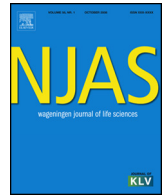




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

NJAS - Wageningen Journal of Life Sciences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/njas



What does care farming provide for clients? The views of care farm staff

Dr. Ann Hemingway, Dr. Caroline Ellis-Hill, Dr. Elizabeth Norton*

Faculty of Health and Social Sciences Bournemouth University, 17-19 Christchurch Road, Bournemouth, Dorset BH1 3LG, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 September 2014
Received in revised form
15 September 2016
Accepted 15 September 2016
Available online xxx

Keywords:

Care farm
Contact with nature
Autonomy
Well-being
Personal growth

ABSTRACT

Care farming in the UK can help the agricultural community to remain viable and facilitate public interaction with the natural environment. It can also be therapeutic because it can address a range of public health and service provision issues by engaging people in farming activities and improving their health, social and educational circumstances. This paper presents the findings from a UK qualitative study exploring what care farming staff feel are the aims and potential outcomes of the experience they provide with their clients. Fifteen care farming staff were interviewed, using a semi-structured interview schedule. In summary the study findings show staff perceived that the care farm offered a homely, supportive environment where people can experience nature and sustainable food production. They perceived the care farm to be a place that provides an inclusive environment conducive to clients' personal growth; it enables them to connect with themselves, others and nature and to develop autonomy. People can be themselves at the care farm where they have the opportunity to learn about themselves and nature. We consider how the issues care farm staff identified are linked with well-being theory.

© 2016 Royal Netherlands Society for Agricultural Sciences. Published by Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

This initial exploratory study was designed to explore the beliefs and values of Care Farm staff regarding the focus of their work and of a broader concept of health, particularly focused on promoting well-being. At a strategic level more evaluation studies are required in order to validate care farming as a public health intervention and in relation to health policy [15]. Although this is a qualitative study with limitations in terms of generalisation, it is the first UK, qualitative study of staff perceptions of what a care farm offers clients and it is anticipated the findings will inform a more robust exploration of the impact of Care Farming on well-being of clients and staff in the future.

Care farming is defined as: "the therapeutic use of farming practices" [3]. In the UK and other parts of Europe care farming (or social farming [16]) has been identified as having the potential to provide health, social care and educational benefits through farming activities [3]. Care farming is used to help to improve the physical health and mental of clients [18] and it has the capability to address a range of public health and service provision issues related to the

education system, prisons and health and social care. Furthermore it may also assist the agricultural community to remain viable and facilitate public interaction with the natural environment [16]. This has been acknowledged as important to the public's health [9].

In the UK there appears to be an increasing awareness by health and social care providers, policy makers and the general public, of a broader concept of health, one that includes well-being and quality of life [8]. Well-being has been seen as important in relation to policy and has been defined as including a positive social, physical and mental state as well as individuals feeling purposeful and able to contribute to society (UK Whitehall Well-being Working Group 2006, cited in Walker and John [23]). Hine et al. [15] have suggested that this wider conception of health means that there is scope for green spaces (including farmland) to contribute health and social care provision.

Ecotherapy can be termed 'greencare' [18] and the scope of such care includes care farming [14]. A recent report by Mind [18] has summarised evidence from a range of studies which have evaluated 'Ecotherapy'. Ecotherapy is defined by Mind [18], p4) as: "an intervention that improves mental and physical health and well-being by supporting people to be active outdoors, doing gardening, growing food or doing environmental conservation work". Care farms can provide ecotherapy activity and the evidence shows that it can improve clients' mental and physical health, help them in the tran-

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: ahemingway@bournemouth.ac.uk (A. Hemingway), cehill@bournemouth.ac.uk (C. Ellis-Hill), lnorton@bournemouth.ac.uk (E. Norton).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.njas.2016.09.001>

1573-5214/© 2016 Royal Netherlands Society for Agricultural Sciences. Published by Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

sition of gaining skills and jobs and engage people who might not access more traditional health – related services [18].

In 2012 there were 180 care farms in the UK [1] and across Europe the number of care farms per country varies being most numerous in the Netherlands, followed by Norway [15]. There is also variation in how health and social care organisations link with care farms and the support structures that exist to support them. Whilst some countries' care farms have formal backing this is not the case in the UK. Here care farming is a relatively recent notion [15] possibly explaining the lack of current, formal support. UK care farms can have affiliations with organisations, be privately run, be in cities or rural areas and be based on different forms of activity and husbandry [1]. The range of organisations referring people to care farms is extensive and clientele include people with learning difficulties, disenfranchised youth and those with mental health problems [1].

Issues that are impacting on the recognition of care farming as an effective public health intervention in the UK include lack of funding, lack of policy and lack of evidence about the benefits of care farming as a health enhancing intervention [15,16]. There can also be a view by authorities that care farming is 'unproven' and not conventional [16].

In order to understand why care farming may be successful it is important to understand the social and psychological processes involved. Some insight has been gained through qualitative studies based in the Netherlands which have sought the perspectives of clients and care farmers about their experiences of working on a care farm, for example Elings and Hassink [10] used focus group interviews with care farm clients to explore what working on a green care farm meant to them. The study participants had histories of mental health or addiction problems. The researchers found that although physically tiring, the care farm work was perceived by clients to be satisfying and it provided a purpose and structure for their days. Clients who had addiction history were able to focus on something other than their addiction. They also experienced feelings of self-respect and improved esteem in an environment where they could be themselves and were accepted by others. The experience enabled people with mental health issues to learn about themselves, to accept themselves and to develop self-confidence. The care farm offered a 'safe' place to practice being part of a community, and was a place where they were not judged; instead it was one where they were respected, they belonged and felt they were accepted.

Later in 2010, Hassink et al. identified a lack of knowledge about client perspectives on care farms in the Netherlands and they carried out a qualitative pilot study that included the views of 41 care farm clients about the qualities of care farms. In the research 33 care farmers and 27 people from care institutions linked with the care farms were interviewed. The care farmers and people from care institutions were asked about rationale for sending clients to the farm and their views about what would be valuable for them there. Findings derived from the research with the care farmers related to themes as follows: *community* (care farms seen as safe and homely places where clients are accepted and respected); *attitudes of farmers* (farmers seeing the person and developing relationships with them); *non-care context* (the farm being a 'normal life' context – not linked to client problems – a context where farmers have freedom to act independently of protocols); *work* (activities being real and useful); *the green environment* (provision of outside, spacious and quiet environs (the latter for clients to withdraw to if they wish)). The research with the clients indicated that they valued being part of the farm community through feeling valued, experiencing non-judgemental attitudes of the farmer, working at their own pace, experiencing the variety of activities and contact with nature, caring for animals and the structure participation offered them.

In the UK Hine et al. [14] carried out a mixed methods health benefit study that explored the impact of care farm experiences on the health and well-being of clients. Overall conclusions were that care farm work had the potential to increase clients' self-esteem, their feelings of being more active, energetic and relaxed and to reduce feelings of depression, confusion, anger and tiredness.

Whilst some of the studies cited above [13,10,14] have sought care farmers' perspectives of the impact of care farming on their clients it appears that only one study in the Netherlands [11] has solely explored the perceptions of farmers in this respect. In their qualitative study Ferwerda-van Zonneveld et al. [11], gleaned the perspectives of 7 care farmers in order to specifically appraise what meets the needs of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), the part the care farm animals played in meeting their needs and what the concerns of the farmers might be. Findings included that the farmers perceived their farms to offer children a safe space to play, a sense of routine and the opportunity to be quiet if they wished. Findings also included that farmers could be a link between the client, carers and care providers. Farm animals were perceived as stimulating and motivating for the children. They also provided the children with social support and enabled them to gain trust, tell stories, make contact, change their behaviours and to get over fear. Whilst farmers perceived the space, rhythm and peace their farms offered as positive, they were concerned about their personal lack of knowledge about ASD and related behavioural problems. This was because it could lead to negative experiences for the farmer and ultimately the client.

The studies above have highlighted aspects of care farming but have not linked experience to a theoretical base. This study will differ from the ones above and be the first of its kind attempting to define key areas which are felt to be influenced by attending the Care Farm which can then be linked with well-being theory.

2. Methodology

Following a literature review on the nature of care farming in the UK, the aim of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore staff's perceptions of what they felt their care farm provided for their clients and to see if or how their thoughts linked to wellbeing theory. The methodology underpinning this study was based on a narrative approach [21] focusing on a thematic analysis of the stories created with care farm staff regarding their role, what they felt the care farm provided for their clients, and the overall aim of the farm.

One centre was approached to take part in the research as we wanted to understand the social ethos of one site – seeing it from a variety of perspectives in order to gain a deep understanding of the perceived social processes within a specific context. These data would inform us as to if/how processes were linked to wellbeing theory and would allow a strong basis to develop research into other sites.

The care farm was situated in the South of England, a farm of around 1000 acres, providing opportunities to many different client groups such as individuals living with autism or dementia, young people and families and school children. The farm itself is a charity and accepts clients from charities, local authorities, medical practitioner referrals and self-referral and is funded via a variety of organisations either directly or through bids for funding which are undertaken on an on-going basis.

Following discussions with the care farm manager approval was sought and gained from the University ethics committee. Individual Centre staff were invited to a presentation about the study at the Centre and were provided with information sheets and time to consider their involvement. It was highlighted that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that if they did not want to take

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5760546>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5760546>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)