University of Hull
Faculty of Arts, Culture and Education

Care Farming, Learning and Young People:

An exploration into the possible contribution of care farming to young people's engagement with learning.

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

by

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February 2020

Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the possible contribution of care farming to young people's engagement with learning. Firstly, the perceptions and experiences of young people accessing alternative curriculum on three care farms were gathered through a methodological approach underpinned by aspects of ethnography. Secondly, care farm providers and school support staff were consulted with to provide an understanding as to why young people attend care farms in England and to ascertain if they felt there were any perceived benefits to their learning.

The study positions its research within three care farm sites across England, all of whom offer alternative curriculum opportunities. Data were captured longitudinally during typical farming practices such as collecting eggs, sheep shearing and fencing to capture any naturally occurring evidence. Unstructured interviews, photo elicitation and semi-structured interviews were all triangulated with observational fieldwork notes.

Data yielded in this study found that care farms provide a nurturing and enabling learning environment for young people to self-discover and be free from the humiliation and frustration experienced, by some, in the traditional schooling system. The most significant finding was the compelling interplay between the care farm context, the natural environment and the values of informal education. The informal relational discourse, evident through triangulated data, synergised with the nature-based pedagogy and the multitude of learning contexts on a care farm. This, therefore, provided a catalyst for young people to learn practically, socially and introspectively.

Dedicated to my wonderful parents and grandparents,

who taught me how to care for the land and the people.

Figure 1: Area of happiness - Birch Care Farm by Max.

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my immense gratitude to the young people who allowed me to work beside them and capture their journeys. You all inspired me with your courage, resilience and humour. These amazing attributes I witnessed whilst on the farms working with you, spurred me on in the most difficult stages of writing. I hope your stories inspire others to discover and experience the immense value of care farms.

Particular thanks must go to the care farms and the incredible staff I had the pleasure of working with. For your kind hospitality, generosity of time and energy, I am eternally grateful.

To my supervisor Max, thank you for your patience. You have provided guidance, advice and challenge throughout and given me the confidence to complete a PhD whilst working full-time. To Sinead, my second supervisor who provided her ongoing critical eye, thank you.

Thank you to Karl Aubrey, Matt Vaughan and Charlie Cooper for their time spent proof-reading, your feedback was most helpful.

To my incredible family for your patience, support and encouragement. To Shaun, thank you for still being here at the end. A special thanks to my wonderful brother Chris, for his hours of proof-reading in the final stages.

Finally, to my beautiful children, Lloyd and Brooke. You are my motivation every day to succeed. You have made sacrifices whilst I have been studying and I am forever thankful. I love you so much and at last, mummy is back!

Declaration

This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at The University of Hull. The research described herein was conducted under the supervision of Dr Max Hope and Dr Sinead Gormally, between September 2014 and September 2019.

I confirm that this is my own work and has not been submitted for an award or qualification at any other university.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the field

Care farming is a developing concept and one that is gaining popularity in England. Whilst a range of empirical research has been carried out over the last ten years, government interest and policy developments have been developing at a steady pace since 2018. An example of this is the Growing Care Farming project which is being delivered by Social Farms & Gardens[1] (SFG) in partnership with Thrive during 2019-2023. 1.4 million pounds has been allocated by the government to significantly increase the number of care farm places available by 2023. During the project launch event in May 2019, the Minister for the Environment, Teresa Coffey provided a keynote address. In her speech, Coffey (2019) stated:

> Care farming provides health and social care and specialist education providers with innovative and effective care options. It benefits society as a whole by reducing the strain on statutory services and the NHS, and it also helps farmers who have an alternative way to use their farm, to provide health, social and educational care services in addition to or instead of commercial production.

During the speech, Coffey (2019) introduces many of the issues that will be explored during the following literature review. With the national political interest in care farming, the need for research evidence on the use of care farms has never been more pressing. The objective of care farming is to provide physical and mental health improvements, socialisation and/or educational benefits through standard farming practices (SFG, 2019). Care farms are diverse and unique in their governance and daily operations; however, all care farms have an underpinning philosophy to use the natural environment to nurture positive health and wellbeing. Some, but not all, care farms offer alternative curriculum provision for young people whose needs are not being met within mainstream education. Young people's experiences of both mainstream education and on a care farm have been the primary focus of only one doctoral study up until now (Hambidge, 2017).

[1] On the 1st April 2018, Care Farming UK merged with the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, to create a new organisation called Social Farms & Gardens.

1.2 Rationale for the study

This study is motivated by personal as well as professional interest. It is therefore appropriate to declare my researcher position and background, as well as my personal involvement within the context of the research. My primary socialisation was situated on a rural arable farm and therefore my passion for spending time outdoors flourished from an early age. I felt fortunate to be born into a farming family whose dedication to nurturing the land still reigns today. After a number of enquiries from various community groups regarding using some of the farmland for horticulture projects, in 2008, alongside my father and interested members of the local community, we embarked on a care farming project. My father's dedication to social justice and his Christian beliefs were at the heart of the pursuit. At this embryonic stage, we offered the use of the land to individuals and groups who felt they would benefit from engaging in farming related activities, thus combining the care of the land with the care of the people. Understandably, mobilizing the care farm project was complex and nuanced, but for the purpose of this study, intricacies have been omitted. My role is a voluntary Director and I oversee the strategic operations of the thriving enterprise, so I am very familiar with the functions of a care farm.

My educational journey has taken many paths from criminology, leadership in education and more recently youth and community studies. My employment history has revolved strongly around young people and, more significantly, alternative models of education. As part of the youth and community professional qualification, I undertook 600 hours of professional practice with young people and communities. This practice involved working with two groups of young people from a local secondary school on the family care farm. The fascinating journey the young people embarked on whilst at the care farm was a springboard for this study and the emergent research questions. This led to a desire to explore the perceptions of young people attending care farms and to discover staff perceptions. Here lies the synchronicity combining my two passions. The relationship between young people disengaged with mainstream education and nature-based interventions was never on my radar until this point. The significance of my positionality for the study will be revisited during the methodology chapter.

1.3 Fundamental objective of the thesis

This thesis sets out to explore the possible contribution of care farming to young people's engagement with learning. By listening to the voices of young people and professionals, the study provides an understanding as to why young people aged 13 to 16 years attend care farms in England. The study explores young people's perceptions of their experiences of formal education and of attending care farms. It is envisaged that this study will, through adopting an ethnographic approach, assess to what extent and in what ways care farms support young people's engagement with learning. The three distinct fields of health, youth work and education are brought together due to their significance to the research aim and questions. To address the research questions, perspectives are gathered from young people, care farm providers and school staff. Responses are examined and analysed allowing conclusions to be drawn.

1.4 Specific aim of the thesis

The specific aim of the thesis is:

> *An exploration into the possible contribution of care farming to young people's engagement with learning.*

1.5 Research questions

In order to work towards the overall study aim, the following research questions were developed:

1. *How do young people and care farm providers articulate the reasons why young people attend care farms in England?*

2. *What are young people's perceptions of their educational experiences, both on care farms and as part of formal education?*

3. *How and in what ways do young people learn on care farms in England, if at all?*

1.6 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is presented in nine chapters, with the first five essentially positioning the research. The introductory chapter sets the scene and is followed by a chapter which provides the context for care farming. With care farming being such a contemporary concept, Chapter Two presents a short section which introduces the notion of care farming, and one that offers some important definitions for the study.

Chapter Three draws together literature and research from the three distinct fields of health, youth work and education. The review begins with a detailed exploration around health and wellbeing discourse drawing on the relationship with nature-based interventions. There is a particular emphasis on young people and their wellbeing throughout this section. Following this is an examination of the literature surrounding the notion of youth and the emerging influences on young people with a focus on their primary socialisation. Elements of secondary socialisation are considered, leading to a consideration of how societal structures may result in certain young people becoming stigmatized and placed in a deficit position within society and potentially, the education system. Finally, the status and scope of alternative curriculum provision is critically examined, and alternative learning environments reviewed.

Chapter Four describes the methods and methodological approaches adopted in this study. The ontological and epistemological framework underpinning the study, as well as the importance of reflexivity and the methods used to collect data, are also defined and defended. A detailed examination of the ethical considerations and procedures is presented.

Chapter Five locates the research on three care farm sites in England. An overview of each site is provided, and the distinct features of each farm are highlighted. Logistical details such as the

size of the farm, the facilities available and the client groups who attend the farms, are reviewed.

Chapter Six introduces the young people at the heart of the study. Their pseudonyms are presented along with basic information to provide a background context to the individuals who shared their stories during this research.

Chapter Seven presents the empirical evidence obtained from the various methods incorporated in the research. Responses from the young people, the care farm staff, and the school support staff are thematically ordered throughout this chapter to illuminate any similar or contradictory responses and to highlight potential arguments. Fieldwork notes are also integrated in order to create a rich picture of how care farming may or may not support young people's engagement with learning.

Chapter Eight presents an extensive discussion of the evidence provided in the study. The chapter is organised around the primary themes raised by the participants and researcher observations. Consideration is given to previously reported literature throughout, both empirical and theoretical, and the original research questions provide an anchor. This chapter identifies the significant contributions to new knowledge emerging from the study and to illustrate this, a conceptual model has been created.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis, by drawing together the key themes in prior chapters to consider the research as whole.

Throughout the thesis, images captured by the young people are situated at various intervals. The intention of this, was that their voices remain prominent throughout.

Chapter 2: The Care Farming Context

This chapter introduces the concept of care farming and provides some useful definitions for the study.

2.1 Agricultural uncertainty and opportunity

Over the last twenty years the farming industry in the United Kingdom (UK) has been adversely affected by a series of events, including devastating disease outbreaks and increased taxes (Keep, 2009). The impending Brexit agreement being processed through parliament has created unprecedented levels of insecurities amongst the farming community and many are anxious to ensure Brexit is a success for the supply of food in the UK (National Farmers Union, 2019).

In response to this context, many farmers have sought alternative revenue streams by using their land for diverse purposes, rather than traditional agriculture. Examples of this divergence are petting farms, campsites and farm shops which allow members of the public to access the farm amenities. In a report by the UK's government ministerial division, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA, 2018:18) it was stated that the changes are "…widely thought to offer considerable scope for improving the economic viability of many farm businesses".

Combining or replacing the use of farms for other purposes is known as farm diversification. Farm diversification is when a farm moves away from traditional farming pursuits, be that arable or livestock, by adding new income generating ventures. DEFRA (2018:28) defines diversified activity as "work of an entrepreneurial nature on or off farm but which utilises farm resources". A report produced by the House of Commons library suggests that in 2007/08 there were 57,100 farms in England of a size considered sufficient to occupy a farmer for at least half a working week, and of these, 51% had diversified activity (Keep, 2009). More recently, a farm business survey carried out by DEFRA (2018a), reviewed by Riley (2017), reported 64% of farms

had diversified into a non-agricultural business. The most popular diversification was the letting of empty farm buildings and incorporating solar energy methods. One less documented initiative was using the agricultural landscapes as a therapeutic environment to benefit particular individuals and groups. This concept is more commonly known as care farming (SFG, 2019).

2.2 Building momentum and diversity

Since 2001, the number of care farms registered with Social Farms & Gardens has expanded significantly with the southeast of England experiencing the highest growth (SFG, 2019). The most recent statistics suggest there are 250 care farms operating across the UK (SFG, 2019). The governance and structure of care farms is varied, and many are established as a charity, company limited by guarantee, social enterprise or another business model independent from the commercial farm. However, regardless of the chosen governing structure, all care farms have a fundamental purpose to share the farm with those who may benefit from the natural environment presented on a farm. In their research exploring the emergence of care farming, Hine et al. (2008:9) concluded that:

> …sharing the farm, their farming skills and knowledge with others, and being able to make a real difference to vulnerable people's lives has been the primary motivation for UK care farmers.

Similar to the varied business structures of a care farm, the provision also differs in size and the opportunities available. Care farms are typically based on collaborative partnerships between health care services, social care services and the education sector. The farm participants and the farmers themselves with, in some instances, their wider family, are a fundamental aspect of the partnerships. Furthermore, all care farms offer some elements of traditional farming, such as animal husbandry, horticulture, meat production, arable, forestry or agricultural engineering. Additionally, care farms offer elements of 'care', such as health care and/or social care along with many opportunities for learning and education.

Several care farms embrace DEFRA's definition of diversification (specified on page 17) having commercial production activities at their core. This is alongside care farm participants who are involved in the farm's day to day operations; an example of this is Botton Farm. Botton Farm (managed by Camphill Village Trust) based in North Yorkshire rears a variety of animals such as Highland Cattle and poultry for meat production, manages an on-site butchery and farm shop where farm participants, who have a range of disabilities, are involved in the operation (Camphill Village Trust, 2019). The intention of involving farm participants in the commercial aspects of the care farm is multi-faceted, including developing employability skills, improved social skills and a general enriched quality of life. Income generation from commercial activities also supports the sustainability of the care farm.

Alternatively, there are care farms that do not focus primarily on commercial production activities and are more care orientated, with the farming element used primarily to produce benefits for the participants rather than for commercial agricultural production. In this instance the care aspect can be viewed as a process using the farm environment to facilitate this rather than being driven by an end product. Askefield Care Farm in Lincolnshire provides such an example. Whilst based on a working commercial landscape, the therapeutic benefits of engaging in the natural farming environment are central to the day-to-day operations at this care farm (Askefield Care Farm, 2019). Successful social rehabilitation and therapeutic intervention take precedence over any commercial production. Income generation is primarily sourced through successful external funding applications to financial sources such as the 'Big Lottery' and subsidised through Personal Independence Payments from the farm participants and/or their carers. A nominal amount is charged for attendance at the care farm and this covers the cost of staffing and resources. Introduced in 2013, Personal Independence Payments are gradually replacing Disability Living Allowance for people with a long-term health condition or disability and who are aged 16 to 64 (Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2019). For many participants and care farms this is a continual development due to the emergence of Personal Independence Payments across England and the associated challenges individuals face accessing these (Disability Rights UK, 2012). In his study on the impact of care farming in the

UK, Leck (2013) found that the most common daily charge was between £35 and £50 but actual charges varied considerably depending on the specific needs of the individual concerned. Whilst not a lucrative venture and rarely sought after for economic reasons, care farming can provide a complementary addition to commercial farming. Furthermore, Leck (2013:107) would suggest care farming has been "critical with regard to enabling the continuation of farming operations that might not otherwise have been sustainable".

Care farms are diverse and unique in their nature and therefore generalisations about care farms are difficult to make. Elings (2011:50) believes that relationships are central to a care farm. She states:

> A care farm provides community integration in a natural way, with emphasis on participants' own strengths, an individual approach and a consideration of the relationships involved.

Furthermore, the underpinning philosophy of using the natural farming environment to nurture improved health and wellbeing remains a constant across the care farming sector. SFG (2019) summarise care farm operations stating they:

> **Provide health, social or specialist educational care services for individuals from one or a range of vulnerable groups:** includes people with mental health problems, people suffering from mild to moderate depression, adults and children with learning disabilities, children with autism, those with a drug or alcohol addiction history, disaffected young people, adults and people on probation.
> **Provide a programme of farming-related activities for individuals with a defined need**: including animal husbandry (livestock, small animals, poultry), crop and vegetable production, woodland management.
> **Provide supervised, structured care services on a regular basis for service users**: part of a structured care, rehabilitation, therapeutic or specialist educational programme.

Are commissioned to provide services by a range of referral agencies: such as social services, health care trusts, community mental health teams, education authorities, probation services, National Careers Service etc… Clients can also be self-referred as part of the direct payments scheme[2] or be referred by family members.

Utilise the whole or part of a farm: commercial agricultural units, smallholdings or community farms**.**

This list, provided by SFG, is not exhaustive but provides an overview of the complexities surrounding the provision offered on care farms.

The following literature review will begin by considering the historical development of nature-based interventions, including care farms, with an underpinning focus on health and wellbeing. The second part of the review examines the deficit discourse around youth and the emerging influences facing young people. Finally, the current extent and forms of alternative provision are located with particular consideration given to the use of alternative environments.

[2] Direct payments are payments for people who have been assessed as needing help from the government, and who would like to arrange and pay for their own care and support services.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

The following literature review brings together elements of the three distinct fields of health, youth work and education. While this may seem an obscure trajectory for the review, all three areas are significant to the research aim and objectives. The review begins with a detailed exploration around health and wellbeing discourse drawing on the relationship with nature-based interventions; a particular focus on young people is evident. Following this is an examination of the literature surrounding the notion of youth and the emerging influences on young people with a focus on their primary socialisation. Elements of secondary socialisation are considered, leading to a consideration of how societal structures may result in certain young people becoming stigmatised and placed in a deficit position within society and potentially, the education system. Finally, the status and scope of alternative curriculum provision is critically examined, and alternative learning environments reviewed. The interplay between young people, alternative provision and the potential of a nature-based pedagogy to provide rich learning opportunities is considered and informs the chosen methodological approach to explore the possible contribution of care farming to young people's engagement with learning.

3.2 Health, Wellbeing and Care Farming

This section aims to critically analyse the developing notion of care farming and the related health, social and educational benefits it may provide for participants. It will draw upon health and wellbeing literature, government policy and statistics along with the emerging field of research on care farming. The term health will be used to capture all aspects of health and wellbeing including mental health and physical health, this is because of the wide range of literature and research related to nature-based interventions. Due to the aims of this study there will be a particular focus on health and wellbeing amongst young people.

Hine et al. (2008) suggest care farming is one of a number of nature-based interventions captured under the umbrella term of 'green care' (Figure 2).

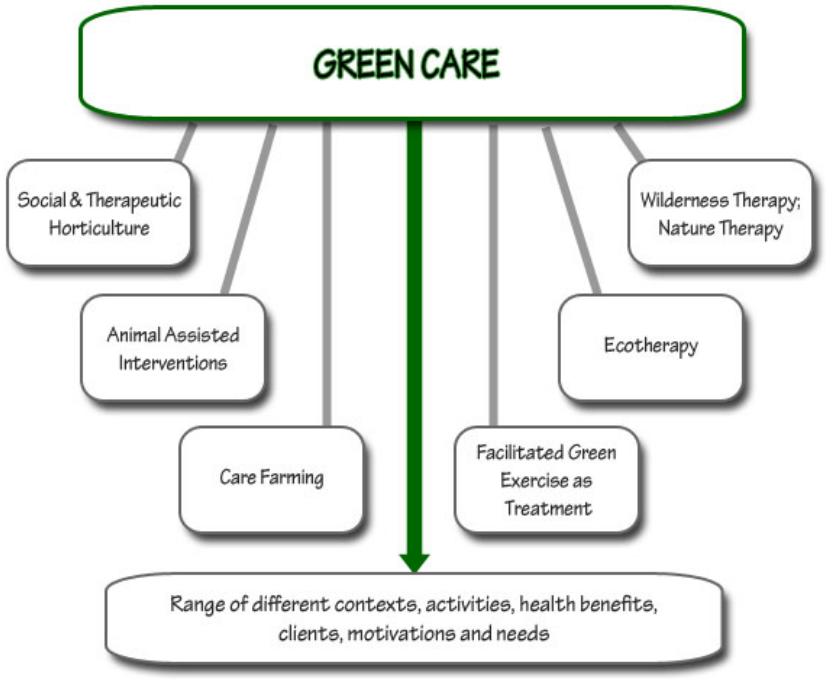


Figure 2: The Green Care Umbrella (Hine et al., 2008)

A range of activities that promote mental and physical health and wellbeing through contact with nature all feature under the heading of green care. Care farming activities utilise gardens, farms and other outdoor spaces as a therapeutic intervention for children, vulnerable adults and their communities. Despite care farms varying from one another in terms of the client group for which they provide a service, the ethos of combining agriculture and health care forms the bedrock of each care farm. The diagram above identifies how green care is the umbrella term for various health and wellbeing interventions. However, for the purpose of this study, the primary focus will be upon the relationship between care farming and learning for young people aged 13 to 16 years. Justification for this target audience will be provided in chapter 4.

3.2.1 Emergence of nature-based interventions

Whilst care farming is a relatively new concept which has been gaining popularity over the last ten years, the benefits of contact with nature have been well documented since the medieval period (Ulrich, 1984; Bird, 2007; Frumkin, 2001). As early as 1812, physician Benjamin Rush suggested working in a natural environment is crucial to supporting the recovery of those incarcerated. Often known as the "father of modern therapeutic horticulture" (Sempik et al. 2010:2), Rush believed that working on a farm attached to an asylum improved patients' mental health and declared "digging in the soil has a curative effect on the mentally ill" (Rush, 1812:226). His observations are corroborated through the use of many prison farms, notably Dartmoor in 1852 and hospital gardens allowing patients to indulge in physical work or enjoy the serene surroundings (Bird, 2007). Whilst the inhumane regimes and tribulations of the Victorian asylums must be acknowledged, the less-well documented area of the positive use of the natural environment in this context should not be omitted.

Bird (2007) documents the use of fresh air and sunlight to treat tuberculosis during the 18th and 19th century and these natural curative agents are strengthened in the work of McDonald (2004:104) who described how historically, all hospital patients could "see out of the window to see sky and sun-light at least" to aid recovery.

Nature-based approaches for improving health and wellbeing gathered momentum and by 1944 the use of gardening was noted as an effective process for rehabilitation, particularly for injured people (Sempik & Aldridge, 2006). Despite this, by the 1970s most hospital and prison gardens had closed. This was due to the demands on space for patients or prisoners, changes in health policy and the fact that the health benefits of being outdoors had to compete against other higher priorities such as crime reduction. Coincidentally, at this time, there appears to be a growth of interest coming to the fore highlighting the restorative properties of nature on human physical and emotional health (Ulrich, 1984; Hartig et al., 1991; Louv, 2005; Pretty, 2004).

The value provided by natural environments for young children's wellbeing and development was highlighted at the beginning of the twentieth century by sisters Margaret and Rachel Macmillan. Both were influential advocates of play in the outdoor environment for children and believed this was an area not being addressed in England at the time, possibly due to the industrial revolution, resulting in many children's poor health and wellbeing (Knight, 2013). Their passion and drive resulted in the establishment of the first open-air nursery school in 1914, recognising the importance of fresh air for the development of healthy bodies and minds. A compelling quotation from Margaret Macmillan (1914:5) used frequently in early years literature is: "The best classroom and richest cupboard is roofed only by the sky". The underpinning philosophy of Macmillan is evident in educational initiatives to date such as Learning Outside the Classroom (Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, 2019) and Forest Schooling (Knight, 2016).

Wilson (1993:31) hypothesized the existence of biophilia, a term which means "the innate emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms". Building on the work of Fromm (1973), Wilson believes that humans have a natural propensity to gravitate towards natural surroundings and the rich diversity of colours, shapes and life that exist in nature. Frumkin (2001:234) expands on the biophilia hypothesis and presents a range of evidence to suggest that the hypothesis applies to four aspects of the natural world – animals, plants, landscapes and experience of the wilderness. Frumkin concludes that there is persuasive evidence that contact with the natural world offers health benefits. He makes recommendations to the health profession and suggests that:

> …satisfying these preferences—taking seriously our affiliation with the natural world—may be an effective way to enhance health, not to mention cheaper and freer of side effects than medications.

In support of Frumkin's proposals, Mitten (2009:6) believes that the contribution nature can make to improving health and wellbeing has been depreciated and ignored by many public services. He suggests that:

> The power of the natural environment has been overlooked and undervalued by health practitioners and medical people, city and community planners, school personnel, parents…

Despite Mitten's (2009) remarks on the lack of value attributed to the restorative properties of the natural environment, there has however, been significant research undertaken and developments across the services he alludes to, since his work was published. Many of these developments will now be examined.

More recent explorative studies around the potential health benefits of being in nature were carried out by Bragg et al. (2013); Bragg and Atkins (2016) and Bragg and Leck (2017). Through their evaluative research alongside the mental health charity MIND's nature-based projects, Bragg et al. (2013) concluded that those individuals who participated in nature-based interventions improve overall wellbeing. Furthermore, their experiences can furnish participants with useful coping skills leading to improved social inclusion which is vital to the recovery of those living with poor mental health. The study found that nearly 69% of participants experienced increased wellbeing by the end of the project and nearly 68% felt they were better connected to nature (Bragg et al., 2013). However, the credibility of the research was jeopardised by only 54% of all projects returning data, so should all of the projects have responded the data could have been significantly different. This study also does not probe responses of specific groups. Concluding that the projects had a major impact on participants lives, MIND had funded 130 nature-based projects and 12,071 people directly benefitted from the programme (Bragg et al., 2013). Two of the projects were care farms.

This positive correlation between exposure to nature and improved health is corroborated through the work of Kaplan (1995) who suggests that being in nature has a restorative effect on individuals, in particular, cognitive functioning. According to Relf, contact with nature can reduce mental fatigue that can be caused by "multiple assaults on our attention" for example preparing for an examination (Relf, 1992:136). Furthermore, Elings suggests exposure to nature can provide two things: firstly, nature provides respite from the occurrences contributing to mental fatigue, and secondly, the subconscious interaction with nature 'just happens' without

having to think about it (Elings, 2011:46). Kaplan (1995) developed the 'Attention Restoration Theory' based on the noted observations during a wilderness programme with adults in the USA. The study examined directed attention and the fatigue that can be caused through overuse, consequently resulting in the need for rest and restoration. Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) promulgated the notion that being involved in natural environments provides restorative experiences required for a healthy mind. In other words, natural environments can aid recovery from directed attention fatigue. Mitten (2009:7) describes the essential elements in the healing power of nature as a necessity to be in free nature and live with the "natural rhythms of our earth". More recently, Elsey et al. (2016:100) suggest that a care farm can offer the environment required to help relax the mind, "reducing the constant bombardment of worries and concerns", therefore providing the mental space required to "regain the ability to focus attention on more taxing tasks". An emerging gap from the latter studies is how the findings can be applied, if at all, to young people disengaged from the mainstream school system. A fundamental question to explore and analyse is whether the classroom environment causes mental fatigue that could be remedied through exposure to a natural environment such as a care farm.

Faber-Taylor et al. (2001) used 'Attention Restoration Theory' as a catalyst for their study into nature and attention in children with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). They intended to decipher whether contact with nature also related to the attentional functioning of children. Involving children aged seven to 12, with a formal diagnosis of ADD or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) at the heart of their study, Faber-Taylor et al. concluded that their findings are consistent with those of Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) and that there is a causal relationship between nature and attention, which can be applied to children with ADD/ADHD. Through their findings, Faber-Taylor et al. (2001) made some key recommendations for practice suggesting that school classrooms should have large windows, breaks are given in a green environment and that the design of school playgrounds incorporate green space. The latter study extends Attention Restoration Theory to children aged seven to 12. However, it does not account for another population, namely being young people aged between 13 and 16 years old.

3.2.2 Nature supporting health and wellbeing

Kaplan (1992:72) believes that the natural environment is essential for human functioning, both cognitive and physical. His work on restorative experiences in nature supports the notion that nature is beneficial for health and wellbeing. He concludes:

> Nature is not merely 'nice'. It is not just a matter of improving one's mood, rather it is a vital ingredient in healthy human functioning.

The healthy mind to healthy body link has long been recognised (Faulkner & Taylor, 2005; Marmot, 2010). However, the increase of sedentary lifestyles and behaviours such as eating microwaveable meals, using internet applications, interactive online gaming and increased financial pressures have resulted in fewer people engaging in physical activity (Louv, 2005). In their research into the impact of sedentary lifestyles and mental wellbeing, Biddle et al. (2000) reviewed the evidence for the role of physical activity in improving cognitive functioning and reducing conditions of anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. Their work provided a springboard for practitioners working in the field of mental health and provided openings for the prevention and treatment of mental health conditions. The notion of mental health promotion was put forward by Biddle et al. (2000) and whilst it may appear an intangible phenomenon, a discourse was emerging around physical activity and the enhancement of quality of life. In his independent review of health inequalities, Sir Michael Marmot (2010:28) provides evidence and recommendations for urgent governmental action to improve the health and wellbeing of the nation; he suggests it is a matter of "fairness and social justice". One of his recommendations was to improve the "availability of good quality open and green spaces across the social gradient" providing further incentive to support the health benefits of engaging in the natural environment (p.24). Taking Marmot's work into account, the most recent government initiative around children and young people in nature will be reviewed in 3.2.4.

Pretty et al. (2009) working with the University of Essex, developed a model of life pathways to demonstrate the significant impact of inactivity and disconnection with the wider natural world:

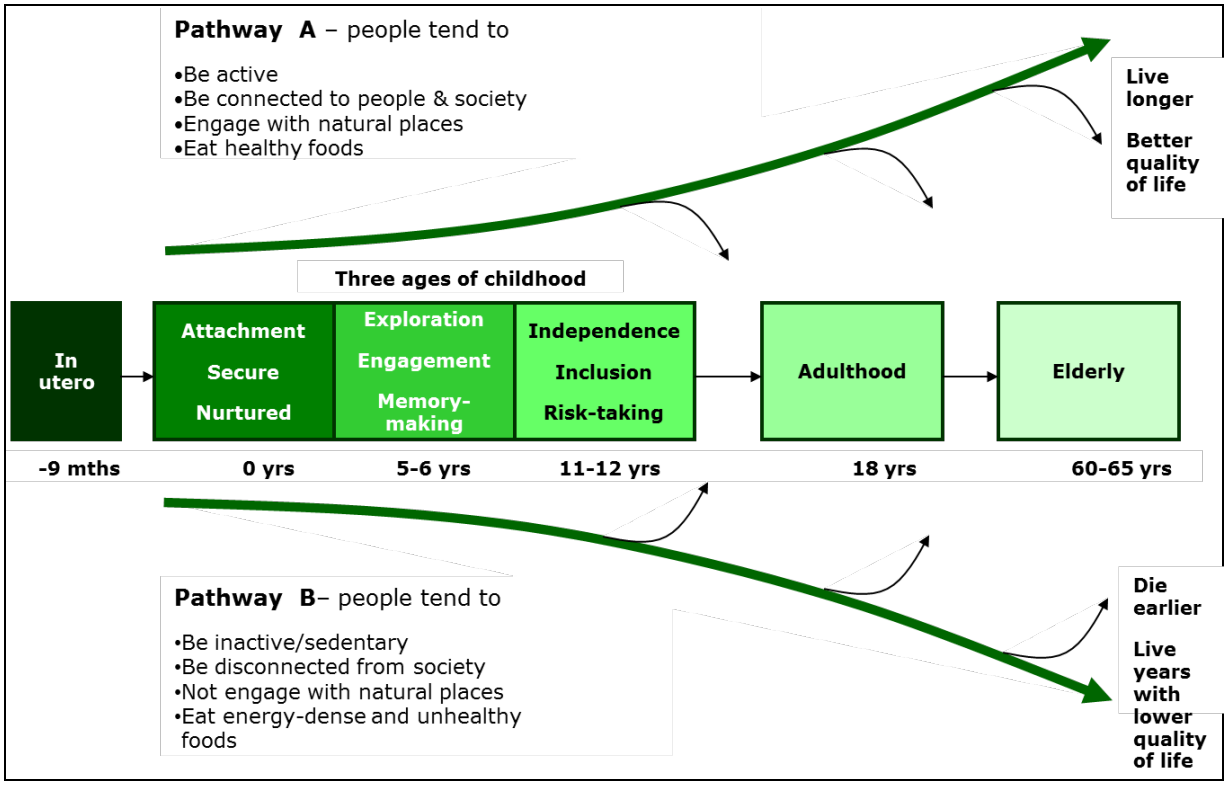


Figure 3: Model of life pathways (Pretty et al. 2009)

The funnel of pathways outlined above represent extremities, but the underlying statement is unmistakeable; contact with nature is a contributing factor to quality and length of life. Pretty et al. (2009) purport that by increasing physical activity in natural places, some of the substantial mental and physical health challenges facing society would be addressed. Worthy of note on Figure 3 is the omittance of reference to the age group at the heart of this study, 13 to 16 years. However, Pretty et al. (2009:12) do acknowledge children generically in their report suggesting that there is:

> … growing evidence to show that children's contact with nature and consequent levels of physical activity affects not only their wellbeing but also their health in later life.

Whilst there is a research gap in empirical evidence on individuals' experiences on care farms, one study carried out by Hine et al. (2008) aimed to provide a 'snapshot' to support the

evidence base for care farming. Using a mixed method study, 72 participants took part in a health benefit analysis. Participants derived from a range of vulnerable groups, one of which was disaffected young people. The results show convincingly that spending time on a care farm enhances mood and improves self-esteem. Hine et al. (2008:255) conclude that:

> Working on a care farm can significantly increase self-esteem and reduce feelings of anger, confusion, depression, tension and fatigue, whilst also enabling participants to feel more active and energetic. Care farming can therefore offer an ideal way of helping a wide variety of people to feel better.

Whilst the study does not provide detailed data on the responses of the specific groups, the results provide a springboard for further exploring young people's experiences of care farms. One of the few scholars who has explored young people's experiences on care farms is Hambidge. Hambidge's (2017) doctoral research was a study involving young people with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) based on a care farm in southern England. Using a mixed method typology which included quantitative measurement scales and quantitative observations, Hambidge generated evidence to support the conclusion that young people with BESD who had experienced a care farm intervention, reduced the risk of becoming categorised as Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET). She also confirmed through her research that "…young people who attended this care farm successfully re-engaged with their social environments…" and provided the "relevant foundations to re-engage with learning" (Hambidge, 2017:238). The latter finding is particularly significant for this study as this is an area in which the staff participants will be questioned. Worthy of note is Hambidge's assertion that through attending a care farm, young people are supported to achieve self-actualisation.

In his hierarchy of needs (Figure 4) Maslow (1943) would suggest health is a pre-determinant of self-actualization, and only when an individual has reached a state of ideal health will they progress onto the next stage of love and belonging; thus, in his work physiological needs precede psychological needs.

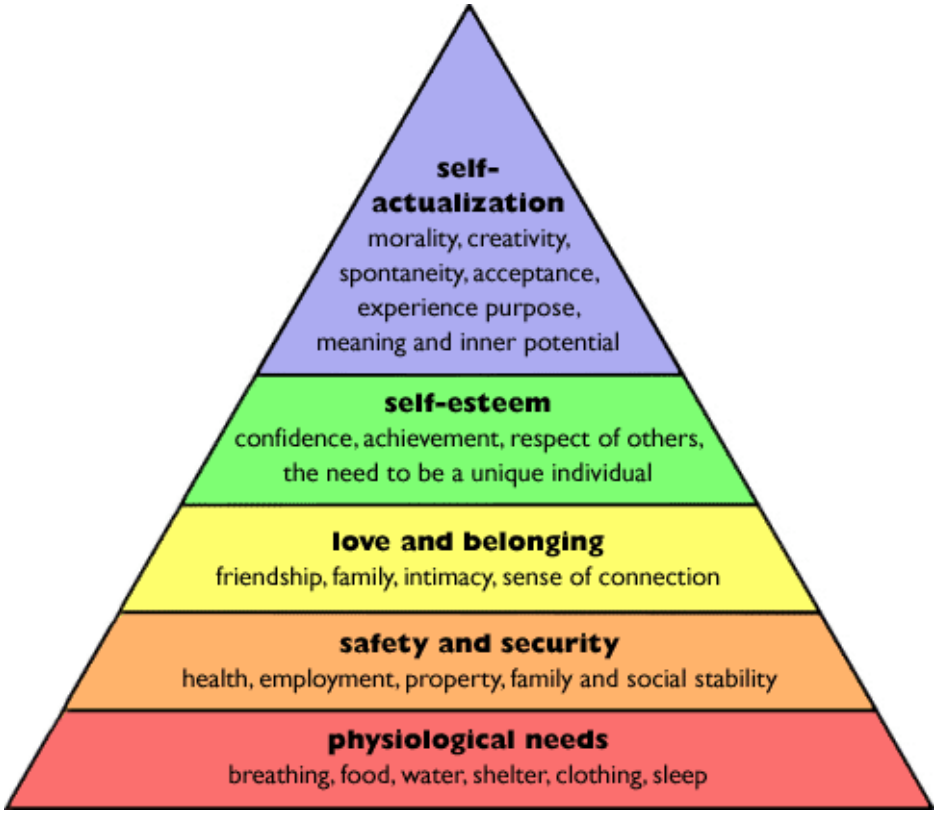


Figure 4: Hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943)

Although Maslow contributed much to the field of human psychology there appears to be a caveat in his work when surrounding the discourse of mental health. Maslow focused on positive mental health and did not account for an individual experiencing mental health distress or possible addictions; for these the psychological factors often override the physiological needs. For example, a habitual drug user with poor mental health may only be satisfied by a substance 'fix' rather than a roof over their head and a nutritious meal. Ishizuka (1981) offered an alternative model (Figure 5) integrating three spheres that determine psychological health and self-actualization. The spheres represent the search for self, the need for intimacy, and the quest for achievement; together, Ishizuka suggests, they form an individual's personality.

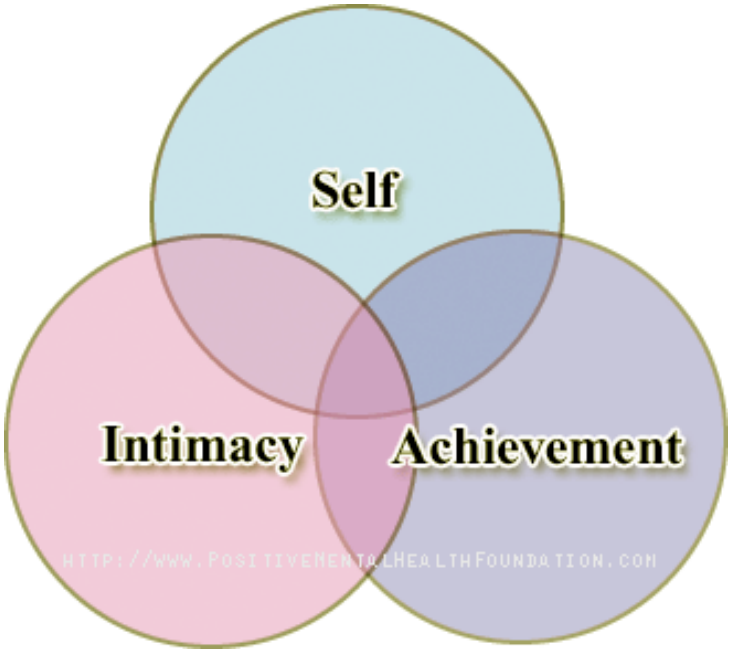


Figure 5: Model of positive mental health (Ishizuka, 1981)

In his work Ishizuka sought to define and quantify the subjective nature of wellbeing and develop a single working model of positive mental health and human personality. If an individual experienced a crisis in any one of these three interconnected universal spheres of psychological health, then defensive symptoms such as anxiety, anger, and depression or, in some cases, psychosis might occur.

The health of the nation was also the focus of 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People', a White Paper put forward by the Coalition government in 2010. A key aspect of the paper was strategies to deal with the rise of 'common mental health disorders' which the paper suggests account for over 70% of the burden of longstanding ill health in England (Department of Health (DoH), 2010). Worthy of note is the reference to 'green spaces' and the impact of these in improving mental health and the quality of community life, a key driver for the green care agenda at the core of this study (DoH, 2010:39). A commitment to improving green spaces in local communities and giving individuals the opportunities to grow their own food is a commitment made by the DoH in the White Paper and one that synergises with the ethos of a care farm. More recently, the Public Health England (PHE) strategic plan (2020-25) maps out the key

priorities for PHE over the next five years. Unlike the previous 2016-20 plan which made no reference to green spaces, the 2020-25 strategy acknowledges the role of access to green spaces in reducing health inequalities. PHE (2019:17) suggest that:

> …the design of sustainable environments can help provide the conditions for good health and reduce health inequalities by improving access to leisure and green spaces.

The role of promoting and maintaining public health is one which primarily falls to the government, through the establishment and maintenance of the relevant legislation and policies - a number of which are discussed above. These aim to safeguard the health of the nation and can be prioritised both financially and procedurally (Naidoo & Wills, 2008). There is a limitation to this however, and whilst the government devises policies and allocates financial resources, politicians could effectively manipulate policies and legislation to maintain political ideologies, therefore risking the reinforcement of the structural health inequalities ever present in society (Cooper, 2012a).

3.2.2.1 Mental health

Whilst there is an overlap between mental and physical health, the significance of poor mental health has been at the centre of numerous government policies and frameworks in recent times. Currently one in four individuals of all ages are affected by mental illness in the UK (Rethink, 2019). Furthermore, with regards the younger population, NHS Digital's[3] annual mental health bulletin (2017/18) stated that "28.5% of children aged 5 to 19-years-old had contact with professional services…due to mental health worries in the past year" (NHS Digital, 2018).

More recently the Children's Society's 'Good Childhood Report 2018' found that between 2009 and 2016, children's happiness with friends and life as a whole dropped (Children's Society, 2018). The same report in 2014 found that young people aged between 14 and 15 had the lowest levels of wellbeing and were more likely to be excluded from school (Children's Society,

[3] Replaced the Health and Social Care Information Centre in 2018

2014). This level of detail, however, was not provided in the most recent report and therefore a comparison cannot be made. Nevertheless, NHS England corroborate the 2014 findings, proposing that young people with mental health problems face lower educational attainment than their peers and display behaviours that pose a risk to their general health such as drug misuse, alcohol abuse and risky sexual behaviour (NHS, 2015).

In their work Coleman and Hagell (2015) suggest that mental health is one of the most pressing issues for young people. Supporting this is the latest large-scale study of mental ill-health amongst 11 to 15 year olds carried out by Green at al. (2005), who conclude that around 13% boys and 10% girls have emotional, behavioural and/or hyperactivity disorders. Furthermore, the NSPCC reported in 2015 that they provided 85,000 counselling sessions for young people with concerns regarding their mental health, a significant increase from 24,000 in 2013/14 (Brown, 2015a). In their research report on youth mental health and economic impact, Knapp et al. (2016:35) state that:

> Mental health accounts for a significant proportion of health problems experienced by young people in the UK but are more likely to be missed in young people than in any other age group.

Lepper (2015) describes the increase in children and young people being turned away from services due to not meeting the high clinical threshold for intervention as an anticipated 'time-bomb'. Given the latter statistics and observations, there is no doubt that poor mental health amongst young people is a pressing national concern.

The Coalition government (2010-2015) response to the escalation of mental health conditions and the need to promote positive mental health across the country was highlighted in the document 'No Health without Mental Health' (DoH, 2011). The DoH (2011:4) launched the mental health outcomes strategy, outlining two key imperatives:

- Improve the mental health and wellbeing of the population and keep people well.
- Improve outcomes for people with mental health problems through high quality services that are equally accessible to all.

In support of the new strategy, the then Government Health Minister, Andrew Lansley, provided the foreword stating:

> The Government recognises that our mental health is central to our quality of life, central to our economic success and interdependent with our success in improving education, training and employment outcomes and tackling some of the persistent problems that scar our society (2011:1).

Lansley appeared to value the crucial place that positive mental health plays in the functioning of society. However, it could be suggested, through the use of the phrase "persistent problems that scar our society", that the government was promoting a deficit model and assigning poor mental health to the deep-rooted societal inequality encapsulating individuals' daily lives. It is possible that Lansley was using poor mental health as a smoke screen to wider societal breakdown (Centre for Social Justice, 2011). Nevertheless, seemingly it was a positive initiative that implicitly supported the development of public health interventions such as care farming, while the central health strategy imperatives targeted the whole population, rather than specifically those experiencing diagnosed mental health difficulties.

A more recent NHS policy document outlining the trajectory for improving children and young people's mental health in England from 2015 through to 2020 is entitled 'Future in Mind'. Highlighting the deeply engrained challenges facing child and adolescent mental health services, the policy document outlines key themes which NHS England consider are fundamental to "creating a system that properly supports the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people" (NHS England, 2015:13). Within the policy document, the then government minister responsible for child and adolescent mental health, Sam Gyimah, placed an emphasis on services working in partnership to transform existing provision and made reference to collaboration with the voluntary sector. Care farms are predominately voluntary and community providers, and therefore Gyimah presented care farming with an opportunity should their potential be evidenced further. Knapp et al. (2016:35) support Gyimah's focus on collaboration, purporting that there should be early investment in projects that support the prevention of mental health issues amongst young people and an increase in "collaboration between agencies such as youth justice, education and health". Greater

collaboration amongst professionals to develop healthier environments for all was also put forward by Frumkin (2001) in his work discussed in 3.2.1.

The Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) and the Department for Education (DfE) appeared to respond to the growing numbers of young people experiencing mental health distress, when in 2017, they jointly published a public consultation document entitled, 'Transforming children and young people's mental health provision: a green paper' (DHSC/DfE, 2017). The 'green' consultative paper set out the ambition that children and young people who need support with their mental health are able to access it when required through their school, NHS, family and communities. The government has responded to the consultation through a summary of responses, but no further progress has been reported to date.

3.2.3 Societal factors

A range of societal factors can impact on the health and wellbeing of the population. Where a person lives and how children experience their primary socialisation are all indicators of future health, educational achievement and lifestyle choices. Often known as a 'post-code lottery', the socio-economic environment a child is exposed to and the health inequalities that derive from that social position, cannot be underestimated as a predictor of future life chance (Woods, 2016). Living in poverty is a serious issue facing many families and young people in the UK. A report by the End Child Poverty Action Group (2018) found that almost half of all children in some UK cities are estimated to be living in poverty. The next section will examine the links between the levels of deprivation in the UK, access to nearby nature, and health alongside wellbeing.

3.2.3.1 Demographics

It could be argued that one rationale behind the growing body of evidence on the benefits of contact with nature is aligned to the changes to society in England within the last century. Sempik et al. (2010:18) suggest that the urbanisation of society and the greater number of people living in an entirely urban setting has increased often resulting in limited access to natural spaces and a "disconnection from nature". Katcher and Beck (1987) argue that the disengagement from the natural environment is mostly due to the vast shift of people away from rural areas to cities. This is supported by the most recent government census in 2011, which suggests that at the time of the census '81.5% (45.7 million) of the usually resident population of England and Wales lived in urban areas and 18.5% (10.3 million) lived in rural areas' (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2011). Statistics infer that the urban population has grown on average by 8.1% since 2001, confirming the increased urbanisation of the country. The Natural Environment 'White Paper', 'The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature' draws upon a large-scale study in the Netherlands which found that living close to areas with more green spaces correlated with fewer mental health problems (DEFRA, 2011). Herzog and Strevey (2008:748) noted through their research that when in a natural setting, which is calm and peaceful, "features thought to promote recovery from stress" are in abundance. Similarly, Chawla and Litt (2013) believe that people will have improved health and wellbeing if they reside near natural surroundings such as parks, greenways, natural landscapes around workplaces, gardens and playgrounds. In a policy briefing aimed at increasing natural environments in Colorado, USA, they state:

> Access to nature has been related to lower levels of mortality and illness, higher levels of physical activity outdoors, restoration from stress, a greater sense of well-being, and greater social capital.

Correspondingly, this is supported by a study carried out by Charles and Louv (2009:23) who discovered that residing in greener spaces resulted in children having a lower body mass index. They stated:

> Our new study of over 3,800 inner city children revealed that living in areas with green space has a long-term positive impact on children's weight and thus health.

Research also shows that children living in inner-city areas in England are substantially more likely to be obese (Baker, 2018). In their work on nearby nature attenuating the adverse effects of life stress amongst children, Wells and Evans (2003) reviewed a number of studies examining children and young people's preferred environments and cognitive functioning (Sebba, 1991; Lynch, 1977; Grahn et al. 1997; Wells, 2000; Coley et al. 1997). They concluded that the evidence was sufficient enough to suggest that green natural settings have a beneficial effect on children's wellbeing and subsequently lack of access to the natural environment contributes to poor cognitive functioning as well as poor social interaction and 'social connectness' (Wells & Evans, 2003:313-315). In their own proceeding study, Wells and Evans (2003:311) tested the previous findings with 337 children from rural areas (with a mean age of 9.2 years) and discovered similarities to earlier studies, concluding that:

> …the impact of life stress was lower among children with high levels of nearby nature than among those with little nearby nature.

Alternatively, Hartig et al. (1991) believed that access and interaction with nature alone does not restore individuals. Moreover, they propose that it is the lack of social pressures and requirements to conform to others that synergise with the nature experience.

It is worth noting here that interacting with nature is only one of the many ways to buffer stress, however inferences may be drawn from the findings of Wells and Evans (2003) study in relation to young people living in urban areas with high deprivation levels. Those individuals already experiencing barriers to social interaction may have their situation further exacerbated by the lack of access to nearby nature, thus impacting on their resilience against stress and adversity (Evans & Kantrowitz, 2002).

3.2.3.2 Endangered species

The impact of the increased urbanisation is reflected on within the work of Louv (2005). Although his research emerged from America, the underlying observations can be applied to England. He connects the urbanisation of families with the consequential lack of access to green

spaces and predicts an increased parental fear of children playing outside (Louv, 2005). Increased traffic, extensive media coverage of missing children and the emerging negative connections to parkland are all significant contributors to the perceived threat of children playing or just being outdoors. Negative connections reinforced by media coverage of dead bodies being found in woodland areas (Adkins, 2015) and serious assaults in park lands (Lancaster, 2010) which Louv suggests is developing into nature becoming an 'enemy' amongst parents and their offspring. Louv (2005) suggests a 'bogeyman syndrome' alongside an irrational fear of green spaces contributes to children and young people not engaging in the outdoors as frequently as in the past. Gladwell et al. (2013:4) support Louv's point and suggest that:

> …the current generation of youth is largely restricted from accessing nature due to parental fears regarding stranger danger, traffic and criminal activity.

Additionally, they note that if generations of families continue to disengage with nature and devalue the benefits of contact with nature then the health of the nation will suffer. Louv (2005:158) likens a child in nature to an "endangered species" needing protection from the social influences preventing engagement with the natural environment.

3.2.3.3 Lifestyle

For children and young people in England, society has changed over recent years. There have been dramatic technological advances including the emergence of an array of gaming devices. The advancement of gaming systems has been compared to a "snowball effect" and is still expanding daily (Dillon, 2011). Some would suggest these developments in technology have led to the younger generations becoming less likely to engage in outdoor activity and are leading more sedentary lifestyles than ever before (Louv, 2005; Pretty et al., 2005). A national survey carried out by a child exploitation charity reported young people (13 to 19 years) spend, on average, 8.08 hours a day using various forms of technology both in and out of school. This included television, films, video games, computers, mobile phones, and the internet (National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, 2013). Furthermore, a Childwise

report indicated that 90% of young people aged between 11 and 16 years in the UK have their own computer or similar device (Childwise, 2018). Whilst the pace of change should be embraced, Louv (2012:38) suggests “a combination of natural and virtual experience” are required to prepare young people for the 21st century. The endemic rise in technological devices could also be attributed to the low number of young people engaging in physical exercise.

The proportion of children who met the England ‘physical activity guidelines’ was presented in the Health and Social Care Information Centre’s (HSCIC) 2018 statistical report. Only 12% of 13 to 15 year olds met the suggested level of activity. Physical activity is defined by the NHS as “moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity for at least 60 minutes every day” (HSCIC, 2018). An advertising campaign initiated by Unilever (2018) entitled ‘dirt is good’ aimed to encourage children to spend more time playing outdoors. Based on a national survey finding, 74% of UK children play outdoors for less than an hour a day, Unilever believed that maximum security prisoners spend more time outside than many children (Unilever, 2019).

Sedentary lifestyles could also be contributing to the rise in childhood obesity in England. NHS England (2014:9) state that “the number of obese children doubles while children are at primary school and share that “by the time they’re in Year Six, nearly one-in-five are then obese”. Furthermore, research carried out by Van Jaarsveld and Guilliford (2015) found that whilst the prevalence of obesity is stabilizing amongst two to ten year olds, incidences amongst 11 to 15 year olds continue to rise. This is supported by evidence from the NHS (2015) stating that obesity levels amongst young people show “a significant upward trend in overweight and obesity rates for the oldest age group (11 to 15 years)”. At the highest levels in recent years, being overweight and obese has affected almost two-fifths of young people in this age group. The NHS (2015) report attributes this increase to poor nutrition and low activity levels which could be as a result of the increased use of technology combined with the lack of aforementioned, physical activity.

A further contributing factor to the disconnection with nature suggested by Sempik et al. (2010) and Louv (2005) could be the ascending employment rates. The ONS infer that employment is at the highest level since records began, peaking at 73.2% (ONS, 2015) potentially resulting in more people engaging in work with less time for nature-based activity.

3.2.3.4 Reduction in services

Reduction in provision for young people in their local communities perpetuated by the increase in technology, may have contributed to the rise in poor health amongst this group. Smith (2013) notes from the latter part of the 1970s there was a decline in the number of young people attending youth work settings such as a youth centre. This, Smith suggests, was due to the ever-increasing development of home-based entertainment. Both Smith and Putnam (1995) identify how young people were withdrawing from socialising in groups to access new and exciting technological advances in the home such as wider television access and the development of computers and games consoles. Smith (2013) suggests that the reduction in engagement with youth services contributed to a decrease in funding allocated to the sector, as other services showing greater demand took precedence in financial distribution, such as social care provision. Local authorities were not required through legislation to provide youth services. As a result, the Coalition government (2010-2015) made some of the most significant cuts ever seen to provision for young people. Moss (2011) reported on the mass closure of youth clubs across the country due to austerity measures. The report highlighted how government cuts resulted in the closure of 350 clubs in England between 2010-2011. Similarly, Mulholland (2018) stated that local authority funding for youth services had plummeted by almost two-thirds, from just over one billion in 2008-2009 to 388 million in 2016-2017, with the steepest cuts occurring after 2010 in line with Moss's findings.

The emotive work of youth service activist Doug Nicholls (2012) describes the cuts to services for youth as a 'chain-saw massacre' and suggests young people are bearing the brunt of the political mistakes of others, blaming neoliberal ideology for the demise of the youth service.

Neo-liberalism is described by Held (1990) as the creation of a state which has no involvement in both the economy and in the provision of opportunities across society. Translated into policy and practice the term encapsulates the then Coalition government's agenda to offer public services to new providers, intensify social action and devolve power to local communities (House of Commons, 2010).

3.2.4 Political positioning

A by-product of neo-liberal ideology was the emergence of the 'Big Society' which underpinned the Coalition agreement in 2010 (Cameron, 2010). A number of Acts of Parliament such as The Localism Act (2011), brought with them a range of initiatives aimed at empowering communities by devolving more decision making away from central government, often referred to as the aforementioned 'Big Society'. Decentralisation from the state provided opportunities for many sectors to review their provision and respond to local needs. The political move to decentralise services came under heavy criticism. Cooper (2012a) suggests that the neo-liberal notion of 'Big Society' did not provide opportunities and was the deepest ever spending cuts to the public sector. Nevertheless, in support of the Coalition's aspiration, the previously reported government 'White Paper' – The Natural Choice (DEFRA, 2011:45) states:

> The Big Society has a very important role to play in protecting and improving our natural environment. We need to unleash the potential of citizens, neighbourhoods, communities and civil society.

The paper details the then government aspiration for individuals embracing and connecting with the natural health service and sourcing alternative forms of treatment for poor health and wellbeing. Whilst the presiding government has changed since the 'White Paper' was written, the direction of travel has not. Increased attention is being focussed on the public health benefits of engaging with the natural environment. The social prescribing roll-out across England is an example of this. Social prescribing is a non-medical intervention described by the Social Prescribing Network (2020) as:

> … a means of enabling GPs and other frontline healthcare professionals to refer patients to a link worker - to provide them with a face to face conversation during which they can learn about the possibilities and design their own personalised solutions… so that people with social, emotional or practical needs are empowered to find solutions which will improve their health and wellbeing, often using services provided by the voluntary and community sector. It is an innovative and growing movement, with the potential to reduce the financial burden on the NHS and particularly on primary care.

Social prescribing is one aspect of the wider social inclusion agenda and uses primary care as a gateway to enhance opportunities for individuals experiencing long-term poor mental health to access everyday sources of support, leisure, community activity and the natural environment. One of the intended outcomes of the social prescribing initiative is a more cost efficient and effective use of the financially stretched National Health Service (Kings Fund, 2015) and social care resources (Scope, 2015), therefore synergising with the government's austerity measures. As discussed in 3.2.2.1, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have been heavily affected by the financial crisis, resulting in a need to extend the scope of interventions. Writing for the *Children and Young People Now* professional journal, Lepper (2015) reports that "cuts to child and adolescent mental health services are being blamed for an escalation of mental health problems among pupils". Coleman and Hagell (2015:23) support the social prescribing agenda and suggest that:

> …we need to broaden our attention to other delivery mechanisms for mental health interventions for this age group including making the best use of services of the voluntary sector…

Having access to green spaces and engaging within the natural environment as a vehicle to improve health and wellbeing, is firmly embedded within the ethos of care farming. Care farms have a window of opportunity here to engage with the social prescribing initiative and locate themselves as an alternative form of therapy for a range of health disorders and wellbeing needs. Research carried out by Bragg and Leck (2017) and Leck (2013) provides evidence to support the purposefulness of care farms in relation to cost and outcomes for individuals. Leck (2013:258) states that his doctoral study "demonstrated that care farms provide a service that can meet the requirements of all relevant stakeholders".

Additionally, in her guide to social prescribing for commissioners and health professionals, Friedli (2013:42) explores various activities that could be prescribed such as arts, reading and crafts. Worthy of note here is her reference to 'green activity' or 'ecotherapy'. She observes that:

> …'green activity' denote schemes in which participants become both physically and mentally healthier through contact with nature. This can include: gardening and horticulture; growing food; walking in parks or the countryside; involvement in nature conservation work (e.g. green gyms); and developing community green spaces.

Elsey et al. (2016:100) take this one step further by suggesting that care farming is 'prescribed' for mental illness. In their work they refer to the potential of providing a 'one-stop referral process' from General Practitioners (GP) to non-medical interventions such as care farming to reduce the existing overprescribed interventions such as medication. The English City of Leeds is operating a model currently incorporating nature-based interventions in their 'suite' of treatment options (Elsey et al., 2016).

Initial feedback from the social prescribing pilots suggested that the process is working well with many positive outcomes being recorded (Dayson et al., 2013), although the measures of success are hard to quantify due to the complexity of each individual accessing the service. Various diagnostic tools have been implemented with the aim of capturing valued outcomes; however, research published by the University of York (2015:1) reviewed the evidence from their local pilots and concluded that "evidence on the cost effectiveness of social prescribing schemes is lacking".

A more recent government initiative is the Children and Nature Programme (DEFRA, 2018b). Launched in 2018, the government laid out plans to encourage more children and young people to engage with nature in and out of school. The new 25-Year Environment Plan from DEFRA entitled *'A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment',* maps out strategies for enhancing the environment and health of the nation, but specifically relevant to this study are the plans to connect people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing; this notably includes young people. Within the report DEFRA makes reference to care farms when

listing existing nature-based interventions that are used to improve health conditions. Farms are mentioned later on in the report with regards education visits:

> We want to make it easier for schools and Pupil Referral Units to take pupils on trips to natural spaces on a regular basis where they can combine learning with feeling healthier and happier. This might involve class visits to a city farm, a local nature reserve, woodland or National Park (DEFRA, 2018b:76).

Coming out of the 25-year plan is a project entitled 'Growing Care Farming'. The government has committed funding and aspire to work with the care farm sector to expand provision by 2023, trebling the number of places to 1.3 million per year for children and adults in England. Detailed evaluations of the impending projects have been incorporated within funding allocations and therefore impact data will start to emerge.

3.2.5 Emergence of care farming – research and gaps

The evidence within the literature reviewed so far exploring the therapeutic value of contact with nature, is certainly burgeoning and persuasive. However, literature around the use of care farms is embryonic. There are over 250 recognised care farms throughout the UK (SFG, 2019), and although this figure is increasing annually, care farming is still a developing practice and many of the features have been inspired by European counterparts. Individuals of any age experiencing poor mental health, with physical disabilities and a range of other additional needs attend a care farm with an aspiration to improve their overall health and wellbeing. A study initiated by the University of Essex reviewing the delivery of care farms, recorded that the majority of care farms cater for individuals with mental health issues (65%) and learning difficulties (73%), while 52% cater for disaffected young people (Bragg, 2013). However, due to the low response rate of 66% from the established care farms, the latter statistics do not capture all care farms operating at that time and are therefore not wholly representative.

Internationally, the Netherlands lead the way in care farming hosting over 1,100 care farms, 600 of which are integrated into their social prescribing schemes and health insurance system.

Worthy of note is that historically, the care farm projects were recognised by the governing institutions and therefore received state funding (Wilcox, 2007). As an alternative to medicines or to complement medicinal interventions, health care practitioners can prescribe patients a place on a care farm to encourage therapeutic exercise in nature. This is also the case in Norway (Louv, 2012). In his work, Louv contended that the UK's governing institutions are beginning to see the benefits for individual patients and the cost-saving implications for health service resources. Leck's (2013:iv) research supports this in his findings from his doctoral study on the impact of farming in the UK. He concludes that "for every £1 that was invested on a care farm, there was a return that exceeded £3.50" and therefore found care farming to be a "cost-effective vehicle" to enhance the health and wellbeing of participants. Concluding his study, Leck (2013) recommended that the value care farming provides to the health care service and individuals, should be digested and understood by policy makers and commissioners.

The emergent body of research and literature on the use of care farms, combined with the growth in the sector, seemingly provided an opportunity to professionalise the provision. Social Farms & Gardens, formerly Care Farming UK (CFUK) was established as the body to support and develop care farms with a mission to:

> …provide a voice and supportive services for care farmers, to inspire decision makers and to develop policies and actions that will support care farming in the UK (CFUK, 2015).

Social Farms & Gardens have previously developed a 'Code of Practice' for care farmers to work towards and eventually achieve, therefore providing a benchmark and consistency across providers. Accredited training for potential and existing care farmers is available to support the professionalisation of the service and subsequently enable the promotion of care farming across the health, social care and education sectors.

The emerging field of research on care farms is growing (Murray et al., 2019; Asquith, 2017; Hambidge, 2017; Bragg & Atkins, 2016; Bragg, 2013; Leck, 2013) and research data analysed in existing studies give an indication that care farms have specific qualities that participants may

benefit from. These include engaging in purposeful activities and being part of a social community based within a natural environment.

Asquith (2017), as a Nuffield scholar, explored the role agriculture could play in delivering social care. As part of his research, Asquith visited seven countries across the world and spent time on care farms examining their functions and purpose; he also met with influential decision makers such as Members of Parliament (MP). The research findings concluded that agriculture does have a role to play in challenging health inequalities but a stronger evidence base is required. In his conclusion, Asquith (2017:23) states:

> …farms integrate health and social care to provide community-based, non-clinical care, which is exactly what the NHS is working towards providing.

He also draws attention to the fact that whilst farms have a role to play in offering social interaction and contact, they cannot do so in isolation and thus support from policy makers is crucial. Notably, in his research, Asquith further identifies a potential impediment to the practice of care farming: namely, the ambiguity surrounding the term 'care farming'.

The term care farming was originally conceived through the interpretation of the term used in the Netherlands to describe similar provision ('Zorgboerderju') but since this adoption other terms have developed and are being applied to the context of care farming. Phrases such as 'social farming', 'nature-based interventions', 'multi-functional agriculture' and 'connective agriculture' are all terms that are used interchangeably in the literature, causing much confusion as to the purpose and function of care farming. Leck (2013:261) reflects on this issue in his work, suggesting that 'care' is only one aspect of what a care farm provides and states:

> The term care has passive and unidirectional undertones that wrongly suggests this is something that is provided rather than celebrating the fact that everyone actively participates in the process.

This discussion point has been taken up by Social Farms & Gardens and a consultation with care farmers and commissioners is ongoing with the aim of achieving a commonly agreed term.

However currently, care farming is the phrase used by Social Farms & Gardens and therefore the one adopted in this study.

3.2.6 Care farming and young people

In addition to the numerous studies based on adults (see 3.2.1), research is building momentum around young people's relationship with the natural environment (Moore, 1996; Coley et al., 1997; Chawla, 1998; Sebba, 1991; Kahn & Kellert, 2002; Hambidge, 2017).

The Natural Environment White Paper 'The Natural Choice' claims that:

> Children [young people] are becoming disconnected from the natural environment. They are spending less and less time outdoors. In fact, the likelihood of children visiting any green space at all has halved in a generation (DEFRA, 2011:27).

The report noted that connections between young people and nature are weaker now than in the past, supporting Charles and Louv (2009), who assert that primary experiences of nature are being replaced by machines.

Whilst attending a care farm, participants can be both passively and actively involved with nature. Louv (2005:51) suggests one reason for the emotional benefits of being in nature may be "...that green space fosters social interaction and thereby promotes social support". Young people who have previously engaged in potentially hazardous behaviours such as substance abuse and self-harming may flourish whilst at the farm and can benefit from a non-judgemental atmosphere. In her work on care farms in the Netherlands, Elings (2011:4) states that "young people with difficulties show less behavioural problems after their stay on a farm". From the literature reviewed, a care farm appears to be inexhaustible for new discoveries, and individuals attending the farm could potentially make life-changing discoveries embracing the multi-sensory facets on their journey. Care farming focuses on the possibilities instead of the limitations of the participant and therefore aligns to the social model of disability. The social model concept views the individual as a capable person before taking into account any disability and label assigned to them (Elings, 2011; French & Swain, 2000; Asquith, 2017).

The previously reported White Paper from The Natural Environment demonstrates that "contact with nature enhances children's education, personal and social skills, health and wellbeing, leading to the development of responsible citizens" (DEFRA, 2011:27). The social value of contact with nature suggested by DEFRA has been the subject of a number of earlier studies (Hartig & Evans, 1993; Louv, 2005:51), with Louv in particular focussing on teenagers during his research in Finland where he found that participants "could clear their minds and gain perspective and relax" when in natural settings. Some would argue that it is not the contact with nature that enhances wellbeing, but alternatively the connection with nature when an individual connects personally with the natural environment (Mertins, 2020).

Writing for 'Teaching Times', Dutton and Chandra (2013) claim that exploring the natural world can help schools to overcome children's poor mental health. Highlighting the Haven Project based within a secondary school in Liverpool as a model of good practice, Dutton and Chandra (2013:43) believe that nature can act as a co-therapist with young people and allows them the opportunity to 'just be' themselves, free from any 'judgemental interactions'. The Haven Project uses the school garden area as a therapeutic medium for those pupils who need additional support with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The horticulture intervention is young person led, with activities being instigated by the young people. This informal pedagogy allows the young people to make their own discoveries and experience the sensory enrichment. The approach used at the Haven Project significantly resembles the ethos of good youth work practice: empowering and young person led (Batsleer & Davies, 2010).

Future Roots (2015) is another care farm based in southern England that claims to offer 'the opportunity for people to utilize a rural environment to enhance their wellbeing and to reach their potential'. The Future Roots project has two specific programmes for young people who find school challenging and have an interest in working outdoors. Based on agricultural landscapes, animal husbandry and horticulture, one of the courses provides

> …an opportunity to gain an accredited qualification for the hardest to reach young people who are at risk of permanent exclusion from the education system (pre-NEET)

due to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties as well as those with special educational needs (Future Roots, 2015).

The Director of Future Roots, during a television interview, likened her experience working with young people on the care farm as seeing a "chrysalis to a butterfly" (ITV, 2012). Through attempts to measure impact and monitor attitudes to learning, Future Roots (2015) state that in one of their evaluations with the young people:

- 100% were reported as having increased motivation
- 89% were reported as having developed their communication skills
- 66% were reported as having improved behaviour
- 44% were reported as having increased attendance.

Despite Future Root's evaluation being solely an intra-organisational study, there have been several corroborating academic studies that associate children engaging in nature with better mood, increased focus in the classroom, improved academic achievement and overall wellbeing (Dismore & Bailey, 2005; Chawla, 2015; Hambidge, 2017; Richardson et al., 2019).

Dismore and Bailey (2005) examined the relationship between outdoor and adventurous activity with enhanced school academic development, suggesting some causative effect. In their review of the literature they discovered a number of possible explanations such as physical activity enhances "flow of blood to the brain…increases mental alertness and improves self-esteem", or an alternative perspective is that outdoor activities generate "empowering situations in which children relax and enjoy learning" (Dismore & Bailey, 2005:10). A comparable study was undertaken by Kuo et al. (2018) who used observations to capture pupils' behaviour during school lessons inside and outside the classroom. They conclude that lessons taking place outdoors, within a natural setting, boosts engagement in the classroom afterwards and furthermore, encourage teachers to experiment with teaching outdoors. Limitations are recognised within Dismore and Bailey's and Kuo et al.'s studies, such as the lack of baseline measures that destabilize the confident attribution of causality, but their findings do offer insights into a potential area for future study.

The 2006 Labour government published a manifesto focussed on encouraging schools and further education colleges to engage with teaching and learning in the outdoor environment. Entitled 'Learning Outside the Classroom', the manifesto intended for schools and colleges to improve their outdoor provision for children/young people and also encourage the evaluation of such work (CfLOTC[4], 2019). Training packages were provided by the then government department, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), and a 'quality kitemark' made available for those providers who were recognised as meeting the DfES standards, offering a quality learning experience outside the classroom. Ofsted (2008:5), through their inspection methodology and process, evaluated the impact of the manifesto and reported that:

> When planned and implemented well, learning outside the classroom contributed significantly to raising standards and improving pupils personal, social and emotional development.

In their evaluation report on the 'Learning Outside the Classroom' initiative, particular attention is given to young people who were hard to motivate or were disruptive in the classroom environment. Ofsted (2008:23) described the positive effects of the outdoor environment and stimulating activities on this group of young people and used the example below to capture the findings:

> A group of 15-year-old boys in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) who had been excluded from mainstream school in the past took part in a weekly session where they learned how to handle small motor boats... They all progressed well, taking considerable responsibility for their own and each other's health and safety, and working collaboratively. This work led directly to the possibility of their gaining demanding accredited qualifications and the possibility of future employment. Their behaviour was exemplary and they thoroughly enjoyed these sessions. The PRU staff noted that their attendance in full-time education had increased markedly while on the programme. For many, it rose from about 30% to over 80%.

The activities described in the Learning Outside the Classroom manifesto bear resemblance to those provided by a care farm, and the ethos of the strategy is built on the same principles: to use the outdoor environment to nurture positive health and overall wellbeing. Some care

[4] Council for Learning Outside the Classroom

farms, particularly those that work closely with schools, have achieved the kite mark. A limitation highlighted by Ofsted in their evaluation document is the lack of evidence of impact harvested by the providers. In response to this finding Ofsted (2008) recommends that an evaluation of Learning Outside the Classroom takes place by schools and colleges in order to maximise the impact of learners' achievement, personal development and wellbeing. This data would also add to the evidence base for the value of young people engaging with the natural environment.

Pretty et al. (2013) report on the benefit of contact with nature for facilitating therapeutic outcomes for youth within or at risk of entering the criminal justice system. Venturing into the discipline of criminology and health promotion, Pretty et al. (2013:184) suggest that nature and green space can:

> …foster behaviour change by addressing any of the issues directly related to their criminal activity and helping them avoid and overcome these problems.

Drawing upon wilderness therapy research, Pretty et al. (2013) suggest that access to green spaces and engagement with nature-based activities can be a catalyst for attitudinal modification and potential behavioural changes amongst young people who engage in criminal activities. They believe that nature can provide a distraction from negative everyday influences and offer an alternative lifestyle. Whilst Pretty et al. omit to reflect on young people who undertake risky behaviours in natural spaces, such as excessive alcohol consumption and gang related activity, they nevertheless offer an insight into the potential impact of participating in structured activities in nature for youth at risk of social exclusion.

Elings (2011:17) supports the findings of Pretty et al. in her work on the effects of care farms amongst young people with behavioural difficulties in the Netherlands. She suggests that being on a care farm supports troubled young people to "get a handle on their lives again in a safe environment", where there is less aggression present than in a school or college facility. As one of the few researchers focusing solely on young people's experiences of care farming, Elings

work is highly significant for this study. Elings (2011:18) notes the following factors that she feels contributed to the positive outcomes from her research with young people:

- Consistency of staffing at the care farm created stability
- The farmer as a positive role model
- Feeling involved on the farm created an atmosphere of equality
- Emphasis on the young person's abilities promoted positive attention
- Learning in a real-life situation
- Being outside of a destructive environment
- Opportunity to be creative in the farming environment, moving away from the abstract to the practical.

The final point, Elings observes, is that young people often need a purpose to stimulate a sense of responsibility. She suggests that a care farm has infinite opportunities for this in comparison to a classroom, where lessons are often too abstract. As she states, "young people often need an environment that is 'unfinished', where they can fill in the blanks for themselves" and activities such as plant maintenance, animal husbandry and horticulture fulfil this (p.18).

Corroborating elements of Elings (2011) work are the findings of Hambidge's (2017) study based on a care farm in England. Hambidge discovered through her work with young people that trusting relationships with the farm staff and mentors were an integral part of the care farm experience. Another key finding was how exposure to the natural environment can support improved self-esteem, self-efficacy and empathy towards others. A limitation of their work was that both Elings and Hambidge's studies were carried out with young people who had identified behavioural and social difficulties, so the focus group was narrow. Nevertheless, the findings are highly significant for this study.

Some evidence concerning the social rehabilitation properties of nature for young people emerged from Leck's study (2013) and Hambidge's (2017), but the lack of empirical evidence is worthy of note.

3.3 Youth - a narrative of disconnection

Central to this study is the group known in popular discourse as youth or young people, but more specifically young people aged 13 to 16 years who are disengaged with mainstream education and consequently at risk of social exclusion. The literature review will now move on to examine discourse surrounding the notion of 'youth'.

3.3.1 Youth as a social category

Before examining the narrative of disconnection, it is essential that the social category of youth is given attention and a discussion held around whether youth as a group exist or conversely, the term is a mere social construction.

Sercombe et al. (2002) note that youth are not a homogenous group of individuals and that there are many sub-categories of young people experiencing differing social realities. This is supported by Bradford (2012:23) who remarks that "it is impossible to regard youth or young people as an entirely universal category". Spence (2005:46) implies that whilst being a universal phrase, the term 'youth' carries a 'great deal of baggage' with mainly negative assumptions. Similarly, Jeffs and Smith (1990) suggest that terms such as 'adolescence', 'youth', 'young person' and 'teenager' are used interchangeably and posit that the latter terms are linked to different professions and social groupings, therefore factually subjective.

Another perspective on youth is that of biology. Mizen (2004:9) claims that age is central to defining youth and states that 'youth is most fundamentally a question of age'; he concludes with this statement after reviewing the varying entitlements that are allocated to a certain biological age such as voting and sexual activity. Globally this is also the case as entitlements for young people vary across the world; for example, the minimum age for a driving licence in Canada is 14 years compared to the African nation of Niger which is 23 years of age.

Some believe that 'youth' is a phase of life influenced and shaped by the shifting economic, social and cultural processes at that time, and is more than merely a transitional phase (Macdonald & Marsh, 2005). However, the structural forces cast upon the transitional phase of youth are significant enough to shape an individual's life chances and destinations in adulthood. The social exclusion some young people face may be a lived experience during the proposed transitional phase of youth. Bynner and Parsons (2002) believe that not being in education, employment or training at age 16 is the most powerful predictor of unemployment in young adulthood. They also argue that being out of education is associated with teenage pregnancy, criminal activity and drug misuse. This is further supported through research produced by Newton and Buzzeo (2006).

The contradictions throughout the literature, combined with the 'increasing fuzziness' (Cieslik & Simpson, 2013) on the biological age boundaries of the period of youth are so wide ranging that it is challenging to define youth as a definitive social category (Jones, 2009). Part of this challenge is to question the ontological reality of 'youth' as a tangible entity. Jeffs and Smith (1990) argue that the term 'youth' has limited use and infers that those within this category are socially deficient and in need of control, a perspective further endorsed by Cooper (2009) in his work on the 'problem' of youth.

In their study on youth in a neoliberal society, Sukarieh and Tannock (2015:30) reinforce Cooper's perspective and note that young people are treated as a problem and are 'widely and unjustly' demonised. The view of youth as a problem is further perpetuated through structural forces such as engrained societal values and the mass media. Furthermore, for the subcategory of disengaged youth, who are at the heart of this study, they face greater complex structural forces that may fuel further isolation from economic, societal and educational opportunities.

Whilst acknowledging that the term youth is socially defined and an ambiguous category (Bradford, 2012), for the purpose of this study, young people of statutory secondary school age

13 to 16 years who are entitled to alternative education curricula, and studying at key stage 4, are the focus.

3.3.2 Influences on youth

The process of socialisation, with the norms set by societal constructs, begins when a child is born. From birth onwards, across the globe, a child is exposed to the culturally assumed consensus that encapsulates human lives. The notion that children and young people are inherently conditioned by their peripheral environment provides a foundation for understanding how identity is formed in the early stages of life. The primary socialisation and societal influences a child encounters are multi-faceted; nonetheless, they enable a child to construct their own meaning of the world. While there are many different theories related to child development, the ecological systems theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) places emphasis on how environmental factors play a central role in development. Developmental psychologist Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that human development was ultimately moulded by an individual's interaction with his or her environment. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory details the complex layers of the environment, furthermore, demonstrating how each layer has an effect on a child's socialisation and development. The nested system consists of micro through to macro elements, and as seen in the diagram below, are interdependent of each other. The model bears similarities to Thompson's (2003) Personal, Cultural and Structural model, which identifies concentric oppressive forces.

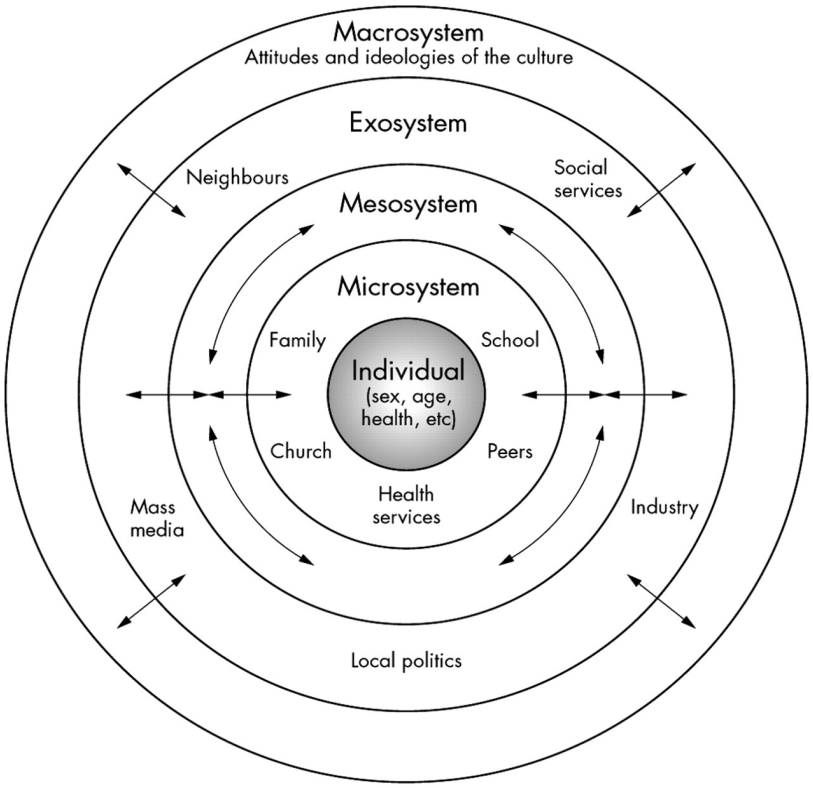


Figure 6: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1979)

The model developed by Bronfenbrenner implies that the societal landscape has a significant impact on an individual's development. This works alongside the continuing biological processes and the immediate family influence. The systems paradigm allows for a ripple effect meaning changes or conflict in any one layer will permeate throughout other layers. An example of this could be when a young person changes school resulting in peer group variations and altered support networks. Worthy of note are the exosystem and macrosystem; these layers demarcate the broader social systems in which the young person does not function directly. Structures present within the exosystem may impact on an individual's development by interacting with some aspects within the microsystem such as a parent/carer working pattern set by the industry (Berk, 2000). The macrosystem is the outermost layer in an individual's environment and comprises of cultural values, customs and laws (Berk, 2000). In his later work, Bronfenbrenner (1992:228) suggested that the macro-system may be thought of as a societal blueprint for particular cultures or other social contexts. The percolating influences highlighted within Bronfenbrenner's model allow the cultural values defined by the

macrosystem to have a cascading effect throughout the interplay of all other layers. Prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviour towards youth (as described by Spence (2005) cited on page 54) could be perpetuated throughout the ripples creating a naive consciousness amongst young people and therefore reinforcing deep-rooted oppression (Freire, 1972). The result of this could be young people internalising the negative attitudes and being left defenceless to challenge.

The notion of how the environment exerts an influence on a child and young person's development is central to Bronfenbrenner's theory. However, there appears to be a fundamental focus on sociocultural contexts rather than physical environments such as green spaces. The influence of the natural environment is absent from the nested ecological system, yet the evidence put forward throughout this review suggests access to nature is significant to a child's holistic wellbeing. In support of this, Kyttä (2003:11) states that a child's relationship with the natural environment is 'formed through active interaction with it'.
An alternative perspective on the influence of environmental forces suggested by Bronfenbrenner is provided by academics who believe an individual's character and behaviours are wholly determined by their genetic composition (Galton, 1869; Freud, 1923; Chomsky, 1965; Bowlby, 1969). Bronfenbrenner's systems theory also received criticism that he was too generic with his 'one size fits all' model, suggesting a normalised childhood for all and omitted to consider cognitive factors and complex identities (MacBlain, 2014). There is also a lack of acknowledgement that children can create their own identities through resilience, autonomy and mobility (Christensen, 2010).

Adult influencers such as teachers, parents and carers are conduits for the fabrics of society. Alongside broader societal influences such as the media, they provide a child with social context, cultural history and language or languages. As social constructivists, Vygotsky et al. (1978) believe influences provided through society give children cognitive tools required to support their development; however, it could be suggested these tools may reinforce discriminatory views and therefore oppressive values. Reflecting on the historical nature or

nurture debate, Yolton (1985) examines the historical work of John Locke (1632-1704). Locke was a social constructivist who maintained that humans are born as blank slates with no innate views or attitudes. He believed that children develop exclusively from their environmental influences, including invisible societal influences. Yolton (1985) draws on the work of Locke, believing that acquisition of knowledge is from experience alone. Locke was one of the original philosophers to develop the epistemological notion that identity of the self is formed through a continuity of consciousness. Supporting this view is the behaviourist Watson (1930:32), who stated that he could mould any child, suggesting that cultural and societal influences are wholly responsible for the identity formation of the person. He asserted:

> Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select.

This bold statement by Watson could be interpreted as a process of manipulation and the beginning of a process of internalisation. The work of Locke (1632-1704), Yolton (1985) and Watson (1930) demonstrates how adult influencers such as a parent, carer or teacher can instill their personal values and beliefs on young children. These values and beliefs are most likely based on the 'taken for grantedness' referred to by Berger and Luckmann (1966:13), and fueled by the numerous myths, lies and misinformation that permeate society, consequently accepted as the norm. Children are defenseless to absorbing conscious and unconscious discrimination long before they can decide for themselves. In this way, the cycle of conditioned oppression begins, and many young people have significant challenges to confront long before joining the schooling system. Some perhaps do not ever overcome these and begin school life already significantly influenced. One influencing factor is put forward by Blaine (2013) who explores how personal beliefs effect behaviour. Blaine felt that an individual's behaviour replicates their beliefs and expectations, therefore influencing how they experience a diverse world. Blaine believes (2013:17) that personal beliefs allow individuals to execute 'a script for conducting oneself in the on-going drama of life'. There are, however, also young people who decide to deviate from the ideologies that they have been socialised into through childhood and choose an alternative path; such as adopting different political perspectives and religious beliefs.

The process of internalisation is one that is highlighted and challenged through anti-oppressive practice. Featuring throughout training courses for youth workers and social care professionals, students are provided with information, knowledge and guidance in the hope of removing or negating the influence of oppression amongst the young people, families and communities they work alongside. The term 'anti-oppressive practice' does not feature as prominently in the field of education, although it could be suggested that it is there under the guise of the more popular terms of inclusion, equality and diversity throughout the prescribed standards of teaching practice (DfE, 2011). Central to anti-oppressive practice when working with young people and their communities, is raising awareness of the powerful influence of the principles illustrated within Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem. Young people should be empowered to ensure the ripples that work from the inside out reflect anti-oppressive values and challenge the taken-for-granted attitudes often normalised within many societal structures. This will hopefully arm young people who have faced negative influences throughout their childhood with the knowledge that some belligerent attitudes are not the norm. Freire and Ramos (1996) refer to this as a process of *conscientization*. Only by challenging oppressive attitudes and behaviours, will the structural inequalities and the dominant ideologies engrained in society be brought to account and young people be given a fair chance to thrive; an aspiration that underpins the values of youth work.

In support of youth work as a profession, Nicholls (2012:99) believes that youth workers

> …should be the strongest critics of the social forces and relationship that make young people so alienated and confused that they can behave so badly in the first place.

While this is a universal statement with regards all young people, it could, however, be applied to those disengaged from mainstream schooling and therefore those at the centre of this study.

According to the work of Thompson (2003), by the time a child becomes a young person, many of the conscious and unconscious discriminative attitudes could be deeply engrained. For example, perspectives on gender will have already formed based on the primary and secondary socialisation experienced, and some of these attitudes could be oppressive. Dominelli (2002:13)

suggests that an individual who is oppressed in one area of life '…may be oppressive in other elements of it', thus raising the notion that young people who are oppressed through socialisation with dominant ideologies may become the oppressor themselves. Therefore, the cyclical nature of oppression continues, leading to reinforcement of the prevailing social ideology (Freire & Ramos, 1996).

On a macro structural level, Gramsci (1971) noted that growth of the dominant societal ideologies leads to the development of hegemony. Simon (2015) suggests hegemony is the relation of dominance, by consent and not coercion, of one group over another. The hegemon holds the power in society and due to having predominant influence, they possess the authority to manipulate any information and communication dispersed to the wider society. Hegemonic forces such as the mass media transmit information and therefore can influence stereotyping and create moral panics surrounding various groups, for example young people. During the disturbances of 2011, images portraying young people in destructive scenarios were showcased in the media rather than images representing those demonstrating against the 'riots'. This, therefore, fuelled any existing negative attitudes towards young people. Writing in the Daily Mail, Hastings (2011) suggested the perpetrators of the riots were, 'A large, amoral, brutalised, subculture of young British people who lack education because they have no will to learn'. He went on to declare that the young people '…are essentially wild beasts' suggesting they need containment. As a result of this coercion, those exposed to the media reporting may internalise the negative representations. Thus, the process of cultural hegemony exerts pressure on the subconscious of a whole country which cannot fail to avoid the media. Merton (1957) describes this process as a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', strengthening the ideological and political beliefs of the hegemon who hold and exert power over society. Therefore, promoting a deficit lens with which young people are viewed.

Cooper (2012b) offers an alternative perspective on the 2011 disturbances, examining the structural forces that contributed to the widespread discontent. Building on the work of Hall (2011), he acknowledged the political powerlessness and economic marginalisation of young

people. Cooper (2012b) argues that the events were the result of young people fighting back against the dominant oppressive regimes and the structural forces that constrained their lives.

Parffrey (1994) examined socio-political influences on young people and the legislative movements that she attributed, at the time, to the rising number of young people disengaging with mainstream school. Parffrey (1994:108) goes so far as to state that due to the political movements and changes in legislation, for example the introduction of standard attainment tests, young people who are already vulnerable have become neglected and had their 'rights to education in its fullest sense, abused'. Macdonald and Marsh (2005) refer to this group as the socially excluded underclass. Parffrey uses school exclusion statistics to strengthen her perspective that school cultures and practices are toxic for vulnerable young people, whose needs are ignored by schools suggesting a system failure rather that an individual's failure to conform. A consequence of exclusion from school is destructive, delinquent behaviour and the social exclusion of young people who are left with little structure and purpose to their daily lives (Parffrey, 1994). In order to conquer this cycle of destruction Parffrey suggests greater collaboration and accountability is needed across stakeholders such as the health, social and education sectors for young people who need additional support and, at the same time, a wider attitudinal change in societal values towards young people. The Social Exclusion Unit (2004) states that young people at risk of social exclusion are 'complex and interconnected' and therefore a collaboration across services is welcomed.

3.3.3 School exclusion

Being disenchanted with traditional schooling is not a new phenomenon. The United Nations Commission on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (2008) stated that exclusion from schools should be a 'last resort only' and alternative quality education is to be provided for those out of school, creating fairness and opportunities for all, including vulnerable young people.

More recently, the House of Commons Education Committee (2018) produced a report entitled 'Forgotten Children'. The report examined the rise in school exclusions and reviewed aspects of quality alternative education. The reporting team generated data through visits to alternative curriculum providers, listening to young people and interviewing a range of staff involved in alternative curriculum programmes. An alarming finding was the increasing number of 'hidden exclusions' and the number of schools who were using 'off-rolling' as a means to remove young people from their school role and therefore their performance statistics (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018:3). Attributing this 'unlawful' practice to the culture of performativity within schools (also highlighted by Ball (2008) in section 3.4.1), the House of Commons Education Committee (2018:14) stated:

> An unfortunate and unintended consequence of the Government's strong focus on school standards has led to school environments and practices that have resulted in disadvantaged children being disproportionately excluded, which includes a curriculum with a lack of focus on developing pupils social and economic capital.

The Government House of Commons Education Committee stated that there were approximately 2.3 million young people (14 to 16 years old) in the UK and of these over 339,360 had been subject to a fixed-term exclusion during 2015/16 (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018). Earlier, Stamou et al. (2014) reported on DfE data outlining that there were 304,370 fixed-term exclusions in 2011/12 amongst 14 to 16 year olds, therefore demonstrating a significant increase over four years. The latter figure does not include those young people who are spending time in 'nurture' or 'intervention' units instead of the mainstream classroom, nor does it include those engaging in alternative curricula.

The DfE (2013a) suggests that young people are more disconnected from education than ever before and some even suggest the country is losing a whole generation (Allen & Ainley, 2010). Researching in the UK, Steedman and Stoney (2004) estimated that disengaged pupils represent between one fifth and one third of all 14 to 16 year olds. The House of Commons Education Committee (2018:9) corroborated this, stating that 47% of children participating in alternative provision are 15 years old with over half of all exclusions occurring in between 13 to 14 years old or above.

The complexities surrounding alternative curriculum provision will now be reviewed.

3.4 Alternative Provision

Santry (2018) defines alternative provision as:

> …education outside school, arranged by local authorities or schools, for pupils who do not attend mainstream school for reasons such as school exclusion, behaviour issues, school refusal, or short or long-term illness.

The term alternative provision also includes Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), where young people may attend on the PRU site or could access other forms of alternative provision off-site such as a care farm. There are no legislative age restrictions for accessing off-site provision; however, the majority of young people are in years ten and 11, aged between 13 to 15 years old (see 3.4.2 for more detailed figures) (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018).

3.4.1 Status and scope

There is a marked difference between the models of alternative education provided by schools such as Steiner or Montessori and alternative curriculum provision, yet the terms are often used synonymously. The purpose of schools utilising alternative provision is predominantly to prevent permanent exclusions or to re-engage a young person in education before their school leaving age (Ofsted, 2014).

Alternatives to the mainstream classroom environment for those young people who are not thriving in schools are not a recent development. In 2012, the Taylor Report was commissioned by the government. This came ironically in the aftermath of the riots involving young people, who should have been attending school. The Taylor Report (Taylor, 2012:2) highlighted the significance of quality alternative education programmes and saw this as a means of diminishing the emerging 'educational underclass'. This term, suggesting pathologizing discourse, refers to young people:

> …who are outside the mainstream education world who fail to achieve academically and grow up without the skills to become successful adults and members of society.

Whilst the author does not expand on the subjective meaning of the term "successful adults", the report suggests that the young people engaging in alternative provision may become free from criminal activity and achieve satisfactory health and wellbeing. Characterized as 'disconnected' and 'disengaged', these young people may also lack robust social networks that provide assistance in the form of housing support, financial aid and employment connections; all necessities contributing to the development of social mobility and self-sufficiency. Taylor (2012:4) acknowledges that many of the young people actively involved with alternative provision have evolved from dysfunctional and chaotic lifestyles; he reports that:

> These children are often stuck in complex patterns of negative, self-destructive behaviour and helping them is not easy or formulaic. Many also have developed mental health issues.

Kettlewell et al. (2012) produced a research report on behalf of the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) focussed on 'engaging the disengaged' young people in schools. The report highlighted the successes and failures of interventions already in place within some institutions. A key finding was the wide use of alternative curriculum programmes with a vocational, work-based focus used to re-engage pupils and how successful they were at preventing some pupils from disengaging altogether with the education system. A potential vocational focus could be horticulture or agriculture. Some theorists, including Ball (2008), Illich (1971) and Slee (2011), argue that the discontentment amongst several groups of young people does not start and end at the curriculum; it stems from deep inside the educational system itself and the unhelpful restrictive assessments, prescriptive curriculum and exam culture embedded intrinsically within its core. Coffield and Williamson (2011:8) posit that the constant 'tinkering' with the curriculum by the Government has impacted significantly on the motivation of pupils and the quality of learning. An example of this 'tinkering' is the changes to the GCSE grading system which occurred during 2018. Coffield and Williamson (2011) suggest a move away from 'exam factories' and target-driven schools to 'communities of discovery' where young people experience a democratic education. This also supports Batsleer's (2008) notion of 'relationships' as central to the learning experience. Coffield and Williamson (2011:44) suggest

that the current education system constantly changing at the hands of the governing political party could lead to domination:

> …when the powerful are allowed to claim they know what is needed and inflict their will on the rest of us.

When reflecting on the work of Ball (2008), Batsleer (2008), Slee (2011), and Coffield and Williamson (2011), it could be implied that young people engaging with alternative curriculum provision are victims of the 'exam factory' culture, and do not fit with the education mould set by the hegemon. Furthermore, perhaps young people referred to alternative curriculum programmes are by-products of the hyper-accountability teachers and school leaders are exposed to, resulting in the non-conforming pupils being moved off-site, off-rolled and having alternative provision 'imposed' on them 'rather than optional' (Hope, 2015). This, therefore, fosters the perspective that alternative provision is a negative outcome, rather than one that nurtures those who crave an alternative to classroom-based learning. During their investigations, the House of Commons Education Committee (2018:3) acknowledged that alternative provision was viewed as a deficient mode of education, stating that:

> …alternative provision was the best outcome for some children we spoke to, but in order to access it children have to be branded a failure or excluded in the first place, rather than it being a positive choice.

This deficit model of education could also result in young people internalising failure and potentially viewing their lack of achievement in mainstream education as a reflection of their own skills and abilities. This lack of self-belief could lead to poor mental health and wellbeing for those young people experiencing this exclusion. It is known from the government's Green Paper on mental health (see section 3.2.2.1) that amongst other factors, exam stress and subject choice, all impact on young people's mental health and wellbeing. Interestingly, links are beginning to emerge between the restrictive school system, alternative provision and poor mental health.

Hope (2015:111) questions whether the British education system is appropriate for all young people and suggests a "deep-rooted change…so that all children have an equal chance of success within the mainstream sector". Te Riele's (2009:39) research synergises with the work

of Hope, attributing the number of young people disengaged with mainstream school down to 'out-dated' policies established based on false assumptions of young people. She believes that policies should reflect how fragile and splintered life can be for many young people, promoting a pedagogy of hope. Dodd (2018) purports that the rate of young people being excluded and moved off site could only be reduced when schools place greater emphasis on "looking at the underlying causes of behaviour, including whether there are unmet learning needs or unmade reasonable adjustments".

The deep-rooted changes proposed by Hope (2015) and te Riele (2009) point to a change to discipline regimes and punishment within schools. The discipline inflicted within a school classroom on young people who do not conform resembles a prison environment according to Foucault (1995). He argues that discipline creates 'docile bodies' through the constant observation and monitoring of young people in the classroom environment. Foucault also suggests observation and 'the gaze' are key instruments of power where the norms of behaviour are set and reinforced. Schools examine pupils and insist they conform to the norms of the school regime, policies and culture; this is evident in those schools that enforce a zero-tolerance policy. Cooper (2002) supports this notion, claiming that schools reinforce the dominant ideology and impose regulations on young people such as timetables, curriculum and assessment. Beckmann and Cooper (2005:476) explore the harms generated by the education system and go so far as asserting that schools are violent institutions that strengthen inequalities through reinforcing oppressive norms of society. Allen and Ainley (2007:131) indicate that young people are 'disaffected by their schooling', placing the accountability on the failure of the school system and not the young person. Corroborating this perspective are Mills and McGregor (2014:4) who state that:

> All young people have the capacity to learn and to enjoy learning; they do not fail school, rather, schools fail them.

Managing behaviour in the classroom has been a central focus of government policy over the last ten years. A new raft of powers for teachers to manage challenging behaviour were ratified through the Education Act 2011 and included the power to detain a pupil under the age of 18

without parental consent and to search pupils without their own consent. Schools Minister at the time, Nick Gibb (2011) stated that the new legislation "hands to teachers all the powers they need to ensure that every classroom is a safe and ordered place". However, a potential repercussion of this rhetoric could result in an increase in school exclusions for those young people who struggle to conform to the school regime. This is supported by Dodd (2018), who believes that the stricter schools make their curriculum and behaviour policies, the harder it is for all young people to conform and fit the mould. Zero tolerance approaches to behaviour have also been attributed to the rise in exclusions and numbers of young people attending alternative provision (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018:11). Brown (2015b) adds that increased competition amongst schools, academies and free schools combined with the pressure to achieve good performances in league tables, may lead to schools turning to exclusion as a way of dealing with disruptive behaviour rather than managing it within the school system. Cigman (2006:163) suggests that the colossal stress teachers are under leads to "institutionalised intolerance for the under-performing pupil" and those pupils pose a risk to the performance of the school whilst "challenging the institutional equilibrium" (Slee, 2011:160). This is further corroborated by the increase in exclusions since the introduction of the new powers (DfE 2015).

Writing in the Times Educational Supplement, German (2010) examines reasons behind exclusions from school and puts forward the perspective that schools are too quick to exclude rather than seeing the full complexity of the young person's situation and reasoning behind the behaviour. German states that:

> Once many of those thousands of young people are excluded, they never return to full-time, mainstream schooling, so they are set on the slippery slope of delinquency, youth detention, crime, incarceration, anti-social behaviour and future unemployability.

German purports what can be interpreted as a dystopian perspective but one that reflects reality as substantiated by Rennison et al. 2005; Allen and Ainley, 2007; and Dodd, 2018. German (2010) concludes by proposing that rehabilitative measures are put in place for those young people facing exclusions rather than punitive procedures. Alternative provision may offer

one of the rehabilitative strategies for those at risk, but provision must be viewed as such and not a punitive measure.

Building on the work of German (2010), there is a robust evidence base to suggest a strong link between young people who have had negative experiences at school and the likelihood of disengaging completely from post-compulsory learning (Coles et al., 2002; Maychell et al., 1998; Payne, 2000). A study by Rennison et al. (2005), for example, found that young people in the NEET group were over three times more likely to have been excluded from school than young people overall. A further study by Her Majesty's[5] Chief Inspector of Prisons (2015:84) states that 85% of boys in custody had previously been excluded from school and 41% were 14 or younger when they last attended school.

In her review of vocational education in 2011, Alison Wolf suggested that it is highly probable that young people from the age of 14 are being 'pushed' into staying on at school or college due to the lack of well-paid employment opportunities (Wolf, 2011). This is a perspective supported by Allen and Ainley (2013) in their work on the 'great reversal' and inequalities within the education system. Allen and Ainley (2010:51) believe the economy and labour market are key contributing factors to youth unemployment and disconnection with wider society. However, they do recognise that schools have a role to play in creating a 'lost generation' of young people and a developing notion of youth 'underclass'.

In the midst of hyperactive policy change (Ball, 2008), the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) to 18 years old was given royal assent (DfE, 2015). Implemented as part of a broader social inclusion agenda, a key outcome of the initiative was the reduction of young people not in employment, education and training. By ensuring young people are engaged in education and/or training up until the age of 18, the government policy inferred young people would stay on to study and gain the skills and qualifications that would lead to sustainable employment. This aspiration appears to be a dichotomy with the aforementioned perspectives put forward

[5] Queen Elizabeth II

by Wolf (2011) and Allen and Ainley (2013). Young people were being forced to stay on in education due to their chronological age with no jobs available for them when they leave, yet the government insisted young people were leaving school too early with too few skills and qualifications for employment. More importantly, in relation to this study, is the limited consideration in the literature towards the young people who are accessing alternative curriculum programmes, and how raising the participation age has and will impact on their education and training opportunities. An article in the Teaching Times (2015) that assessed the policy development of raising the participation age purported that 'opting out is no longer an option' for young people. The journal article stressed that training providers and schools still had a lot to do to ensure there is provision that meets the needs of every young person, including those who have disengaged with mainstream schooling. The Teaching Times (2015) article stated that:

> By working together to support the implementation of RPA and communicating the wider choice of qualifications available for 14 to 19 year olds through high quality IAG [Information, Advice and Guidance] provision, the education workforce can help to make bleak futures a thing of the past.

Whilst the aspiration is thus set for all young people, there is a small percentage who choose not to engage with the raising of the participation age provision and still fall within the NEET category. Since the implementation of RPA, the DfE (2019) has reported that the NEET rate has fallen gradually, but there are the few young people that continue to not conform to the government ideology.

3.4.2 Provision and evidence

Santry (2018) reported that there were almost 16,000 pupils on-roll at PRUs and another 22,000 in local authority alternative provision in January 2017. Data gleaned from the school census and alternative provision census in 2017 shows that young people aged between 13 to 15 years are the most likely to experience school exclusion, resulting in being placed in a PRU or within local authority provision (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018).

There is no set genre of alternative provision programmes as there is much variety across England, and providers range from further education colleges, voluntary and community sector organisations, charities and alternative provision free schools (Taylor, 2012). Providers may offer subject specific educational programmes such as motor vehicle maintenance while others focus entirely on providing holistic, personal, social development activities. It is this lack of standardisation that Hope (2015:109) views as problematic and suggests even the 'word 'alternative' can in itself be confusing'.

In his report commissioned by the government, Taylor (2012) states that academic outcomes for young people accessing alternative provision are poor and many do not achieve a GCSE qualification; this is corroborated by Martin and White's research (2012). However, Taylor observes that the most effective alternative providers work with those young people whose mainstream schools have been unable to manage and focus on improving behaviour, attendance and wellbeing (Taylor, 2012). Concluding his report, Taylor makes 28 recommendations for improving the quality of alternative provision programmes. Through these measures Taylor claims that permanent exclusions would reduce. A key recommendation is the need to position alternative provision alongside the wider local education offer and not to be seen as a side-line for those young people who had nowhere else to go. Local schools should 'own' the alternative provision 'offer' and see it as a resource to help their most challenging pupils (Taylor, 2012). This synergises with the most recent government report where the Education Committee state alternative provision is still not seen as a 'positive choice' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018:5).

All of Taylor's 28 recommendations were accepted by the then Secretary of State for Education in 2012. Despite this acceptance and subsequent implementation, exclusion rates have steadily risen questioning the credibility of Taylor's recommendations and the implementation strategies used by the government.

3.4.3. Alternative environments

Similarly to the lack of uniformity amongst alternative curriculum providers, the young people who are referred to alternative provision are not a homogenous group; however all have an entitlement to an education (UNCRC, 1989). Martin and White (2012:4) carried out a research study exploring how young people accessed and engaged with alternative provision. Through their research sites they discovered that alternative provision was being accessed by young people who had social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, cognitive and communication difficulties and physical difficulties. They found that the following groups of young people were present and are typical of alternative curriculum cohorts:

- Young people with a statement or SEND[6] diagnosis (more recently known as an Education and Health Care Plan).
- Young people without a statement or SEND diagnosis but presenting with additional needs.
- Young people excluded or at risk of exclusion from school.
- Young people requiring support in preparation for transition to future stages of life and learning.

Throughout their research report, Martin and White (2012:5) highlight key strengths of the alternative programmes they examined. One of these was that:

> …it provides young people with relatively 'risk-free' opportunities to engage in new activities and experiences that they may then decide they would like, or would not like, to pursue further. They can trial certain vocational or learning experiences, without having to formally commit, giving them the opportunity to make informed realistic choices about the appropriateness of these activities for their future destinations.

When examining the effective characteristics of alternative curriculum programmes Martin and White (2012:14) made a pertinent observation for this study. They state:

> The location of alternative provision can also contribute to its success. Provision delivered in work-based community or multi-purpose settings, for example, in farms, garden centres and sports clubs, provides a contrast to the traditional school or PRU setting. Many learners respond well to the additional elements these environments offer, including the opportunity to learn outside, in large open spaces and engage with members of the public.

[6] Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Farms are one of the locations suggested by Martin and White (2012) that are effective alternative provision sites. This can be evidenced through the work of Carlshead Care Farm in West Yorkshire who offer alternative curriculum programmes to the local education authority for young people aged 14 to 16 years. Writing for the Guardian newspaper in 2008, Davies provided an overview of the activities undertaken by the young people on Carlshead Care Farm and offers anecdotal evidence of the success. Within the article a senior local authority manager states that whist at the care farm the young people "start to achieve for the first time" and it "makes them look at the world differently". Another farm offering alternative curriculum not reported in the Guardian, is Hall Farm Eastoft. This care farm offers placements to young people who have disengaged, or are at risk of, disengaging with mainstream school. Feedback from schools who refer young people to care farms has been affirmative. A Deputy Head Teacher writing about a young person whose placement had recently finished at a care farm stated that:

> RP had the best learning experience. He loved every aspect of it. He enjoyed the foodie bits too and liked to win the produce at the end of the day. There is not much positive happening in RP's life and the farm was a real highlight of the week. His self-confidence and self-esteem were really boosted (Smith, 2013).

A further statement outlines the holistic development a group of young men had made whilst attending the same farm:

> You clearly had the magic wand with these four students. They loved it and never wanted to leave. They loved learning new skills, but the social and emotional development was incredible. All boys grew in confidence and felt that they had something positive to offer. Learning in school is difficult for them (Smith, 2013).

There are a number of traditional, rural farms offering alternative provision and many describe themselves as care farms. Others may be city farms, allotment projects or animal sanctuary centres but the list is not exhaustive. CFUK reported in 2013 that 52% of care farms offered alternative provision for young people across the UK demonstrating that care farms do not confine their client base to those with disabilities or mental health issues. By having a meaningful and tangible result from farming the land or caring for animals, greater relevance is shown, compared with traditional education techniques (Elings, 2011). Rogers (2015), writing in *Children and Young People Now* states that "pupils benefit from social care farming". This was

the first article to identify care farming in the journal suggesting that services for young people now have another 'tool' to avoid excluding young people permanently.

Illich (1971) presented a radical viewpoint that perceives school as a destructive, toxic environment where habits are forced, and one which promotes disconnection from the prescribed curriculum amongst young people. Illich (1971) calls for de-schooling and radical changes to the education system to remove the 'hidden curriculum' that caused learning to align with grades and accreditation rather than important skills. Through his work, Kraftl (2013) does not wholly harmonise with Illich but suggests that alternative learning spaces are created that are non-school-like in a deliberate attempt to promote teaching and learning. One of the alternative learning spaces advocated and reviewed by Kraftl (2013) is a care farm.

In his work drawing together geography and alternative education, Kraftl examines care farms as an alternative learning environment. Kraftl (2013) notes the large gap in the extant research focussing on the educational role of care farms and argues much of the academic research has revolved around the positive health and wellbeing properties of care farming. He makes links back to Bronfenbrenner's ecological-systems theory (Figure 6) suggesting that the importance of education in a child's holistic development has been somewhat lost.

Early years education philosopher and pioneer Malaguzzi (interpreted by Smidt, 2013) believed that the environment itself is the third teacher and a partner in the learning process; alleging that the child and instructor are the first and second teachers. Inspiring the unique approach of Reggio Emilia, his pedagogical philosophy was based centrally around children's participation. He assumed that children are not the target of instruction, bearing resemblances to Freire's (1972) banking concept of education where children are the passive recipients of knowledge, but rather they take on the active role of an apprentice (Katz, 1993). Smidt (2013) outlines how Malaguzzi based his educational philosophy on the 'pedagogy of relationships' rather than an 'us and them' approach often perpetuated in the traditional schooling system. Whilst Malaguzzi did not explore the impact of the environment in the later stages of education, it could be

posited whether the natural farming environment could be the third teacher in the alternative curriculum context.

3.4.4 Creating opportunities

The opportunities for engaging young people with learning through alternative curriculum programmes are endless. Creating educational opportunities that aim to meet the needs of all young people will ensure a more socially just system, and one that includes rather than excludes based on ability, interests and aspirations. Te Riele (2009) studied three well-established community-based organisations in Australia, all of which embraced an alternative pedagogy when working with young people disenchanted with mainstream schooling. Common themes across the providers noted by te Riele were flexibility, promotion of social development, emphasis on informal learning, small group sizes, fostering a sense of belonging and promoting a culture of respect. Te Riele (2009:80) found that

> …young people who had felt devalued as school learners, described how the projects offered a caring environment and a place where they felt accepted.

She concluded that the success of the alternative curriculum providers at engaging with disaffected young people included the below:

> A culture of respect, security and relationships of trust were crucial in making their learning experiences worthwhile and distinguished these projects from their previous experiences of schooling (p.82).

The findings from te Riele's study bear resemblances to the values of youth work practice and informal learning pedagogy; working with the young people relationally. It could be postulated that perhaps the most effective alternative curriculum providers embrace informal pedagogies. Jeffs and Smith (1990:7) note that informal educators working with young people:

> …contribute to the development of the context and conditions which allow the desired 'internal' change we know as learning to occur.

One of the opportunities derived from informal pedagogy within alternative curriculum could be the development of social capital. Social capital has multiple definitions, interpretations, and uses however, the definition put forward by Putnam (2000) is worthy of note. Putnam

(2000:19) describes the concept of social capital as “the connections and social networks among individuals and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them”. Putnam (2000) believes social capital provides informal educators with a significant rationale for their activities. He suggests that within groups or associations, social capital can be fostered which ultimately links with better health and wellbeing, increased educational outcomes and better quality of life for all. Furthermore, the development of social capital through both alternative curriculum provision and positive health and wellbeing has been raised by numerous authors during this literature review (Smith, 2001; Chawla & Litt, 2013; House of Commons Education Committee, 2018). Smith (2001) states that through informal education, a dialogical approach and a collaborative environment, educators can take young people “to the heart of what is required to strengthen and develop social capital”.
Additionally, Leck (2013:116) examined the potential to develop social capital on a care farm environment and through his research he concluded that “social capital accumulates on a successful care farm, with this being considered to benefit everyone who is directly involved”. These are highly contested postulations from Putnam and Leck due to the notion of social capital being multifarious and complex.

3.5 Summary

This literature review has examined a significant amount of work spanning an extensive historical period in the context of nature, young people and alternative provision. Due to the aims of the study, young people aged 13 to 16 years have been the primary focus. The chapter has explored the research surrounding nature-based interventions and more specifically care farming. The evidence presented has demonstrated that all engagement with the natural world is beneficial for human health and wellbeing to some degree. However, the potential of a care farm environment is less well documented. Much of the literature surrounding care farms is contemporary due to the newness of the concept, therefore this study has a unique opportunity to contribute to the limited existing body of evidence currently available.

The construction of 'youth' as a social category has been examined and the stigmatising nature of being defined as an 'excluded' young person reviewed. The potential impact of this stigma on young people's self-esteem and self-worth has been considered along with possible wider influences. The multi-faceted restrictive nature of the traditional schooling system has been attributed to school exclusions and off-rolling.

Finally, this chapter scrutinised the discourse around alternative provision and examined the current status and scope. Alternative environments have been reviewed and the potential of a care farm location to offer a credible alternative curriculum has been explored.

Drawing together themes and gaps arising from the literature review, the following chapter outlines the methodology that was chosen to address the research aim. The methodology adopted aims to identify and interrogate a care farm's potential benefits to young people, specifically through the provision of a natural setting and the individual experience of alternative provision. Furthermore, this study assesses the extent to which young people engage on a care farm and the prospective learning derived from this.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the methodological approaches chosen to address the research aim and subsequently answer the research questions, which are detailed below. The ontological and epistemological framework underpinning the study, as well as the importance of reflexivity and the methods used to collect data, will also be defined and defended.

Research aim:
To explore the possible contribution of care farming to young people's engagement with learning.

Research questions:

1. How do young people and care farm providers articulate the reasons why young people attend care farms in England?

2. What are young people's perceptions of their educational experiences, both on care farms and as part of formal education?

3. How and in what ways do young people learn on care farms in England, if at all?

Choosing an appropriate methodology for the study had to take into account a range of factors but most importantly putting the young people and care farm providers at the heart of the research. Ascertaining the views and lived social realities of young people was central to the study and therefore selecting a holistic methodology that saw them as active agents and co-producers of knowledge within the inquiry process was adopted. In this way, the aim was to generate accounts that seek to avoid a simplistic and reductive interpretation of what it is like to participate on a care farm. Instead, I attempted to capture the complex and multi-faceted journeys undertaken by the young people. Through the collection and interpretation of detailed accounts, I have attempted to "see through the eyes of…the people who are being studied" (Bryman, 1988:61). Below is the intended research design framework which will also help structure what follows:

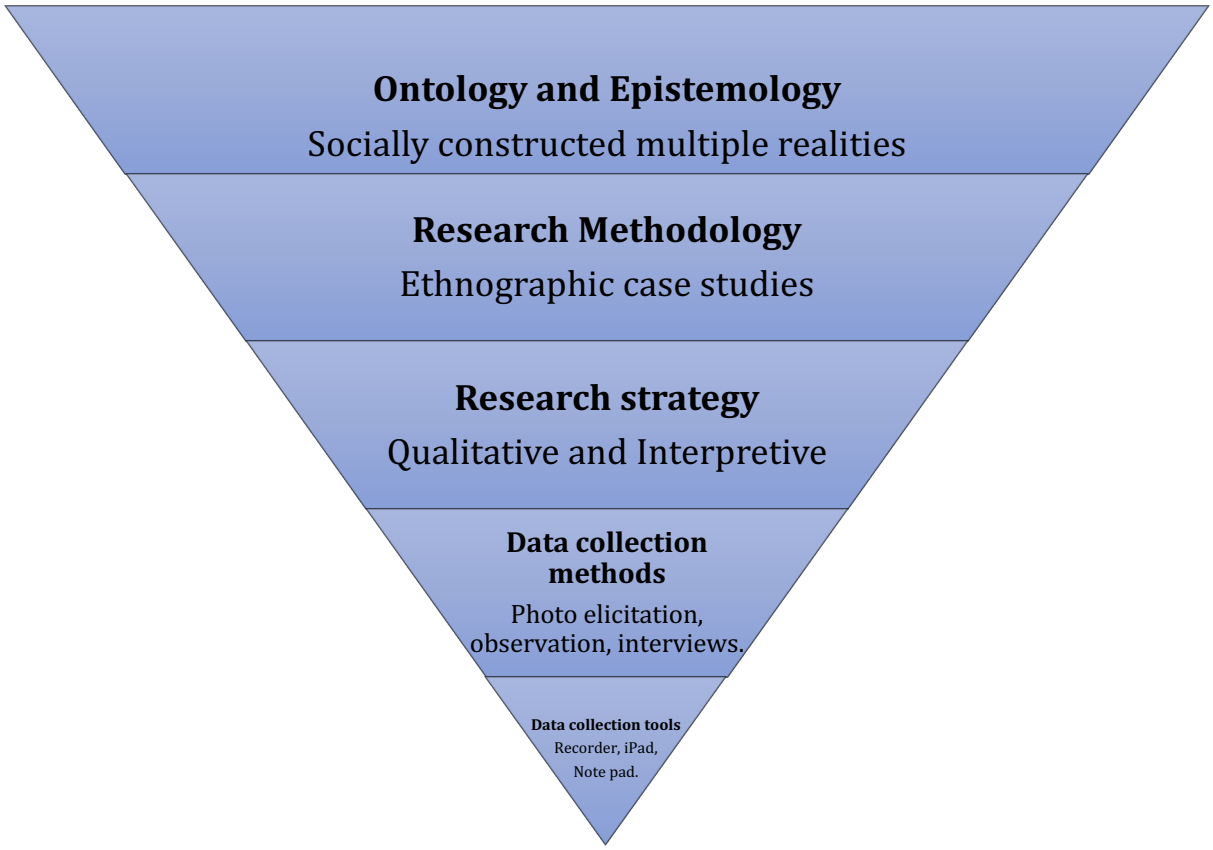


Figure 7: The research design framework

4.1.1 Ontology, epistemology and decisions of methodology

Mason (2002:4) suggests that any attempt to capture the reality of experience immediately raises "difficult questions". Questions such as 'what is reality?' and 'how can reality be represented?' are complex questions that warrant further examination.

The ontological standpoint for a study concerns the researcher's assumptions about the form and nature of reality to be studied (Mason, 1996). This could be whether reality is conceptualised as a single, objective truth or whether reality is constituted through multiple subjective experiences with various interpretations. The rationale for this study is to research young people's experiences and adults' perceptions of care farms, within specific locations under the principle that individuals have thoughts and feelings and that those are meaningful components of the social world. Given the highly personalised nature of their experiences it is reasonable to assume multiple interpretations across the participant group and therefore the

study is interpretive and wholly qualitative (O'Reilly, 2005). Mason (1996) suggests that there may be different versions of the nature and essence of social experiences and a universal truth cannot be taken for granted.

The ontological perspective that the social world is not objectively real and instead, is socially constructed and subjectively experienced assumes that it is necessary to "collect subjective accounts and perceptions that explain how the world is experienced and constructed." (Opie, 2004:20).

Epistemological questions relating to the ontological standpoint described above emerge when a methodology is constructed such as, how can we come to know about the lived realities of the young people? According to Mason (1996), epistemology helps generate knowledge and explanations about the ontological components of the social world, which in this study, are social meanings and realities. The epistemological basis for the study gives credence to socially-constructed phenomena, such as the models of reality that are created and experienced by young people. In contrast with behaviour neuro-science perspectives such as Pinker (2002), this study emphasises that theory of knowledge is socially constructed and aims to capture and evidence how this knowledge is demonstrated within the young person's reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Fetterman (2010:21) believes that "documenting multiple perspectives of reality in a given study is crucial to an understanding of why people think and act". Limitations of the epistemological assumptions that knowledge is experiential and subjective are widely acknowledged in the literature such as the 'truth' of the accounts given by participants (Hammersley, 2011). Opie (2004:22) suggests that a "major truth challenge" is the honesty of participants during the data collection period and he advises that researchers should acknowledge this potential flaw.

Due to the overall aim of the research an interpretivist paradigm was chosen as the harvesting of data would be over a year-long period and would hopefully provide an understanding of social behaviour in a given context; more specifically, the views of young people attending care farms. Interpretivist approaches to research are often referred to as qualitative methods (Bell &

Goulding, 1984) and have been defined as concerned with patterns of behaviour, meanings and the way people understand situations (Denscombe, 2003). Pole and Morrison (2003) believe that qualitative methods are based on an epistemological tradition of interpretivism. Through observing and working alongside young people and staff within a care farming environment over a period of time, I hope to seek an understanding of shared, common experiences of the group, documenting and recording their responses.

4.1.2 Capturing lived realities – aspects of ethnography

O'Reilly (2012:11) purports that:

> Ethnography is a practice that: evolves in design as the study progresses; involves direct and sustained contact with human beings, in the context of their daily lives, over a prolonged period of time; draws on a family of methods, usually including participant observation and conversation; respects the complexity of the social world; and therefore tells rich, sensitive and credible stories.

Similarly, Pole and Morrison (2003) suggest that an ethnographic approach generates a comprehensive description of the social action within specific locations and enables the researcher to view how young people construct the social world. The philosophy that underpins ethnographic methodology is also known as "naturalism"; the notion that the social world can be captured and understood in all complex forms only when it is studied in its natural state (Matza, 1969:5). In other words, gaining an 'insider view' within an ethnographically based methodology using ethnographic methods. In research underpinned by elements of ethnography, there is an emphasis on observation in a "naturalistic" setting where the researcher merges into the background of the setting and aims to not "disturb the field". The challenges presented by this approach, however, were plentiful (Mukherji & Albon, 2015:86).

The intention was to collect data from the real-life experiences of the young people and as far as possible undistorted by the researcher. This 'distortion' and not 'disturbing' the field however is challenging and virtually impossible to avoid due to researcher subjectivity, any potential researcher bias and also the mere presence within the research location. Interpretation of the events were based on my personal constructed reality and beliefs, seeing

the young people's experiences through my socially constructed lens, which potentially creates a limitation to the credibility of data generated. However, through being reflexive in a systematic and thoughtful way and by engaging in continual reflective practice the possible distortion was minimised. Mason (2002) suggests that the 'difficult questions' around the nature of truth and reality demand a reflexive approach in order to secure appropriate levels of authenticity; this is the focus of section 4.1.3.

Nonetheless, adoption of this approach underpinned by ethnography, enabled the generation of rich sensitive stories from the young people that respected the complex nature of their social world. Fetterman (2010:1) suggests ethnographers:

> …adopt a cultural lens to interpret observed behaviour, ensuring that the behaviours are placed in a culturally relevant and meaningful context.

On-going participation is a central aspect of ethnography and the researcher should pay due attention to the role this plays during the data collection period in the setting. Building productive working relationships with the setting is viewed as a duty of the researcher to initiate and both Coffey (1999) and Fielding et al. (2008) suggest that this relationship is strengthened when the researcher shares a common ground with the values of the setting. My experience of care farming values and principles supported this process and through practising ongoing reflexivity it was hoped that professional objectivity was reached. However, some would argue this is impossible to achieve and is a criticism of ethnographic research (Mason, 1996; Fetterman, 2010). This complexity will be revisited in section 4.1.3 and 4.1.4.

Factors that could hinder and distort the data collection that are unavoidable are personal attributes such as age, gender and ethnicity, some of which could be a barrier to engaging with young people who may have pre-conceived views about certain characteristics. Pole and Morrison (2003:13) assert that researchers "must be able to blend in with the researched" and subsequently be accepted; this however could be challenging with groups of young people who can often take a significant period of time to trust and feel comfortable with a stranger present in their world (Montgomery, 2016). In Chavez's (2008:491) work on insider researcher

positionality she suggests that researchers need to "get into their own heads first before getting into those of participants". Furthermore, she draws attention to multiple social identities stating that researchers must be particularly aware of:

> …in which ways they are like their participants and in which ways they are unlike them; they need to know which of their social identities can advantage and/or complicate the process.

My passion for social justice underpinned by youth work values such as democratic participation, should support this process. I am a professionally qualified youth worker with many years of experience working with young people who found certain areas of their life difficult, one of which was mainstream school. Through working closely with the young people, I became aware of the barriers they faced every day towards schooling, and I embraced the opportunity to enable them to develop their voice, influence and participation in activities they may enjoy and thrive in. My aspiration for social justice and educational inclusion for all young people played a role throughout the research and I firmly acknowledge this fact. I am also aware that fitting into a situation with minimal disruption, almost in a chameleon-like way, is wholly utopian.

Allan (2012:66) notes that ethnography as a research method lends itself to working with young people and believes it "builds upon existing skills, relationships and expertise of youth practitioners and young people alike". Moreover, James (2001) explains that one of the reasons why ethnography has been used so readily by youth researchers is the fact that it allows young people to be viewed as social actors in their own right and be worthy participants. The work of Batsleer (2008) is central to engaging with all young people and ensuring they have equal access to the opportunities on offer. Batsleer asserted that a dialogic approach to education was more effective than a didactic style and rather than educators applying a set curriculum and expecting students to be able to recall the information in an examination, the model of education as a critical dialogue is preferred. The dialogic approach suggested by Batsleer is central to my personal philosophy and is also embraced by Light et al. (2009:25) who state, "Dialogue characterizes all forms of human communication and....is therefore critical to the active construction and exchange of knowledge…". Gallagher (1992) supports this view

suggesting that the potential of language such as conversation and dialogue can disclose meaning and truth, however the truth extracted from the dialogue is self-interpreted by the researcher. Nevertheless, participatory ethnographic methods which allow the researcher to capture the unique voices of the target group and tell a story about their lived reality, appeared to be the most appropriate methodology for this study.

4.1.3 Reflexivity

Anchoring on a social constructivist epistemology, the researcher's personal experiences become of central importance to the culture or sub-culture being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The myriad limitations and advantages associated with humans studying other humans are well documented throughout the research methods literature (Mason, 1996; Brewer, 2000; O'Reilly, 2012).

Using the phrase "reflexive ethnographers" to capture the personal narrative researchers bring to their study, Denzin and Lincoln (2000:740) suggest that a researcher uses their own experiences in the culture reflexively to look deeply at interaction. Mason (1996:6) believes that reflexivity, or, "critical self-scrutiny" is a part of qualitative research. She suggests that researcher actions should be subject to the same critical scrutiny as the other data. Brewer (2000:127) defines reflexivity within ethnographic research and believes it involves:

> …reflection by ethnographers on the social process that impinge upon and influence data. It requires a critical attitude towards data, and recognition of the influence on the research of such factors as the location, of the setting, the sensitivity of the topic, power relations in the field and the nature of the social interaction between the researcher and the researched.

Contrasting with a positivist approach, this research acknowledges that there will be subjectivity and a lack of neutrality, however taking this into account throughout the research process and understanding my role within the research contributes to critical reflexivity. Banaji et al. (2018:100) suggest that reflexivity is "…considered a pivotal element of ethnography" and advise that it is acknowledged "…that neither researcher nor researched are empty vessels, but rather subjects with their own agendas and unequal positions". On-going reflexivity in a

systematic and thoughtful way confronts potential bias and pre-conceived views that may be held by the researcher, therefore strengthening the objective interpretation of what is observed during the data collection period. This will lead to greater understanding of the social world experienced by the young people and subsequently their lived reality.

Allan (2012) pays due attention to relationships when researching young people with particular emphasis on potential power imbalances. She suggests that the notion of power is continuously negotiated throughout the research and reflexive practice should be employed to reflect on the differing roles, identities and relationships applied.

Being aware of how personal views can impact upon the neutrality of interpretation is at the heart of reflexive practice. Mason (1996:41) however, urges caution advising that researchers do not "underestimate the reflexive challenge posed by analysing your own role within the research process". This is, of course, acutely significant when researching amongst familiar territories as is the case with this study on Birch Care Farm (see 4.1.7). Recognising and critically examining researcher positionality was a priority to be considered during the contemplation of methodology choice in this study. Researcher positionality will now be addressed and the work of Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) reviewed in this context.

4.1.4 Positionality

In contrast to a phenomenological enquiry, social constructivism accepts that researcher influence will be present in a study and furthermore effects the epistemology of the researcher. Recognising the influence I could have on the research process is imperative. Clough and Nutbrown (2002:68) capture this sentiment below:

> …methodology is as much about the way we live our lives as it is about the way we choose to conduct a particular piece of research. Methodology is about making research decisions and understanding (and justifying) *why* we have made those decisions. Our research methodologies are (we would argue) rooted in our own personal values, which, in some form, inform our ethical and moral responses to problems and challenges.

Positionality as a researcher is an area I have been wrestling with since the start of my doctoral studies. The work of Bourdieu (1991:28) and his notion of habitus and how this influences the researcher/research is of great significance. He calls on researchers to practice "epistemological vigilance" paying regards to their own social contexts, values and beliefs and how these may colour their view of reality. He states:

> Social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside of agents…the world encompasses me…but I comprehend it…precisely because it comprehends me. It is because the world has produced me, because it produces the categories of thought that I apply to it, that it appears to me as self-evident.

Bourdieu's work emphasizes that the social world is the product of social construction, a perception of an individual, group, or idea that is constructed through cultural or social practice. Bourdieu believes that social researchers have the capacity to reflect upon and be reflexive about the social construction of reality and I interpret this as myself as researcher being reflective to see the wider forces influencing my world view such as primary socialisation, life experience and media. Bourdieu (ibid) uses the phrase "research habitus" which can reflexively lead to an understanding of the position of the researcher. It is our capacity to reflect on what has made us who we are.

On a practical level, Opie (2004:19) recommends that researchers take time to reflect on their philosophical positioning and how any fundamental assumptions held could influence research-related thinking and practice. He states that through reflexivity and reflective practice a researcher can assertively present their findings and interpretations

> …in the confidence that they have thought about, acknowledged and been honest and explicit about their stance and the influence it had upon their work.

Similarly, Opie (2004:24) believes that researchers who make their positionality explicit allow themselves to develop and conduct robust work that "they can justify and will stand up to scrutiny". Furthermore, Brewer (2000:127) suggests that personal positioning within the research will influence how the data are interpreted and conveyed in writing up the results. To support the goal of ensuring reflexivity, it is essential to acknowledge that the analysis of data

will effectively constitute an interpretation of what is being studied through my own socially constructed reality.

According to Fetterman (2010:1), the choice of research topic or participants to study in itself is biased. He suggests that to mitigate the negative effects of bias, the ethnographer "must first make specific biases explicit". In keeping with Fetterman's suggestion, Wellington (2000:43) proposes one of the first tasks when undertaking any research is for the researcher to explore any assumptions about themselves such as values, beliefs, ideas, motivation and prejudices. He goes on to suggest that researchers' need to ask themselves if they have any bias or prejudices that would affect their role as a researcher. Furthermore, Gormally and Coburn (2014) recognise that acknowledging values and an epistemological standpoint is critical when researching with young people as these two aspects could affect how the researcher engages with young people or how the young people respond to the researcher. I intend to address this now.

As acknowledged within section 1.2, I have a personal and professional interest in the chosen research topic. This, Fetterman (2010) would suggest, is in itself biased and must be made explicit. The association between my voluntary role as a Care Farm Director and my youth work employment trajectory, has driven my desire to research young people's experiences on care farms. I am acutely aware of how the philosophical values I possess could affect my role as a researcher, and at an early stage in the research, I made a commitment to reflexivity and reflective practice throughout all stages of the process. I noted Opie's (2014) assertion that through acknowledging my epistemological standpoint, findings and interpretations would stand up to scrutiny.

My personal educational philosophy and pedagogy is centred on social-learning theory and the notion of informal learning. Social learning theory is based on the premise that individuals can learn from socialisation with others, embracing notions of imitation, role modelling and observation (Bandura, 1977). Similarly, informal learning pedagogy is described by Batsleer (2008:11):

> Informal educators…go to meet people and start where those people are with their own preoccupations and in their own places… both learner and educator engage in a process of learning from the context of the everyday.

Conversations, relationships, participation and mutual respect are all key attributes of informal learning processes when working with young people (Young, 2006). Both principles of social-learning theory and informal learning theory, hold the relationship between the educator and learner at their core. The connections between learning theory and pedagogy became clearer to me when I started out in my career as an alternative curriculum practitioner in 1999 and have continued to be during my career progression into higher education institutions. The increasing understanding and natural fascination with how young people learn has influenced my personal research interests and pedagogy today. In their work on 'Finding Nexus', Gormally and Coburn (2014:4) examined the relationship between youth work practice and research activity suggesting that youth work values such as social justice, empowerment and youth participation can be 'useful' when undertaking research with young people. A passion for social justice and the young people themselves have always been the driving force behind my thirst for alternative curriculum activity and more specifically those young people who find mainstream schooling difficult.

From experience when working with learners disengaged from education, ensuring learning took place was somewhat of a challenge. The young people approached life from differing cultural or social perspectives, learnt at different rates, some were often dealing with devastating events in their lives but I believe most young people can be encouraged to learn if, as facilitators of learning, we present learning activities to meet their learning preferences. Robinson (2006) argues that young people have different attributes that should be nurtured through education to cultivate creativity, rather than being stifled by robotic curricula. Being an effective facilitator of learning when working with the young people often meant ensuring all learners became engaged in a given task and achieved the outcomes set. Whilst this did not necessarily mean all young people were learning effectively, it certainly was an achievement to engage the learners and observe the development in their social skills. I suggest if young people feel the learning has a meaning to their lives and development as individuals, whether the subject area interests them or because they have had some input into the planning of

learning, they will be more motivated and take ownership of their learning and hopefully achievement. In the latter learning environment, Einstein sums up the underpinning philosophy: “I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn” (Einstein, n.d.). This thesis embarks on a journey to investigate whether the care farm environment is one of these conditions.

4.1.5 Devising the research questions

The overall research aspiration to explore the contribution care farming may have on young people’s engagement with learning was established and research questions were developed. Three research questions were drawn from the overall aim of the study incorporating the views of the young people and care farm staff. Research questions were kept broad and purposefully exploratory in order to generate authentic responses. ‘How’ and ‘why’ were the common phrases used within the questions as according to Wellington (2000:49), these questions are “usually the more interesting but invariably the most complex”. I was mindful that questions were worded to allow participants the opportunity to share their thoughts safely and honestly and I remained genuinely open to exploring many interpretations, including those who believed care farms are not beneficial. Framing the questions at this stage was crucial to the execution of the study and ultimately, anchored the analysis of the data.

The questions were also intentionally developed to enable photographic responses to be produced. The study was originally designed to ascertain the views of young people and care farm staff but as it developed there was an opportunity to involve two members of staff from schools that referred young people to the care farms. O’Reilly (2009:18) states that the “ethnographer should not be surprised to find others chipping in” when asking questions and describes the data collection phase of research as “one long conversation with people and ‘a field’ you are fascinated with”. Thus, the study was adapted to include this additional dynamic which allowed for greater opportunity to triangulate findings.

4.1.6 Selection and sampling

The target population of the study were young people aged 13 to 16 years who were accessing alternative curriculum activities through a care farm. The modes of referral and rationale for engaging on the care farm were not clear for each young person at the start of the study but became evident throughout the data collection phase.

My aspiration was to gain access to sufficient care farms which offered an alternative curriculum to young people aged between 13 to 16 years old. To qualify, the care farms would need to have young people attending currently or have planned interventions with this client group in the near future, to ensure the data collection time frames coincided. A purposive electronic sampling strategy was used initially to ensure qualifying care farms had the opportunity to show an interest in participating in the research. Generating interest from the gatekeepers was the first hurdle to overcome in gaining access to the young people. However, I was very aware that even though a care farm may show an interest, there was no guarantee the young people would be willing to participate in the research; therefore, I did not want to limit my potential audience at this early stage. Fetterman (2010:35) suggests "mixing and mingling" with potential research sites at first before narrowing down the specifics.

Responses via email from qualifying care farm providers were not as forthcoming as anticipated. In the end, three care farms, from the five that showed an interest within their email reply, were chosen as data collection sites based on their function of working with young people on an alternative curriculum, something that not all the interested care farms offered. It was considered that three care farms would allow for depth of investigation and room for comparison, as well as supporting the allocated data collection schedule. A further consideration when determining the sample to be studied was that of pragmatism. The location of the care farm sites had to be within realistic travelling distances; indeed, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) encourage the researcher to consider geographical location and travel costs at an early stage of planning. Thus, the size of the sample influences the ways in which the

research design is practically developed. Three care farms would provide some variation in the accounts generated and create a further richness and depth of analysis. If more sites had been included, it would have been unmanageable to capture the depth and detail required for the telling of each account. Fetterman (2010:40) purports that

> Only by penetrating the depth and skimming the surface can the ethnographer portray the cultural landscape in detail rich enough for others to comprehend and appreciate.

Correspondingly, Allan (2012) infers that for ethnographers, depth is of greater importance than breadth whilst Mason (1996) suggests that the sample should be large enough to make meaningful comparisons.

The three qualifying care farms were Maple Care Farm, Birch Care Farm and Rowan Care Farm (all pseudonyms for the purpose of anonymity). The next juncture was arranging a mutually convenient time to meet with the managers (gatekeepers) at the care farm sites. It was during these crucial meetings that the gatekeeper confirmed that they understood the research aims and objectives and were happy to support me with the evidence collation on their care farm site. It was also ascertained if there were any young people currently attending the care farm or any planned interventions forthcoming. O'Reilly (2009) suggests that ethnographic research is not a one-off event and is something that should be negotiated and renegotiated carefully; she stresses that everyone involved must be clear on this at the start of the relationship. This was always with the caveat that the young people may choose not to participate in the research and their choice was absolute.

Initially I sought the perceptions of eight young people from across the three sites to allow for depth of data collected and also for manageability purposes. This figure would also allow for any possible withdrawals and non-attenders. I was privileged enough to be able to work with the desired number of participants and four more than anticipated. This was due to the young people at Rowan Care Farm being willing and keen to share their stories. The varying consent documentation was secured from all (See Appendix C).

4.1.7 Researching familiar territories

Birch Care Farm is the care farm that I am personally involved with; my father is the on-site farmer and I manage the strategic operations. This subjective connection, therefore, made this choice of research site controversial and created quandaries for myself as researcher during the planning stages and data collection phase. All dilemmas required reflexivity and flexibility, yet upon reflection the benefits of this insider perspective were advantageous. Chavez (2008:474-475) uses the phrase 'insider positionality' when she refers to the study she carried out with her Mexican family. She describes the caution that must be used to avoid a 'rose-coloured observational lens or a blindness to the ordinary' when researching within a familiar setting. She also notes however, that the assumptions made about insider positionality in the literature are "theoretical" and "supported by little empirical evidence". Nevertheless, due attention had to be given to researching alongside colleagues and family members.

Whilst researching at Birch Care Farm I had to assume multiple identities such as daughter, manager and researcher, which was not the case at Rowan or Maple Care Farm. Issues with access to the farm were not a concern at Birch Care Farm but managing relationships whilst working alongside the young people was worthy of consideration. I overcame this through transparency and by encouraging the staff team to be co-participants throughout my research journey. Details about my research aims and research questions were discussed with the staff team prior to the study commencing and any fears of managerial surveillance alleviated at this stage. The operational staff team were not research participants, although we worked alongside each other during the data collection period.

My father was interviewed along with one other care farm manager. The style of interview was semi-structured and therefore whilst slight digressions could be made, the pre-determined questions helped keep the interviews earnest and intellectual. I experienced no difficulties managing private and public space when working alongside my father and colleagues so consequently, I viewed this opportunity to "maximise the privilege of already knowing the field"

(Chavez, 2008:480). However, caution was advised by Korpela et al. (2016:4) that when carrying out ethnographically-based studies with family members:

> …no part of the totalised fieldwork experience that informs the analysis and the writing process can be dismissed or trivialised as unscientific.

Therefore, the limitations of researching with my father was not ignored and a reflexive approach was implemented in order to identify any emerging bias that could impact on the data collected.

4.1.8 Data collection schedule

The table below illustrates the days I spent at each farm:

2017	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F
January	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31			
February			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28			
March			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
April	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30					
May	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31		
June				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
July	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30					

Table 1: Data collection schedule

Birch Care Farm Maple Care Farm Rowan Care Farm

As the operational times differed across each care farm, the length of time spent with the young people varied across each of the three sites. Birch opened between 9.30 till 2.45, Maple 9 till 3pm and Rowan 9.30 till 3pm. I resided at Rowan Care Farm on the farm site during the data collection phase which allowed for a greater depth of enquiry, as well as limiting journey times.

4.2 Data collection methods

Describing the ethnographer as a "human instrument", Fetterman (2010:33) suggests that exploring the terrain of a social group is likened to a "hike through the social and cultural wilderness", which begins with fieldwork.

For this study, the chosen methods and tools needed to capture the lived reality of the young people attending a care farm and therefore address the research questions. To support the collection of data, evidence was derived from differing sources, generated by using a range of methods and tools. Whilst maintaining integrity in relation to the philosophical foundation of my research (Mason, 2002), data collection tools and methods chosen needed to seize what I set out to achieve. I chose tools that support the epistemological grounding of the study and reflected my view on social reality. My youth work values of participation and empowerment can be aligned with participatory research seeking to engage with marginalised voices, in this case young people disengaged with mainstream education.

It was anticipated that through the use of differing ethnographic methods the authenticity and credibility of the data collected would be enhanced. While using methodological triangulation supports corroboration of data, Mason (1996:26) urges caution when integrating different methods and advises that researchers do not expect "straightforward corroboration" as two or more methods do not always lead to comparable data. Mason further recommends that chosen methods are epistemologically consistent and can be integrated pragmatically into analytical units. Furthermore, whilst triangulation involves using different methods to corroborate the findings (Cohen et al., 2000), as a qualitative researcher anchored on the premise that there is no absolute truth, a thematic analysis of participants' responses was carried out, identifying any themes and patterns.

The main research method was that of unstructured interviews to generate accounts and perceptions of those central to the study, the rationale for which I will expand on in a later

section. In addition, semi-structured interviews, participant observations and photo elicitation were used as tools to facilitate discussion and capture the thoughts and experiences of all the participants; young people and adults.

This section aims to identify the methods and tools used whilst exploring the rationale for their selection.

4.2.1 Interviews as method

The decision to use interviews as a central form of data collection was influenced by two factors; firstly, my personal belief regarding the nature of reality discussed earlier, and secondly, the practicalities of the study. Byrne (2012) suggests that interviews emphasize narrative forms of meaning and allow participants the opportunity to tell personal stories on their own terms, thus semi-structured/unstructured interviews provided an environment in which young people and care farm providers could voice their opinions and enabled the production of rich, comprehensive data (Heath et al., 2007). Fetterman (2010) describes interviews as the ethnographers' most important data gathering technique. Interviews embraced the interpretive focus of this study concerned with uncovering the meanings and understanding that young people and care farm providers ascribe to learning. Stephen and Squires (2003:161) suggest that "…we must simply listen to what young people themselves have to say when making sense of their own lives". I intended to embrace the latter suggestion made by Stephen and Squires (2003) and listen to the young people throughout the unstructured interviews and observations.

4.2.1.1 Unstructured Interviews

Acknowledging the difficulties surrounding how an ethnographer should carry out an interview, O'Reilly (2012) suggests that interviews begin with a passive approach and are shaped by the use of informal questioning. Described as a "powerful tool in the ethnographers' kit", Pole and

Morrison (2003:30) provide an overview of the strengths of unstructured interviews suggesting that they are a useful "format to provide a gateway into conversation" with young people. Pole and Morrison observe that there is a possibility an unstructured interview may turn into a natural conversation between researcher and participant which could be a positive occurrence for the research in hand when working on the care farm together. O'Reilly (2012) refers to these natural conversations as "opportunistic chats" and Hochschild (2010) "guided conversations". Batsleer (2008) believes that conversation is at the heart of youth work and central to relationship building with young people, something I needed to undertake with the participants once consent was confirmed and throughout the data collection phase. Using the phrase 'informal interviews' to describe unstructured interviews, Fetterman (2010:41) lends support to Batsleer, stating that "informal interviews are also useful in establishing and maintaining a healthy rapport".

Formal interviewing and direct questioning may be interpreted by the young people as intrusive, interrogatory and potentially futile. Rubin and Rubin (1995) encourage ethnographers to think of collecting data as one long conversation with someone you are fascinated with. It was hoped this perspective would support the creation of a natural dialogue and an environment to explore subjective meanings. Gaining an insider view is central to addressing the research questions and unstructured interviews would encourage the young people to delve into their thoughts, to express their opinions, their doubts, fears and hopes in a comfortable manner whilst engaging in meaningful farming activities (O'Reilly, 2012). Using more informal approaches to discover categories of meaning amongst the young people would also help ascertain how one young person's perception compares with another.

Capturing the unstructured interviews could have posed a problem and given the logistics of the interviews being anywhere on a farm site, recording the interviews had the potential to be very problematic. I overcame this challenge in three ways: firstly, with a high-tech voice recorder that captured speech despite background interruptions; secondly, through rigorous fieldwork notes; and thirdly, I cross-checked my interpretations with the young people where

required. The recordings happened spontaneously when young people were offering some insight into their thoughts and also purposefully when a more structured conversation was taking place for example; when I posed a specific question. Recordings were taken during one to one conversations and also whilst we were engaged in group work activities. There was also the possibility a young person did not want to discuss an emotive point whilst in the company of others on the farm land and that was fully respected. If the young person wished to share sensitive information with me, in conjunction with farm staff, a suitable area of the farm was sought.

O'Reilly (2012) draws attention to the possibility of unstructured interviews overlapping with participant observation, suggesting that interviewing and listening occur all the time for ethnographers. Conversational questioning was used to elicit a range of responses and allowed the young person to respond as they felt appropriate using their own interpretation.

4.2.1.2 Semi-structured interviews

In contrast to the use of unstructured interviews with the young people, this method was not deemed appropriate when gathering the views of care farm staff. This was mainly due to confidentiality purposes and the fact that sensitive issues may be discussed within the interview (O'Reilly, 2012). Open-ended questions, such as 'what are your thoughts on why young people attend care farms', were posed to the care farm providers giving them the opportunity to articulate the reasons for why young people attend care farms in England (research question 1). Similar questions were presented to all staff in the hope that general, comparable information from all three care farms would be generated (See appendix J and K). It was envisaged that two staff from each care farm would be interviewed individually in order to produce sufficient, informative data. This was achieved and one more staff member from Rowan Care Farm offered to be interviewed thus totalling seven.

Interviews were arranged at a suitable time and place for the participant allowing for flexibility to accommodate varying working hours and locations. Keeping ethics at the forefront of the

data collection phase, the chosen location was a place where the participant felt able to express themselves freely and confidentially (Fetterman, 2010). If consent was gained from the care farm staff member, interviews were recorded allowing me to immerse myself in the interview rather than frantically writing notes. Interviews were transcribed soon after the event by an external audio transcription service that came recommended by a University of Hull colleague. All transcripts were checked for accuracy by myself. External transcription services were chosen due to my full-time work commitments and the urgency to keep on top of the data collection during this demanding period of the study. O'Reilly (2012) recommends that interview recordings are not left too long before being listened to so other memorable notes such as body language and any other explanatory notes can be added.

Limitations of using semi-structured interviews have been acknowledged. Issues such as social control and power dynamics within an interview situation have been explored and the work of Kvale (2006:484) consulted. He states that a qualitative interview "entails a hierarchical relationship with an asymmetrical power distribution of interviewer and interviewee"; therefore it is paramount the researcher accepts that during the interview participants will be actively constructing their world, resulting in an account that is a representation at that particular moment in time. For these reasons, a non-hierarchical relationship was intentionally sought, and I combined interpersonal and research skills to effectively facilitate the interviews.

4.2.1.3 Participant Observation

Ethnographic research design can take many forms and involve varying levels of participation. Pole and Morrison (2003:22) describe participant observation as another "tool" in the ethnographer's kit and offer three levels of participation, one of which is "participation as observer". According to O'Reilly (2012) and Fetterman (2010), participant observation is the main method of ethnography. Participating in the lives of young people enables the researcher to immerse themselves in the field and ask questions that relate to their daily lives. As Fetterman (2010:37) states:

> Participant observation combines participation in the lives of the people under study with maintenance of a professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data.

Worthy of note is Fetterman's reference to maintaining professional distance to ensure data is captured effectively. This is something I needed to pay attention to, given the fact that I was engaging in activities involving animals and other potential distractions; reflexivity was critically important here. Gold (1958) examines the role of 'participant as observer' and urges caution with this approach, highlighting the potential for the researcher to lose perspective on the research. Pole and Morrison (2003) support this suggesting that participant observation is especially demanding, and reflexivity will help ethnographers remain focussed. O'Reilly (2012) proposes that participant observation takes time, and usefully distinguishes between those aspects of a setting first noticeable upon arrival and those aspects noticeable once immediate observations have become familiar, such as table layout. This is also true of the people that I came into contact with. Building relationships over time allowed for familiarity and individuals to be comfortable with my presence. Through spending prolonged time on the farm, I was able to "get to know them [young people] beyond a one-off interview and to gain a greater understanding of their views and experiences" (Punch, 2002:322). Observations were on-going whilst I participated on the farm with the young people.

Capturing the observed commentary and behaviours on the care farm was always going to be challenging due to the interactive nature of the work so practical strategies were required. I used a small note pad and pen to record shorthand notes throughout the day and a voice recorder to capture my reflections at opportune times. I also took photographs of areas and objects that were worthy of noting. These were both used as an aide-memoire when writing the full reflexive recording during the evenings; this was done in the form of a fieldwork journal for each site. Below are two excerpts from the fieldwork journals with any identifying data obscured:

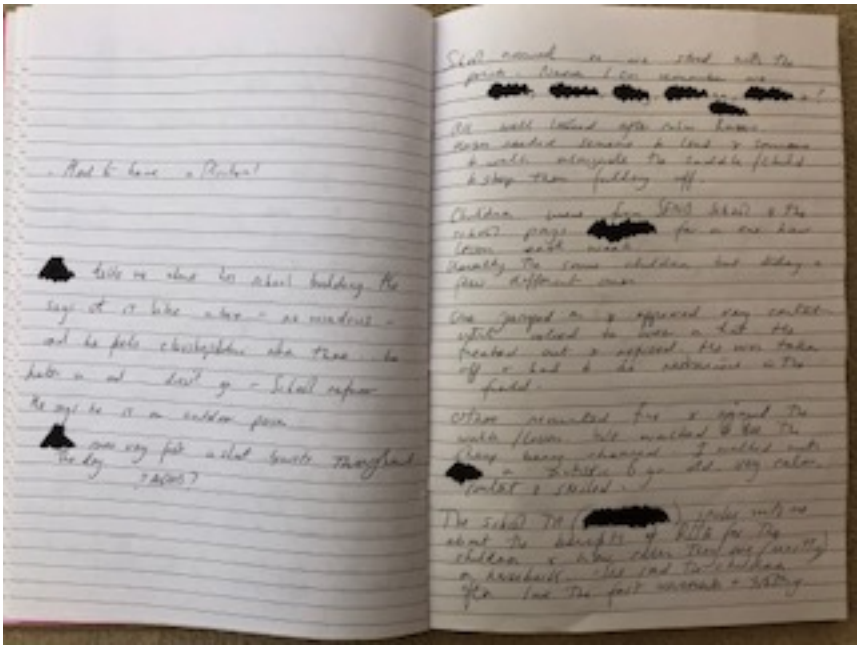


Figure 8: Fieldwork journal 1

Figure 9: Fieldwork journal 2

O'Reilly (2012) suggests that notes are written up as soon as possible, and certainly each day to avoid forgetting information that may be highly relevant during the analysis stage. Mills et al. (2013:85) advise that

> …writing of any kind helps our fragile memories…Ethnographers get no rest, and the privacy of one's own room, at the end of the day, is often the place for writing 'up' ones fieldnotes.

Fetterman (2010:117) supports this view stating that "too long a delay sacrifices the rich immediacy of concurrent notes", adding that field notes are the "bricks and mortar of an ethnographic edifice". Atkinson (2015) refers to field notes as a form of representation of events, experiences and interactions selected by the researcher, therefore running the risk of omitting data not chosen by the researcher. Reducing the social world experienced by the young people on a care farm into written form would allow experiences to be revisited and reviewed. On a similar note, Geertz (1973:19) proposes that documenting social discourse leads to events being turned into accounts which can be "reconsulted". Whilst there is significant importance on the writing of field notes, an alternative view is put forward by Jackson (1990), who proposes that too much effort is put into taking field notes which impacts negatively on the interaction between researcher and participants. Nevertheless, whilst recognising the complexity, limitations and necessity of making field notes, significant energy was invested in this crucial task. Perceptions of the participants were also captured through the use of more interactive tools; these will now be explored.

4.2.2 Photo elicitation

One method I had a particular interest in using was visual ethnography. This was due to the interactive nature of the method, which was suited to the location in which data were collected. Further, I wanted to offer the young people an alternative method of communicating and expressing their thoughts. As Pink (2013:1) states, "Images are indeed part of how we experience, learn and know as well as how we communicate and represent knowledge". One aspect of visual ethnography is photo elicitation which, along with videoing, are becoming integral elements of an ethnographer's work (Pink, 2013).

Another rationale behind my choice of method was the fact that some young people found literacy or expressing themselves verbally difficult and using a visual medium may have

overcome any fears associated with this. Photos may indicate the thoughts of participants that they might not express in an interview or when walking around the farm. O'Reilly (2012) believes that experiences and emotions that could be repressed in an interview situation may be articulated more successfully through images. Young people could also have been more familiar with technology than in previous years and as such, cameras on telephones and iPads are largely a contemporary reality for many young people (Pink, 2013; Bradford & Cullen, 2012).

Photographs encouraged dialogue from the young people, thus enabling them to remain active in the reconstruction of knowledge (Einarsdottir, 2007). The use of photographs within ethnography is a key feature of the work of Pink, and in her 2013 book she spends time debating the use of images and how they can contribute to the generation of knowledge. She suggests the use of any image for ethnography is contingent on "how it is situated, interpreted and used to invoke meaning, imaginings and knowledge" (Pink, 2013:35). On a similar note, Thomas (2009) believes that photos are the product of the research subject and reflects their intent or position when taking the picture. For the research in hand, the use of images was led by the young people situated on the care farm and interpreted by themselves. Individually, the young people were invited to capture images around the care farm of places/areas where they felt they had learnt something or one where they had not. I also encouraged the participants to capture any other image that they felt was relevant to address the research questions, narrating their thoughts and feelings as they captured the photographs. Similarly, Mizen (2005) used photographs in his work with young people. He gave young people a disposable camera so that they could capture images of their employment practices in order for them to create a unique source of evidence of their working practice. Mizen (2005) argues that the use of photographs can enhance our knowledge and understanding of children's lives. For this reason, I chose to include images in the body of the thesis; young people's perceptions were at the heart of this study and I wanted this to be evident throughout.

Discussing the photographs the young people had taken around the care farm with the individuals themselves brought new information and knowledge to the research, which might not have been the case without visual methods. The use of photographs also illuminated any contradictions between what the young people shared verbally and what they represented visually (Thomas, 2009). Combining the use of images and other data works well according to O'Reilly (2012), who suggests that giving cameras to research participants can actively co-construct the ethnographic story with them.

Pink (2013) raises awareness of the limitations of using images to represent a reality suggesting that images can be ambiguous and do not take account of the cultural context behind them. A further limitation could also be the mood of the young person on the day the image is taken, and for this reason the opportunity to take images was present on every contact day. Whilst the limitations of the use of images are acknowledged, through reflexivity and awareness, using visual representations of the young people's experiences on a care farm strengthened the evidence generated in order to address the research questions.

4.3 Ethical considerations

With a few minor exceptions, Atkinson (2015:172) suggests that "ethnography is among the most ethical forms of research". He justifies this assertion by reflecting on the ethnographer's passion for their chosen research topic and desire to understand the stories of others, insisting this commitment eradicates any form of harm and/or abuse taking place during the course of the research. There have, however, been exceptions to this but Atkinson believes that the "vast majority of field researchers have created a highly commendable attitude towards their research…and participants" (ibid); this is certainly something I wished to emulate. This study, underpinned by ethnographic principles, researches perceptions of adults and young people, however, there were particular enhanced risks when researching with young people.

Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015:33) recommend that when undertaking research with young people, researchers "should be alert to issues of manipulation, coercion and their relation to power and authority". Similarly, Bradford and Cullen (2012:50) suggest that "research that engages with young people's narratives and lived experiences can be overpowering and emotionally intrusive". This is of central importance to the study in hand as the young people may have had negative experiences of authority in their educational history and preconceived views of teachers may have manifested themselves. Bucknall (2014:80) uses the phrase "otherness" to describe the inevitable power differentials between an adult researcher and their young participants, suggesting that the researcher considers how they can best overcome the 'otherness' through building a rapport or familiarity with the participants. She goes on to state that it is the responsibility of the researcher to try to meet the young people on their own terms (ibid). To mitigate any power differentials, I spent time alongside the young people on the care farm before beginning data collection in the hope that I could create safe conditions for them to express themselves honestly, in their language, on their terms, without fear of being judged. My training as a professional youth worker complemented this process and my philosophical grounding on youth work values and principles alleviate any personal or professional concerns when working with this group of young people. Gormally and Coburn (2013:10) believe that "having prior youth work experience can [also] provide an excellent skills base for communicating with young people".

Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015:38) use the phrase "ethical symmetry" to describe the relationship they believe researchers should strive for when using participatory research methods with children and young people. Developing a set of ethical values should provide the anchor for research approaches and require revisiting throughout the study. In other words, ethical symmetry involves reflection on the ethical values that guide our interactions and the decision making that occurs within research to try to minimise asymmetries of power that may be attributed to status and maturity. In the case of Birch Care Farm where I have management responsibilities, the notion of 'ethical symmetry' could equally be applied to the adult participants who may have perceived a power dynamic whilst I was on site collecting data. In

addition, Bradford and Cullen (2012:76) believe that the notion of power is a consistent issue when researching with young people, meaning that researchers have to "be reflective about the range of different relationships, roles and identities that they engage in during the process".

The dynamics of consent can be complex and further compounded by the potential vulnerability of the young people who are no longer accessing mainstream school. Assigned to a social category of non-conformity, the struggles that a parent or carer may have experienced cannot be underestimated. Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015:79) highlight that parents and carers "may see the research as another unwelcome welfare intervention that exposes them to others judgements" which could lead to the eventual decision for their child not to participate in the research.

Recognising this potential misconception, I was keen to manage gaining consent professionally and with compassion. Drawing on my youth work values of participation, empowerment and promoting voice it was hoped that parents and carers would understand the positive aspects of the research, allowing their child the opportunity to share their experiences and thoughts in a non-judgemental manner. The informal style of the research information sheet was carefully written to try alleviate any fears (appendix B). It was of utmost importance that the research did not reinforce a young person's or their carer's consciousness of the excluded identities already assigned to them (Groundwater-Smith et al. 2015).

Wellington (2000:46) urges caution when attempting ethnography with young people and suggests due attention is paid to the researchers' presence during the gaining access stage and data collection phase. He raises a number of issues around researcher dress, the language spoken, accents and behaviours and how any change in this from the researchers' natural state can appear "patronising" to the young people and could be met with "suspicion". It was my intention to remain natural at all times during the completion of the study, not trying to be a young person, moreover, retaining my researcher identity mixing amongst the young people.

Ethical approval was sought from the University of Hull ethics committee and secured prior to any data collection (appendix I).

4.3.1 Access and Informed consent

Once the care farm manager/ gatekeeper had granted access to the care farm site (discussed further in 4.1.6), seeking permission from the young people and adults to share their experiences was the next priority. The age of the young people being researched meant consent needed to be obtained from a parent or carer and the time delays this could cause needed to be factored into the data collection phase of research. O'Reilly (2012:87) suggests positively that gaining initial access to research participants is not as challenging as it may seem; she believes that "people do not mind you hanging around them and asking them questions", and "most people are flattered in your interest in them". However, this may be an unrealistic perspective as there are also many difficulties regarding gaining access. One of the difficulties faced in this study, was gaining consent from intermediary decision makers such as the local authority for those young people within the social care system and Head Teachers for those still on a school role. The length of time this took was underestimated and a delay was made to the start of data collection at one care farm site due to the lack of response from a school. This was rectified once the rigorous ethical procedures in place were shared with the school.

Informed consent applied to all participants and stakeholders involved in the research process and therefore due attention was given to ensure that all understood the research trajectory (Mason, 2002; Cohen et al., 2000; Opie, 2004). In this respect, and by acknowledging the requirement for informed consent and anonymity, all participants were given a participant information sheet (appendix B, D & G) and asked to sign a consent form (appendix C, E, F, G & H). In the case of young people, their parent, carer or intermediary was also asked to complete a consent form. The 'University of Hull Research Integrity and Ethics: Ethical Principles, Guidelines and Procedures for Research and Teaching' was consulted (University of Hull, 2016)

as was the work of Gray and Malins (2004:59) who suggests that the following are included when obtaining informed consent from research participants and stakeholders:

- The aims of the research.
- Who will be undertaking it.
- Who is being asked to participate.
- What kind of information is being sought.
- How much of the participant's time is required.
- That participation is voluntary.
- That responding to all questions is voluntary.
- Who will have access to the data once it is collected.
- How anonymity of respondents will be preserved.

After my initial visit where I met the care farm managers and a number of young people, all three sites agreed to ascertain consent from any young person who showed an interest in participating and the managers took responsibility for the collation of the documentation on my behalf. This was decided due to ease of access to the young people and relationships already established.

A carefully constructed information sheet and letter was given to all young people at the consent stage (see appendix A). These were given out along with the general research consent form and image consent (see appendix C & F). The letter ensured that participants were fully aware of the research project and their role within that. Opie (2004:28) advised that "all known aspects of the research are disclosed to all involved", he also goes on to state that "information about the research is given in a form that potential participants can understand". This honesty could prevent any potential harm being caused and avoid difficult situations arising during the course of the data collection phase. Being candid about the research aims and practicalities helps participants make informed choices about whether to engage or not (O'Reilly, 2009). The information sheet and consent forms outlined the right to withdraw from the research at any

point. Further details on how to contact the researcher or research supervisor were included on the form for those who required further clarification.

Pink (2013) acknowledges that ethics are complexly situated in research and focusses her attention on ethical considerations when undertaking visual ethnography. She addresses the complexity of ethics in relation to the publication of images produced during data collection, suggesting researchers go further than just seeking consent to use images in a public arena and re-negotiate consent at various stages in the research to ensure participants are fully informed. This was worthy of consideration for this study given the timescales spent with young people and the number of images that were produced.

A further consideration raised by Pink is the anonymity of images and the impossibility of preserving anonymity of people and places. Whilst I did not envisage taking photos of participants, unless requested by the young people, animals and surrounding areas were captured and therefore could cause harm to the organisation through publication due to how the representations may be interpreted by their viewers which in this instance would be the general public (Pink, 2013). To reduce any harm to the organisation and participant, sensitivity was applied to each image through the removal of any identifying text and faces. Honesty and transparency are crucial to ethnography and there is no place for deceptive techniques (Fetterman, 2010).

Once consent and access were granted, scheduled dates for participating at the care farms were arranged in conjunction with the care farm staff (see Table 1). Attendance is usually very personalised for each young person, so flexibility was required with dates.

4.3.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Throughout the research process the anonymity of all participants and organisations was upheld. Atkinson (2015:177) states that ethnographers "guarantee individuals' anonymity,

certainly". Young people and care farm providers were sharing their personal experiences and sensitive thoughts with me therefore, it was paramount confidentiality was observed at all points in the research. Fetterman (2010:146) describes this sensitivity as probing "beyond the façade of normal human interaction". To support this, pseudonyms were used throughout and the names of farms were altered to avoid any participant being identified. Using pseudonyms is a simple way of "disguising the identity of an individual and protect them from potential harm" (Fetterman, 2010:147). Faces were disguised on all photographs therefore limiting identifiability.

Anonymity was secured further when fieldwork notes were written with no identifiable features shared and were only accessible by myself. Furthermore, interview transcripts were transcribed and once emailed securely to myself, they were saved within a password protected document only known to me. All recordings were deleted by the external transcription company once I confirmed receipt.

4.3.3 Harm to participant

As indicated previously, whilst ethnographic research is unlikely to cause physical harm to participants, it may cause emotional distress or anxiety (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Murphy and Dingwall (2001:340) air on the side of caution and believe "ethnography can harm individuals…research participants may experience anxiety, stress, guilt and damage to self-esteem during data collection". Some of the participants in this study were young people who had experienced various difficulties in life often resulting in a disengagement with mainstream education. With this in mind I did not want to cause any more trauma to the individuals and therefore sensitivity, openness and an honest approach was of utmost importance. In line with advice from O'Reilly (2009:19) who suggests that "the researcher always remains sensitive to the context and research participants feelings", a conscious effort was made throughout the time spent with the young people, not to ask any questions that had the potential to cause emotional distress or anxiety.

Fetterman (2010:133) suggests that respect for the social environment being studied ensures not only the rights of participants but also the "integrity of the data". In line with ethical procedures, young people were reminded of their right to withdraw from the research at regular points. Remaining committed to the original aims and objectives of the research and faithful to the promises made in the consent documentation is crucial to carry out ethical ethnography.

4.3.4 Harm to researcher

There was no harm to researcher anticipated through carrying out this study, however it needed to be considered due to the fieldwork nature of the study. The matter of researcher safety is documented by Madden (2010:91) in his work on 'Being Ethnographic'. He states that "it is both common sense and ethical for ethnographers to keep themselves safe". With this in mind, at each care farm site a health and safety induction was carried out on the first day of data collection; this involved a site tour and an overview of emergency procedures in case I experienced any difficulties.

As previously described, some of the young people I was working alongside were complex and there was a certain unpredictability with behaviour at times. My concern for this and the responsibility I held with regards to managing behaviour when working with the young people was discussed at an early stage with the care farm managers. I was also made aware of safeguarding protocol should any disclosures be made by the young people or if I observed any cause for concern.

A member of the farm team was always present throughout the day and unstructured interviews were carried out in open spaces on the farm site, thus reducing the opportunity for accusations against the researcher or participant. Madden (2010:91) supports the measures adopted above when he discusses how the role of participative researcher has serious ethical

implications for the young people, “but it can also throw some serious ethical responsibilities back onto the ethnographer”.

4.3.5 Exit strategy

Brewer (2000:101) believes that “an exit strategy is an important part of any research design” and withdrawal from the field needs to be considered carefully. Brewer goes on to recommend a “gradual withdrawal” from the setting when research is overt, however this was not always possible in this study due to the non-attendance of some participants during the final days of data collection.

Nevertheless, attention to withdrawal and exit from the setting is of utmost importance when working alongside vulnerable young people who may have experienced difficulties with relationships previously. In support of this, Madden (2010:93) suggests that whilst ethnographers are taught “a great deal about their participant group…[it] also opens them up to serious relationships and responsibilities with their participants”. Additionally, he states that “all ethnographers must deal with the responsibilities and obligations that go with forming close human contacts”. With this in mind, I was well aware of the need to be open and transparent about my time with the young people from the start of the data collection phase; this would hopefully help to manage expectations and avoid unnecessary harm. Despite this, breaking relationships in the field was certainly challenging at one care farm when the young people became angry and non-compliant as their care farm experience was coming to an end, unfortunately this coincided with my last data collection day. Due to the positive experiences I had observed, the young people felt that I could persuade the school leader to extend their time at the farm rather than return to their typical school routine. Learning that this was not possible created disappointment and what I interpreted as resentment from both young men. This was dealt with through informal discussions whilst undertaking activities which I was aware the young people enjoyed doing. They were also separated by the care farm staff during the afternoon activities which helped alleviate any tension. Murphy and Dingwall (2001:340) state

that “in observational fieldwork, participants may form close relationships with the observer and experience loss when the study is completed”; this is perhaps the case here. A celebration for the young men and their achievements whilst attending the care farm occurred during the last hour with all care farm staff and clients present. This was well received and poignant.

4.4 Coding tools

The transcripts and photographs were coded and analysed using QSR*NVivo software. NVivo is a computer programme available to assist with qualitative data analysis and is an aid to bring order and structure to the data “so patterns, categories and relationships can be discovered” (Brewer, 2000:106). Transcripts and photographs were imported into NVivo creating a rich repository of data which were then subject to interrogation. Themes were derived from the developing variations amongst the data (see appendix L, M & N). Patterns and connections between the data began to emerge and therefore codes were identified. Sub-themes were developed to further explore and substantiate the overarching code. Fetterman (2010:10) believes it is in this stage of ethnography that the “researcher synthesizes ideas and often makes logical leaps that lead to useful insights”.

Despite criticism by Kelle (1995) that using computer-based software can distance the researcher from the data, I experienced quite the opposite. Regular close scrutiny of the data allowed me to immerse myself in the responses of the participants and also allowed for time to reflect on the potential themes and similarities generated across the three sites.

4.5 Summary

This was a study underpinned by ethnographic principles, involving three locations and this chapter has explored how the research design was conceived and carried out. Three care farms were selected through purposive sampling, and prior to any data collection, each site was visited for an in-depth research visit. Methods of participant observation, interviews and photo

elicitation were used to generate responses from the young people, school staff and care farm staff. 12 young people, 7 care farm staff and 2 school staff contributed to the study.

Detailed ethical considerations were given significant attention and reflection. The personal commitment to reflexivity and how this is pivotal to the research trajectory has been documented, along with how the value-based practice of youth work anchors the chosen methodological approach.

The next chapter provides an introduction to the care farm sites where the research was located.

Chapter 5: Overview of the care farm sites

5.1 Introduction

What follows next is an overview of the three farm sites where the research study was located. Distinct features of each farm are highlighted alongside key logistical information such as size, facilities available and client groups attending the farms. Subtle nuances and similarities will also be summarised at the end of this chapter.

Care has been taken not to include any data collected at this stage; therefore, what follows is a descriptive summary.

5.2 Birch Care Farm

Established as a not-for-profit social enterprise in 2009, Birch Care Farm was developed on land that belongs to an established farmer who had a desire to 'Share the farm with those who may benefit' (Birch Care Farm vision statement, 2020). Previously the 26-acre site was used to grow organic arable produce and the farmer's family home is located on the same piece of land as the care farm. The farm is located in a small village comprising 250 houses and very few amenities other than a village public house. The nearest town is six miles away and there is a bus once a week servicing the local village, meaning that Birch Farm is typically accessible by private vehicle rather than public transport. It would be highly unlikely someone would walk to the farm unless they lived in the local village, distinctly different to Maple Care Farm's location.

Figure 10: Amenity building – Birch Care Farm

Figure 11: The landscape - Birch Care Farm

Set on 26 acres of agricultural landscape, Birch Care Farm has developed significantly since its conception. Spearheaded by the resident farmer, a large amenity building, office space, woodland, three large barns and a range of horticulture activity areas such as raised vegetable planting beds, a large polytunnel and wheelchair accessible pathways around the site have all developed over the previous ten years. The site has a dedicated entrance to the care farm with sufficient parking for many vehicles and an area for large coaches used for school visits.

Upon arrival at Birch Care Farm the site is clean, uncluttered and the vast agricultural landscapes are evident, again, a contrast to Maple City Farm. On a similar note, visits to Birch Care Farm are by appointment only due to the vulnerability of some participants and the extensive working area of the farm. It is quite possible that an unannounced visitor could arrive on site and the care farm groups could be working at the opposite side of the farm.

The local community are able to hire the amenity building for occasions and are always invited to care farm open events, although the community engagement is not as visible here in comparison with Maple Care Farm.

Figure 12: Pigs and sheep – Birch Care Farm

Figure 13: Chickens – Birch Care Farm

Animals feature at Birch, but not in the same quantities or varieties as at Maple or Rowan. The farm has three pigs, four goats, two ponies and 100 chickens. Animals mainly spend their time outside in the fields rather than in secure pens as evident at Maple Care Farm. Throughout the year a neighbouring farmer often brings two or three calves and lambs as temporary residents for the care farm participants to care for and study.

Birch Care Farm participants' bear similarities to those attending Maple although the staffing structure differs. A range of school groups, young people on alternative curriculum programmes, and adults with physical and learning disabilities are the most common attendees at Birch. A Care Farm Supervisor oversees all the attendees on a daily basis, and they are responsible for allocating roles and responsibilities to the support staff and volunteers each day. The farmer himself is included within the staffing ratios on certain days of the week and supervises the care farm one day per week. Young people and adult participants work together and socialise at break times together. There is no set member of staff for young people, and no separate social spaces, which differs from Maple Care Farm where young people have a dedicated cabin.

On a typical day the young people arrive at 9.30am and leave at 2.45pm, a slightly shorter day than Maple but longer than Rowan. The day is structured, and activities set in advance by the Care Farm Supervisor. Activities include general animal husbandry, collecting eggs, planting seeds, weeding, fencing and digging potatoes. At Birch there is a greater focus on horticultural activities than at Maple and Rowan with growing/cultivating fruit and vegetables a priority throughout the year. Birch Care Farm sells their produce on a very small scale.

Parts of Birch Care Farm are still a working commercial farm, so farm machinery is visible, and maintenance of the machinery takes place on site. Tractors and trailers feature on the care farm, and due to the presence of the on-site farmer, care farm participants are given the opportunity to see the machinery and become familiar with its operation.

Whilst it has previously offered nationally recognised accreditations for care farm participants, Birch does not currently offer accreditation opportunities.

Birch Care Farm is a member of Social Farms and Gardens and has achieved the Care Farming Code of Practice.

5.3 Maple Care Farm

Founded in 1981, Maple Care Farm was developed on land that had historically been used for housing. It is based one mile from the large city centre and is a fifteen-minute walk from the central city train station. The urban location of the city farm is striking as you approach the entrance due to it being based in the heart of a housing estate; you could almost walk by the farm without noticing it amongst the terraced houses and narrow streets. The farm is set on a three-and-a-half-acre site (roughly equivalent to three football pitches), yet significantly smaller than the two other sites visited.

Maple Care Farm is a company limited by guarantee and also a registered charity. It is a not-for-profit venture and is open to the public as a visitor attraction where members of the public are encouraged to visit the farm at any time. The mission statement of Maple Care Farm is as follows:

> Maple Farm identifies, confronts and addresses the problems of poverty, inequality, prejudice and lack of opportunity in our inner-city community by supporting and promoting community regeneration and self-help within environmentally friendly and self-sustaining systems, using the background of a mini farm, community gardens and related resources.

This is displayed for all to see upon arrival at the farm:

Figure 14: Mission statement – Maple Care Farm

There is a central focus on community regeneration and community heritage at Maple which stems back to the initial aims of the use of land – creating a green space for the community to enjoy. The farm opens every day of the year except the 25th December and on their website state:

> **…admission is FREE!** Come and meet our friendly animals, play in our under 8's playground, enjoy fresh, home cooked meals in our Café, The Farm Kitchen or stock up on plants from our peat-free Garden Centre…You can also do all your recycling in our Community Recycling Centre! (Maple Care Farm, 2018)

A noticeable nuance is the focus on community accessibility and visitor attraction prominence at Maple and how on the other data collection sites public access would not be permitted due to both safeguarding and health and safety reasons. Public access is prohibited at Birch Care Farm and Rowan Care Farm and specifically at Birch Care Farm visitors are not permitted without prior appointment. The extremely rural location of Rowan Care Farm would make it very difficult for visitors to casually drop-by.

Upon arrival on day one, my first observation was the number of visible rubbish bins and how I had to park my car in the centre of the farm site on a city street. Reflecting on my own first thoughts, pre-conceived views of exactly what constituted a care farm were being challenged. Unknown at that point was the fact that the bins were part of the community recycling project supporting the farm aim to promote community regeneration.

Figure 15: Parking - Maple Care Farm

Figure 16: Central street- Maple Care Farm

The site comprises of a range of small buildings including a café, staff offices, classrooms and numerous animal housing shelters. The range of animals at Maple Care Farm was vastly different to Birch and Rowan Farm, and despite the condensed site, the variety of animals was abundant. Maple prides itself on caring for and breeding rare breed animals and endangered species such as bagot goats and soay sheep.

Figure 17: Pond - Maple Care Farm

Figure 18: Animal pens - Maple Care Farm

Figure 19: Paths - Maple Care Farm

As well as being open to the public, pre-planned visitors and group visits to the care farm were also evident. Planned visitors were not too dissimilar to Birch Care Farm including college groups, individuals with learning disabilities and young people on alternative curriculum programmes as the regular attendees. Of interest for this study were the young people attending the farm, and I worked closely with the Youth Training Manager who has lead responsibility for Maple Care Farm's work with schools, Pupil Referral Units and the Local Authority. Young people on alternative curriculum programmes attend the farm every day, group sizes vary and communication with the other client groups is evident. Due to the small square area of the farm, individuals and groups interact throughout the day and the general public walk through the site frequently. Young people, however, have their own designated social space in a cabin where snack breaks and lunch can be taken.

Daily tasks were allocated across the groups by the lead workers at the start of the day, but an unstructured format was also evident. Often farm tasks undertaken depended on the disposition of the young people that day, and also the relationships among the young people were at times strained. Another factor was the on-going new additions to the menagerie; during my time on the farm new life was present every day and often this created new duties and impromptu tasks such as milking goats and separating new animals from potential threats.

A typical day for the young people attending Maple Care Farm started at 9am, earlier than Birch and Rowan, with a walk around the site whilst waiting for the Team Leader to gather the group together. Group sizes observed varied between three and eight; this included Support Workers that some young people required to support their learning and behaviour whilst on the farm. The Team Leader would allocate tasks which usually started with animal care so the young people would begin feeding the animals and prepare them ready for moving into the fields to graze. Other daily tasks included grooming ponies, cleaning animal accommodation, collecting eggs and sweeping communal areas – these tasks were common across all the care farms visited. The day would typically finish at 3.30pm. Distinctive to Maple Care Farm was the forging area and opportunities the groups derived from this. A staff member qualified to teach forgery

metal art was able to support the young people to participate in this high-risk task and create their own metal objects such as a key ring and hanging basket hooks.

Maple Care Farm offers accreditations and qualifications for the young people attending to work towards. Typically, the afternoon is dedicated to working on portfolios and assessments.

Maple Care Farm is a member of Social Farms and Gardens and has achieved the Care Farming Code of Practice.

5.4 Rowan Care Farm

Rowan Farm is a 180-acre organic livestock farm based on a large privately owned family estate. The estate hosts many elements: a commercial pheasant shoot, award winning ancient semi-natural woodland, arable and livestock farms, cottages, a restaurant, various leisure activities and Rowan Care Farm. The working farm comprises vast fields, pastures, streams, hedges, orchards and woodland. The nearest town is approximately nine miles away from the farm with no operating bus service, making Rowan the most rural care farm visited.

Rowan Care Farm was established ten years ago by the farmer on site who has a passion for young people who are not reaching their potential in mainstream schools. Similarly to Birch Care Farm, it is the resident farmer who has spearheaded the initiative. The care farm is fully integrated within the working farm; participants are able to contribute to all the possible work opportunities on the farm and is not a standalone venture like Birch and Maple Care Farm. Whilst aligning with care farming principles and practices, Rowan Farm prefers not to use the term ‘care’ in their official title. In 2016, Rowan established itself as a registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) with the objective to

> Advance education for the public benefit, in particular of young people who are challenged, disaffected and excluded, experiencing learning difficulties, suffering from

stress or who have physical or mental health issues, through farm-based activities (Rowan, 2020).

Upon arrival at Rowan the rural estate and the idyllic views are hard to not notice. Surrounded by hills and wilderness, Rowan Farm is markedly different to Birch and Maple Care Farm.

Figure 20: Fields - Rowan Farm

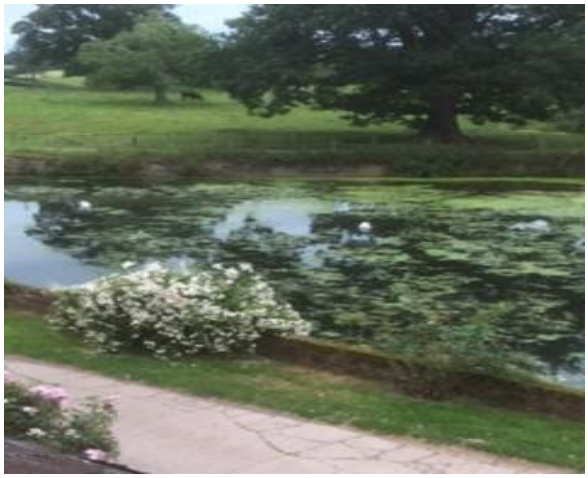


Figure 21: The entrance - Rowan Farm

A further distinct feature of Rowan is that this farm only works with young people on alternative education programmes. Rowan is only open to young people aged 11 to 18 years old and not adults. On occasion school visits are hosted, but the primary aim of Rowan is to work with young people not engaging in mainstream school.

Rowan Farm is home to a herd of pedigree Beef Shorthorn cattle, a flock of Lleyn sheep, ponies and working dogs, pigs and poultry and is the base for the Rowan Riding for the Disabled Group (RDA). The farmer is a qualified RDA teacher and is proud that Rowan Farm hosts RDA groups using the farm staff and ponies. The young people attending the farm are heavily involved in the delivery of RDA lessons.

The building at the heart of Rowan Farm is the base room which has a kitchen, space to eat together and locker areas for the participants to place their valuables.

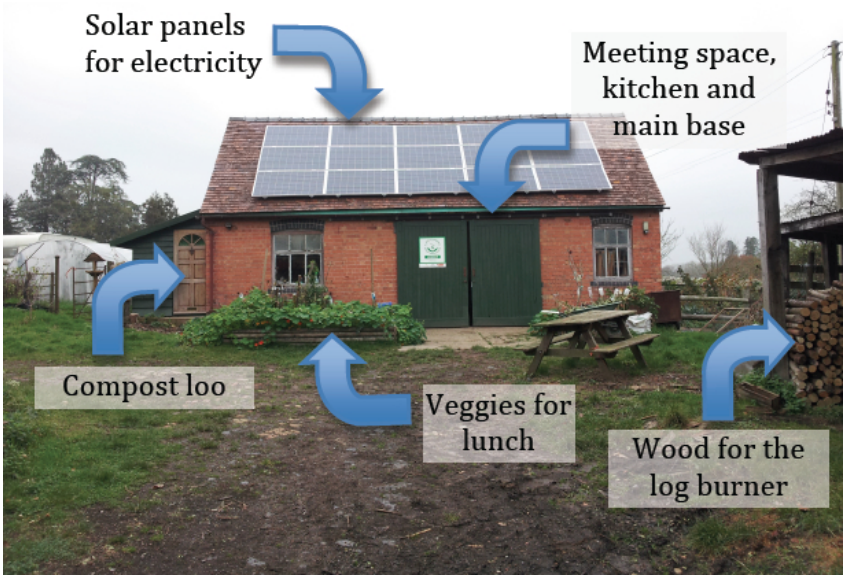


Figure 22: Base room - Rowan Farm

Meals for the day are chosen in conjunction with the young people and often includes produce grown and reared on the farm such as chicken stew and pheasant soup. Young people are involved in cooking lunch and serving it to their peers. This is a daily event that sees the group and staff team coming together, sitting around a table and eating together.

Due to the extremely rural location of Rowan, the team offer a collection and drop-off service from the local town each morning and afternoon. Often young people use this, although some use taxis and others arrange personal transport to the farm. A typical day sees the young people arriving between 9.30 to 10am and leaving at 3pm. Supervised by the farmer and the staff team, tasks observed include stock checking around the farm, sheep shearing, weighing lambs, grooming ponies, feeding animals and digging fences. Young people work alongside the farm staff team and sometimes the contract farmer to help with meaningful farm tasks. A large proportion of Rowan is farmed by a contract farmer, which allows the resident farmer to work with the young people and develop the therapeutic aspect of the farm.

Similarly to Maple and Birch Care Farm, young people are referred to Rowan through a range of education providers such as Pupil Referral Units, therapeutic schools, mainstream schools as well as parents/carers referring privately.

Figure 23: Sheep shearing - Rowan Farm

Figure 24: Herding sheep - Rowan Farm

Figure 25: Cow shed - Rowan Farm

A significant difference between Rowan and both Maple/ Birch Care Farm is that the young people are expected to carry out challenging tasks on a very busy, diverse farm business in the heart of the countryside. Some of the tasks undertaken may not be suitable for an adult with physical disabilities and/or multiple learning disabilities such as supporting sheep shearing.

A key feature of Rowan is the buggies that are used to travel around the farm site; these are necessary due to the size of the farm. Young people are required to undertake a test before being able to drive a buggy supervised by the staff team. All the young people observed took great pride in driving the buggy around the fields in order to carry out their allocated tasks.

Figure 26: Buggy - Rowan Farm

Provision for young people to work towards maths and English qualifications is available at Rowan with a member of the staff team dedicated to working on this aspect of the farm.

At the point of data collection, Rowan Farm was not a member of Social Farms and Gardens but the management team were considering becoming a member and working towards the Care Farming Code of Practice in the near future.

5.5 Summary

All three sites had common characteristics yet also subtle nuances. A prominent similarity was the ethos of each farm visited and how this supported the definition of care farming provided by SFG:

> The therapeutic use of farming practices to provide health, social or educational care services for a wide range of people (SFG, 2019).

All farms and the managers had a strong belief and passion for using natural spaces to improve health and wellbeing across the target audience. Maple was open for the general public as well as targeted groups to enjoy the farm, yet Birch and Rowan limited their participant groups. Birch was open to participants from a range of vulnerable groups such as those with learning disabilities and poor mental health. Rowan however, restricted their provision to young people aged 11 to 18 years old. The commonality here is that all worked with young people but only Rowan dedicated their provision to this age group.

The daily routine and activities were very similar across all the sites. The groups began the day with an informal drink, usually a coffee, and a conversation about the previous few days allowing the participants to share any news or possible concerns at the start of the day. Farm tasks for the day, set by the staff team, were shared with the participants during this morning gathering before the groups went outside to commence the duties. Tasks at Rowan and Birch

were very structured whilst at Maple, tasks were set but if the young people did not want to engage there were quiet spaces around the site for reflection.

Another similarity was the use of animals to engage the farm participants and offer activities for animal husbandry. Due to the extensive commercial farm operations, the number of animals, specifically cows and sheep, on Rowan Farm were significantly higher than Birch or Maple. Birch and Maple had a greater diversity of animals such as goats, pigs, rabbits, chickens and ducks, but they were in smaller quantities and specifically for use of the care farm visitors, not for large-scale commercial purposes.

The role of the farmer was comparable at Rowan and Birch where the farmer played a central role in the staff team and the general operation of the care farm. Both farmers had farmed their land for a number of years before establishing a care farm on the site. Maple was structured differently with a team of senior managers overseeing the farm daily operations; all had a range of expertise and backgrounds such as youth work, horticulture and animal husbandry.

The sizes of the farms were vastly different ranging from 3.5 acres (Maple), 26 acres (Birch) to 180 acres (Rowan) yet the ethos of all remained the same. Mission statements shared a similar theme:

> ‘confronts the problems…using the background of a mini-farm’
> ‘advance education…through farm-based activities’
> ‘to share the farm with those who may benefit’.

The next chapter will explore the demographics of the young people at the heart of this study. An overview of the care farm staff participants is also provided.

Chapter 6: Overview of the participants

6.1 Introduction to the young people

Understanding and getting to know the young people at the heart of this ethnographic study became critically important during the data collection phase, rather than at the onset of the research. During the initial stages, when identifying the young people, information was brief and served merely as a process to confirm they met the research criteria outlined in the methods chapter. What follows is a brief overview of each young person who contributed to the study. The overviews include a pseudonym name, gender, age at the time of the research and a little background information that was provided by other professionals who work closely with the young people. Other professionals include care farm staff, support workers and school staff.

Worthy of note at this stage, is that the majority of the background information provided by others could have been constructed from a deficit position. Therefore, I made no judgements about the narrative provided at this stage and positive information was also encouraged. Full consent to participate in the study was gained from all participants outlined below (see appendix C & F).

6.2 The young people

Name: **John** Gender: Male Age: 14
Care farm attended: Birch
Days of attendance: One day per week
Information from others:
John attends the Care Farm as he is being bullied in mainstream school and has low self-esteem. His school teacher believes John is not reaching his full potential in the classroom and

would thrive in a care farm environment. He has an interest in animals and manual work. John has a clinical diagnosis of anxiety and visits a counsellor regularly.

Name: **Max** Gender: Male Age: 14

Care farm attended: Birch

Days of attendance: One day per week

Information from others:

Max was referred to the care farm to try an alternative model of education. He is often temporarily excluded from mainstream school due to violence and disruptive behaviour both in and out of the classroom. He enjoys art and practical work. Max has a clinical diagnosis of ADHD.

Name: **Kieran** Gender: Male Age: 15

Care farm attended: Maple

Days of attendance: Two days per week

Information from others:

Kieran attends a specialist school for children and young people with social and emotional difficulties. He has previously been permanently excluded from two mainstream schools due to extremes of behaviour and refusing to attend. Kieran has a number of clinical diagnosis including Tourettes and Autistic Spectrum Disorder. He attends the Care Farm two days per week with a Support Worker due to previous suicide attempts and difficulties socialising with others. Kieran has shown an interest in animals, being outdoors and physical work.

Name: **Luke** Gender: Male Age: 13

Care farm attended: Maple

Days of attendance: One day per week

Information from others:

Luke attends a specialist school for children and young people with social and emotional difficulties. He has a clinical diagnosis of dissociative identity disorder. Luke attends Maple Care

Farm one day per week and another farm one day. He loves practical work and looking after animals.

Name: **Savannah** Gender: Female Age: 13

Care farm attended: Maple

Days of attendance: One day per week

Information from others:

Savannah has a varying weekly programme of education. She attends Maple Care Farm one day, mainstream school one day, another farm one day and is home schooled two days a week. She has been excluded from school numerous times due to extreme violent behaviour towards school staff and peers. She has a love of animals and being outdoors.

Name: **Declan** Gender: Male Age: 15

Care farm attended: Rowan

Days of attendance: One day per week

Information from others:

Declan is registered with a Pupil Referral Unit and attends the care farm two days per week. He is a school refuser who enjoys practical tasks and being with animals. Declan is a 'looked after child' supported by the local Social Care team. He has a diagnosis of autism.

Name: **Harry** Gender: Male Age: 15

Care farm attended: Rowan

Days of attendance: Two days per week

Information from others:

Harry is a school refuser who has previously shown extremes of behaviour whilst attending school. He is in specialist foster care and has a history of substance misuse. Harry loves mechanics and practical work.

Name: **Ben** Gender: Male Age: 16

Care farm attended: Rowan

Days of attendance: Two days per week

Information from others:

Ben is a school refuser who has previously shown extremes of behaviour whilst attending school and has been involved in gang related violence. He has a clinical diagnosis of ADHD. Ben has an interest in mechanical engineering and agricultural work and has recently had interviews for subject related apprenticeships.

Name: **Simon** Gender: Male Age: 14

Care farm attended: Rowan

Days of attendance: Two days per week

Information from others:

Simon is registered with a Pupil Referral Unit but refuses to attend. He attends the care farm two days a week but his attendance is sporadic. Simon has an obsession with weapons and has a history of violence. His carer at home has poor mental health and drug addictions. Simon enjoys practical tasks and has an interest in mechanics.

Name: **Sophie** Gender: Female Age: 17

Care farm attended: Rowan

Days of attendance: One day per week

Information from others:

Sophie was previously excluded from school due to poor behaviour and joined the care farm aged 14. After completing a college course recently, she has returned to the care farm as a Volunteer Peer Mentor one day a week, on the other days of the week she has secured paid work with animals. Sophie has a clinical diagnosis of ADHD.

Name: **Ebony** Gender: Female Age: 20

Care farm attended: Rowan

Days of attendance: One day per week

Information from others:

Ebony began attending the care farm at the age of 13 until she was 16. She was a young carer caring for her mother and also refused to attend school. Now 20, Ebony continues to attend the farm in a voluntary capacity as a Peer Mentor.

Name: **Freya** Gender: Female Age: 17

Care farm attended: Rowan

Days of attendance: Two days per week

Information from others:

Freya was a school refuser who was referred to the care farm aged 14. She has a passion for horses and loves caring for them. She has continued to attend the care farm as a volunteer one day a week and is currently looking for paid work.

6.3 The staff

Seven staff working on the three care farm sites were interviewed as part of the data collection process. All staff interviewed held differing positions on the care farms as shown in the table below; two were the farm owners and the farmer in charge of the alternative provision; two were managers supporting the administration of the young people attending the farms and three were training/ support staff working alongside the young people daily.

Care Farm	Role	Title
Birch	Administration Manager	MAN A
Birch	Farmer/Owner/Manager	MAN B
Maple	Manager	MAN C
Maple	Training Officer	TO E
Rowan	Farmer/Owner/Manager	MAN D

Rowan	Support Worker	SW F
Rowan	Training Officer	TO G

Table 2: Care farm staff overview

6.4 Summary

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the young people who gave consent to be involved in the research. Information from others who have worked with the individual has been provided with the caveat that this is rather circumstantial. However, by employing a methodology underpinned by ethnographic principles, through this study the young people were given the opportunity to share their personal journeys candidly whilst engaging in their natural environments.

Staff participants have been identified and for the purpose of the analysis, all have been allocated a coding title (Table 2).

The next chapter presents the responses from the young people, care farm staff and school staff. Fieldwork notes are also integrated to build a picture of the research findings, and subsequently provide a response to the research questions. Findings have been thematically ordered, based on the similarities of responses.

Chapter 7: Data Analysis

7.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to use the accounts of the research participants to illuminate understanding of how a care farm may contribute to young people's engagement with learning. The chapter brings together material from all participants; young people, care farm providers and school staff. The decision to present data as a collective whole is not to generalise, but rather, to identify the key themes that are pertinent to the study. The sources of all data are stated throughout so that differences and commonalities between participants and sites can be clearly identified.

The chapter is organised around the different groups of participants; firstly, the data generated from the young people and school support staff will be analysed followed by the care farm staff accounts. Where it was deemed relevant to the point being made, care farm staff responses and personal researcher reflections were integrated alongside the young peoples. The original research questions anchored the analysis of all accounts and themes arising from this allowed further examination of participants' perceptions. The research questions were:

1. How do young people and care farm providers articulate the reasons for why young people attend care farms in England?

2. What are young people's perceptions of their educational experiences, both on care farms and as part of formal education?

3. How and in what ways do young people learn on care farms in England, if at all?

A total of 46 transcripts of conversations with 12 young people were produced, and 101 photographs taken during the course of data collection, all have been reviewed during the

analysis. Seven care farm staff were interviewed and two school support staff on the care farm sites. Selected quotations have been presented as verbatim for authenticity purposes and to protect the voices of participants.

The three original research questions were used as the primary headings for ease of reflection and consistency of analysis with 20 emergent themes derived from the transcripts and photographs. An overview of the themes and sub-themes are displayed in Table 3, 4 and 5 below:

Table 3: Principal themes and sub-themes - Young People

RQ1: How do young people articulate the reasons for why they attend care farms in England?

Theme	Sub-theme	Sources	References
School's decision		8	11
To get qualifications		1	3
Experience of mainstream education		14	22
	School buildings	4	12
Being in the outdoors		9	11
Behaviour in mainstream education		21	63

RQ2: What are young people's perceptions of their educational experiences, both on care Farms and as part of formal education?

Theme	Sub-theme	Sources	References
Stress and pressure of school		24	84
Relationships with other care farm users		11	15
	Relationships with other young people	16	31
Lack of practical work at school		4	16
Happiness		31	46
Bullying		8	13
Anger		8	18

RQ3: How and in what ways do young people learn on care farms in England, if at all?

Theme	Sub-theme	Sources	References
Social skills		10	15
	Interpersonal	6	9
Practical meaningful tasks		22	25
	Horticulture	5	6
Animals		62	89

Table 4: Principal themes and sub-themes - Care Farm Staff

RQ1: How do care farm providers articulate the reasons for why young people attend care farms in England?

Theme	Sub-theme	Sources	References
Mainstream education		7	32
Home life		3	6

RQ3: How and in what ways do young people learn on care farms in England, if at all?

Theme	Sub-theme	Sources	References
Practical skills and qualifications		7	23
Relationships	Humans	6	17
	Animals	1	2
Interpersonal skills		7	24

Table 5: Principal themes and sub-themes - School Support Staff

RQ1: How do school support staff articulate the reasons for why young people attend care farms in England?

Theme	Sub-theme	Sources	References
Practical skills		2	3
Interpersonal skills		1	8

RQ3: How and in what ways do young people learn on care farms in England, if at all?

Theme	Sub-theme	Sources	References
Practical skills		2	6
Interpersonal skills		2	10

The overlap in responses between research question one and two became evident when analysing the data generated. Young people made reference to their experiences of formal education being a central reason why they attend a care farm therefore these data have been combined; table 3 above provides evidence of this.

The first section in the chapter examines how young people articulated the reasons they attended a care farm. Thoughts and commentary from the school support staff and care farm staff were incorporated as their statements often parallel those made by the young people. Where the responses show synergy, this will be highlighted.

7.2 How do young people articulate the reasons for why they attend a care farm in England?

7.2.1 Experience of mainstream education

When asked to share the reasons they attend a care farm, all young people made reference to their experiences in the mainstream school system which they had all attended at some point in their lives. All the young people were very open about their experiences of mainstream education. The young people were all in varying stages of exclusion; some were at risk of being excluded from their current school whereas some had been subject to a number of permanent exclusions. Some were classified as 'school refusers' meaning they negated school attendance. Two young people, who had been assessed as having needs which could not be supported in a mainstream school, shared their knowledge of attending specialist provision in a hospital school.

The extremities of the young people's reasons for attending a care farm were certainly varied including the desire to pursue a vocational qualification, becoming violent within a class, and being physically assaulted themselves in school. However, a commonality expressed by all the young people was the term stress.

7.2.1.1 Stress and pressures of school

All young people revealed at some point during data collection that they found school stressful. John (Birch) expressed how he felt coming to the care farm as:

… it's just time away, away from the stress of school.

Ebony (Rowan) who had experienced four school exclusions, the first of which was when she was 12 years old, described how the pressures of school were too much for her and stated:

…getting kicked out of mainstream school I will say like it done me, the world of good, it really did because I couldn't cope with everything that they expected me to do there.

Expectations of mainstream school resulted in Ebony being very satisfied to be excluded from the system and engage in alternative modes of education on the care farm. Likewise, Max (Birch) shared his struggles at school and described attending a care farm:

I struggle at school, so it's like kind of breaking down my days.

When asked why he attended the care farm, Kieran (Maple) expressed the view that school is a stressful place and a robotic institution stating that:

K: ….to fit into school you've got to be a robot.
RFC: Why do you say that?
K: You've got to be all same, you've got to be good at certain subjects set by the school, nuff [enough] *stress man.*

When asked about their experience of formal education John and Max at Birch Care Farm made some concise comments:

My experience of school is beyond terrible. (John, Birch)

My experience of school is its challenging. (Max, Birch)

On a different occasion John stated:

I'm struggling with school. (John, Birch)

This was corroborated by the Leader from the John and Max's school who in her interview commented:

School is difficult for these boys. (SSA, Birch)

When asked why Kieran (Maple) attended the care farm his Support Worker (SSB) replied:

He just gets himself so worked up sat, sat there in a classroom environment that he just, he just gets so stressed. I think he just stopped going to his first secondary school, he stopped attending because he just couldn't cope with like the, how busy it was and the expectations, just the environment, but I think it was like a culmination of everything that were around him and the stress and pressures of mainstream. (SSB, Maple)

The difficulties young people face in school and the pressure of learning in classrooms was also mentioned by Manager D (Rowan):

Some have learning barriers, you know, the dyslexia, the dyspraxia, the dyscalculia, you know, that, that kind of, ADHD, you know, all that stuff that if you're sat in a class of thirty, makes conventional learning difficult, so then you start to get difficult, I suppose some just go under the radar, you just keep quiet. But some kick off and then it's all about the bad behaviour and getting excluded.

(MAN D, Rowan)

Making decisions and the stress this evoked was raised by the two young people who were still in mainstream school. John (Birch) shared his stress and worry he was currently experiencing whilst he picked his 'options', a process whereby young people choose the subjects they would like to work towards for the last two years of school, typically working towards a GCSE formal qualification.

RFC: I noticed you were a bit grumpy last week.
J: Yeah, yeah, I was just annoyed.
RFC: What were you annoyed about?

J: Just school.
RFC: But what had happened?
J: Well because I was just worrying about picking my options, that's all.
RFC: Oh, has that been stressing you out?
J: Yeah, but then I had to pick them, er, for Monday, for this Monday so it was kind of stressful.

The pressure of making important choices with limited practical options appeared to be causing John some anxiety. Similarly, Max (Birch) shared his thoughts on the 'options' process:

M: Because I don't really believe in myself.
RFC: Why don't you believe in yourself? Well what, what's given you that impression in your mind, not to believe in yourself?
M: I don't know, I just, I just don't know where life's going to go and what I'm going to be, and we're having to pick options and think about our career and I don't know what I want to be.
RFC: And does that stress you out?
M: Yeah.
RFC: But why does it stress you out?
M: Because like some people have like ideas of what they want to be, and I don't have a clue and I didn't have a clue what to pick for my options.

John and Max were two young people who were still being educated within the mainstream environment despite experiencing a number of temporary exclusions. All other participants had been permanently excluded so choosing 'options' was not a decision they faced. John made reference to how it made him feel a number of times:

RFC: You look fed-up today John.
J: Just that school's really stressful and making my ears hurt.
RFC: What's stressful about it?
J: Everything, the pressure of being good. The pressure of taking your options because you have to think about what job you want.

The testing regime in school was another factor that caused John (Birch) stress, resulting in poor behaviour and subsequently a 'red card' which was a behaviour management strategy used by the school to remove a young person from a class.

J: I just couldn't cope this week so I got lots of red cards. Not sure if I got one for English but definitely for my tests that I had with my science teacher.
RFC: What kind of test was it?
J: A science one.
RFC: What, like preparing for GCSEs, like mocks?
J: I don't know, maybe.
RFC: And what happened in the test?
J: Yeah, I couldn't do it, I didn't, like forgot about it as I couldn't do it.
RFC: So because you couldn't do it, what did you do?
J: And messed about and got a red card.

On a similar note, the Training Officer at Maple Care Farm mentions the rigours of continuous mainstream school assessment as a reason for why young people attend a care farm and they also make reference to large groups:

Social anxiety, peer pressure, behavioural needs, learning needs which are difficult to fulfil when in large groups, some require more of a nurturing environment. For some students, putting them through GCSEs and academic subjects is setting them up to fail and outside of their realms of capability. (TO E, Maple)

Comparably, Kieran (Maple) also displayed 'undesirable behaviour' when being asked to undertake a task he struggled to comprehend. His Support Worker stated:

Well if Kieran doesn't want to or can't do something in school, when he's sat down, in a lesson, he'll scream. He just gets himself so worked up sat, sat there in a classroom environment that he just, he just gets so stressed. (SSB, Maple)

Ebony (Rowan), rather than the work itself, puts her exclusion from mainstream school down to the lack of support provided when she needed it, which resulted in her becoming disengaged.

E: It was, it was more so for the fact that I had a lot of issues going on at home, my sister wasn't very well and school changed and they took away my support when they turned it into, is it the academy now isn't it? I had a lot of support, a hell of a lot and then when it turned to XXX academy they took all of my support and within the first three weeks they kicked me out.
RFC: Do you think if the academy had had support in place you'd have been alright, you'd have stayed in school?
E: Yeah, I just needed help. Yeah and behavioural support workers and things like that. Yeah, definitely but no that's, it just didn't happen but … I got kicked out in year eight.

The perceived stress of school reported by the young people, appears to be multi-faceted yet all describe fundamentally negative experiences. The challenges of school for the young people was corroborated by the staff through their explanations.

7.2.1.2 Lack of practical work

The significance of practical tasks offered on the farms was considered a reason why young people attend care farms across the three sites. For John (Birch), the lack of practical work at school was causing him to disengage in lessons. He said:

…you don't get any practical work these days, you don't get to like try and say what you're good at, they give you your options and that's it.

John explained how he felt the lack of practical lessons at school was a hinderance for him as he felt much more at ease with practical, interactive lessons rather than typical didactic teaching. He described how being on a care farm was his *"dream"* being able to *"do practical stuff all day"*. Max (Birch) corroborated this stating

I haven't done a practical since like year eight…don't even do any practicals now apart from talking and writing down, that's all we have to do.

Manager D (Rowan) expressed their thoughts on the lack practical work in schools:

But some [young people] kick off and then it's all about the bad behaviour and getting excluded, and if they did more practical stuff, I'm sure if schools could do, do more practical stuff you wouldn't get the levels of disengagement that you get, then you start a downward cycle of poor self-esteem, low self-confidence…

Kieran's (Maple) Support Worker commented on the practical aspects of the farm:

The reason why, why alternative provision is offered is if they're struggling at school, erm, by struggling I mean they're not attaining and they're not concentrating or there's just, they lack the social skills to, to get on in mainstream. Well for XXX for instance, he is just, it's his personality, he's so outdoorsy, he's, he's really talented in what he's doing practically but not in the classroom.

The Care Farm Training Officer at Maple also refers to practical tasks when asked why young people attend care farms:

We see many students who cannot put their minds to maths and English, however, perform brilliantly when given a practical task to be involved in. (TO E, Maple)

The lack of practical skills was further supported by Manager D (Rowan) who stated:

I've always thought, have been a bit disillusioned with state academic system. I think it's too academic, you know, the more practical skills should be available for kids to learn.

The School Leader (SSA, Birch) made reference to the practical skills young people have the chance to develop when being referred to the care farm:

The farm for me is inspirational and I always feel that it has allowed all the young people I have sent to develop their practical skills but maybe more importantly their emotional intelligence.

Manager B's (Birch) response to why young people are referred to care farms was:

Schools are exasperated that various pupils aren't settling at school or thriving and then they come out to farms where it's a little bit more relaxed, you're out in the countryside and obviously it's a lot more practical work.

The tensions between academic and practical work was raised by all participants. Responses revealed that participants desired a more practical-based curriculum and believe this would appease the destructive behaviour often displayed in schools.

7.2.1.3 Bullying

Another recurring reason why some of the young people found school difficult and therefore faced exclusion was due to bullying. Below is an excerpt of a conversation with Luke (Maple):

RFC: What did you find difficult about school?
L: Oh, people in general, you know, tormenting me, bullying me, making me stressed because two years ago, well three years ago now, I wasn't in school, couldn't read or write but … never supported me or never supported my family, you know, they left me and, you know, left me to rot for two years, so I've had an hard life, and when I was at … Primary School, aka XXX I call it, bullied for five years, beaten up, never had, erm, education properly, couldn't read or write, you know, I used to be punched in the face, used to be punched in the face, blood everywhere.

Luke described bullying as the reason he attends Maple Care Farm. He stated:

Yeah, well there was three schools, XXX Primary School, then I moved up to XXX, but they keep rejecting me, so I got fed up and just left, there was this person who bullied me and winded me up and I just left, so yeah, I come to the farm now.

Luke's Support Worker (SSB) reinforced this stating:

Luke's come to the farm because he seems to be finding it difficult at school at the minute.

Bullying during school was also an issue for Savannah (Maple) when she was asked about attending the farm:

RFC: What are the key differences for you from being at school to being here?
S: Well least I won't have to be tormented by other people, it's nice to get away from people to be honest but also, erm, you know, it's like a break from school to be honest.

Similarly, Max (Birch) shared his experience of bullying at primary school where he faced his first exclusion:

M: Erm, I got bullied. I got bullied there like quite bad to the point where I used to walk into school, like hugging my mum and I wouldn't let go of my mum, and then the teachers had to physically drag me off my mum.
RFC: So, for you would you say that bullying has been the most difficult part of life so far, in education, I don't mean your family, I mean school wise?
M: Yeah.

John (Birch) attributed bullying at school to the reason he became disengaged from school:

Yes, and then that's when it all went down for me, bullying caused me to go down.

On a separate occasion whilst working with John (Birch), he raised the reluctance to challenge bullying at school as a reason he starts confrontations:

I told teachers and, erm, they didn't do anything, so that's when it all went down for me. I thought right, the teachers aren't going to do it, I'll do it myself and that's when I started fighting a lot.

Correspondingly, both John and Max (Birch) mentioned their frustrations at feeling the teachers do not support them with incidents of bullying in school:

J: If you report it they [the bullies] just come at you more and that's what the teachers don't understand.

M: They just say oh keep away from them and it's just like well no, you can't because it's in my lesson. It's like one of the kids I used to hang around with, I was in his, er, Maths and Science and he just does nothing but bully me, so…
RFC: Oh, and you've told school?
M: Yeah. But in environment like this, I mean it's, it's just ace.

In the latter comment, Max alludes to the feeling of being safe from bullying whilst attending the care farm. Toxic relationships within school and physical assaults were vividly described by the young people as one of the reasons they yearn to learn elsewhere.

7.2.1.4 Relationships

Relationships with peers and teachers was mentioned frequently by the young people as one of the reasons they attended a care farm. When asked why he comes to the care farm and does not attend school Harry (Rowan) stated:

I don't know, I just don't like the teachers there.

Similarly, on a different occasion, Ben (Rowan) said he "*Didn't like anyone there*" and Declan (Rowan) stated he:

Didn't like any of the kids, teachers, so I came here. Like obviously it's more … like my school's like I'm trapped and that and it's horrible, that's why I didn't like it really.

Freya (Rowan) also shared that she:

Didn't like anyone at school. I never attended school either.

Relationships with teachers was raised by a number of young people. Max and John (Birch) describe why they behave well and engage positively whilst attending the care farm:

RFC: You have both been impeccably behaved whilst I have been working with you.
M: Well yeah, because you respect us.

J: Yeah, well people at school don't.
RFC: What do you mean, you know when you said because you respect us Max, what do you mean by that? Do you mean people at school don't respect you?
M: Yeah, like all the teachers don't respect us.
RFC: How do you know they don't respect you, in what way?
M: Because of the way they treat us.
RFC: And how does that make you feel?
J: Annoyed, angry, want to kick off.
M: Just makes us feel crap and not want to be there.

Max and John's responses are corroborated by Manager A (Birch) when they describe how young people are respected on the care farm:

A young person also benefits from the high staff ratio we offer, they feel well supported and listened to and that they matter and are important to us and have a role to play. We take the views of our young people seriously and have time to discuss ways forward with projects with them.

Savannah (Maple) also commented on her relationship with a teacher and the reasons why she attends the care farm:

S: Because I'm not allowed in the school.
RFC: Why aren't you allowed in school?
S: Because this teacher thought she'd be clever.
RFC: And what happened with the teacher?
S: I head-butted her, it weren't my fault.
RFC: If you were still in school what do you think would have happened?
S: I would have ended up battering her.

Max (Birch) discussed the different pedagogical approaches he had experienced whilst being on the care farm. He commented on the informal, relational style of communication and how this helps him behave well:

M: I sometimes behave at school after being here better because like you show, like you talk to us in a way we wouldn't think like teachers like you would talk to us, like you're so truthful, you don't, you don't beat around the bush, you go straight into it.
RFC: [laughs] That's because we're on a farm isn't it?
M: Yeah. But at school they're like, they try and defeat the main object and they'll go round the obstacles courses rather than going straight through it.

The perceived friction between young people and their school teachers was well documented in the responses. Conversely, one young person alludes to a more relational approach that he had experienced whilst attending the care farm and he attributes this to his respectable behaviour on the farm.

7.2.2 Behaviour in mainstream education

There are emerging links between the young people's experiences of mainstream education and their behaviour in school, so it is quite challenging to separate the two. From the responses generated, the work itself seemed to be problematic for some young people which they attributed to poor behaviour. John (Birch) described how the work in school he has to undertake is often too hard and therefore he purposefully misbehaves to get excluded from the classroom.

RFC: …so because you couldn't do it, you got angry.
J: And messed about.
RFC: Yeah, because…you…find it a bit difficult so you make sex noises and mess about.
J: Sometimes it's because I couldn't do it, or just didn't want to do it.

When asked why he did not ask for help he replied:

RFC: So what is it that's stopping you from saying I can't do it Miss, can I have some help?

J: Embarrassment.

Embarrassment was also an issue for Max (Birch):

M: Yeah, people just laugh at you when you ask for help. And, erm, I'm really embarrassed because like they're all smart and it's like second to top and I was in bottom set but because of my behaviour they put me in second to top.
RFC: And you're struggling with the work?
M: Yeah, and it peed me off because I'm kind of from bottom set.

Max was trying to articulate that due to his poor behaviour in his allocated set, which happened to be the lowest category, he had been placed in a much higher category in the hope his behaviour improved. This appeared to have been a behaviour management approach at the school in question.

Savannah (Maple) described the work set as **"too boring"** and therefore she **"just kept on walking out of classrooms."** By way of contrast, when asked if the work set was too hard Savannah replied **"too easy and too boring".** Kieran (Maple) described his behaviour in a specialist school and his desire to be at the care farm:

RFC: On the days that you're at school what kind of happens?
K: Nothing.
RFC: Do you just get pissed off?
K: Yeah. Wish I were here.
SSB: You scream don't you and shout loudly?
K: I don't, I just shout normally because I just shout, what's point in being quiet and nobody hears you, then nobody understands?

John (Birch) discussed the strategy he used for being removed from the classroom:

J: I used to be naughty to fit in as well.
RFC: Were you John?
M: That's what I do.

J: Yeah, I used to like make sex noises and stuff to get me out of the classroom.
RFC: Did you?
J: Yeah.
RFC: What, like the chickens do?
J: [laughs]
RFC: What, in class?
J: Yeah, and I used to get a red card, loads of after-schools but I didn't want to be in the class.

Similarly, Kieran's Support Worker (Maple) commented on his perceived fear when asked to do classroom-based work:

RFC: Why do you think Kieran has been excluded from so many schools?
SSB: Fear I'd say, and as soon as he goes to put pen to paper he just screams.

Freya (Rowan) described her behaviour in school as **"vile"**, she said:

I had fights and then kept getting kicked out and then go back and then getting kicked out again within days.

Similarly, Sophie (Rowan) said she accessed the care farm:

Because I struggled at school with my behaviour, erm, I got kicked out all the time. And because I've got learning difficulties. I felt uncomfortable so how I coped with that is being naughty.

Here, it appears as if the young people and staff are describing the various strategies implemented to confront the imposed school curriculum.

7.2.3 School buildings

A number of young people commented on the physical structure of their school when expressing their thoughts on why they attend a care farm. They reported that the school buildings themselves are oppressive and/or the location of the school is suffocating. The image

portrayed is certainly not one of green space and natural environments which the young people seemed to crave on the care farms.

There's no windows, it's beside a multi-storey. (Declan, Rowan)

It's in the middle of, it was built as a youth centre, there's not a blade of green, it's next to a multi-storey, opposite a factory. (Ben, Rowan)

A Training Officer from Rowan remarked on the school building mentioned by Ben at a later stage in the research:

I have sat in that school and it does feel like a prison, it's, it's an old youth club and it's all concrete block construction. (TO G, Rowan)

Further comments included:

Next to a dual carriageway. (Kieran, Maple)

…they don't like the walls, they don't like the doors… (TO G, Rowan)

My school is like a prison. (Ben, Rowan)

This comment by Ben is similar to Kieran's (Maple) comment on the security at school:

Yeah, it's literally, everything's locked in, every door is locked and that, it's horrible man.

Notably it was only young people from Rowan Care Farm and Maple Care Farm who commented on the school buildings; a possible explanation for this may have been due to the school in the case of Birch Care Farm not being located in an urban district.

7.2.4 Being outdoors

Some young people expressed their desire to be outdoors as a reason for attending the care farm. Harry (Rowan) when asked why he attends the care farm stated:

It's better than school, I get to do outdoor stuff, I'm an outdoor person not an indoor person.

Correspondingly Kieran (Maple) said:

Just, oh, freeness, free, not stuck in a room.

Furthermore, Max (Birch) shared:

Because it's, it's more hands-on and like I learn better with like hands-on, because, being outdoors, and like I think just to be stuck in a classroom, erm, five days a week, five lessons a day is a bit too much for me.

Luke (Maple) expressed his thoughts on experiencing anxiety and being outdoors:

RFC: In terms of you being anxious, do you like being outdoors rather than indoors?
L: Yes, I do like being outdoors instead of being in a classroom.
RFC: And what does the outdoors do for you?
L: Er, feel free, happy, I don't like, I don't like being in a stuffed room all the time because I get, it feels like I'm being choked to death inside.

When asked what it was about school, he disliked Declan (Rowan) replied:

Going to school and staying inside because I don't like inside, I like being outside.

Freya (Rowan) shared one of the reasons she attends the care farm and not mainstream school:

They [care farm staff] *don't like shove you in a classroom, they make you like do more, like learn stuff outside. I want to learn outside.*

Moreover, Harry (Rowan) mentioned how coming to the farm will help his future prospects:

RFC: Why do you come to the Care Farm Harry?
H: To help getting a job where I can have a farm.

Harry's (Rowan) rationale for attending a care farm concurs with the response from Manager B (Birch):

… I suppose you've got pupils who are, have their mind set on a farming career and that's where they want to be and are not settled at school for that reason, they want to be outside and learning about making a living in the countryside.

The desire to be outdoors and learn practically was acknowledged by the school staff, and appropriate action was taken for the young person to access alternative curriculum on a care farm.

7.2.5 School's decision

Some of the young people attributed their place on the care farm to the school itself. When asked how he was referred to the farm, Kieran (Maple) believed that his former school instigated the move "*Well they pretty much told me I had to come*".

Savannah (Maple) also appeared to have no choice:

RFC: So why do you come here and not school?
S: Because I'm not allowed in the school.

Correspondingly, Sophie (Rowan) shared how she was moved to the care farm with little negotiation:

I didn't get on at school, so they just moved me when I was in year ten to the farm.

In contrast, Ebony (Rowan) was offered a care farm as alternative provision based on her interests:

I come here because I had a few problems at school, erm, I was a bit of an awkward child, bit of a recluse. The idea, what it was when I started at PRU [7] and they asked me a few different things, you know, we do off site provision, so what sort of things are you into? And they told me they did horses and I told them, you know, I'd done horses when I was younger, I'd like to get back into it.

Luke (Maple) had been taken off the formal school timetable and as described by his Support Worker, Luke now attends the farm as outdoor provision:

SSB: Luke has recently been taken off timetable so, due to difficulties in the classroom and his effects on other children, he's got a separate timetable to everybody else.
L: Yeah.
SSB: And now, he's having an outdoor, he's been educated offsite here at the farm.

Kieran's (Maple) place on the care farm appeared mutually agreed:

RFC: Why have you come to the farm?
K: To get out of school.
RFC: And why do you need to get out of school?
K: Because, I can't sit in a classroom all day and the school agreed.

Ben (Rowan) viewed the care farm place pragmatically: *"Er, they asked me if I wanted to be here so I said yeah."*

John and Max (Birch) were accessing the farm provision as a short-term placement to support their engagement with school and would return to mainstream after the care farm programme was complete, despite their reluctance (see 4.3.5).

7.2.6 Qualifications and future prospects

[7] Pupil Referral Unit

One young person remarked that his only reason for attending the care farm was to obtain qualifications. Both Maple and Rowan Care Farm offered participants the chance to work towards qualifications such as literacy, numeracy and horticulture-based units. It was only Luke (Maple) that made reference to the qualifications and this was obviously a priority area for him:

RFC: So why are you here, why do you come to Maple Farm?
L: So I can get qualifications. I only just come here for qualifications.

Accrediting practical learning was discussed by the managers of the two sites that offered formal qualifications:

The more formal qualifications as well that we offer, so whilst they're out there doing practical work for them it's just like, yeah, we're cleaning out the animals, we're feeding the animals but also they're building knowledge for their qualifications. So they do an XXX Award in practical countryside skills…
(MAN C, Maple)

Similarly, Manager D (Rowan) shared that:

We're a satellite centre, and but we do all the training and we, we'd teach all the kids and get all their portfolios together and then XXX are our internal verifiers. It means the young people getting a qualification and it's genuine. *(MAN D, Rowan)*

Freya (Rowan) described how her qualification she was undertaking elsewhere had been supported by the practical learning at the farm:

…then I started coming out on a Friday, to ride and help with the ponies and now as soon as I finished NVQ I come out on a Monday as well. The work on the farm has helped me pass my NVQ.

The above narrative around qualifications demonstrates how qualifications can be supported both internally on the care farm and externally for young people pursuing qualifications at other education establishments.

7.3 What are young people's perceptions of their educational experiences, both on care farms and as part of formal education?

Due to the emerging overlap between research question one and two regarding the young people's experiences of formal education being a primary reason many attend a care farm; this section will identify any additional commentary provided by the young people on their experience on care farms.

7.3.1 Anger

Anger was an emotion that three young people referred to during the data collection period. John (Birch) shared how he was feeling one day upon arriving from school:

RFC: So what's, what's been so bad for your week?
J: I've just been getting angry more than often at…yeah, trying to be positive, it's killing me. I just get annoyed by various stuff, I talked to my counsellor this week but I just, I've just been struggling. Yeah, and, er, I just couldn't cope this week.

Whilst painting tyres, John (Birch) shared an incident that had happened that week at home when he felt angry:

RFC: And you punched your wall?
J: Yeah, not just that, the fence as well.
RFC: Your fence?
J: It's like this material but like it's hard but like it breaks.
RFC: And where is the fence?
J: Er, it was, it was at my, er, back garden.

We continued to talk about anger and John explained he had support in place, organised by his school:

J: I had a meeting this week with my behaviour, counselling person outside school, did I tell you about it? Erm, because of my anger issues and everything about like how to deal with it, what makes, like what triggers it off.
RFC: Is it going alright?
J: Yeah, it's good, I tell her about stuff and then it just makes me feel better, because I bottle everything up, can't really talk to anyone.

John was already beginning to worry about when the counselling provision would finish as it was only a ten-week opportunity.

J: Yeah, I like talking to someone every week. But like when it stops, what if it, like what if I can't control it still?

Ebony (Rowan) shared how her experience on the care farm helped reduce her anger and had steered her away from the criminal justice system:

RFC: So if you didn't have the opportunity of coming here and meeting XXX and the team here, do you think your life could have been different?
E: Yeah, I was angry.
RFC: Do you think you might have gone to prison or a secure place perhaps?
E: Yeah, definitely, some of my friends did.

7.3.2 Happiness

Some young people made reference to how the farm environment made them feel happy. As well as general narratives given by the young people whilst undertaking farming tasks, images of areas on the care farm which made the young people feel happy were captured on an iPad independently by the young people. Max (Birch) decided to try capture an image of the whole care farm site:

RFC: So why did you take that picture then?
M: Because the farm, it makes me feel happy.
RFC: Just the whole thing?
M: Whole farm makes me happy being here.

Figure 27: Area of happiness A (Max, Birch)

John (Birch) took an image of an area where horticulture activities occurred:

RFC: So is there anywhere else that you feel quite happy and you like being?
J: In the, er, bit where we plant and grow the onions.

Figure 28: Area of happiness (John, Birch)

Max (Birch) chose to take a picture of the daffodil walk:

RFC: Are you getting the daffodils? Why are you getting the daffodils?
M: Because it makes the place look happy.
RFC: And actually we've had a bit of a journey with the daffodils because when you first started the bulbs were only just about an inch big weren't they? And we all had to be careful of them and now look at them all in full bloom.
M: Yeah. They make me happy too.

Figure 29: Area of happiness B (Max, Birch)

Many images of animals were captured to indicate the young people's happy spaces. Savannah (Maple) took a photograph of a new baby goat that had been born that morning:

S: Yeah. Look, he's coming.
RFC: Do you feel calm here?
S: Yeah.
RFC: What sort of other feelings do you have when you're here with the animals? I know I'm asking you lots of questions aren't I?
S: Happy.

Figure 30: Area of happiness (Savannah, Maple)

Similarly, Kieran (Maple) captured two images of him and another baby goat, also born that morning. Whilst situating the iPad, Kieran described how he was going to care for the baby goats and help protect them from any bullies.

Figure 31: Area of happiness A (Kieran, Maple)

Figure 32: Area of happiness B (Kieran, Maple)

Luke (Maple) explained how he liked walking around the farm site to think and this made him happy:

L: To relax and be happy, I just like going walking round. Yeah, I just walk around, me.
RFC: So do you feel safe and happy when you're walking round?
L: I've just got things on my mind, like things to do or what's next, that's all.

Luke (Maple) captured images of many animals and shared some thoughts whilst taking the photographs:

L: I feel happy with this bird. I talk to her.
RFC: You like talking to her?
L: Yeah.
RFC: What do you like about talking to her?
L: I just do is, there used to be a peacock around here called Reg but he passed away. I talked to him a lot.

Figure 33: Area of happiness A (Luke, Maple)

Being with the new baby goats was also a place Luke said he felt happy and safe.


Figure 34: Area of happiness B (Luke, Maple)

Luke took a photograph of the animal feed store and the chart listing the amount of feed each animal required daily. Luke explained that he felt happy in there and had learnt a lot from feeding the animals.

Figure 35: Area of happiness C (Luke, Maple)

Figure 36: Area of happiness D (Luke, Maple)

Animals were also a central feature of where young people found their happiness at Rowan Care Farm, in particular the horses.

Freya and Ebony (Rowan), on separate occasions, both took images of the horses explaining how the horses made them feel happy and safe on the farm. Freya stated the horse *'is the best part about coming to the farm'.*

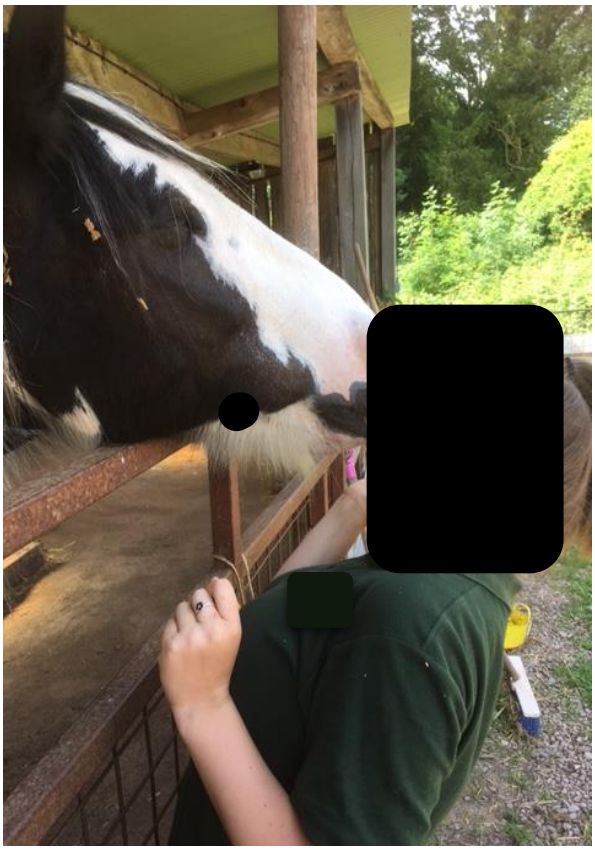


Figure 37: Area of happiness (Freya, Rowan)

Figure 38: Area of happiness (Ebony, Rowan)

Horses featured heavily at Rowan Care Farm due to the emphasis on the Riding for the Disabled provision offered there. This was unique to the three farms visited although Max (Birch) highlighted his relationship with one of the ponies as being a special aspect of his time on the farm:

RFC: What do you like about the ponies?
M: They're loving.
RFC: Had you ever stroked a pony before coming here?
M: No.
RFC: So, what do you feel like when you're with Ewel?
M: Oh it's sick [amazing]
RFC: You led him yourself last week didn't you?
M: Yeah, I feel like when I take him for a walk I can like talk to, it sounds daft but like talk to him.

Figure 39: Area of happiness C (Max, Birch)

John (Birch) also remarked on the ponies and his happiness although did not take a photograph:

J: Just, I feel like you get like more sun and you just feel much happier with the animals and seeing how they are, how they live.
RFC: Do you feel safe and happy?
J: Yes, definitely near the ponies because they're like so timid and calm.

Where young people felt most happy on the farm was during the practical activities. Max (Birch) captured an image of him and the bird box he had made which he felt was one of his happiest moment on the farm:

Figure 40: Area of happiness D (Max, Birch)

Another practical activity was captured by Harry (Rowan) of him driving the farm buggy ready to go check on the new calves:

Figure 41: Area of happiness (Harry, Rowan)

An alternative practical activity that was captured when young people were taking photos of places where they felt happy was forging. Luke (Maple) took this image of the forgery area where he had been forging hooks with one of the care farm trainers:

Figure 42: Area of happiness E (Luke, Maple)

The happiness derived from undertaking practical tasks was remarked on by Manager A (Birch) who stated:

And the results they get from this practical work increases their confidence and self-worth. We regularly see faces filled with pride or showcasing their work and talents.

The subjective concept of 'happiness' was interpreted by the young people in a variety of ways. All captured their 'happy place' on the farm and provided a narrative behind their choice. For some it was a visual experience, seeing the plants and animals; for some it was touch and the feel of the animals and for some it was practical application of the work on the farm.

Intriguingly, for four young people, the notion of being able to speak with an animal and feel safe in that space generated happiness.

7.3.3 Relationships with other care farm users

When asked about their experience of attending a care farm, some young people commented on their relationship with the other users including their peers. Tensions were present at times and were captured in the young people's commentaries and personal fieldwork notes. Max and John's (Birch) relationship was intriguing. Quite often the boys would work very well together and make comments such as:

John's like a brother to me is … he always looks after me. (Max, Birch)

However, it seemed their relationship became strained on a number of occasions both on the farm (observed) and whilst in school (anecdotal). During tasks John became very submissive towards Max. Upon asking John about this behaviour at a later stage, he shared his fear of Max.

RFC: So before coming to the farm was Max your friend at school?
J: No, he was a bit harsh, just like sometimes he'd just push me or try hurt me.
RFC: What?
J: Yeah. It's alright, that's why sometimes, that's why I'm off like this today because I have the fear of him going to get mad at me as he has been harsh at school this week.
RFC: Seriously, you feel scared of him?
J: Yeah.

The week after the above conversation John did not attend the farm as planned. When asked about his non-attendance the following week, he explained that it was related to Max's behaviour at school towards him.

RFC: And have things not been good with Max at school?

J: No.
RFC: Is that one of the reasons you didn't come last week?
J: Yeah.
RFC: I thought it was. I wondered if you'd fallen out.
J: He's just been horrible to me. He always is.

The tensions between Max and John were captured in fieldwork notes:

Max and John fell out today quite a lot, so I was stuck in that and had to help trying to diffuse situations, so the day got even more intense as we went along.

Relationships also became tense whilst at Maple Care Farm between a group of young people. Luke described his experience:

RFC: Do you find being outdoors helps with your anxiety?
L: Well I do, yeah, but, yeah, so, er, yes, so Jack, Henry, Marshall, come down and said, well Kieran kicked soil on me, you know, so I throwed soil at, back at him because I was getting wound up, next minute he kicks me back, next minute Jack said stop it both of you, and the next minute he says like, you know, like, right, that, for, for now on, for all day you're not doing gardening and he ruined it.

Fieldwork notes captured aspects of the unease:

So, bit tense today at times, potentially some tension mounting between Kieran and Luke again, which made it a bit awkward, so we had to split groups, so it's a bit awkward for me knowing who to work with.

Positive relationships were also raised by some young people. Declan (Rowan) indicated:

RFC: What do you like about being on the care farm?
D: Working with other people.

The Training Officer (Maple) made reference to working with others when young people attend a care farm:

They feel part of a team with responsibilities and a role, which often they have had little experience of before. *(TO E, Maple)*

Relationships with other client groups on the care farm was alluded to by two young people. John (Birch) explained that he found working with some of the disabled adults difficult:

RFC: How are you enjoying being with other groups on the farm?
J: First of all, not all of them but just some.
RFC: Which groups don't you like being with?
J: Disabled people, but like. They're so noisy. They're like, they just do faces and I just can't help but laugh, so it's hard.

Similarly, Max (Birch) responded:

RFC: How have you found working with the other people on the care farm, people with disabilities?
M: Er, it's, it's been a challenge but I suppose after a while you're supposed to get used to it and I mean they are just normal really. I mean at the end of the day they're only human aren't they? Everyone gets treat equally so I don't see why I should go to school with people without disabilities, like some people with disabilities, some people without, they treat them differently just because they've got disabilities.
RFC: Do you think you've learnt anything about people with disabilities since being here?
M: I hadn't really met anyone proper disabled but.
RFC: So do you feel you've learnt something about life and people?
M: Yeah, different ways to handle situations instead of just laughing at them. But like I said, they're only human at the end of the day.

The changes in attitudes towards people with disabilities shown in Max's narrative above is supported by the School Leader (SSA) who, when asked about young people's experiences on the farm, said:

Students working alongside people with additional needs is also a valuable learning experience and gives them an insight into another world. Empathy is a key skill that they appear to get!

Manager A from Birch shared these sentiments:

I regularly see young people interacting exceptionally well with our adult care farm clients, I feel this makes the young person feel part of the grown-up world they are transitioning into.

Rowan Care Farm only offered provision to young people and Maple Care Farm had dedicated workers for other client groups who attended the farm on the same day as the young people therefore the only joint activities occurred at Birch Care Farm.

7.4 How and in what ways do young people learn on care farms in England, if at all?

In order to answer research question three, young people were asked at varying intervals, if they felt they learn whilst attending the care farms and in what way. They were also given the opportunity to take photographs of any areas where they felt learning had taken place and provide a narrative as to why that particular area had been chosen. Similarly, staff and support workers were asked their views on learning on care farms and encouraged to expand on any instances they put forward.

7.4.1 Animals

When asked if young people learnt whilst attending a care farm, the response was a resounding yes from all participants. When surveyed about the ways they feel they learn and how, the reactions were mixed as seen below, but one theme was very prominent across the three sites – the animals.

When asked what he feels he has learnt during his care farm experience John (Birch) replied:

J: Er, probably just being with the animals because I don't like, I haven't really seen that many animals other than horses before so I've learnt about new ones.
RFC: And which are your favourite animals so far?
J: I don't know, they're all quite good.

He goes on to explain what he has learnt about animals:

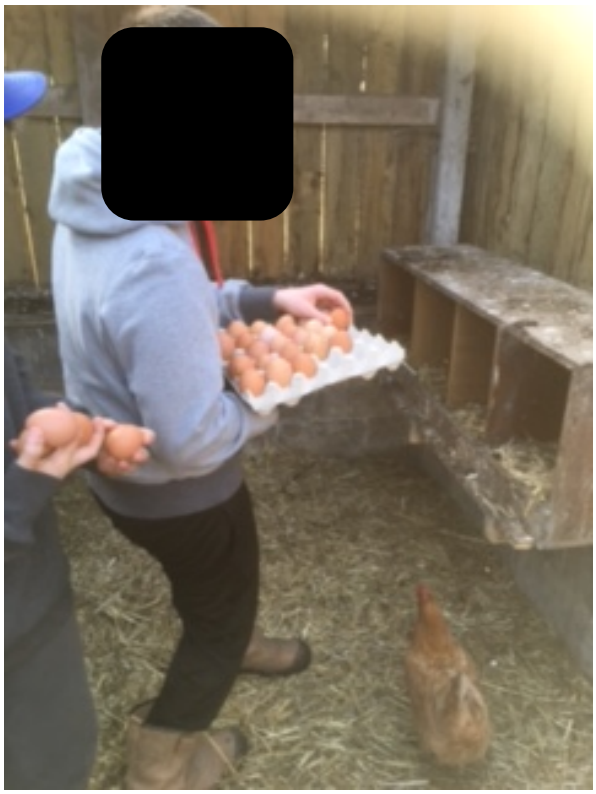
I've learnt it's different like seeing the animals compared to the life we have, like we have a busy and very complex life compared to animals, they just do the same thing over and over again but like after school and like during school like we go through stages from going to school, working, then you retire, you get a pension paid and you, a long life for us but like not many animals live that long or, and they just have the same daily routine with no stress.

Whilst sharing the above John captured a number of images representing where he felt he had learnt; both images involved animals. Figure 43 shown below, is John feeding the chickens and Figure 44 is John holding the pony whilst waiting for the Farrier to arrive.

Figure 43: Area of learning A (John, Birch)

Figure 44: Area of learning B (John, Birch)

Max (Birch) also felt he had learnt about animals but more about the practical, biological functions. He was surprised and intrigued when we collected the eggs for the first time:



M: The egg is still warm, why? Ugh and it's a bit slimy, why?

Figure 45: Area of learning A (Max, Birch)

Max (Birch) went on to say what he had learnt about chicken reproduction:

RFC: So Max is going to go try and see the cockerel and why the cockerel? [laughs]
M: Because I learnt a fact.
RFC: And what fact did you learn about cockerels?
M: Cockerels don't have a penis.

Max's inquisitiveness about the chickens continued when he seemed to strike up a bond with one particular chicken called Wonky (aptly named due to her beak shape). When taking photos of places he felt he had learnt whilst attending the care farm Max took the following:

Figure 46: Area of learning B (Max, Birch)

RFC: So why are you taking a picture of Wonky?
M: She was my first friend I met.
RFC: How do you feel when you're in there with the chickens?
M: I feel loved.
RFC: You feel loved? Have, you know, before you came to the farm Max, have you ever felt a chicken or touched a chicken before?

M: No, I'd never even seen one.

Every morning when arriving at the farm Max would ask if he could go and see Wonky:

M: Can we go and see Miss Wonky? She's in the other pen.

On a similar note, Max took the iPad to capture an image of the ponies:

Figure 47: Area of learning C (Max, Birch)

RFC: What, what do feel you had learnt about the ponies?
M: They're loving and caring.
RFC: Lovely. Had you ever stroked a pony before coming to the care farm?
M: No, never, its sick *[amazing]* **being with them. I've learnt trust.**

The care of animals also featured in the young people's responses at Maple Care Farm. Luke (Maple) was keen to share what he has learnt on the care farm:

RFC: Luke, would you say you learn here and how?

L: Many things, forging, I like blacksmith, and, weaving, animal care and, er, I think that's just it maybe. I learn lots of the different animals and how to care for them.

When asked to take images to clearly show what he felt he had learnt at the farm, Luke took the following images of the rare-breed chickens:

Figure 48: Area of learning A (Luke, Maple)

Figure 49: Area of learning B (Luke, Maple)

On a separate occasion Luke stated:

L: I've learnt loads here.
RFC: And what do you feel like you've learnt?
L: About different, about different breeds of animals. I didn't realise how many there was.

Savannah (Maple) made her way to the pigs and explained what she had learnt about them:

RFC: Savannah, can you take me to somewhere where you feel you have learnt something on the farm?
S: Come on, let's go see piglets.
RFC: Do you learn when you're here on the farm?

S: Obviously.
RFC: What kind of things?
S: About animals, how to look after them.
RFC: Tell me something that you've learnt while you've been here.
S: You know pigs, they've got pig brains did you know that? And do you know how to tell a boy and a girl pig.
RFC: No, do you?
S: You look at their parts. Look here.

Figure 50: Area of learning A (Savannah, Maple)

RFC: So tell me more things you've learnt, all these things that you've done.
S: Did you know, do you know baby pigs?
RFC: Go on.
S: As soon as they're born you have to put a curler around their tail?
RFC: You have to put what on their tail?
S: A curler to make it curly. Alright, and something else I've learnt then. What else? A male duck is a drake. Can I take a photo of the pigs?
RFC: Go on then. Is this somewhere where you feel like you've learnt something?
S: Yes. How to feed a pig, how to stroke a pig, it's got right loads of dead skin.

Figure 51: Area of learning B (Savannah, Maple).

Kieran (Maple) shared how he had learnt how to care for the ponies. From observation, he was always keen to groom them.

Kieran asked me to take a picture of him hoof -picking the pony. He is very confident with animals and works very hard to care for them. He doesn't like breaks and prefers to keep working. (Excerpt from RFC fieldwork notes)

Figure 52: Area of learning (Kieran, Maple)

Kieran also asked to take a photograph of his tutor when describing his learning:

I asked if Kieran wanted to take any pictures of where he has learnt something or any other images he'd like to take around the farm and he said take a picture of XXX, who is the tutor. I replied what do you mean by that? And he said XXX, I've learnt everything from XXX, which I thought was really, really interesting.

(Excerpt from RFC fieldwork notes)

At Rowan Care Farm young people shared how and in what ways they felt they learned on the care farm on many occasions. Ebony (Rowan) felt her main learning experiences had occurred whilst working with the animals and caring for them.

RFC: How and in what ways do you feel you learn whilst being here Ebony?
E: Oh, the animals, the buggy driving, the riding, everything really.
RFC: Can you be more specific?
E: Well I mean we get, there's so much you get to do and learn about, like in, I've done lambing, I've given help with calves, helped cows give their calves, you know, I've learnt how to horse ride, the animal care too.

Figure 53: Area of learning (Ebony, Rowan)

Correspondingly, when asked about his learning, Ben (Rowan) stated: *"how to feed animals".*

Harry (Rowan) felt he learns by being with the care farm staff and the animals. Below are images of Harry feeding the pigs and driving the buggy around the farm.

Figure 54: Area of learning A (Harry, Rowan).

Figure 55: Area of learning B (Harry, Rowan)

Harry was very proud to transport us around the fields to feed the animals and check for any straying lambs. He explained how he had to take a test before being able to drive the buggy. He said he loved learning about the buggy and now enjoys carrying out the farm work using it. (excerpt from RFC fieldwork notes).

Harry (Rowan) has daily reviews and his learning is captured formally on the review sheet; this particular day he said he had learnt how to wean ***"calves from cows to allow cows to recover":***

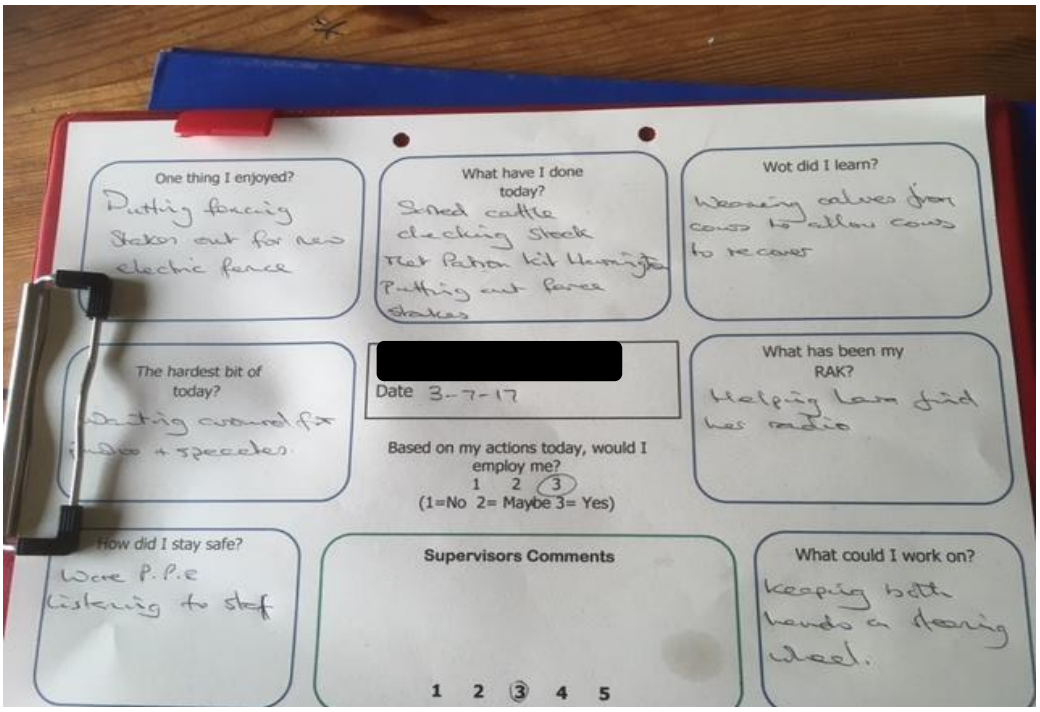


Figure 56: Learning review (Harry, Rowan)

Declan (Rowan) shared that he had learnt a great deal about sheep with particular reference to shearing time. Rather than describing the learning he requested that a photo was taken instead of him in action on shearing day:

Figure 57: Area of learning (Declan, Rowan

7.4.2 Practical meaningful tasks

There are emerging synergies between animal husbandry activities and practical meaningful tasks. Indeed, animal husbandry is a practical meaningful task however, to try and make the distinction, in this section responses involving non-animal related learning activities will be presented.

Max (Birch) made reference to 'hands-on' learning at the care farm and how he preferred this to classroom-based learning:

RFC: So why do you feel you learn here?
M: Because it's, it's more hands-on. So I think to come here it's just like just to get away for a bit and you can talk without like getting judged on what you say and do practical stuff.

John (Birch) also commented on the practical aspects of being at the care farm:

RFC: Why do you say you learn more being here?
J: Because it's more physical learning then just mental learning, like we learn things that you're going to need in life and like every school lesson's just stuff that you're not going to be needing for the job you pick, it's just stuff that you use to just get past it, whereas this, this is so you can get forward in life and so you can learn more productive stuff.

John described one area on the farm as a place he felt he had learnt a lot of new knowledge and this was also one of the areas he chose as his 'happy' place (Figure 28). The polytunnel was the location of many horticulture activities, especially during the colder months. Both John and Max planted onion seeds in small pots within the polytunnel and once they had sufficiently grown, the boys planted them in the raised beds outside.

Figure 58: Area of learning C (John, Birch)

Max (Birch) described how making a bird-box and helping build a partition wall in the barn (Figure 59 below) had been his favourite activities undertaken on the farm. Max was delighted to be able to take his bird box home to show his family (see Figure 40). He stated:

Yeah, it's the practical part of actually doing it to have that happen, know what I mean. Building a box myself rather than just reading about it has learnt me loads!

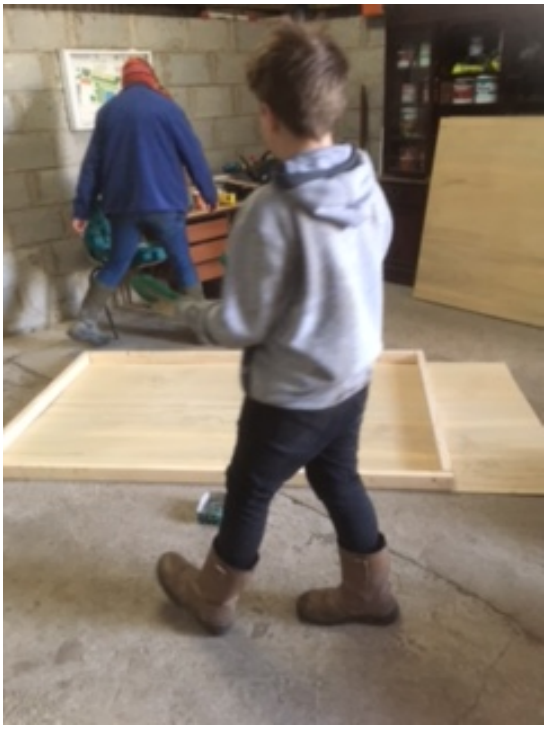


Figure 59: Area of learning D (Max, Birch)

Learning through the practical aspects of the farm was raised by the School Leader (Birch) who stated:

The hands on approach has really worked for our students. They like to see that they have made a difference in the day. The variety of activities available during the day is good for attention span.

The Training Officer at Maple also made reference to learning practically:

I think they enjoy learning a vocation- for many who are not academically minded this may be their first opportunity to show off their skills and feel like they are succeeding at a subject. We see many students who cannot put their minds to maths and English, however perform brilliantly when given a practical task to be involved in. (TO E, Maple)

Similarly, Manager A (Birch) made reference to the pride young people have when sharing their learning with others:

When showing visitors around the farm you can instantly see the pride in their faces and in their voices when showing them what they have achieved and been part of and sharing their knowledge of what they have learned.

Luke (Maple) felt that he had learnt maths skills and other practical skills when undertaking forgery activities.

RFC: Is this one of the things you like about coming to the farm, doing this kind of stuff?
L: Yeah, or stonemasonry, apart from that.
RFC: Would you say you learn here and how?
L: Many things, forging, I like blacksmith stuff. I like measuring and making stuff like hooks and keyrings
RFC: That's also like a bit of maths work as well isn't it?
L: Yeah, there you go, more learning.

Figure 60: Area of learning C (Luke, Maple)

Figure 61: Area of learning D (Luke, Maple)

Whilst shearing sheep Declan (Rowan) shared what he felt he had learnt whilst attending the farm:

RFC: Could you tell me about a couple of things that you've learnt whilst you have been coming to the farm?
D: Erm, how to drive.
RFC: Anything in particular?
D: Yes, I've learnt how to drive a tractor through having a few sessions with XXXX. I can also drive the buggy now I have passed the test which helps get the farm work done quicker.

Ebony (Rowan) remarked on her experience of the practical work at the farm:

E: So much that I have done here … not normal experience that somebody else would have under their belt, like … you know, I'm a twenty year old girl, erm, I've got farming experience, I've got care experience, I've got horse care experience, you know.
RFC: How have you learnt from these experiences do you think?
E: Well here it's not just theory, you know, it's all practical, you learn on the job, whereas I'd prefer to do that anyway, which is what I've done in most of my work whether it's been bar work I learnt on the job or care work I learnt looking after my mum and sister, you know.

Manager C (Maple) makes reference to the importance of meaningful practical tasks offered on a care farm and believes this is a reason young people regularly attend:

Sometimes we get referrals through and a young person hasn't attended school for a year, and they'll come here, and they come every time, it's because they're doing something that they want to do and something practical that they're interested in.

Manager D (Rowan) makes the link between practical learning and the growth of self-esteem amongst the young people:

So that, it's, it's the practical stuff that you can kind of, and, you know, build the self-esteem, teach, you know, they can learn things and it's, it's all, it's all so immediate.

The vast range of practical tasks presented by the young people when asked about their learning on a care farm is worthy of note and symbolises the numerous practical learning opportunities available in this setting.

7.4.3 Socialisation and interpersonal skills

A recurring theme evident in the responses from some young people when asked about their learning on the farm involved aspects of socialisation and identity. Max (Birch) explained what he had learnt about respect:

RFC: So do you feel like you have learnt anything while you've been here?
M: Yes, respect.
RFC: Aw, what about, respecting who, animals, people, the environment?
M: People because at first I felt like it was going to be like, everyone was going to be like, I don't know, moody with each other or do something wrong and that's it, you get time out or something but you come here and you find a better way to deal with things but at school you like, you go and like I don't know, you misbehave or you have a little blip, that's a warning, you get sent out but here they find ways to go around the situation, instead of punishing you.
RFC: So do you feel you've learnt something about life?
M: Yeah, different ways to handle situations instead of just laughing at them, I've learned some adults respect you.

On a separate occasion Max made reference to the people he met at the farm being a highlight and the impact the staff team have had on him. He likens this to *"another family"*. He also asks if he can come back to the farm for his work experience project that his school facilitates each year.

RFC: What have been some of your best bits about coming to the Care Farm Max?
M: The people.
RFC: Meeting all the other people?
M: Yeah. When, at first like I thought it was only just going to be like go in, don't speak to anyone, get on with your stuff, go home, but it might sound daft but to me it's like a second family to me.
RFC: Yeah.
M: Because just be able to come here and talk to someone it's just, like I don't really talk to my, my family at home but I come here and I feel like I can let everything out. I mean just the, the members of staff are unreal, they're so nice and, they listen, they listen to you all and they don't just think oh he's, he's talking jibber jabber or something. So to me it's like another family.
RFC: That's lovely to hear.
M: Miss, do you think I'll be able to come here for work experience?

Declan (Rowan) also mentioned 'people' as one of the aspects he enjoys at the farm and learns from.

RFC: What do you like about being on the care farm?
D: Working with other people, not just working with animals, I like working with the people as well.
RFC: Do you think you learn from the other people?
D: Yes, defo, course.

This was supported by Manager C (Maple) when asked about the learning young people experience:

There are the social aspects to it but, and there are the working with different people, so everyone mixes and mingles on the farm, we've got volunteers here, people with mental health problems, young people with learning disabilities, adults with learning disabilities, so everyone's mixing and mingling, so we're all learning different skills off each other all the time.

The Training Officer (Maple) also made reference to young people socialising with others whilst on the farm and the benefits:

As the farm also has many staff and other service users to work alongside…They are given the chance to interact with others, building social skills, problem solving, managing their time.

Two young people, in the same conversation, mentioned that the care farm allows them to be themselves and who they really are. Both mentioned that they had learnt to be happy on the farm in their true form.

RFC: You said you have learnt to be yourself here Max, why is that the case?
M: I don't know, it's like a, it's like a better environment, instead of like being around everyone, so it's like getting in trouble and say like, I don't know, your friends are feeling a bit, a bit giddy, so you're like, you want to act cool with everyone but here it's like, it's out the way, it's like.
RFC: You can be yourself?
M: Yeah, you don't have to be different because like, I think like around everyone else at school you have to be different to be, to be in.
J: To fit in.
M: To fit in, yeah. But like here you can be who you want, you can be with people that you like but at school you're not necessarily with everyone you like.
J: Yeah. Here I can be sad if I feel sad without people taking the piss.
M: So it's like changing the way, changing your appearance for them. It's like the way I normally do my hair. I normally get bullied for like the way I do my hair at school so here it's like cool.
J: You can meet new people and be yourself. (Max and John, Birch)

Max (Birch) also felt that the farm was a non-judgemental environment:

So I think to come here it's just like just to get away for a bit and you can talk without like getting judged on what you say.

Learning about yourself and being with others was mentioned by Manager C (Maple) as one of the key learning experiences young people undergo when attending a care farm. They indicated:

I think because we're an open farm, we have members of the public here, we have lots of adults and young people with learning disabilities, I think the young people that come to us, we're not just building the skills, such as maths, English but it's also there's interpersonal skills as well and building skills around interacting with other people because we get lots of young people here with social problems, social anxiety, those sorts of problems, so being in a place that is quite open, it helps them learn its ok to be you.

John (Birch) likened his personal learning to overcoming his fear of being with the chickens. He overcame this fear over the course of the data collection phase.

RFC: Have you learnt anything about yourself whilst being here?
J: That I can push myself and not be frightened to try…it's a bit like being with the chickens.

The School Leader (Birch) made a number of references to the personal development of young people attending the farm:

[Students develop]…*a more positive attitude to giving things a go. Seeing a value in education and what you can achieve. I do think that the positive experience remains with them forever and so may have an impact in the future. This was definitely true for XXX who found a "friend" at the farm (XXX) and this had an incredible effect on his ability to engage with others and be more confident in new situations.*

She believed that "*Practical skills. Patience and persistence with tasks. Empathy for others. Team work. Self belief.*" were all key things young people learn on a care farm.

When asked what benefits she feels the young people have gained from attending the care farm she replied:

Self worth and self esteem goes through the roof. Our students feel that they have got something to offer and can be successful again. They almost revert back to small children in their excitement of what they have learned and achieved. I love to see their smiles! (SSA, Birch)

Luke (Maple) mentioned that walking around the farm helped with his anxiety:

L: I walk around the farm to relax.
RFC: To relax, you like walking round the farm?
L: Yeah, I just walk around, me.
RFC: So do you feel safe when you're walking round?
L: I don't know, I've just got things on my mind, like things to do or what's next, that's all. It's when I feel anxious and nervous.
RFC: Does walking around the farm help that feeling?
L: Yeah.

Luke's Support Worker (Maple) has observed his social development on the farm:

I've seen him like he's becoming so independent, erm, really independent, wandering round the farm and doing, not relying on anybody else to do it for him. Erm, XXX, he's, he's a completely different person from when he's at the farm to when he's at school.

She went on to state:

So he's like climbing walls literally, literally climbing the wall when he has to go to special school. Like being on a farm is completely different that, to the classroom because they're still, they can still access levels of social media and I think being outdoors they're learning and they're socialising and they're working as a, like teams and, do you know? It's a completely different environment here.

The School Leader from Birch commented on the difference in the behaviour and the self-esteem of the young people she has referred to the care farm:

Students who have been to the farm almost improve in their behaviour whilst they are at the farm but it is short lived when the time ends. I do think that it helps to develop self-esteem which has an impact on learning in the classroom, however, it has not proved to be the "magic wand" to this being long lasting.

The above section has grouped and reviewed responses from all participants thematically. The next part will focus on any additional responses from care farm staff. Narrative that has been used in the above section to corroborate responses from the young people and support staff will not be incorporated below. What follows contains supplementary data that may generate further lines of enquiry.

7.5 Care Farm Staff

Throughout the semi-structured interviews seven staff shared their perceptions on why young people attend care farms and to what extent they felt learning occurred, if at all. Questions which aligned to the central research questions were posed to both care farm provider participants and school support staff (appendices J & K). Responses soon revealed a range of recurring themes which were grouped accordingly.

7.5.1 Research question 1: How do care farm providers articulate the reasons for why young people attend care farms in England?

7.5.1.1 The restrictive curriculum and meeting individual needs

Manager C (Maple) refers to the blanket approach of the mainstream curriculum and how this approach does not meet the needs of all young people. This she felt, is a reason why some young people disengage and are referred to a care farm as an alternative mode of education:

The curriculum and schools as they are now, they're very much, although teachers do differentiate in their work and all the rest of it, it is kind of one shoe fits all, erm, and it, it doesn't, it doesn't suit all young people, so some young people go to school and struggle and they struggle from day one, it's not suitable for all young people…so we have young people here with mental health issues at school, young people with behavioural issues, young people who, with dyslexia, dyspraxia, all sorts, and just lots of young people who are struggling with mainstream education.

Struggling with the restrictive timetabling and set routines of mainstream education was attributed to why young people attend care farms by the Training Officer at Rowan Care Farm:

…they don't like having a set routine, which is why I think the farm works because they're going to come here and we don't do a set task at a set time on a set day, it's whatever needs to be done, so they can come in one day and they could be doing something that they don't necessarily enjoy that much, you know, mucking out horses but they know the next time they come in they could be chasing cattle, chasing sheep or, you know, it's give and take and because they've got, I think it helps them to realise that, you know, not everything is about routine.

Accommodating individual needs and making it fun was what Manager A (Birch) felt attracted schools and young people to a care farm environment.

I think the approach to learning in mainstream education doesn't suit everyone. On a farm young people can work in a fun and supporting environment with lots of choices and encouragement tailored to their particular needs, the hands-on tasks available cater for a wide range of young people. Differentiation is abundant on the farm, there is an activity to suit everyone's ability and understanding and everyone has a part to play in a group task.

This was supported by one of the school staff who similarly referred to care farms meeting the needs of all young people, not just those who are struggling in mainstream education. Additionally, worthy of note here is the reference to the limitations of funding. Financial

implications were however, only mentioned by this one participant and therefore not considered a substantial theme.

If I had the funding, I would have a care farm as a first consideration for most students. It meets the needs of any young person. (SSA, Birch)

7.5.1.2 Home life

The personal lives and backgrounds of the young people were mentioned by a number of care farm staff as reasons why young people attend care farms. Manager D (Rowan) shared her personal thoughts on three separate occasions:

… a lot of it I would say is about chaotic backgrounds, not, not the appropriate support from their parents I suppose, or carers at home. Erm, kids who are in care. It's that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs isn't it? That was a real lightbulb moment for me.

Yeah…having got to know some of the family situations, you know, got one mum that's, you know, had mental health problems all her life, another mum, you know, had been a victim of domestic violence.

If your energies are about surviving and then having to do your best at school, you know, what, what's that about? Devastating.

Manager B (Birch) also alluded to primary socialisation of the young people:

Some of them have had a very, very turbulent upbringing and care farming is, it's certainly worth a try, it may not be the answer for some, or even a lot of them, but for some they will really settle and feel at home and start to put down roots and find a purpose in life.

One of the Support Workers had previously (seven years prior) been a participant on alternative provision at Rowan Care Farm before becoming a volunteer and now an employee. She

reflected on her reasons for attending a care farm seven years ago making reference to her upbringing:

It was something different, like obviously my family's quite rough, so like my mum's side of the family are all into drugs and it's just my little escape and it's very different and it's something that I was good at because let's face it, I was never going to go down that path of life.

I love the farm, I love the team, I love doing sheep work. Yeah, love being outside. It is an amazing place. (SW F, Rowan)

The response from Support Worker F (Rowan) corresponds with Manager B (Birch) who also remarks on addictions in the family unit as a reason young people may attend a care farm. Furthermore, the place of a role model is acknowledged:

It's more than likely they've had a difficult background for various reasons, maybe a family tragedy, maybe some addictions in the family, whatever, so they're going to come with, more than likely anyway, there's quite a bit of emotional baggage, struggling with discipline, struggling to find a purpose and so it's a question of trying, trying, to be patient with them and trying to be in their place really, trying to put yourself in their situation and giving them a role model if at all possible, that life, even though you've maybe had a really bad start, that it can, it can be purposeful and you can be happy.

7.5.2 Research question 3: How and in what ways do young people learn on care farms in England, if at all?

7.5.2.1 Practical skills

As well as being recorded as a reason why young people attend care farms (research question one), the many practical activities offered on a care farm and the learning experiences these generate were commented on. All staff participants remarked on this.

They [young people] *learn from a practical point of view with new hands-on experiences, staff and volunteers have a lifetime's worth of different skills and knowledge to share with them. They learn about building and construction, horticultural woodland and orchard management, animal care, renewable energy to name but a few.* (MAN A, Birch)

Manager D (Rowan) made synergies between practical tasks and therapeutic benefits.

….it's through the practical stuff you can, you can demonstrate immediately the start of that therapeutic relationship and it's through the practical stuff.

Manager B (Birch) refers to many practical learning opportunities on a care farm:

The worse thing that could happen to them is just to be at home on their iPads or watching telly or reading comics or playing games, when they're outside on a care farm they're with other people, they're having wider experiences, and obviously farming you've got, you've got to know what you're doing and, the young people with me certainly learn about tractors, learn about animals, learn about building, all sorts of things that come into farming and you need basic maths and English as well.

The reference to maths was also made by the Training Officer (Rowan) who described the disguised mathematical learning that occurs when working on the care farm and compared this to learning in school:

School's not got a real world application as far as they're [young people] *concerned because they're sat looking at it off a blackboard or a whiteboard and it doesn't, to them it's got no real meaning, whereas when they come here…it's also that there's Maths in everything that we do like measuring animal food, how big this field is, measuring out the size of the field, how much fencing do I need? How much netting? How many posts do I need if I put so many posts per sort of half kilometre or whatever? And cooking as well…it's doing maths without knowing they're doing maths.*

Interestingly, the mathematical learning whilst making animal feeds was chosen by Luke (Maple) as one of his areas of happiness and an area in which he felt he learns (see Figure 35 and Figure 36).

7.5.2.2 Socialisation and Interpersonal skills

A number of suggestions were made concerning how young people learn about themselves and develop their interpersonal skills whilst on the care farms. All staff made reference to interpersonal skills.

Manager B (Birch) was firm in their belief about learning with others on a care farm:

Undoubtedly, undoubtedly they learn, you can't, you can't be outside among other people without learning.

Learning social skills and life skills were alluded to by a number of staff:

Social skills are very important too, can they turn up on time, dress appropriately, help others, be kind of to one another, respect other's views? Can they share and help someone out when they are struggling? All important life skills that they can take into adulthood. (MAN A, Birch)

They learn, it's not necessarily things that are going to get them a GCSE but they learn life skills, so I mean certain students, I can remember when they first started had no social skills, so they wouldn't make eye contact or if they were, wanted to ask you a question they would just walk in between you and someone else that you were having a conversation with, stand right there and start talking at you, and how to sit down and eat lunch, a lot of students don't know how to sit down and eat, because they always stand up with a bowl and, you know, it's little, little things that hopefully they take away with them. (TO G, Rowan)

One of the Support Workers who had previously been a young person attending a care farm shared how proud working on the farm made her:

…like it used to be my like stamp, like I'd be proud to walk through town, walk home, smelling of sheep shit and horse shit. That was me, that was me, and somehow it's become me every day, I walk through, I drive with hands smelling of sheep shit and all sorts. I'd be proud. (SW F, Rowan)

7.5.2.3 Relationships

Building on the concept of developing interpersonal skills, a number of care farm staff made reference to the importance of building professional relationships with the young people and this being reciprocated in many ways.

Manager D (Rowan) articulated their thoughts about the importance of relationships with young people:

You'll forget what we say and you'll forget what we do but you'll never forget how we made you feel.[8] *Yeah, and, and I think that's really key to, you know, we make them all feel kind of respected and liked, you know, kind of, they're capable of stuff, you know, we believe in them…and helping them by building the stories, you know, because when there aren't nice stories from home.*

Baring resemblances to the response above, the approach to working with young people on the care farm was described by Manager C (Maple):

The staff here, although we're all qualified teaching staff, it doesn't feel as formal as school because we do try to give young people that little bit of leeway and we're kind of a bit understanding if they come in late, we'll say well it's not really good enough, you know, you need to try harder but we're not like school where, you know, it's a, send them to the headmaster's office and a shouting at and that kind

[8] This is a very close paraphrase of a quotation attributed to Carl Buehner in 1971.

of thing, so we do try to be a little bit more relaxed and as understanding as we can be.

Relationships with animals was also touched upon:

… the horses are really good, it's a lot about how they approach the animals, can quite often be quite telling about how they approach people and a lot of them will find a horse easier to approach than they would a person, so if they're very safe.

Once you've got that little insight you can go over with them and show them how to do something with the pony and sharing common ground can be a way in and, you know, and I also like to, I always talk to them and they think I'm a bit of a hippy when I tell them about, you know, about their energy being reflected back from the animals and so if you want to, if you want to stroke the animals you've got to go in calmly, you know, let them come over to you, let them see you, stroke them gently, so if you go in screaming and kicking so they're going to want to run away. (TO G, Rowan)

7.5.3 Do care farm providers believe attending a care farm helps young people re-engage with mainstream education?

Care farm staff were asked the above question to try to ascertain if they feel there is a connection between attending a care farm and mainstream education. This was an adaptation to research question two when young people were asked about their experiences of formal education and care farms. The responses from the staff were varied and inconclusive however a number believed that attending a care farm, perhaps once or twice a week, may be used as an incentive to remain in school rather than encounter permanent exclusion.

The Training Officer (Rowan) used the analogy of a 'carrot' and a possible 'reward' to describe attending the care farm.

…using it as a carrot, you know, you think in one way you almost get used as a last chance saloon, so kids that they can't cope with in the PRUs they send to us so it's quite nice to be used as a reward instead of the, you know, the ultimate [permanent exclusion].

It's basically an exchange for if you sit through these core subjects and behave then you can go and get your qualification in something that you want to do.

(TO G, Rowan)

Furthermore, Manager D (Rowan) stated:

If they don't behave, they're not allowed out here and they love it out here.

Manager A (Birch) suggests attending the care farm extends the period of time that a young person is engaged with mainstream education. They express that:

We've found here that attending our care farm prolongs the time that young people are able to have their needs met in mainstream education. Coming to a care farm gives the young person focus and helps to improve their behaviour in school, knowing that this will be their reward at the end of it.

An alternative perspective is provided by Manager D (Rowan) who suggests that attending a care farm might not encourage participation in education:

When I started it [the Care Farm], *I naively thought I'd have kids out here a couple of days a week, then they'd go back to the PRU units and do the rest of it and what I realised, they don't do the rest of it, they're not engaged in any sort of education, they just muck about there really.*

Some staff described how they encourage the young people to remain in mainstream education and *"endure"* it:

…even if they got their mind set on farming or mechanics, that they could endure it at school just to get some of the essentials, like spelling, simple arithmetic…but

certainly in my case I always encourage them to try and, and get some of, basic education because whatever they do it will stand them in good stead.

(MAN B, Birch)

Likewise, Manager C (Maple) shared that:

We're always trying to make sure that children stay in school as much as possible and would always try and push them to have some kind of education.

Manager B (Birch) believes that care farming is certainly an option to enable young people to generate a sense of belonging in life. They share their thoughts with regards young people re-engaging with formal education as a result of attending a care farm:

Well I think young people are very precious, they're the future of the planet and if care farming can provide for some a purpose, can provide for some a little bit of grounding, er, a bit of balance, a bit of comfort, er, a bit of stability then I think it's very well worth having a try.

7.6 Summary

This chapter has presented the data generated by the various methods utilised during the data collection phase of the study. By merging the data, key themes have developed. These themes have been shaped by the similarities in response from all participants, regardless of role or location. Some are more strikingly obvious than others. Data which suggested that care farming did not have an impact on learning were limited despite the use of ongoing conversational questioning and 'opportunistic chats' (O'Reilly, 2012). The integrated data showed the findings thematically, providing similar conclusions and therefore adding greater credibility to the results (Hambidge, 2017).

Both care farm experiences and formal educational experiences have been presented from the perspectives of the young people, care farm staff and school staff. Perceptions around the learning undertaken on a care farm have been highlighted and many opportunities for learning socially and practically have been evidenced through the participant responses. The young

people's stories and educational histories illustrate the contribution care farming has had on their engagement with learning. Care farm staff and school staff corroborate this.

This chapter has provided the context for the interpretative analysis evident in the forthcoming chapter. Drawing together and discussing the findings outlined above, Chapter 8 presents and identifies the significant contributions to new knowledge emerging from this study.

Figure 62: Area of happiness B – Rowan Care Farm by Freya.

8. Discussion chapter

8.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this study was to explore the possible contribution care farming may have on young people's engagement with learning. Underpinned by an ethnographic methodology, 12 young people aged between 13 and 16 years, 2 school staff and 7 care farm staff were observed, interviewed and joined in their daily activities by myself to capture their lived realities on the three care farms that were selected as case study sites. Through working alongside the participants, I addressed the research aim by exploring data in relation to the following research questions:

1. How do young people and care farm providers articulate the reasons why young people attend care farms in England?

2. What are young people's perceptions of their educational experiences, both on care farms and as part of formal education?

3. How and in what ways do young people learn on care farms in England, if at all?

Chapter 7 provided a detailed exploration of the harvested data which was presented as themes based on the systematic analysis of data. This chapter will discuss the main findings and reflects on the data generated in relation to the existing literature reviewed in chapter 3. By locating this study in the field, I put forward a number of key claims regarding making new contributions to this area of research. This chapter uses the detailed analysis of data to address the central aim of how care farms contribute to young people's engagement with learning. Material from all participants and the observational data are systematically analysed; not to generalise key points, but rather to combine evidence in order to identify similarities and differences to construct a rich understanding of how a care farm may contribute to a young

person's engagement with learning. The discussion exposes the substantial contributions this study offers to the existing body of knowledge around care farms and young people's learning experiences.

The most significant finding was the compelling interplay between four elements. The four elements were:

1. The young person;
2. The other participants;
3. The informal relational discourse harnessed by the care farm staff;
4. The nature-based learning contexts available on the care farm.

The informal relational discourse, evident through triangulated data, synergised with the nature-based pedagogy and learning contexts on a care farm. The individual young people and other farm participants were immersed within this symbolic experience. I argue, therefore, that this synergy provides a catalyst for young people to learn practically, socially and introspectively. This key claim forms the basis of the following discussion chapter and will be further examined below.

As this is one of the few studies directly exploring young people's experiences on care farms in England, it is challenging to make useful comparisons with similar studies. This study is unique from related studies undertaken on care farms through the ethnographical style with which data were generated. No other researcher has captured data from three case study sites and worked alongside the participants using an ethnographic approach. Through a systematic study with participants based on three different farm sites across the country, perceptions were gathered and methodically analysed. Findings have been triangulated from across all three sites to offer a robust insight into the participants' perceptions and experiences on farms which offer alternative provision for young people aged 13 to 16 years.

In order to align with the research questions, the chapter consists of two main sections. Firstly, experiences on a care farm and within mainstream education are discussed, drawing on the

contributor narratives together with researcher observations. Secondly, the contribution to learning derived from care farm provision and extracted elements of the participants' accounts are evaluated alongside theoretical perspectives. Sub-headings have been used throughout to provide a focus on key discussion points.

8.2 Experiences of mainstream education and on a care farm

This section deals with the data surrounding how and why young people, care farm providers and school staff, articulate the reasons young people attend a care farm and reviews perceptions of their educational experiences, both on care farms and within mainstream education. One frequently documented perception surrounded assessment regimes.

8.2.1 Exam factories

Findings from all participants across the three sites indicated that for many young people their experiences of mainstream education were demanding and often traumatic. Phrases such as "couldn't cope", "beyond terrible", "challenging" and "struggling" were evident in the young people's responses. Similarly, responses from the school staff and care farm staff included the phrases "school is difficult for these boys", "couldn't cope with how busy it was", "couldn't cope with the expectations" and "pressures of mainstream". These findings concur with a range of literature around the restricting regimes fostered within school environments and how these can impact negatively on young people. Within this study, the voices of young people have corroborated this. Ball (2008), Illich (1971) and Slee (2011) attribute the discontentment amongst some young people with the school system to the astringent assessment and examination culture rather than a cultural emphasis on flexible learning opportunities. An interview with a farm manager in this study, revealed examinations are setting young people "up to fail". Supporting this response are Coffield and Williamson (2011), who suggest the "exam factory" culture is victimising and excluding. Parffrey (1994) corroborates this when she suggests that the school assessment cultures and practices are toxic for vulnerable young people. Developing this discourse further, I assert that the culture is fundamentally negative, and even traumatising for those young people who do not meet the required standard set by

the governing institutions. The trauma I emphasise was evident in the responses from some young people during this study. John endorsed this assertion when he remarked that "the pressure of being good" and a fear of failure in relation to passing examinations, was one of the causes of the immense stress and subsequent physical pain he described he was experiencing. The reported stress experienced by the young people with regards to the pressures of mainstream schooling, is incredibly detrimental to their mental wellbeing at a time in their lives when many other pressures are also afoot (see section 3.2.2.1).

The latest government Green Paper (DHSC/DfE, 2018), aspiring to transform mental health support services for children and young people (see section 3.1.2.1) recognises that, amongst other factors, exam stress and subject choice all impact negatively on young people's mental health and well-being. John's response around exam stress, subject choice and similar occurrences shared below resonate with the work of Polk (1984), who argues that for some young people the experience of mainstream schooling is humiliating and painful. This study has engaged directly with young people with clear feedback that the humiliation is a reality for them, and not merely a theoretical perspective. Whilst this might only be for a minority of young people, the data yielded from this study advocates for the exploration of alternative models of education, one of which I argue, could be a care farm. Furthermore, improved provision of support for young people experiencing stress generated by the testing culture in mainstream schools is necessary. Since the data were collected, a glimmer of hope has been provided by Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman (2019) who has recommended that the updated inspection framework, being implemented in September 2019, will move away from the "data heavy culture" and "narrow curriculum" evident in schools. Acknowledging that the role Ofsted and the subsequent inspection regimes have played in perpetuating the existing culture, she hopes the new framework will provide a greater focus on a "rich and broad curriculum". In light of the inspection reforms, it is pertinent to suggest that, perhaps the refreshed emphasis on a broader curriculum may ease the pressure collectively identified by the participants in this study. The reforms may also support the view that alternative curriculum providers are a positive asset to a school offering a rich and broad curriculum, rather

than a perceived punishment for non-conforming behaviour (see 3.4.1). As this study has demonstrated through the data generated, there is a magnitude of learning opportunities available to young people on a care farm.

8.2.2 Self exclusion

The findings of this study revealed that the coping strategy adopted by many of the young people experiencing humiliation and pain in the classroom was to self-exclude. By misbehaving (refusing to do the work - Max), being disruptive (making sex noises – John) and sometimes being physically violent in the classroom (assaulting a teacher – Savannah), the young people were removed from the classroom and subsequently avoided the work that was causing them anxiety and stress. The self-exclusion strategy described by young people was emphasized and reinforced through the narratives of the care farm staff and school support staff. One farm manager believed that when the work becomes difficult some young people "kick off and then it's all about the bad behaviour and getting excluded". Another example of dealing with the stress within a classroom was screaming, as a school support staff member shared: "…as soon as he [Kieran] goes to put pen to paper, he just screams". During an unstructured conversation whilst grooming a pony, I asked Kieran why he screams in the school classroom. He replied, "what's the point in being quiet and nobody hears you, then nobody understands?". This was a powerful statement that conveyed his frustration. Parffrey (1994:108) attributes this frustration and the desire to self-exclude documented by many of the young people, to a 'system failure'. She suggests that the school system itself has failed the young people rather than the resulting behaviour being a failure to conform.

When questioned on why they did not request support from their teachers rather than pursue self-exclusion, the young people responded with phrases such as "embarrassment", "shame" and "people will laugh", therefore promoting a deficit position and perhaps one of self-preservation. Through their studies, Hartig et al. (1991) acknowledged that social pressures and requirements to conform to others are prevalent in mainstream schools. They suggested that

the lack of social pressures within a natural setting such as a farm, help 'restore' individuals. Being reluctant to ask for help due to shame was something the young people unanimously reported when sharing their experiences of school; yet relevant empirical evidence captured on the care farm sites evidenced a polarised depiction. Responses from the young people suggested that relationships with their teachers were fractured therefore confirming Batsleer's (2008) notion of 'relationships' as central to the learning experience. Data demonstrated that positive relationships with care farm staff and other participants were based on equity, respect and dialogue (see 7.2.1.4). I therefore put forward this values-based, pedagogical approach, to deter the destructive self-exclusion strategies implemented by some young people when engaging with learning in classroom environments.

8.2.3 Robots and dreams

All participants – young people, care farm providers and school staff – made reference to the restrictive curriculum and lack of practical learning opportunities within the mainstream education system. Data revealed that care farms offered their participants' numerous opportunities for engaging in meaningful practical activities and predominately, these activities were based on the young people's interests. It became apparent during the course of data collection that all three care farms did not have a prescribed curriculum driving the provision; instead the needs of the natural environment and the animals often dictate the daily tasks. An example of this is when fruit needed picking from the trees due to a potential mite infestation, or when an animal had given birth overnight and urgent care was required. Even the care farms that offered young people the opportunity to work towards a qualification used the naturally occurring opportunities on the farm to fulfil the assessment requirements.

Kieran described his experience in mainstream school as "robotic", suggesting that school pupils were robots having to perform well at the subjects the school and government decide needs to be taught: "to fit into school you've got to be a robot". Kieran became quite angry when using this metaphor and shared how he was not a robot. The metaphor of a robot was

also used by Endacott et al. (2015) when describing their experiences of teaching and aligns with the work of Cooper (2002) and Illich (1971), who believed that schools reinforce government ideology such as the National Curriculum and impose regimes, for example timetables and standardised assessments, upon young people. Foucault (1995) suggested that the education system creates 'docile bodies' who are compliant with the dominant ideologies in society. Arguably, adhering to nationally-endorsed regimes and hegemonic decisions around the curriculum can be seen as a robotic process that creates such 'docile bodies', and thus, do not meet the educational aspirations of the nature-based pedagogies exhibited by care farms.

Correspondingly, other young people commented on the restrictive curriculum and minimal opportunities for practical activities in mainstream school. Phrases such as "you don't get any practical work these days", and "you don't get to like try and say what you're good at", were used to describe their experiences in school. The views of the young people were corroborated by school staff and the care farm staff who all commented on the restrictive academic focus of schools and how this stifles practical curiosity and talent. Across the three study sites, care farm staff attributed the limiting curriculum to "bad behaviour", "getting excluded", "disengagement", "low self-confidence" and young people not "thriving" in schools. Accounts from all participants suggested that the care farm environment offers a distinct alternative to the oppressive school curriculum and allows young people to learn both practically and physically. One young man commented that being on the care farm enabled him to fulfil his "dream" of doing "practical stuff all day". This 'dream' was reinforced by a School Support Worker on a separate care farm, who commented that the young man she was supporting was "really talented in what he's doing practically but not in the classroom". This young man was described by his School Support Worker as "outdoorsy", and she shared that he struggled to concentrate and make adequate progress in a classroom environment, resulting in three permanent exclusions. Correspondingly, on another farm site, the Training Officer remarked that many of the young people attending the care farm "cannot put their minds" to academic subjects "however, perform brilliantly when given a practical task". The distinction between working academically in a classroom environment and working practically on a care farm was a

persistent theme across all three care farm sites amongst all participants. These findings support the work of Elings (2011:18) who states that "being outside of a destructive environment" and "having the opportunity to be creative in the farming environment, moving away from the abstract to the practical" were crucial aspects of a care farm when working positively with young people. Clearly, the meaningful practical activities undertaken on a care farm were purposeful for the small group of young people in Elings research and is securely maintained through this study across the three sites. Based on the findings of this study, I propose that the practical activities on a care farm offer a positive alternative to the stifling restrictive curriculum imposed on many young people in mainstream school. The care farms in this study offered a multitude of purposeful opportunities for fulfilling dreams and eliminating robotism.

8.2.4 Stress and time away

Stress was a recurring word used by many participants, but more significantly, by all the young people at some point during the unstructured interviews. The assessment regime described above in 8.2.1, and the necessity to choose future 'options' were attributed to the stress some young people had experienced. Young people shared how the care farm environment offered a retreat from the stress of school and "time away". The restorative properties of nature were well-documented in the literature (Kaplan & Kaplan (1995), Relf (1992), Elings (2011) Louv (2005), Hine et al. (2008)), however a gap became apparent when looking more specifically at care farms and young people aged 13 to 16 years old. Through offering a natural environment that restores mental fatigue and alleviates the "multiple assaults on our attention" (Relf, 1992:136), I argue that a nature-based pedagogy supported the young people who had experienced significant stress and humiliation generated by the curriculum-based pedagogy operating in many mainstream schools. Elsey et al. (2016:100) when examining the use of care farms for adults experiencing mental illness, suggested that a nature-based care farm can offer the environment required to help relax the mind, "reducing the constant bombardment of worries and concerns". This is something the young people at the heart of this study shared

they desired with regards to their education. Data yielded in this study found that care farms provide a nurturing and enabling learning environment for young people to self-discover and be free from the humiliation and frustration experienced, by some, in the traditional schooling system.

8.2.5 Inside and outside

Data generated through both the unstructured and semi-structured interviews frequently made reference to how being outside and "without walls" was a vital feature of a care farm. Young people across two sites when describing their school structures reported that they were "like a prison", "no windows", "not a blade of green" and "next to a dual carriageway". Kieran reported that "…my schools like I'm trapped and that is horrible". Their responses were corroborated by the care farm staff who stated, "it does feel like a prison" and believed that the young people "don't like the walls…don't like the doors". What clearly emerges from this study is that not only is the school curriculum restrictive and oppressive, the physical environment and building structures constrain and confine the young people in some schools.

The oppressiveness of school buildings and sites was highlighted in the study by Faber-Taylor et al. (2001:72). They made some key recommendations to improve school structures by having large windows, breaks were to be given in a green environment and that the design of school playgrounds incorporated green space. In support of this was the Marmot review (2010:28) where a general recommendation was made to the government to improve the "availability of good quality open and green spaces". Furthermore, Kraftl (2013) suggests that non-school-like alternative learning spaces are created to support teaching and learning, advocating that a care farm environment has the potential to be this alternative space. While Kraftl points to the potential of care farms, this study has systematically studied the potential and asserts that a care farm **is** an effective alternative learning environment and one that was desired by all participants. Responses from the participants in this study would certainly support this assertion; in particular, Kieran's school support worker remarked that: "On the days he's at school Kieran says he just wishes he was here". By embracing the recommendations put

forward by Faber-Taylor et al. (2001), Marmot (2010) and Kraftl (2013), young people who thrive in a formal classroom-based environment would also gain more exposure to nature and green space.

The preference to be outdoors on a farm setting rather than in a school environment was raised by most participants across the three sites. Luke shared how he likes "being outdoors instead of being in a classroom", describing how he feels "free" and "happy" outdoors. The emotions of feeling happy and experiencing positive thoughts when in nature is documented by Richardson et al. (2019) in their work on nature connection. They stated that "attachment to nature is essential to nature connectedness" (Richardson et al., 2019:3). Harry declared he was an "outdoor person not an indoor person", and similarly, Declan confirmed he did not attend school as he abhorred "staying inside…I like being outside". Likewise, Freya explained that she wants to "learn outside" rather than attending school where 'they…shove you in a classroom". Luke compared his experiences in a school classroom to feeling "like I'm being choked to death inside". The freedom and open-air nature of care farms was a clear driver for young people's desire to attend and participate. In their study examining alternative curriculum locations Martin and White (2012) suggested the location of alternative provision contributes to the success of the programmes. Supporting the preferences shared by the young people in this study, they found that having the opportunity to learn outside and in large open spaces were elements of alternative curriculum programmes learners responded well to.

Two young people at alternative sites used the phrasing 'not stuck in a classroom' to describe why they attend the care farm and Kieran remarked that he feels "freeness" when he arrives at the farm, further stating he "can't sit in a classroom all day".

The young people's desire to be outside was corroborated by the care farm and school staff. One manager described how the young people "want to be outside" and shared that many are "outdoorsy". The interchange between being an "outdoorsy" young person and having the opportunity to learn outdoors raises concerns. This doctoral study has sought the views of 12 young people from across England, all of whom shared how they preferred to learn outdoors

rather than in a classroom environment. It would be pertinent at this point to question how many more young people currently in the mainstream school system favour learning outdoors. However, this preference is stifled by the classroom-based curriculum and discipline regimes such as 'zero tolerance' (see 3.4.1), therefore potentially leading to frustration. There is a distinct opportunity emerging from this study to transform the school system and offer a more inclusive learning environment for those who prefer to learn outdoors. Mills and McGregor (2014:4) suggest "all young people have the capacity to learn and to enjoy learning", yet due to the context, many do not. The context for learning and enjoying learning, in this study, is a care farm.

Based on the accounts of participants in this study, I argue that young people desire choices about their mode of study rather than face exclusion, or pursue self-exclusion, for not conforming with a primarily indoor-based education system. Although forest schools are increasingly being used as part of mainstream provision (Kraftl, 2013), this study demonstrates that care farms also play a role in this, and that they offer something unique and distinct from other nature-based provision. Expanding the use of care farms for alternative curriculum provision, supports access to green spaces and the natural environment for the young people who have a desire to be outdoors and thrive being in, and within, nature. Macmillan (1914:5) once stated that "The best classroom and richest cupboard is roofed only by the sky", and data from this study has demonstrated that the young people preferred an outdoor environment in which to learn, creating a sense of freedom and independence.

8.2.6 Relationships

Another persistent theme that emerged from the data was the notion of relationships. Relationships were complex and nuanced yet were alluded to by all participants within numerous contexts.

8.2.6.1 Relationships with school staff

All young people shared their thoughts on relationships with teachers, with particular reference to the toxicity of these associations. Potentially exasperated by the aforementioned constricting classroom environment, young people expressed how they felt anger towards their teachers at times. Unstructured interviews with the young people revealed they felt that teachers "don't respect us", "make me feel annoyed and angry", and "make us feel crap and not want to be there". Through observations when working with the young people on the care farms, the ongoing negative reference to their teachers was evident and the explosiveness of these relationships became apparent. One young person had seriously physically assaulted a classroom teacher and believed a confrontation was the only way to have her voice heard, insisting the assault "weren't my fault". Elings (2011:17) reported that levels of aggression are significantly higher in a school or college facility than on a care farm. Through her research she found that feelings involved on a care farm created an atmosphere of equality.

The data generated in this study combined with researcher reflections, questions whether the anger expressed by the young people towards their teachers through spoken language and destructive behaviour, was a retaliation. The retaliation could have been against the imposed curriculum, the perceived lack of respect, the didactic nature of teaching and the frustration of feeling helpless. This potential explanation does not justify the erratic behaviour and violence described by the young people; however, it does provide some enlightenment. An alternative perspective is provided by Cigman (2007:163) who suggests that the colossal stress teachers are under to uphold school performance levels leads to "institutionalised intolerance for the under-performing pupil". I argue this intolerance also exasperates the opportunity for teachers to build relationships and spend time with those pupils who need it the most. The superseding priority for teachers to perform both personally and institutionally, leads to a desire to remove the pupil from the classroom rather than provide the nurturing support so desperately needed.

In contrast, when asked about the staff on care farms, responses from the young people were remarkably different supporting the findings of te Reile (2009) and Elings (2011). In a review of 'Learning Outside the Classroom' initiatives, Ofsted (2008:23) described that the positive effects

of the outdoor environment and stimulating activities provided for a group of young people from a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) produced exemplary behaviour. Similarly, Pretty et al. (2013) reported that access to green spaces and engagement with nature-based activities can be a catalyst for attitudinal modification and potential behavioural changes amongst young people who had been involved in criminal activity.

8.2.6.2 Relationships with care farm staff

Findings indicated that relationships between staff and young people on the three care farms were based on mutual respect. Young people described the reason why they engage so positively at the care farm but not in school: "because you respect us….people at school don't", "…like you talk to us in a way we wouldn't think like teachers like you would talk to us" and "you can talk without getting judged on what you say". This style was corroborated by one care farm manager who recognised that her team were all qualified teachers, yet she described the approach on the care farm as "a little bit more relaxed" than mainstream school. Similarly, in her study, te Reile (2009) concluded that the success of many alternative curriculum providers at engaging with disaffected young people included a culture of respect, security and relationships of trust. This approach was further verified by a manager on a different site, who described her way of working with the young people: "we make them all feel kind of respected and liked…they're capable of stuff…we believe in them". The non-judgemental and dialogical style of communication described by the young people and staff bears resemblance to the informal pedagogy evident through the youth work values of equity, respect and participation (Batsleer & Davies, 2010). Davies (2010:2) states that working with young people informally is "rooted in respect" taking into account their "individual richness and complexities"; something happening on care farms that became evident when observing and collating responses from the participants in this study. The relational approach of youth work put forward by Davies (2010), was described by a care farm manager when he suggested that his approach is "to be patient with them and trying to be in their place really". This compassionate style of communication resulted in an avoidance of the deficient view of young people evidenced frequently in the

school system (Illich, 1971; Freire, 1972). Max portrayed the care farm staff team as "like another family" explaining how he felt he could "talk to someone…I can let everything out…the members of staff are unreal…they listen to you….". Family is also the term used by Hambidge (2017:149) to describe the team at the care farm she studied, implying "care farm family" captures the meaningful relationships mentors had with the young people. Richardson et al. (2019:3) suggest that "such emotional responses are associated with enhancing nature connectedness". Demonstrating his respect for the care farm staff, when asked to take a photograph of somewhere on the care farm he felt he had learnt something Kieran responded:

> "…take a picture of XXX who is the tutor". I replied what do you mean by that? And he said "XXX, I've learnt everything from XXX."

During the course of the study there were times when something much more than a mutual respect and relational approach between the care farmer and young people was apparent, something that felt imperceptible yet highly significant. Through empirical research, I witnessed a passion and professional affection for the young people, who were often very complex, emerging from many of the care farm staff. The singing heard when young people were cleaning animal shelters and the camaraderie when helping a goat give birth, were just two moments when I witnessed something absorbing about relationships on a care farm. One care farmer described the purpose of young people attending a care farm: "well, I think young people are precious, they're the future of the planet". He went on to suggest that care farming may provide some balance, comfort, stability and a purpose for some young people. Another care farmer summed up her principal philosophy when working with the young people, stating that "you'll forget what we say and you'll forget what we do but you'll never forget how we made you feel". A powerful statement that concurs with observational data documented whilst working with the staff and young people across all care farm research sites. This is where the interplay of the farm location, the evident mutual respect between the young people and staff team alongside the compassion of the staff, makes the provision so unique. Significantly, these three distinctive factors synergise with each other in this study. Findings imply there is a wider discourse emerging which takes place beyond individual young people and staff, and

moves away from a vortex of failure to a haven of accomplishment. This claim is challenging to refute when considered alongside the data provided within this study.

In her own doctoral study, Hambidge (2017) also found that relationships were an integral part of a short-term care farm intervention for young people with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Hambidge (2017:144) focussed on "learning to trust" and being trusted as a central part of the relationship building. Data yielded from this study across three care farm sites substantiated this and further revealed that the informal pedagogical approach combined with a passion for working with young people was a catalyst for effective relationship building and mutual respect. Furthermore, te Reile (2009:80) in her study of alternative curriculum providers who were deemed 'successful', concluded that "respect, security and relationships of trust were crucial in making their learning experiences worthwhile". Te Riele identified commonalities across the providers which included an emphasis on learning informally, small group sizes and fostering a sense of belonging.

Small group sizes and a person-centred approach were described by the three care farm managers as a reason why young people engaged positively on the farms. One manager stated that the young people "feel well supported and listened to…they matter…are important to us and have a role to play". Furthermore, a comment from another manager suggested that the farm is a "fun and supporting environment with lots of choices and encouragement tailored…" to each young person. Similarly, the necessary support for the young people, many of whom were dealing with social anxiety and had additional learning needs, were referred to by another member of care farm staff. They suggested that larger groups were not conducive to learning for those young people, and a smaller more "nurturing environment" was required. This was corroborated by Sophie, who shared that she was "kicked out" of school many times and attributed this to her learning difficulties, making her feel uncomfortable in the large class and unable to cope. Small groups, no larger than ten young people on any day, and a more "nurturing environment" was one which was apparent on the care farms visited during this study and one in which the participants appeared to thrive. Te Reile's (2009) study into

alternative curriculum programmes acknowledged that small groups sizes were crucial to their success. In this way, the data point to the discovery that the positive learning experiences reported by research participants can be largely attributed to the small, nurturing groups which are intrinsic to the day-to-day operations of a care farm.

8.2.6.3 Relationships with other care farm participants

A further relationship dynamic that emerged through the findings in this study was the associations between care farm participants. While these were on the whole very positive, at times relationships could become particularly tense between the young people. At two sites young people had to be separated on a few occasions due to tensions and subsequent verbal abuse occurring. Reflective notes from one site included:

> Max and John fell out today quite a lot, so I was stuck in that and had to help trying to diffuse situations, so, the day got even more intense as we went along.

Care farm staff handled these incidents dialogically and professionally, resulting in a change of task to de-escalate the situation. Elings (2011:18) found that young people on a care farm present with less aggression than in a "destructive" school environment; however, some antagonism was evident through the observations and interview data generated in this study, therefore questioning the fulfilment of all relationships. Nevertheless, the occurrences of tension between the young people were momentary. In contrast, relationships between the different client groups appeared to be harmonious. At two care farm sites client groups were mixed (see chapter 5) allowing for greater socialisation amongst groups and broader learning opportunities. Empirical data corroborated through interview data confirmed that the care farm environment offered young people the opportunity to build positive relationships and empathy with those often misunderstood. Referring to the combination of client groups, one manager commented about the learning this generates: "everyone mixes and mingles on the farm…so we're all learning different skills off each other all the time". Additionally, another manager stated that the farm has "other service users to work alongside…young people are given the chance to interact with others". Furthermore, a third care farm manager shared her

experiences of regularly seeing "young people interacting exceptionally well with our adult care farm clients". Max shared that he "had never met anyone proper disabled" before coming to the care farm and described how he has learnt "they're only human at the end of the day". Responses from participants correlate with the work of Elings (2011:43) when she suggests that care farms are social communities where "people complement each other and are a valuable resource for one another". Observational data revealed that Max's attitude towards the disabled adults changed significantly during the period of data collection. I observed him laughing at and mocking other participants in the first week; however, in contrast, during week six I observed Max helping a disabled man tie his shoelace and pour him a drink. One of the school support staff shared in her interview that she felt young people developed "empathy for others" whilst attending the care farm, giving them "an insight into another world". Supporting this potential for young people to develop empathy, was one of the school leaders who stated that, whilst she refers young people to the farm to develop practical skills, more important is the potential to develop "their emotional intelligence". Additionally, a staff member remarked that working with other client groups helps the young people "feel part of the grown-up world they are transitioning into". The data triangulated from the young people, care farm staff and school staff, builds up a convincing depiction of young people learning from new experiences and interactions with others on the care farms. The social benefits of being in green spaces such as a care farm, were documented in Louv's (2010:51) work when he suggested that the natural environment "fosters social interaction". Furthermore, Leck (2013:236) in his study with adults revealed that "social inclusion" is at the centre of a care farm and allows individuals to develop both personally and socially. Hambidge (2017:230) coined the phrase "social facilitator" to describe the natural environment and what she had observed amongst the young people with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Leck (2013) concluded his study by suggesting that the social context is equally as important as the natural context of a care farm.

The findings from this PhD study have further identified that the "social inclusion" alluded to by Louv (2010), Leck (2013) and Hambidge (2017) equally applies to those young people who attend a care farm as part of an alternative provision programme. Additionally, findings show

that the care farm environment enables young people to have the opportunity for new experiences with differing social interactions, allowing them to construct their own meanings. Therefore, this supports the assertion that care farms make a significant contribution to young people's understanding of others and in the development of their empathy skills. The natural farm environment, in this context, plays a central role in the social development of young people and can be related to the ecological systems theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), specifically the exosystem. However, in the literature review (see section 3.3.2) it was highlighted that Bronfenbrenner's model omits to make reference to the influence of the natural environment, focussing primarily on the social-cultural context. The present study exposes that the natural environment on a care farm cultivates social interaction, shapes beliefs and provides the foundation for new experiences, practically and socially. These experiences allow young people to address any pre-conceived views that may have been held towards others such as disabled people, evident in Max's remark. A development of this study would be to adapt Bronfenbrenner's model to ensure that the significance of access to the natural environment is incorporated within the nested systems. Further research would be required to examine whether the adaptation works in a variety of nature-based contexts.

8.2.6.4 Relationships with animals

What clearly emerges from data derived from this study is the power of animals to engage young people and to create feelings of safety, calmness and love. Concurring with Hambidge's (2017) findings on one farm site, young people appeared to gravitate towards the animals and felt a desire to care for them; this was a common feature across all farm sites systematically studied. Typically, upon arriving at the farm sites the young people would ask to go see the animals straight away. I observed this with all the young people except one initially who preferred to discuss the jobs for the day. Through the transcribed reflective recordings, one of the many interactions with animals was captured when "Max told me he'd fallen in love with Ewel the pony and he led Ewel around the field numerous times today". Max captured this "love" he mentioned for the pony through photography (Fig. 43). Alongside many of the young

people, when asked to capture somewhere on the farm where they felt safe and/or happy, images of the animals were taken. Whilst taking a photograph of a farm bird, Luke shared how he felt happy when near it and described how he liked talking to her. Consistently, on a different site, Max shared how when he takes the pony for a walk, he feels he can talk to him: "it sounds daft but like talk to him". It is worth noting here that Hambidge (2017) also discovered that some young people in her study would prefer to talk to the animals than their designated mentor. Furthermore, five young people, across the three sites, took images of the farm horses, remarking that they felt happy and safe when they were nearby. Freya stated that the horses were "the best part of coming to the farm", and John shared how he felt safe and happy near the ponies "because they're like so timid and calm". Max believed he had "learnt trust" through his interactions with the ponies. Similarly, Max described his feelings when caring for the chickens: "I feel loved" and made reference to one particular chicken he named 'Wonky' as the "first friend" he had met. Through her doctoral research with adult participants on a care farm, Bragg (2014:133) reported that "having contact with farm animals" was one of the aspects enjoyed the most. Bragg's findings concur with those of this study, and although her research involved an older age group, the enjoyment and pleasure derived from the animals on all the care farms studied, appears evident regardless of age. This section, therefore, presents the argument that animals on a care farm are an effective channel through which young people can express themselves in a safe and calming manner. I have used 'animals' broadly here as a vast range of animal types were alluded to within the data across all three sites. For example, animals mentioned as providing therapeutic benefits ranged from a dove to a large bull.

The narrative from the young people about their relationships with animals was verified by a care farm staff member when he described the impact horses have on young people. He suggested that some young people "will find a horse easier to approach than they would do a person", attributing his comment to the feeling of safety with the animals. Other staff referred to young people enjoying being with the animals and the range of learning opportunities derived from this. The responses from the young people and staff support Wilson's (1984;

1993) and Frumkin's (2001) notion of biophilia, providing more evidence to suggest that humans, in this case young people, have a natural inclination to gravitate towards elements of the natural world, one of which is being with animals. The generalisability of this 'natural inclination' is problematic however, and an inconsistency develops with those who choose to abuse and neglect animals; the natural propensity in this case is sinister and cruel (RSPCA, 2019).

8.3 Care Farms contribution to learning

This section will discuss the findings from the analysis of the data which revolved specifically around learning experiences on care farms. The study ascertained perspectives from all participants on how and in what ways young people learn on care farms, if at all. From the data it can be evidenced that care farms make a significant contribution to young people's learning in the areas of self-discovery, developing empathy towards others, and understanding farm animals. The data generated also revealed a vast array of learning opportunities and experiences occurring on care farms. For the purpose of clarity, these have been themed into learning practically and learning introspectively.

8.3.1 Learning practically and with pride

Findings from this study support, and further develop, the previous research discoveries from Bragg and Atkins (2016); Pretty et al. (2013); Elings (2011); and Bragg et. al (2014), which clearly identify the value of undertaking practical meaningful activities on a care farm. From the data presented in chapter 7, the vast range of activities the young people report they have undertaken and learnt from is considerable. Moving away from abstract tasks often provided within a typical classroom towards tangible purposeful activities on a care farm allows young people to develop a sense of responsibility and "fill in the blanks for themselves" (Elings, 2011:18). An interview with one care farm manager concurred with Elings, suggesting that the care farm offered "the practical stuff…build self-esteem…they can learn things…it's all so immediate". Correspondingly, Max reported that "building a bird-box myself rather than just reading about it has learnt me loads". Another staff member compared the meaningful

activities to those in mainstream education, stating schools do not have “a real-world application” and to the young people some subjects have “no meaning”. Activities observed and undertaken during data collection give an indication of the diverse activities available on a care farm such as forging, buggy driving, bat-box making, planting seeds, farriering, weighing lambs, sheep shearing, horse-riding, fencing and construction of buildings. This non-exhaustive list demonstrates the range of tasks available for young people to participate in when attending a care farm. A school leader reported that “the variety of activities available…is good for attention span”, which was corroborated by the young people, one of whom stated: “there’s so much you get to do and learn about”.

One manager alluded to the therapeutic benefits of undertaking practical activities on the farm. She suggested that it was through the “practical stuff” that the “therapeutic relationship” begins. The data reveal that the tasks alongside the setting, are a vehicle to help the young people build relationships with the staff and other participants. Whilst undertaking the tasks young people also had the opportunity to share any concerns or worries with the staff. This was observed when Max and John were planting onion seeds, during which John disclosed he felt very sad about his mother’s disability and how inhibiting it was to him and his siblings. This exchange allowed the staff member to support John with his feelings and gave him an opportunity to express himself safely and without judgement.

Significantly, all young people across the three sites made reference to animals when they described how and in what ways they learn on the care farm. Some participants’ accounts suggest that they were already receptive to animals prior to attending the care farm and, certainly in the case of Ebony, had a keen interest to expand their existing knowledge. Learning about their existence and experiencing the biological functions of animals was a key feature within the data. Through the robust systematic analysis, 87 references to animals were made, which was substantially more than any other recorded learning experience. This consistent finding undoubtedly demonstrates the significance of animals to the learning experience on care farms. Luke captured an image of the feeding chart that is used to measure and weigh

animal feeds (Fig. 39). He felt he had learnt a great deal from using this chart when caring for the animals. John shared that he had learnt that animals have straightforward lives compared to himself and "have the same daily routine with no stress". The stress he mentions related to school life and the transitional stages in a human life; some of which, he was currently experiencing.

Young people shared how learning about animals and working with them created a sense of calmness, safety and freedom to be themselves. One manager commented on how the practical work increased the young people's "confidence and self-worth" and how she regularly sees the pride "in their faces and in their voices" when their work is showcased. This was certainly the case with Max and his bird-box (Fig. 44). Pride in their work was also evident when one former young person, now employee, reflected on her time attending the farm whilst on alternative provision. She described her dirty work clothes and the subsequent odour after working on the farm all day as her "stamp", and when returning home on an evening "I'd be proud". This response demonstrates the sense of pride and belonging generated through being on the care farm and resonates with the response from one farm manager who stated: "self-worth and self-esteem go through the roof", believing that the young people "have got something to offer and can be successful again". Moving away from the deficit model perpetuated in the mainstream school system for many, a care farm offers young people the opportunity to succeed and generate broader identities grounded on accomplishment and pride. I argue that this opportunity occurs within a nature-based environment which facilitates feelings of happiness and freedom.

8.3.2 Learning introspectively

As discussed in 8.2, findings strongly indicate that young people learn practically whilst engaging in activities on the farm and they develop empathy for others during the social experiences. However, a surprising insight which became apparent during the analysis of data, were the numerous references to young people learning about themselves and feeling free to express their individuality. The care farms created interpersonal affective atmospheres where

feelings of vulnerability were diminished and through positive interactions, young people could start to rebuild their self-worth. This section, therefore, presents the argument that care farms are vehicles to aid self-discovery amongst young people who have experienced personal low self-esteem and self-worth.

I have chosen to use the term 'introspection' to try and capture the notable occurrences during the participant's accounts that refer to aspects of personal growth. Myers (1986:202) describes introspection as 'self-dialogue' which supports the acquisition of 'self-knowledge'. He believes the concept of self-knowledge is learning to know what one thinks, feels, expects, believes and values. Having the opportunity on the care farm to develop self-knowledge and gain a deeper sense of who one is, became apparent in the accounts of the young people.

Throughout the data, emotive experiences of bullying within mainstream school were attributed to young people struggling to engage with learning and often refusing to attend. Young people reported being bullied due to the way they looked, their hair style and their personal interests. Victimisation ranged from negative comments in the classroom through to extreme violence resulting in hospitalisation. Some accounts were difficult to listen to and transcribe, particularly in the case of Luke (see section 7.2.1.3). In many instances the young people reported that the bullying had made them self-loathe and shared how they were forced to put on a front at school to "fit in", therefore conforming with the popular majority of pupils. Noting that bullying was the most difficult part of his life so far, Max felt that when attending the care farm, he could be himself, stating: "[I can] wear my hair like I want to" and express himself without the fear of being judged or bullied further.

In contrast, some young people declared that they had been a bully in school to conform with a particular gang culture they had adopted. However, the care farm environment allowed them the freedom to move away from that culture and be true to themselves. Savannah reported that when attending the farm, she "finds a better way to deal with things" and has learnt to respect others. Similarly, Declan shared that he had learnt from other people on the farm and

can be himself. During his research based in Finland, Louv (2005:51) discovered that teenagers could clear their minds, gain perspective and relax when in natural settings, and based on the participants accounts, I suggest this is also applicable to the care farm setting. This, of course, is complex and nuanced as toxic experiences may feature elsewhere in their lives, but whilst attending the care farm, young people have the opportunity to gain perspective, challenge destructive life trajectories and potentially develop new aspirations. Discussing the turbulent behaviour and lives of many young people engaging in alternative curriculum on the care farm, one manager suggested that whilst on the farm some, but not all, "start to put down roots and find a purpose in life". Harry concurred with this when he shared that he attended the care farm to help him move away from his anarchic life and to "get a job where I can have a farm". Pretty at al. (2013:184) believed that natural green spaces can "foster behavioural change" and act as a catalyst for attitudinal modification. The catalyst in this study was the care farm environment alongside the staff team who facilitated the reflective space for the young people.

The freedom to self-identify was referred to by care farm managers on two different sites. The care farms were described as places where young people develop "self-belief" and "learn it's ok to be you". Dutton and Chandra (2013:43) suggested that natural surroundings can act as a co-therapist and allow individuals to "just be". Similarly, Malaguzzi (2012) contended that the environment was the third teacher when working with young children; however, rather than being seen as three distinct 'teachers', evidence generated in this study on care farms moves towards a notion of co-creation of learning between four aspects. The notion of co-therapist and the significance of the natural environment to facilitate learning amongst young people aged between 13 to 16 years, was apparent through empirical data in this study, but there was another layer that was evident, yet not captured in the existing literature. The informal relational discourse harnessed by the staff, young people and other farm participants, synergised with the nature-based pedagogy and learning contexts on a care farm. This synergy of four elements provided a catalyst for young people to learn practically, socially and introspectively. The diagram that follows, aims to capture this and anchors the key findings in this study:

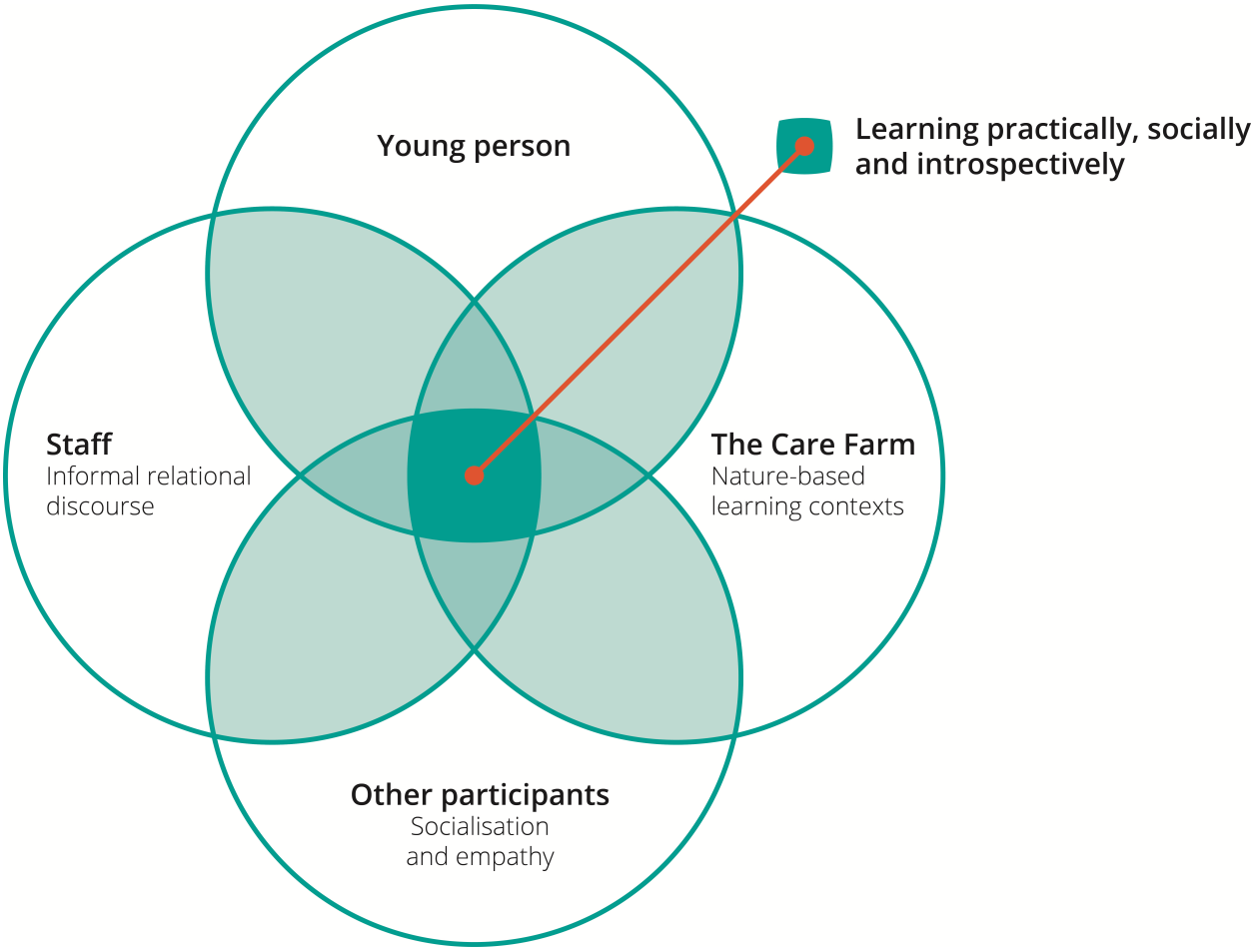


Figure 63: Intersection of learning on a care farm.

The diagram highlights the intersection between the four key features that have emerged from this study and clearly demonstrates the originality of the findings. This chapter has discussed many aspects emerging from the interplay and suggests the richness of this potion opposes the traditional classroom-based secondary school model. Additionally, it offers an alternative mode of education to allow young people who find traditional models of schooling traumatic, the opportunity to thrive.

Another aspect of learning introspectively evidenced in the data across the three sites, was the notion of taking risks. Young people reported that they embraced experiences that they would normally shy away from. John had an intense phobia of chickens but after spending a number

of weeks on the care farm and observing others, he finally entered the chicken coop and collected the eggs alongside me. When we were discussing this, he shared that since attending the care farm he had learnt to "push myself and not be frightened to try". This is an example of how the elements identified on the Venn diagram synergise together (Fig. 67). Observational data recorded the growth in John's confidence during the data collection phase and this aspect was corroborated by a school leader who believed that young people accessing an alternative curriculum on a care farm develop "a more positive attitude to giving things a go". Young people were observed being brave on numerous occasions across all sites, and most young people spoken with were able to articulate times when they had pushed themselves on the farm. One young man described how he had learnt to have the confidence to cook and serve lunch to other people. This was obviously a significant challenge for him socially and personally, as he went on to describe how he had never experienced structured, sociable, meal times before attending the farm. This activation of agency amongst the young people was nurtured by the staff team alongside the inherent freedom entrenched on a care farm, therefore demonstrating the compelling interplay identified in Figure 63.

8.4 Summary

This chapter has discussed the most significant findings from the study and reflected upon the data generated in relation to the existing literature reviewed in chapter 3. Literature was considered from the areas of health, education and youth work; therefore, the study is interdisciplinary and unique. By locating the study in the field, I have put forward a number of key claims regarding making new contributions to this innovative area of research. Three case study sites were used to capture the perceptions of young people, care farm staff and school support staff. The triangulation of qualitative data obtained through unstructured interviews, observations, photo elicitation and semi-structured interviews have been supplemented with researcher reflections to provide a detailed understanding of the contribution care farming may have on young people's engagement with learning. Consistencies across the three case study sites have been analysed and documented. Worthy of note at this point are the distinct

geographical differences and corporate structures of the three care farm sites, yet the accounts provided by research participants bear distinctive parallels.

The main areas which show a new contribution to existing knowledge ascertained through the research findings can be summarised as below:

- Care farms provide a nurturing and enabling learning environment for young people to self-discover and be free from the humiliation and frustration experienced, by some, in the traditional schooling system.

- Animals on a care farm are an effective channel through which young people can express themselves in a safe and calming manner.

- The informal relational discourse evidenced through interactions with the staff, young people and other participants, synergises with the nature-based pedagogy and learning contexts on a care farm providing a catalyst for young people to learn practically, socially and introspectively.

A four-part Venn diagram has been developed to capture the synergy outlined above. Based on the findings, I put forward the argument that the intersection between all aspects provides a catalyst for young people to learn practically, socially and introspectively.

The findings from this PhD thesis build on the existing evidence base on care farming and adds a further contribution around the experiences of young people aged 13 to 16 years accessing alternative curriculum on a farm. The next chapter will conclude the thesis by drawing together the themes and key findings raised throughout this and the previous chapters.

9. Conclusion, reflections and opportunity

This chapter draws together the findings of the PhD study. The study, based on ethnographic principles, specifically set out to fill a gap in the literature and explore the contribution care farming may have on young people's engagement with learning. I set out to work alongside young people aged 13 to 16 years who were accessing alternative curriculum on a care farm and to capture their perceptions of learning. Therefore, throughout this thesis the focus has been on 12 young people and their perceived learning journeys during mainstream school and alternative curriculum. Their accounts and the perceptions of nine staff members have provided rich and insightful data that, when combined with the theory and policy, create a powerful narrative. This chapter contains the following sections:

- Concluding observations
- Contribution and originality of the research study
- Personal reflections on the research process
- Opportunities and recommendations for future research

9.1 Concluding observations

Young people across the study sites shared their frustrations towards the restrictiveness of the school curriculum and the constraining nature of school structures, detailing the desired outdoor environment in which they preferred to learn. Narratives from the young people evidenced aspects of humiliation, shame and in some cases physical pain, that they had experienced whilst attending a mainstream school. This deficit position often resulted in their decision to self-exclude and face a formal exclusion. The latter series of toxic experiences demonstrates the requirement for alternative models of education to meet the needs of those who do not conform to the enforced curriculum and assessment regime apparent in the mainstream school system. The participants had clear and consistent views that identified care

farms as an alternative model of education where young people thrive and one that creates a sense of freedom and independence. I argue that care farms create a positive narrative for the young people, and one that does not assign a deficit label.

I have made the case that relationships are a fundamental aspect of why young people and staff felt learning takes place on a care farm. Relationships based on mutual respect, equity and dialogue were evidenced across the various interactions taking place on a care farm environment. The intensity and sincerity of the relationships with animals were a significant, consistent, finding across all sites.

It should be noted that certain themes remained persistent across the three case study sites despite the very different geographical locations, the size of the farm and to some extent, the resources available on each farm. The consistency of data reinforces the overall research claims and strengthens the trustworthiness of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Through systematic analysis and evaluation of the data I have created a new conceptual model for capturing the contribution care farms have on young people's engagement with learning. The model highlights the intersection of the key elements evidenced on the three care farm sites that facilitate learning experiences for the young people. The findings of this study build on the conclusions made by Leck (2013:258) who found that the unique combination of elements on a care farm impact on multiple aspects of human health and wellbeing. This thesis has identified that there are further factors by which the unique environment established by care farms can positively influence the life chances and experiences of young people.

9.2 Contribution and originality of the research study

The literature review identified a gap in the research concerned with young people's engagement on care farms. Despite the plethora of research surrounding the benefits of nature-based provision for adults and young children, a need for further research was apparent with regards young people. Hambidge (2017) was the first to conduct a study focussed solely on young people accessing alternative curriculum on a care farm. However, despite the

similarities in terms of chosen research site, in this study, the target group of young people differed, and the research methodology employed was fundamentally different.

This study was not an evaluation of one care farm, rather it captured data from three care farms and combined the evidence to create conclusions. This study was based on the ontological assumption that reality is constituted through multiple subjective experiences and therefore an interpretivist methodology that embraced this perspective was selected. The subjective accounts and perceptions of the young people and staff were collected and systematically analysed in order to gain a detailed understanding of their common experiences and patterns of behaviour (Denscombe, 2003). Underpinned by aspects of ethnography, data were generated on the care farm sites enabling the production of rich, sensitive stories whilst respecting the complex nature of the young people's social world and context (Fetterman, 2010).

A key contribution to new knowledge from this study was the humiliation young people reported they had experienced in mainstream schools and how attending the care farm allowed them the time and space to recover from this. These findings build on the work of Elsey et al. (2016) and Murray et al. (2019) who suggested that a care farm offers the environment to relax the mind. Through this study I have revealed that the mental fatigue and humiliation experienced in mainstream schools can be ameliorated through the care farm environment, thus allowing young people the opportunity to self-discover and learn more about themselves and others.

The most distinctive discovery, however, was the centrality of relationships and the dialogical approach evidenced between the care farm staff, the other participants and the young people. The underpinning philosophy of informal learning discourse and those aspects of a relational approach when working with the young people on a care farm was apparent during the data collection and data analysis stages. In their work on informal learning in youth work, Batsleer (2008), Batsleer and Davies (2006) and Young (2006) report that relationships are central to the learning experience. Following this line of reasoning, the study demonstrates how the informal

learning pedagogical approaches embraced by youth work discourse are at the heart of a care farm experience and are fundamentally the most central feature of the many positive experiences. This was consistently documented by both the staff and young people in this study. Young people are treated with respect, humility and as skilled individuals with potential. As demonstrated in figure 63, the supportive relations between the people on a care farm were a substantial enabler in the learning process.

This thesis has not attempted to identify if a care farm intervention supports young people to reengage back into mainstream school. It rather advocates that transitioning back into mainstream school is a destructive outlook for those young people who have since experienced the restorative properties of a care farm. Subsequently, their experiences on a care farm enables them to self-discover, unlock talents and develop a self-belief often masked in mainstream school environments. Through sharing their experiences on care farms young people have had an opportunity to document their stories and through photography, capture areas on the care farm where they felt learning took place.

9.3 Personal reflections on the research process

The purpose of this research was to capture the care farming experience through the lens of young people who were accessing alternative curriculum on a care farm. During chapter one and four I outlined my own positionality and acknowledged how this could steer the research trajectory if "epistemological vigilance" was not in place (Bourdieu, 1991:28). As an active care farmer, recognising the strengths and limitations associated with this was paramount. Following the advice of Wellington (2000) and Opie (2004), I ensured I took time throughout the research period to reflect on how my role and potential researcher bias could influence how the data gathered from the participants were interpreted. Through writing copious fieldwork notes and using my Dictaphone to reflect verbally, often occurring when travelling to and from the sites by train or car, and albeit through my socially constructed lens, reflecting on my researcher experiences was prioritised.

Another process incorporated to reduce potential researcher bias, was that of member checking. In the final stages of writing, I engaged with the three research study sites and met with a number of staff participants. Due to staff relocations and young people moving-on since the data collection phase, it was not possible to meet with all participants. Nevertheless, my visit allowed the remaining staff to learn about the research findings but more importantly, for them to confirm my key arguments aligned with their thoughts. This reflective process ensured my conclusions were authentic and trustworthy.

Parallel with the commitment to reflective research was the growing realisation of the learning I was also personally undertaking. Doing this PhD has required tenacity, vigilance and a commitment to be self-critical throughout the process. I aim to nurture these characteristics developed through undertaking this study in my future career path and research trajectory.

9.4 Future opportunities and recommendations for future research

During the course of the study a number of initiatives have been published by a range of agencies but the most significant of all is the 'Growing Care Farming' initiative launched as part of the 'Children and Nature' programme (DEFRA, 2018b). As presented in chapter three, the government have made a commitment to increasing care farm places by 1.3 million; a significant move to strengthen the existing care farming sector. This is of course, a momentous opportunity for the health, education and social care sectors to realise the potential of care farms. It is hoped that this study will raise awareness of the importance of care farming for the wellbeing of those young people who are being "choked" (Kieran, Maple) by traditional schooling systems. Perhaps the anticipated increase in care farm places could be occupied by the young people who would thrive and enable them to experience the many learning opportunities available on a care farm environment.

Realising the potential of care farming for alternative provision could also have an impact on how alternative curriculum is perceived by the education community. As presented in chapter three, there is a harmful stigma attributed to young people who access alternative provision,

rather than one that nurtures those who crave alternatives to traditional classroom-based environments (Hope, 2015). Participants in this study shared how they felt "pride" (Ebony, Rowan) and a "sense of achievement" (Max, Birch) when they had been on the care farm. This counteracts the deficit position and stigmatisation imposed on them through the exclusion processes the young people had all experienced at some point in their education journey. German (2000) proposed that rehabilitative measures are put in place for those young people facing exclusions rather than punitive procedures. The rehabilitative properties evident on a care farm have been well documented in this study, and in line with German's proposal, the provision must be viewed as such and not a punitive measure. Mills and McGregor (2014:4) put forward the notion that "all young people have the capacity to learn and to enjoy learning" and through this study I have argued that a care farm allows young people to reveal their capacity to learn and to enjoy learning in a natural environment. This study provides more evidence for a cultural shift and perception change towards alternative curriculum provision, specifically provision based within a farm environment.

Another opportunity that has arisen since the start of this study is the new Ofsted framework. Due to be in place by September 2019, the updated framework advocates a move away from the culture of performativity and encourages schools to embrace a broader curriculum offering pupils greater choice and freedom to learn (Speilman, 2019). At this stage, it is too early to assume that the refreshed emphasis on a broader curriculum may ease the pressure of the exam-factory culture (Coffield and Williamson, 2011) unanimously identified by the participants in this study. There is hope, however, that the reforms support the view that alternative curriculum providers are a positive asset to a school offering a rich and broad curriculum, rather than a perceived punishment for non-conforming behaviour.

A limitation of the research process that is worthy of acknowledgment, was the decision to not incorporate the young people's family background and histories within the data. Whilst some participants made reference to their personal lives when away from the care farm, to encompass this level of detail would have taken the study outside of the original parameters. As discussed in chapter three, I absolutely acknowledge that primary socialisations will have

inevitably influenced the perceptions of the young people and would have contributed to their journey to the care farm in many forms. However, the relationship between family background and care farm experiences provides an opportunity for further research.

9.5 Summary

This study has illustrated the many ways in which care farming contributes to young people's learning experiences. By listening to the voices of young people aged 13 to 16 years old who attended three different care farms as part of alternative curriculum provision, and the perceptions of staff members, I have addressed the research questions fully (see section 1.5). Drawing on the three distinct fields of health, youth work and education I have created a conceptual model to demonstrate where the most significant elements of a care farm intersect enabling learning to occur. Based on the data and proceeding thematic analysis, the notion of learning was purposely divided into the three areas of learning - learning socially, practically and introspectively. I have made the case that the informal relational discourse evidenced through interactions with the staff, young people and other participants, synergises with the nature-based pedagogy and learning contexts on a care farm providing a catalyst for young people to learn practically, socially and introspectively.

The significant findings of this study have implications for not only how care farms are perceived as invaluable alternative curriculum providers, but also for the mental health and wellbeing of many young people who continue to suffocate in the mainstream schooling system. Realising the potential of care farms to contribute to young people's engagement with learning is critical to enabling many young people to transform their lives away from a vortex of failure, to a haven of accomplishment and pride.

Figure 64: Max resting on the bales at Birch Care Farm

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Figure 65: Wheelbarrowing at Birch Care Farm, Max and John.

Appendix A: Letter to Young People

Date

Dear .....

Thank you for your interest in this study about care farming and learning. This letter tells you a bit more about the project and gives you some important information to think about before you decide whether you wish to participate.

This study has the title of: Care farming, learning and young people. The questions that I am hoping you will be able to help answer are:

1. Why do you attend the care farm?

2. How and in what ways do you learn on care farms, if at all?

3. What do you think of your educational experiences, both on care farms and as part of school?

I really hope that you might be willing to participate in this study. With your permission, I would like to spend some time on the care farm when you are there. This would not be intrusive and at any time you can opt out of the study. I would like to use technology such as an ipad to capture your experiences on the care farm; this will entail photography and videos and will be led by yourself.

I would also like to carry out short interviews with you, during which I will ask you some questions about your experiences of attending a care farm. You are completely free to talk about whatever you want, and there will be no pressure to answer questions if you do not wish to do so. You can withdraw from the study at any time.

With your permission, I would like to audio-record the interviews so that I can listen back to it later. I might want to use some of the words that you have used when I write up reports and papers, but I will make sure that you cannot be personally identified in any of these. The audio-recording will be destroyed as soon as I have had it transcribed (typed up). The transcript will be safely stored so that it cannot be accessed by anyone else.

If you are willing to participate in the study, I need you to sign the consent form (attached) to show that you understand about the aims of the project and that you have volunteered to take part. As you are under 18, I also need to make sure that your parent/guardian is happy for you to participate. If you want to take part, I kindly ask you to talk to your parent/guardian about it and then ask them to sign the parental consent form.

If you wish to know more about the study, please do not hesitate to ask me in person. You can also email me on:

Rachael Fell-Chambers. PhD Student, University of Hull. Email: [redacted]

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project, please contact the Secretary, Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, University of Hull, Cottingham Rd, Hull, HU6 7RX; Tel No [redacted]; fax [redacted].

Thanks so much in advance

Rachael Fell-Chambers

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet for Young People

Name of department: University of Hull - Department for Educational Studies

Title of the study: 'Care farming, learning and young people'

Introduction

Thank you for considering being part of this research project. I am a university student hoping to gather the perspectives of young people attending a care farm and the staff working alongside you. I am also a Youth Worker. The research questions I am hoping to answer through the research are set out below (I have amended slightly so they are easier to read):

1. How and why do young people attend care farms in England?

2. How and in what ways do you learn on care farms in England, if at all?

3. What are your thoughts of your educational experiences, both on care farms and as part of school?

Do you have to take part?

As part of my work, I would like to spend time with you on the care farm. I would like to capture your experiences and talk with you about your time at the care farm and school. We will also be using video and photos to capture your activity.

Participation is voluntary and refusing to participate or withdrawing participation at any stage will not result in you being treated any differently. Any information gathered until that point will not be used and will be destroyed.

What are the potential risks to you taking part?

There are no foreseeable risks.

What happens to the information in the project?

Confidentiality and anonymity will be preserved at all times. No individual names will be used at any time. Data and records will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet in my office. Data will be retained for five years.

What happens next?

If you are happy to be involved in the project, you will be asked to sign a consent form to confirm this. If you do not want them to be involved in the project, thank you for your kind attention.

Once complete, findings will be shared during optional debrief sessions at each care farm location.

Researcher contact details:

Rachael Fell-Chambers
Email: [redacted]
Tel: [redacted]

Supervisor contact details:

Dr. Max Hope
Email: [redacted]

Complaints process:

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project, please contact the Secretary, Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, University of Hull, Cottingham Rd, Hull, HU6 7RX; Tel No [redacted]; fax [redacted].

Appendix C: Consent Form for Participants (interviews)

THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSENT FORM: (*INTERVIEWS)*

I, ……..

of …….

Hereby agree to be a participant in this study to be undertaken by: Rachael Fell-Chambers, and I understand that the purpose of the research is to explore the contribution care farming may have on young people's engagement with learning.

I understand that

1. The aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible risks/hazards of the research study, have been explained to me.
2. I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my participation in such research study.
3. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.
4. Individual results will not be released to any person except at my request and on my authorisation.
5. I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used.

Signature: …….. Date: ……

The contact details of the researcher are:

Rachael Fell-Chambers
Email: [redacted] Tel: [redacted].

The contact details of the secretary to the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee are [redacted], Research Office, Faculty of Education, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX. Email: [redacted] tel. [redacted]

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet for Parents/Carers

Name of department: University of Hull - Department for Educational Studies

Title of the study: 'Care farming, learning and young people'

Introduction

Thank you for considering being part of this research project. I am a doctoral student hoping to gather the perspectives of young people engaging on a care farm and the staff working alongside them. I am also a Youth Worker. The research aims and objectives are set out below:

Research aim:

To explore the contribution care farming may have on young people's engagement with learning.

Research objectives:

1. To provide an understanding as to why young people attend care farms in England.
2. To assess to what extent care farms support young people's learning and in what ways.
3. To explore young people's perceptions of their experiences of attending care farms and of formal education.

I am hoping to answer the following questions:

4. How do young people and care farm providers articulate the reasons for why young people attend care farms in England?
5. How and in what ways do young people learn on care farms in England, if at all?
6. What are young people's perceptions of their educational experiences, both on care farms and as part of formal education?

Do you have to take part?

As part of the investigation I would like to spend time with your son/daughter/dependent whilst they are attending the care farm. I would like to capture their experiences and talk with them about their time at the care farm and school. Participation is voluntary and refusing to participate or withdrawing participation at any stage will not result in

detrimental treatment. Any information gathered until such time will not be used and will be destroyed.

What are the potential risks to your son/daughter in taking part?

There are no foreseeable risks.

What happens to the information in the project?

Confidentiality and anonymity will be preserved at all times. No individual names will be used at any time. Data and records will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet in my office. Data will be retained for five years.

What happens next?

If you are happy for your son/daughter to be involved in the project, you will be asked to sign a consent form to confirm this. If you do not want them to be involved in the project, thank you for your kind attention.

Once complete, findings will be shared during optional debrief sessions at each care farm location.

Researcher contact details:

Rachael Fell-Chambers
Email: [redacted]
Tel: [redacted]

Supervisor contact details:

Dr. Max Hope
Email: [redacted]

Complaints process:

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project, please contact the Secretary, Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, University of Hull, Cottingham Rd, Hull, HU6 7RX; Tel No [redacted]; fax [redacted]

Appendix E: Consent Form for Parents/ Carers

The FACULTY OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSENT ON BEHALF OF A MINOR OR DEPENDENT PERSON

I, …….. of: ……

Hereby give consent for my son / daughter / dependent to be a participant in the study to be undertaken by: Rachael Fell-Chambers.

I understand that the purpose of the research is to explore the contribution care farming may have on young people's engagement with learning.

I understand that

1. the aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible hazards/risks of the research study, have been explained to me.
2. I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my child's/dependant's participation in such research study.
3. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.
4. Individual results **will not** be released to any person including medical practitioners.
5. I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, during the study in which event my child's/dependant's participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained will not be used.

Signature: …….. Date: ……

The contact details of the researcher are:

Rachael Fell-Chambers
Email: [redacted] Tel: [redacted]

The contact details of the secretary to the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee are [redacted], Research Office, Faculty of Education, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX. Email: [redacted] tel. [redacted]

NOTE: The parent or parents, or person(s) having guardianship of the child must sign the consent form.

Appendix F: Image Permission Form

Centre for Educational Studies, Faculty of Education

In compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998, it is necessary to obtain signed permission from the parent or guardian before taking or using a still or moving image of a child. The student who will be taking these images will comply with the following rules:

- The image (s) will only be used for the purpose stated below.
- The full name(s) of the child / children in the image(s) will not be used.
- The image(s) will not be retained for any longer than required, and details of this are given below.

Name of Student	Rachael Fell-Chambers
Programme of Study	PhD Education
Name of School / Setting	

Name of person whose image is taken (or details of class / year group)

Purpose of taking image(s) – give details of precisely how they will be used and how long they will be retained for.

Images will be used for the purpose of the research only. Images chosen by the young people will be used to capture their experiences on the care farm. Images will be included in the final thesis and remain there indefinitely.

Signature of Student	
	Date
Signature of Parent / Guardian (or attach evidence that permission has been granted)	
	Date
Signature of Headteacher / Placement Manager (or attach evidence that permission has been granted)	
	Date
Signature of Programme Director	
	Date

Appendix G: Participant Information Sheet for Care Farm Staff and School Staff

Name of department: University of Hull - Department for Educational Studies

Title of the study: 'Care farming, learning and young people'

Introduction

Thank you for considering being part of this research project. I am a doctoral student hoping to ascertain the perspectives of young people engaging on a care farm and the staff working alongside them. The research aims and objectives are set out below:

Research aim:

To explore the contribution care farming may have on young people's engagement with learning.

Research objectives:

7. To provide an understanding as to why young people attend care farms in England.

8. To assess to what extent care farms support young people's learning and in what ways.

9. To explore young people's perceptions of their experiences of attending care farms and of formal education.

I am hoping to answer the following questions:

10. How do young people and care farm providers articulate the reasons for why young people attend care farms in England?

11. How and in what ways do young people learn on care farms in England, if at all?

12. What are young people's perceptions of their educational experiences, both on care farms and as part of formal education?

Do you have to take part?

As part of the investigation I would like to interview you to gather your perspectives on the research topic. Interviews will take no longer than an hour and will be arranged at a time and location convenient to you. Participation is voluntary and refusing to participate or withdrawing participation at any stage will not result in detrimental treatment. Any information gathered until such time will not be used and will be destroyed.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?

There are no foreseeable risks.

What happens to the information in the project?

Confidentiality and anonymity will be preserved at all times. Data and records will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet in my office. Data will be retained for five years.

What happens next?

If you are happy to be involved in the project, you will be asked to sign a consent form to confirm this. If you do not want to be involved in the project, thank you for your kind attention.

Once complete, findings will be shared during optional debrief sessions at each care farm location.

Researcher contact details:

Rachael Fell-Chambers
Email: [redacted]
Tel: [redacted]

Supervisor contact details:

Dr. Max Hope
Email: [redacted]

Complaints process:

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project, please contact the Secretary, Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, University of Hull, Cottingham Rd, Hull, HU6 7RX; Tel No [redacted]; fax [redacted]

Appendix H: Consent Form for Institutions/ Organisations

The FACULTY OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSENT FORM – For Institutions/Organisations

(to be completed by the person legally responsible)

I, ... of .....

Hereby give permission for ..... to be involved in a research study being undertaken by: Rachael Fell-Chambers and I understand that the purpose of the research is: To explore the contribution care farming may have on young people's engagement with learning and that involvement for the institution means the following:-

I understand that

1. The aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible risks/hazards of the research study, have been explained to me.

2. I voluntarily and freely give my consent for the institution/organisation to participate in the above research study.

5. I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained through this institution/organisation will not be used if I so request.

3. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.

I agree that

4. The institution/organisation MAY / MAY NOT be named in research publications or other publicity without prior agreement.

5. I / We DO / DO NOT require an opportunity to check the factual accuracy of the research findings related to the institution/organisation.

Signature: ..... Date: .....

The contact details of the researcher are:

Rachael Fell-Chambers
Email: [redacted] Tel: [redacted]

The contact details of the secretary to the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee are [redacted], Research Office, Faculty of Education, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX. Email: [redacted] tel. [redacted]

Appendix I: Ethics Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF Hull
Faculty of Arts, Cultures and Education

ETHICAL PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING

PERMISSION TO PROCEED WITH RESEARCH: ETHICAL APPROVAL

Reference Number:	20162017018
Name:	**Rachael Fell-Chambers**
Programme of Study:	**Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**
Research Area/Title:	**Care farming, learning and young people.**
Image Permission Form	N/A
Name of Supervisor:	**N/A**
Date Approved by Supervisor:	**10/08/16**
Chair of Ethics Committee: **Dr Fiona James**	**19/09/16**
Date Approved by Ethics Committee:	**01st November 2016**

Appendix J: Interview schedule for care farm providers

1. What is your role on the care farm?

2. Does your care farm work with young people aged 14 to 16 on alternative curriculum programmes?

3. What are your thoughts on why young people attend care farms instead of mainstream school?

4. How do you think being on a care farm effects a young person?

5. Do you feel young people learn on a care farm and if so, in what ways?

6. Do you think attending a care farm helps young people to reengage in mainstream school?

7. Are there any challenges when hosting a young person on a care farm?

8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX K: Interview schedule for school staff

1. What is your job role?

2. Does your setting refer young people aged 14 to 16 to care farms for alternative curriculum activity?

3. If so, why do you use care farms?

4. What do you see are the benefits for the young person?

5. Do you feel young people learn on a care farm and in what ways?

6. What do you see are the benefits for the school?

7. Do you see any difference in the young person's behaviour and attitude when/if they are in school?

8. Do you think attending a care farm helps young people to reengage in mainstream school?

9. Have you any thoughts on potential future partnerships between care farms and alternative curriculum providers/schools?

10. Is there anything else you would like to add?