

Jamie's Farm Residential

Monday 28th June to Friday 2nd July 2021

On Monday 28th July, 12 children from the Launch Pad (E-ACT Mental Health Hub) set off to Jamie's Farm in Monmouth, for a trip of a lifetime. They experienced opportunities that they would otherwise never have had the chance to experience, leaving at the end of the week inspired and radiating with confidence.



During the week all the children were fully involved in farm life and helped out with the daily tasks of a farm in summer.

This included feeding and cleaning all the different animals daily, milking the cow every morning, helping the farmer shepherd the sheep from the field to the barn for weighing, grooming the horses, caring for the baby chicks, along with many other jobs.

All the children had the opportunity to regularly cook meals for the rest of the group, learning many new skills and helping plant crops in the farm garden. One group of children even made a wormery. Each day the children took part in an exploration which involved the challenge of a hike and exploring the countryside.



Throughout the week every child who experienced the residential was challenged in a number of ways. This meant that they had to call upon the strategies that they had learnt in school to manage a range of difficult emotions which were thrown at them. An enormous benefit from the trip was giving the children opportunities to put the strategies they had learnt into practise, thus giving them the

confidence to realise that the strategies do work and hence building their resilience, vital for when they return to mainstream.



The children had numerous opportunities every day to achieve things that they never thought they would be able to do, or in some cases be trusted to do. I will never forget the look on one boy's face (who has quite a temper), when he was asked to hold a baby chick. The look he gave me was to say: 'What, they are really asking me to do this?' He left the experience knowing that not only had made a difference, but equally being able to see himself as a gentle, caring young man and not the opposite - which is how he regularly

viewed himself. Throughout the week there were countless stories similar to this, but what made it so much more real for the children was that the adults who were important to the farm, i.e. the farmer, was telling them all that they could do it.

All the children who took part in the residential are from back grounds where they have limited opportunities, including not venturing too far away from where they live. For some children they were able to see and experience things that previously for them they had only seen in a book, thus allowing them to further their understanding and support future learning. For one child this was as simple as knowing the



difference between a pig and a sheep! For others knowing where food actually comes from. Things that many children take for granted.

The following are specific examples of the enormous impact that the week's residential had on the children.

One pupil is a Year 3 boy who due to his anxieties is a selective mute in his mainstream school environment. He threw himself into all areas of the farm life and by the end of the week he was chatting away, asking the farmer lots of questions. By the end of the week his confidence had grown so much he was asking other children if they wanted to play a game with him (normally he would just sit and watch). On two other occasions he came and told an adult that he was feeling annoyed. Such an improvement.



Another pupil is a year 4 girl with social communication difficulties, who really struggles to manage her emotions without responding in a physical manner, while at the same time doesn't trust the adults around her to support her.

This particular pupil was in her element being outside all day, rolling around in mud and interacting with the animals. Equally at the same time it gave her space to learn to manage her emotions appropriately. During the whole week we did not have one incident of her becoming dysregulated and on one

occasion she could openly tell an adult that she was feeling aggressive; when the adult suggested she went for a walk to see the chickens, she did. Throughout the week she really saw that the staff working with her understood her needs and that there were small signs of her beginning to open up and trust.



All of the pupils left the farm different children, full of self-confidence in their own abilities and with feelings of self-worth. What has been important is that as we are a term into a new school year, we have seen this self confidence continue with all children, as they now all attend mainstream education full time. All of the children who were chosen to have the support of the Launch Pad, which included the residential to Jamie's Farm, were becoming disengaged with mainstream education due to anxieties and being unable to manage their behaviour.

It was not only the children who benefited hugely from the residential to Jamie's Farm but the staff who attended also gained much. The staff developed an understanding of how the power of the outdoor environment can give children experiences to develop their self-esteem and confidence. You can tell children what their strengths are but what they need is to be put in situations where they can actually experience and identify their strengths for themselves to really believe it.





At the same time staff witnessed how the children learnt about how their emotions and how their behaviour affects others through working with the animals. It was obvious that the children very quickly saw how their feelings were reflected in the animals they were working with. Children learnt how to regulate themselves through the power of holding/stroking animals.

The staff who attended very quickly took on board what they had learnt and started applying this knowledge and understanding back at the Launch Pad. This involved building raised beds and running an After-School Club where the children who

attended planted some crops and after the summer used what they had grown to cook a meal. We would have liked to have the parents involved but unfortunately COVID regulations at the time prevented this from happening, however it is something we would like to develop in the future.

The staff have also incorporated some animals into the Launch Pad including: 2 Guinea Pigs, 2 Giant African Land Snails and Stick Insects. Not quite farm animals but equally important in teaching children about the value of animals and the respect that they need.

We are constantly looking at ways to use the outdoor environment in order to further support children to develop strong mental health as our week at Jamie's Farm really highlighted the importance of this. Therefore this year we have made links with our local community farm and regularly take groups of children to help out, as well as incorporating Forest School activities into the work we do.

