

KNIGHT FARM

Less than ten miles from Exeter is a family care farm which will change the way you think about care, RUTH CLEMENCE writes



Emily and Luke Knight work with the farm helpers to round up the pigs



Feeding the chickens

PHOTOS: MATT AUSTIN

Knight Farm now offer Farming on Prescription where doctors can prescribe time on the farm to help those with mental health issues

Young couple Emily and Luke Knight started up a care farming business to provide a different sort of care for people with learning disabilities or social needs. The 65 acre site in Cadbury, near Exeter, has a number of farm helpers with a range of special needs who are all expected to help get the farm jobs done; feeding and mucking out the animals, gardening and log splitting.

“They’re part of our team; we all do things together. A lot of people don’t seem to know that care farming is a thing that’s available to a wide ability of people. You just think of farming and you think you have to be really quite able in order to do it, and we try and facilitate the fact that as many people as possible can come and do it,” explains Emily.

Emily, a graduate in business management and Luke, a trained NVQ Level 4 care manager run the farm, which is home to around 200 Lleyn sheep, pigs and chickens. The couple started life on the farm with their two children Solomon, four and Rex, two, after winning a competition in Farmers’ Weekly to rent a farm. They beat off stiff competition and ended up living and working on Rixham Farm in the rolling green hills of the Fursdon Estate.

After a lot of hard work and erecting and repairing four kilometres of fencing the couple now run a working farm, as well as their care farm business. The idea was Luke’s, whose uncle Jon has learning disabilities and is partially sighted, but was always looked after and included on the family farm at Ottery St Mary. Luke says: “It’s something I have grown up with and I have seen how it helps. It’s about making them part of society, letting them give something back.”

Knight Farm now offer ‘Farming on Prescription’ where doctors can prescribe time on the farm to help those with mental health issues. Emily says: “It’s designed for people that have been signed off work for whatever reason, whether it’s anxiety, depression, mild to medium mental health illnesses or any other reason which would be aided by an alternative therapy.”

Working closely with a farm in East Anglia called Clinks Care Farm, Emily and Luke have seen how successful Farming on Prescription can be. GPs and mental health workers based in surgeries can refer patients to a care farm one day a week over a 12 week period. Emily explains: “In general it’s been proven that a 12 week programme can get people back to work.”

The couple have also recently started working with troubled teens. “It’s been very enjoyable working with the teenagers. We’ve got a few people that haven’t necessarily got any learning disabilities but they’ve been through the social care system, fallen out of mainstream education and they’re coming to us as an alternative education. We’re working with their support worker to provide them with educational units,” says Emily. Luke adds: “It’s about enabling people to do stuff that we take for granted.” ■

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Luke Knight with the farm helpers