great sense of humour and has learnt to wash, and grade the eggs. This she sees as part of her daily routine. Faye also loves to work in the tea room and enjoys interaction with the customers.

Great diversity:
We don't know of any other location apart from a care farm that provides such a wide range of activities to suit people's different needs. Gamelea gives people a sense of ownership and belonging as part of a very positive team of people.

The secret of why Gamelea works so well

We seek to nurture, care and train people to take steps towards expressing themselves and fulfilling their possibilities. We believe that our success is because:

- **We welcome everyone**
- **We have 200 acres of glorious countryside**
- **Gamelea has dedicated and talented staff**
- **A wide variety of non-judgemental animals**
- **A happy and positive atmosphere**

In addition to this and of great benefit for care farmers is courage to push the boundaries and the ability to bounce back from the knocks - every day is a new day.

A breadth of animals

Large animals can be daunting to some people, so we specifically keep a range of small animals which our students take care of. During these activities every opportunity to embed basic and key skills is taken. People learn without realising.

Good shepherds:

Whilst Gamelea's own flock of sheep are mainly primitive breeds we have farmers around us who are always happy for us to take some of their lambs left by their mothers. Everyone loves this and the opportunity to bottle feed the babies.



Good friendship:

Whilst not that fond of working with other animals, Mary became attached to Gilbert. She went to see him first thing in the morning, at lunch and said goodbye to him before she went home. Gilbert was Mary's confidant she told him all her troubles. She also shared her joys with him.



Llamas are naturally curious but rarely allow touch:

but they liked giving this young excluded person a kiss!

Start-up and Structure

The term care farming has only recently come to the fore. When we set up the care farm it was unusual and we were seen as odd balls! Local farmers watched us with some amusement and commissioners were hard to convince. We were advised to set up a charity in order for us to be able to offer free places.

If we were to pass on advice to others, we would not suggest becoming a charity as it involves a very time consuming process of creating a board of trustees. This also ultimately moves control of the project away from the farmer. We hope, as care farming begins to be recognised as a core rather than a marginal activity by commissioners, that future care farmers will not have to write bids to provide a good quality service. We hope that the advent of personal budgets in healthcare will be beneficial for this. We currently have five people attending on personalised budgets and charge £55 per day.

We had our first Students with Learning Disabilities in September 2000. We had accessed staff funding at the time which meant that we could be open to many groups and many commissioners were very interested as it was free for them! However, as the funding streams neared completion it was very difficult to move the commissioners' minds and budgets towards paying for a service they had become used to accessing without charge.



Happiness is a certificate:

Translating meaningful work into qualifications is important for many people who attend Gamelea as they give a sense of achievement and can open up progression routes.

Gamelea Farm was one of the first care farms in Derbyshire to offer an alternative curriculum for children excluded from school. As this area of Gamelea's activity grew, the education authority moved to requiring us to deliver qualifications. We delivered bronze and silver ASDAN youth awards which worked well. Our recent publicity from a television slot on the politics show has certainly developed more positive interest.

Please note that not all people who attend Gamelea Farm will be immediately ready to engage with any type of qualification. Some people just need time to settle into the farm setting and feel comfortable and safe before any other options are considered.



Where Next – 2009 and beyond?

It seems to be quite hard to get off the funding treadmill once you are a charity. Our major recent development has been to begin running some areas as the Rural Life Skills social enterprise rather than a charity in order to generate an income without relying on funding bids. We have decided to move our energies behind the social enterprise as it provides greater flexibility for the care farm.

The Charity wishes to maintain our present alternative day service for adults with learning disabilities on behalf of Derbyshire Social Services. Rural Life Skills are building good relationships with schools and work with children in danger of exclusion and are able to offer some vocational courses for the 14 -19 diploma route.

We will:

- **Continue to deliver recognised qualifications**
- **Continue our policy of keeping traditional rural skills alive**
- **Add other courses such as equine therapy, spinning, weaving, felting etc.**
- **Continue to work in an environmentally friendly way**
- **Looking into possibility of building in sustainable ways e.g. straw bale building.**

Policies, procedures, health and safety

As we deal with several different commissioners and also vulnerable people we have to ensure our policies and procedures are in place, monitored and robust. An outside company, 'Growing Rural Enterprise' carries out a health and safety check every year and helps develop our policy in this area. They also ensure we are continually updating our risk assessments and induct new staff.

Our policies include those for vulnerable adults, for safeguarding children and for young people. These are the bare essentials that commissioners and funders require. Once you have these in place refer to them and update them as new laws or policies come into play. CRB checks need to be undertaken for all staff and volunteers and various agencies can do this for you (such as FACE based at Stoneleigh).

Visiting Gamelea

Everyone is welcome to visit the tea room on the farm. Please call to arrange a visit to the care farm.

For more information please contact

Edward and Elizabeth Hill

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