



FARMS FOR CITY CHILDREN

Impact Report

2021 - 2022



Table of Contents

02

Our Framework

03

Our Theory of
Change

04

Introduction from
Chair of the Board of
Trustees and CEO

09

A Year in Numbers

11

News from the
Farms

17

Testimonies from
Beneficiaries

18

Testimonies from
Teachers

19

Looking to our
Future

20

Acknowledgements

Our Framework

Vision

A world where all children and young people benefit from being connected to food, farming and the natural environment.

Mission

Children and young people experience personal growth and develop enhanced transferable life skills through food, farming and outdoor learning activities that connect them with each other and the natural world.

Beliefs

- Poverty of experience is harming children's lives.
- Access to the natural world is a right not a privilege.
- The natural world is inextricably linked to wellbeing.
- Food and farming connect us to the landscape.
- Farming activities and the natural world support physical and emotional recovery from the Pandemic.

Values

- We place beneficiaries at the heart of everything we do.
- We are committed to quality and excellence.
- We embrace diversity and inclusion.
- We nurture creativity and broaden horizons.

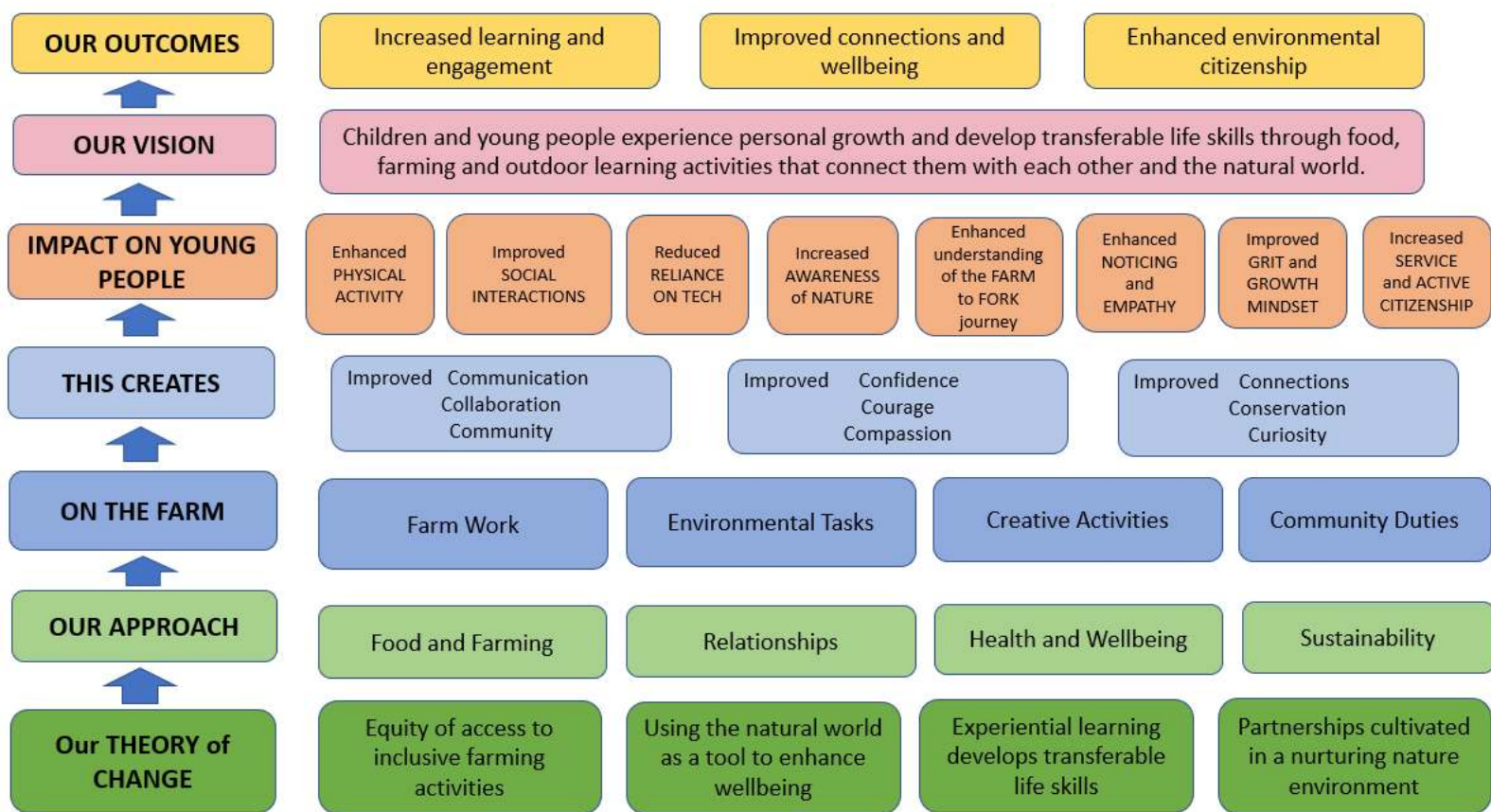
Our 3 Pledges

To increase
learning and
engagement

To improve
connections and
wellbeing

To enhance a sense
of environmental
citizenship

Our Theory of Change



Introduction

Chair of the Board of Trustees – Simon Gregory

In accordance with government guidelines, and as an inevitable consequence of the national lockdown, March 2020 saw Farms for City Children close its three farms, depriving its beneficiaries of a life-enhancing, muck and magic experience.

Eighteen months later, and with the negative impact of the Pandemic being felt most acutely by young people, particularly those living in urban areas, Farms for City Children reopened its doors and welcomed beneficiaries to return with a renewed sense of purpose and steely belief in the therapeutic power of our offer.



We have always known the transformative potential that a week of food, farming and outdoor education can have on a child or young person, but our experience over the past 12 months has reinforced our belief that an immersive week on a farm, connected to nature and a rural landscape as well as enjoying nutritious, healthy food and participating in a team, has a significant role to play in advancing good mental health and wellbeing. For our children, it is a positive experience that they will never forget and one which shapes and influences their lives for the better.

The entire team at Farms for City Children are to be applauded for their grit, agility and resilience in emerging from the most trying period in our 46 year history, with determination, creativity and optimism.





Chief Executive Officer - Donna Marie Edmonds

Our Mission

Farms for City Children exists to remove the barriers that prevent children and young people having meaningful access to the natural world. Through our food, farming, and nature-connected wellbeing offer, we strive to empower the next generation to experience the physical and mental health benefits of being in the countryside, and to see themselves as the custodians of our landscape for generations to come.



We have a moral responsibility to offer opportunities for young people to connect purposefully with the natural world, whether they live in a city, town, village, rural or coastal location. Barriers exist for children across all demographics, but a child is far less likely to have access to a rural experience if they come from a minority ethnic group, have a neuro-diverse profile or are a young person identified as living in poverty.

If the countryside is to be cared for and protected, we must engage those living in all areas to see that they can have a relationship with all that it has to offer. As a charity, we are determined to keep fighting for this equity of access to obliterate the poverty of experience that is currently defining childhood for many millions of children living in the UK.

Impact of our offer

Farms for City Children is the antidote to the negative impact of Covid-19. Sustained periods of lockdown and social isolation, and an over-reliance upon screens and digital relationships, has led to a massive increase in mental health and anxiety needs, unregulated behaviour and disconnection from peers and teachers. The sanctuary of our farms, and the healing, therapeutic offer of working in nature and with animals is well documented, and we have been striving this year to open our farms for more weeks and to reach even more beneficiaries who deserve to know the transformative impact of our offer.

The combined holistic offer of outdoor education activities, with a strong focus on climate education and sustainability, plus the personal and social developments made through profound connections with classmates and accompanying adults, and the health and wellbeing benefits of an immersive week of physical activities, nutritious, locally produced and home-cooked food grown and prepared by the children themselves, results in a nurtured and empowered child, ready to return to school and home with new grit, a growth mindset and a set of valuable transferable life skills.

Children and young people feel a momentous connection to nature, a sense of their own social and moral responsibility to be stewards of our planet, and an emerging feeling of agency in visualising a future for themselves that involves remaining in contact with the countryside and nature beyond their visit.

Teachers report that the impact on them is just as life-changing. Many will experience the week with the same wide-eyed wonder as their pupils, having also been denied access to the countryside in this way throughout their own lives. Teachers regularly feedback that the week stimulates bonds between the children and the adults that endure in the classroom upon return to school. The opportunity to observe pupils liberated from the curriculum and the routines and rules of the school day, is one that is relished by teachers. Others report significant changes to behaviour, emotional reactions and levels of confidence and engagement. Teachers tell us that children are more curious, courageous, and compassionate because of the week on the farm, and these character developments permeate the school and family setting when children return home.

What do children learn?

Days start early and, whilst the cycle of the seasons and vagaries of the weather ensure that each day is different, there is a reassuring routine and structure to life on the farm. A combination of physical farm tasks in tending to the animals and their welfare, maintaining the farms and checking stock is combined with sowing, harvesting, and cooking tasks that anchor the child to an understanding of the field > farm > fork journey. This improves children's food choices, increases their consumption of fresh, locally produced meat, fruit, and vegetables, which can help them develop longer term commitments to leading a healthier life.





A renewed focus on nature nurture is delivered through wellbeing activities to induce greater nature connectedness from long biodiversity walks, birdwatching on the coast and the riverside, beekeeping sessions, sustainable arts and crafts and mindfulness sessions, storytelling, poetry, and astronomy. All of which enable us to fulfil our three pledges:

- To increase learning and engagement
- To improve connections and wellbeing
- To enhance a sense of environmental citizenship

Beneficiaries learn to be mindful and to notice their environment. They learn to take responsibility for themselves, each other, and work in harmony with the animals and the land. Free from digital intrusion, their analogue imaginations are liberated, and they enjoy creative activities, storytelling sessions by the fire pit (sometimes with our founder Sir Michael Morpurgo) and inventing and playing games together, interacting in a way that only children can – utterly absorbed and with total abandon!

Being on the farm gives each child or young person that space to just be. With reduced stress levels, increased freedom and more meaningful interactions and connections, beneficiaries return home with greater resilience and an enormous sense of pride as a result of being a “Farmer for a Week.”

Farms for City Children knows that our week empowers active citizenship in our beneficiaries. Alumni contact us to report that their relationship with nature has been sustained from their visit on the farm as a child into adulthood. We know that the impact of providing these experiences in schools means that we will give children and young people the agency to deal with the climate emergency and loss of biodiversity. We will be supporting them to ‘grow up greener’ and contribute to a sustainable future economy.

In the short term, we know that children return happy and fulfilled, walking a little taller with knowledge, skills, and expertise that they did not have when they set off from home. They will never forget the memories they make, the relationships they cultivate or the way that they felt about themselves as they flourished through a week of “muck and magic” at Farms for City Children.

Our new team and our new strategy

After two very traumatic years during the Pandemic, which saw our farms close, we emerged determined in September 2021 to reopen all farms to children across the UK, with a restructured staff team, a new CEO, and a re-energised ambition to open the farms for bookings for 40 weeks of the year.

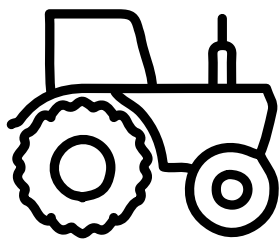
This shift in strategy was a direct response to the perceived level of need post-Pandemic where schools and groups working with children and young people across the country had been prohibited in engaging with outdoor group learning activities since early 2020. The charity believes that by operating for more weeks a year, we can invite a greater number of beneficiaries to the farms in term time and now out of school hours.

This enables Farms for City Children to increase its reach in society as an agency supporting the wellbeing of children and young people. Operating for 120 weeks a year (across 3 farms) allows us to diversify beneficiary groups beyond the standard offer of maintained schools. This strategy allows us to be even more inclusive, working with special educational needs (SEN) specialist centres and groups, children in the care system (LAC – looked after children) with Virtual Schools, target groups within local authorities, young carers, military families, football associations, youth clubs, and with health care trusts.

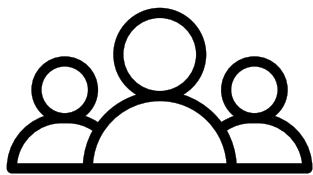
It also allows us to extend the age group that we can work with up to 25, and we have actively sought partnership with community groups that can bring us an older demographic. The new strategy has inducted a partnership with the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, and we now welcome Gold Award applicants to use our farms for completion of their challenges. Our pilot bookings have been an immense success and we are excited about how the charity can serve the needs of these diverse beneficiary groups in 2022/23 as we fully roll out the strategy.



A Year in Numbers



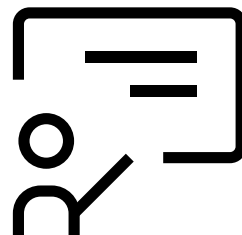
3 farms



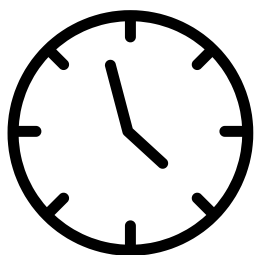
50 staff



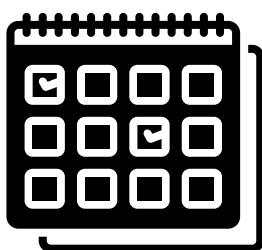
2753 young
beneficiaries



334 teacher
beneficiaries



2095 hours of
activities provided



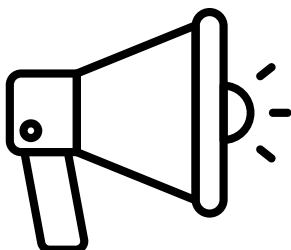
14 distinct
activities in
the working
week



400 days of
activities provided on
the farms



68 schools



12 new
schools



56 loyal
returning
schools



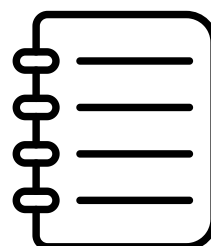
5 new groups



18 regular
volunteers



26 corporate
volunteers



4 work experience
volunteers

Who are our beneficiaries?



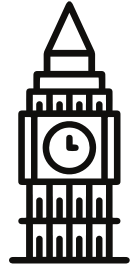
75% of beneficiaries come from areas of high deprivation



62% of beneficiaries are entitled to Free School Meals and Pupil Premium funding



Beneficiaries visit from 16 counties across the UK



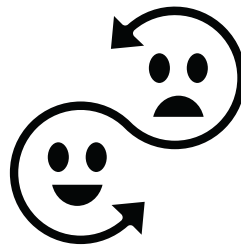
48 beneficiary groups visiting from Greater London



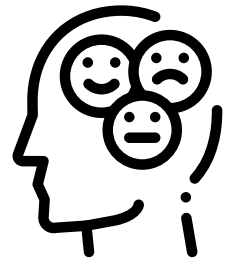
65% of beneficiaries have a diagnosed autistic spectrum condition



52% of beneficiaries have speech, language or communication needs



67% beneficiaries have social or emotional challenges



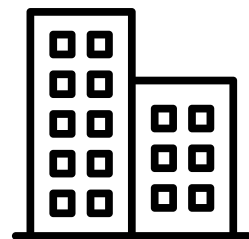
41% beneficiaries have an emotional or behavioural difficulty



Over 60% beneficiaries have minority ethnic heritage



131 beneficiaries from diverse group bookings



75% school beneficiaries come from urban areas

News from the Farms

September 2021 - August 2022

Nethercott House

Autumn

Autumn at Nethercott House was an abundance of harvesting sessions with the children delivering volumes of produce to sell at our food stall in Hatherleigh. Apple picking, juice making, and three new cooking sessions added by our Kitchen Manager increased the field > fork understanding of where food comes from. While our volunteer Pat Brown developed the apiary to prepare Nethercott House to commence beekeeping in the Spring, biodiversity walks into Iddesleigh and night walks to learn about bats and discuss astronomy were popular with the children. Hundreds of trees were planted on the banks of the river Torridge by the children maximising a mass donation from The Woodland Trust and we launched a renewed breeding programme with our rare/at risk Large Black pigs.





Spring

With the impact of the Omicron variant threatening provision delivery again, Nethercott House forged forwards with clearing, weeding, and applying manure to the garden beds in the walled garden, developing volumes of produce in the greenhouse and polytunnels and offering tea infusion sessions to explore the wellbeing benefits of botanicals grown in the garden. Storm Eunice in February caused significant damage to infrastructure, but work continued with incubating eggs from our purebred Buff Orpingtons and hybrid Marans - to create a beautiful dark egg laying hen, multiple new litters of our Large Black pigs being born and bottle rearing orphaned lambs from neighbouring farms. A wassail of the orchards with visiting school children was complemented by two media events with a crew filming an episode of BBC's Escape to the Country and a photo shoot from HELLO! Magazine.



Summer

In the season of births, visiting children witnessed our first caesarean birth of a calf at Bridgetown – amazing highlight! The produce harvested in the autumn is defrosted and turned into delicious recipes by the children and new produce in the gardens yield cauliflowers, new potatoes, spring cabbage, onions, leeks, lettuces, strawberries, and other soft fruits. Surplus rhubarb is picked, cleaned, tied, tagged, and sold on the food stall in Hatherleigh by the children and jam making sessions are a hit! Produce from the garden is now sold in our shop for the children to take cuttings home and continue their growing journeys back in the city. Most exciting to report is that the children have enjoyed their first beekeeping sessions at Nethercott – a real asset in discussing the vital role these pollinators play in the entire ecological chain of being and a transferable educational experience to build on back in the school classroom.

Lower Treginnis

Autumn

Lower Treginnis re-opens in the autumn with the challenge of harvesting huge volumes of produce. The children sell the food as part of the Open Food Network in our Farm Shop, learning how to prepare, weigh, measure, and price the items and complete transactions with customers. Fantastic work experience! Building up livestock numbers again with a new breeding programme across all stock is a priority after such a long period of closure, and it is a delight to consume meat and fruit and vegetables produced on the farm -the first for a long time. Tending to a new milking goat and completing maintenance to the incubation rooms to allow more handling of chicks is enjoyed by the children in addition to the offer of working with pigs, donkeys, and poultry. Coastal walks and watching the seal pups delight the beneficiaries as do learning about the puffins on Ramsey Island. New telescopes donated to the farm allow for evening astronomy sessions which are a hit.





Spring

With Omicron variant tearing through schools, particularly in Wales, causing cancellation and anxiety, the farm moved to day visits with local youth groups to ensure the offer could still be enjoyed by children even in these challenging circumstances. Sessions taken into local Pembrokeshire schools when children could not visit e.g., Key Stage 1 session with identifying vegetables, labeling, and boxing eggs for the shop, planting sweet peas and broad beans, showed how Lower Treginnis could pivot their offer to remain operational. New groups in the form of a BTEC agriculture group visited with 14-18-year-olds allowing work to be completed linked to their studies and the Marlowe's Group (children living in the care system) came for cooking sessions in the kitchen and sustainable artwork sessions on coastal walks. February brought Storm Eunice and it battered the Lower Treginnis farm. Children were involved in all kinds of repairs and a major tree planting initiative with 500 trees donated by The Woodland Trust being planted. Incubation successes enable the farm to have point of lay birds to sell and we welcomed 3000 new lambs born this spring for the children to witness at every visit throughout the season.



Summer

The impact of abattoirs not taking pigs for culling, means we must give away some of our pigs. This provides powerful narrative for the children around food wastage and sustainability of the food production industry. The birds were liberated from “flockdown”, and the farms feel free range again. The clearing of the polytunnel, compost barrowing and planting tomatoes and strawberries and other soft fruits for the kitchen provide some wonderful horticulture sessions and a wildflower session introduced is a huge success with children picking and arranging the flowers. A new enrichment session is launched by our SEMH (social, emotional, mental health) specialist in response to the growing needs of our beneficiaries to have nature nurture wellbeing activities on the farm. Finally, new groups arrive at Lower Treginnis for work during the summer vacation for the first ever time including “Fourteen” a group from East London Mosque and Birmingham Health Trust and Birmingham FC bring a group of vulnerable young people with complex needs supported by their outreach programme.

Wick Court

Autumn

Our year at Wick Court started with a complete overhaul of the garden following two years of it being unattended. With seeds from the other farms, the children started the hard work of bringing the garden back to life. New horse grooming sessions with two new ponies donated to the farm prove a hit as do the pig weighing sessions which offer opportunities to discuss the economics of pig keeping in an industry under threat. A loaned Gloucester Bull is brought in to increase rare heritage breed stock and conversations around rare breeds with the children are a result. The children move all the birds inside and secure new spaces to prepare for “flockdown” and the threat of avian flu. An introduction to “Wellbeing Wednesday” with sessions of birdwatching, biodiversity walks, willow weaving and mindfulness activities in nature add a new dimension to our food and farming offer.





Spring

New seasonal tasks are on offer for the children including willow coppicing and weaving, oak planting, fire lighting, kindling collecting and wood chip path maintenance. A new polytunnel is delivered for the garden, fences are repaired, beds dug, and a new greenhouse erected to rejuvenate the garden neglected throughout the Pandemic closure. Lamb halter training proves to be a hugely popular activity and the horse grooming sessions become more of a therapeutic wellbeing task in our holistic programme and less a physical “farm task” because of the impact the equine nurture has on beneficiaries. A new boar is purchased, and Wick Court successfully produces halal lamb and beef for Nethercott House and Lower Treginnis and welcomes an Imam from Gloucester Mosque, supporting FfCC with further adapting the offer for Muslim beneficiaries. Insect walks to explore biodiversity, owl watching and bat watching sessions and the beekeeping sessions are fully opened with our volunteers Pat and Ted.



Summer

The garden is flourishing at Wick Court because of the energy of our Gardener and team of volunteers, and it offers a bounty of cauliflower, leeks, courgettes, tomatoes, potatoes, grapes, berries, with enough produce for the children to set up a food stall for the local community as part of the Open Food Network. Cooking sessions continue to utilise all produce from the garden, and some interesting new recipes emerge e.g., nettle spanakopita and new salad dressings are developed by the children experimenting with flavours. Sadly, Mr Morgan our pony passes away – the children were bereft – but again prompting educational discussions around the cycle of life. Repair work is always ongoing on a heritage farm and with a historic house, and the moat, the front door, leaded windows, and the pole barn damaged in Storm Eunice all receive attention. Open Farm Sunday – the first open event for the charity in over 2 years – sees almost 400 visitors coming back to see our work and on July 6th we welcomed our Patron HRH Princess Royal for a visit to Wick Court. The summer season sees group bookings in the holidays coming to the charity for the first time.



Testimonies

from our Beneficiaries

"I really enjoyed my time at the farm and would recommend this to anyone and everyone - thank you!"

Year 6 Pupil, St Philomena's Primary, Wick Court

"I want to be a farmer now!"

Year 5 Pupil, Chesterton Primary, Wick Court

"Everyone feels like family here!"

Year 6 Pupil, Orchard Vale School, Nethercott House

"When I found out I wouldn't have my phone I thought it would be hell but I really enjoyed it. I liked being with nature."

Year 6 Pupil, Harris Primary Academy (Orpington), Nethercott House

"Everyone tried something new and tried their best at it. They were really supportive in helping us through our fears and pushing us out of our comfort zones."

Year 6 Pupil, Granton Primary, Lower Treginnis

"I used to be afraid anytime I went to the park when I would be playing in the grassy bit, and there would be tonnes of dogs around, big dogs, and some of them would start barking. It would get me afraid sometimes. Now that I've done the pig weighing, it just makes me feel less scared about that."

Year 5 Pupil, Kelvin Grove, Wick Court

"Loved the new experiences: The quiet, hearing an owl and watching the bats at night."

Year 6 Pupil, St Thomas More's, Nethercott House

"The things I will remember is EVERYTHING! I enjoyed every minute of every day. All the lovely heart warming farmers were really helpful and really kind. The great opportunities I had with the animals were really surprising. I will never forget my time here."

Year 6 Pupil, Granton Primary, Lower Treginnis

Testimonies

from our Teachers

"We saw a huge improvement from Monday to Friday in our children. More confident, smiling, laughing, playing and having the opportunity to just 'be children.'"

S. Cox, Leamore Primary
Wick Court

"Preparing and eating food from the garden, from identifying and harvesting it within the farms garden makes meal times an important activity. Taking responsibility for the produce gives children a new level of understanding and appreciation."

R. Keast, Yeo Valley
Nethercott House

"Thank you for another wonderful week of Muck and Magic."

A. Pais, Kelvin Grove Primary
School, Nethercott House

"Every aspect of the week supported learning, raised self esteem and enriched our pupils lives. I can say with confidence that the children will remember the experience for the rest of their lives."

D Hall, Harris Primary Academy
(Crystal Palace),
Lower Treginnis

"Almost every task provided an opportunity for teamwork and collaboration in a time when communication and socialisation may have been impacted (post Covid)"

M. Wright, Holbeach Primary,
Wick Court

"Lots of children who tend to struggle or can be overlooked in the classroom have had the chance to shine. They have grown in confidence. This is a once in a lifetime experience for them all."

C. MacCormick, Eleanor Palmer
Primary, Wick Court

"Children had the opportunity to learn a lot about themselves; particularly the enjoyment they gained from hard work, and realizing how much they could achieve."

P. Jones, Harris Primary Academy
(Kent House),
Lower Treginnis

"Children have thrived in the fresh country air. Life affirming and life changing! Thank you."

I. Field, Granton Primary,
Wick Court



Looking to our Future

With an ambitious new Business Plan launching to welcome even more beneficiaries and open for even more weeks of the year, Farms for City Children is committed to the next chapter in our constantly evolving story. The significant development of partnerships in the last year has allowed us to take a seat at the table of a number of national working parties and strategy groups around food, farming, wellbeing and children's health initiatives, and on campaigns to secure funding in schools for outdoor learning and nature connected activities.

Ensuring that our brand is communicated effectively has resulted in an increase in media activity this year with plans to deliver more webinars, podcasts and to take an active role in keynote speaking and workshop delivery at conferences. A refreshed visual identity is on the horizon, as is an announcement about new Ambassadors and Patrons to advocate for the interest of the charity, ensuring that our staffing, governance and patronage better reflect the diversity of our beneficiary groups. This brings with it wonderful opportunities for commercial growth on our three farms, ensuring that the assets of the farms can be utilised to serve more beneficiary groups and secure the financial future of the organisation.

Collaborations with new funders will allow the charity to be a key player in national outdoor learning strategy work and we are excited to be part of the OWL collaboration with the Ernest Cook Trust, to name just one of the exciting new initiatives launching in September 2022. Developing land at Nethercott House in Devon, to have a more sustainable and regenerative offer with a strong focus on biodiversity and agroforestry, reveals huge potential for diversification of our offer and for more partnerships with colleagues working across climate education and sustainability.

As we continue to welcome groups supported by third sector community-based organisations, we know that 2022-2023 will be the third year where our reach extends far beyond relationships with schools. Measuring the impact of this work with a MRes student from Harper Adams University, funded by the Worshipful Company of Butchers, will deliver a compelling piece of evidence about the impact of our offer on children, young people and their accompanying adults across all three farms.

Bouncing back from the Pandemic and forced closure has been traumatic, but Farms for City Children is more resilient, more agile and more optimistic than ever before. Our future is bright, and we look forward to reporting on all the successes in due course.



Acknowledgements

This year has seen a significant increase in partnerships with funders, donors, third sector colleagues, social enterprises, livery companies, community groups and schools.

We could not have re-opened and re-launched Farms for City Children without these valued friends and partners and the continued support and care of long-established relationships with multiple Trusts and Foundations. We are excited to have onboarded new partners in funding, third sector networks, and across the educational and social care sector to help us have an even greater impact in 22/23.

Our thanks and appreciation go to every individual, company, trust and foundation who have given so generously in 21/22: you have truly enabled thousands of children and young people to reap the benefit of spending a week at one of our farms.



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