

# Tickwood Care Farm Shropshire

## CASE STUDY

National Care Farming Initiative



### Summary

- Set up in 2005 by Edward and Anna Dugdale, and run on the family's 400 acre beef and sheep farm
- Caters for an unusually wide range of clients, from age 4 to 64 – which is explained by its non-client specific funding base
- Receives an increasing number of visitors, but still struggles with funding

### What is special about this care farm

The care farm offers an unusually wide range of activities, all dotted around the main farm. These include gardening, animal husbandry, woodland management, coppicing, sensory and fossil trails, forest school and wheelchair woodland walk. "Diversity is our strength," says Edward. "If people don't like gardening, then there is the space and opportunity for them to do something else."

The farm delivers several projects for a wide mix of agencies. Many developed out of initial meetings with key personnel from nearly 50 local organisations, which were secured by the tireless persistence of a Dutch, care-farm-familiar, student helper.

*Fun by the water's edge is just one of the many ways Tickwood can help.*

### Target market

Tickwood hosts educational visits from an unusually broad range of clients. There are main groups of visitors: (i) prolific offenders – groups of 5, three times per week; and (ii) children with physical and learning disabilities from a local special school, called Severndale - six classes of 8-10, two or three times per week.

The farm also receives visits from several other ad hoc groups. These stretch from elderly people living at a hospice, young adults with learning disabilities attending college, volunteers and people doing community service, and badly behaved young children from local primary schools – in the latter's case, 3-10 per session, a couple of times per week. A parent support group is also in its early stages of visiting.

Some of what the farm provides fits directly into the school curriculum, and seven of the Severndale School children are doing a City and Guilds course in Horticulture. But part of what Tickwood delivers requires thinking 'outside the box.' Explains Edward, "It's about saying, 'Let's go and try something and see if it gets people excited', and if it works we will go off in that direction. One size doesn't fit all – you have to give people different experiences."



### In their own words

**Motivation** – Edward has a background in providing housing/supported living for adults with learning disabilities. Anna has trained in both forest school leadership and life coaching, with a special interest in helping children finding their vocation.

**Approach** – “The majority of adults with learning disabilities get institutionalised by the time they are in their late 20s – new things don’t work with them,” says Edward. “Our aim is to introduce things to them when they are younger.”

**Benefits** – Edward can point to a range of evidence to prove the care farm’s value:

**Increased usage** – Severndale School used to send 10 children weekly – now it sends four classes per week. Last year everyone in the school attended at least once – this year’s target is at least twice. And for all groups the drive is 20 miles each way.

**Positive feedback** – Parents and visitors speak about the benefits to children and other clients, which has been a big impetus to the increased useage by organisations.

**Case studies** – “You can see the impact as students grow and change” says Edward. He recounts the change in one boy, who, during 10 years at Severndale, never expressed an interest and rarely spoke. But at the farm he has slowly started to talk, first asking if he could push a wheelbarrow and recently holding a detailed 15 minute conversation.

**Enhanced self esteem** – Apart from being outside in the fresh air, plus doing and learning about new/interesting things, the ‘feel-good factor’ amongst the individuals has multiplied over time.

### Key challenges

Edward is disappointed by the lack of support he has had from Shropshire Council, despite their supportive meetings and statements. “The status quo is ever present – it’s like a huge pressing weight on everything” he says. “There is a reticence to doing anything out of the box.”

His approach has been to convince people by showing them, rather than just talking to them. “You have to set something up, get some clients attending, and then people will come and visit” he says.

Edward says he has taken ‘the path of least resistance’ on insurance, explaining that because the insurance applies only to farm visits, “things have to be tweaked slightly at times to place responsibility where the insurance dictates.”

### Tips for others

To do care farming, you have to be driven by emotion, and to be persistent, says Edward. Never let the “red tape” stop you from doing something you believe in.

His other advice, for anyone working in a local authority and thinking of going into care farming, is stick there until you’ve got something working. “It’s safer to work within the establishment and set something up than trying to attack it from outside,” he says.

### For more information

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