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**Article:**

Murray, Jenni, Coker, Joyce F. and Elsey, Helen (2019) Care farming: Rehabilitation or punishment? A qualitative exploration of the use of care farming within community orders. *Health and Place*. 102156. ISSN: 1873-2054

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2019.102156>

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## Care farming: Rehabilitation or punishment? A qualitative exploration of the use of care farming within community orders



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### 1. Introduction

Community-based sentences for offenders can include spending time at a care farm (CF). A care (or social) farm is part of a commercial farm or agricultural landscape, used to promote mental and physical health through normal farming activity (Hine, 2008). Activities vary across farms but broadly include traditional farming work, horticulture/land maintenance work, animal-based activities and other work (such as meal preparation, camping, tractor driving). The types of activities offered depend on the origins of the farm (ie an existing farm that has diversified or a farm set up specifically for the purposes of care farming) and the service users. Service users of CFs can include those with autism, learning and physical disabilities, dementia, mental ill-health, disaffected youth, people with substance misuse and offenders (Bragg, 2014; Murray et al., 2016). In the UK, most CFs provide care for those with learning difficulties, with very few taking in adult offenders. The number of CFs has been growing, particularly in Europe, with the Netherlands having the most (around 1,000) and other countries such as the UK, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Ireland and Spain each having between 100 and 900 farms (Di Lacova and O'Connor, 2009; Elings et al., 2011). Funding for CFs comes from a variety of sources: charitable and private sector donations and schemes, contracts with local authorities and health care organisations, probation services and through income generated from the sale of farm produce.

In our previous work, we conducted a mixed methods systematic review of the impacts of CFs to identify the mechanisms by which care farming might work for various service user groups (Elsey et al., 2018a). Based on the evidence from the review and guided by the Medical Research Council concepts to evaluate complex interventions (Moore et al., 2015), we developed a theory-based logic model (Fig. 1) (Elsey et al., 2018a). The model attempts to describe how the experience of being within the CF setting, interacting with other services users and the farmer, in work activities, brings positive individual benefits that may translate to measureable outcomes. The measureable outcomes are those that have been reported in quantitative studies while the mechanisms and process outcomes are those that have been

suggested by several supporting theoretical frameworks and reported by service users in the qualitative literature (see Elsey et al., 2018a for more details). The theoretical frameworks and philosophies embraced by CFs are numerous, including for example, psycho-evolutionary theory, salutogenesis, attention restoration theory, and attachment theory (Antonovsky, 1987; Bowlby and Ainsworth, 1992; Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Ulrich, 1983). These reported theories reflect, in part, the varying needs of the service user groups, thus multiple theories and philosophies for care farming may be highly appropriate. Most of the evidence informing the logic model is derived from studies in the fields of mental ill-health and substance misuse with limited evidence from offenders in probation (Marshall and Wakeham, 2015). However the mechanisms of effect identified in the model show clear areas of overlap with desistance theories. For example developing social relationships, feelings of belonging, non-judgement, and being valued and respected are key mechanisms within the logic model that align with social re-integration within desistance theory. This overlap persists across the spectrum of desistance theories including building human relationships, opportunities for reflection and change (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986; Farrall and Bowling, 1999) developing self-efficacy (Maruna, 2001; McCulloch, 2005; McNeill, 2006) and social capital by learning and applying new skills to develop a new more positive identity (Laub and Samson, 1993; Maruna, 2001; Giordano et al., 2002; Farrall and Calverley, 2006; McNeill et al., 2012). Thus although the available evidence suggests that CFs have the potential, via these mechanisms, to impact on recidivism, there is a lack of empirical evidence on the impacts CFs for offenders.

The Ministry of Justice has expressed a desire to involve the Third Sector in the rehabilitation of offenders (CPA, 2017) and this could include CFs. However within the current context of Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) it is unclear how probation services are using CFs across England and the extent to which CFs are able to accept commissions to support rehabilitation of offenders.

The aims of the current qualitative study were to explore the experiences of care farmers, offenders and probation staff working in and with CFs to a) inform the development of the logic model specifically

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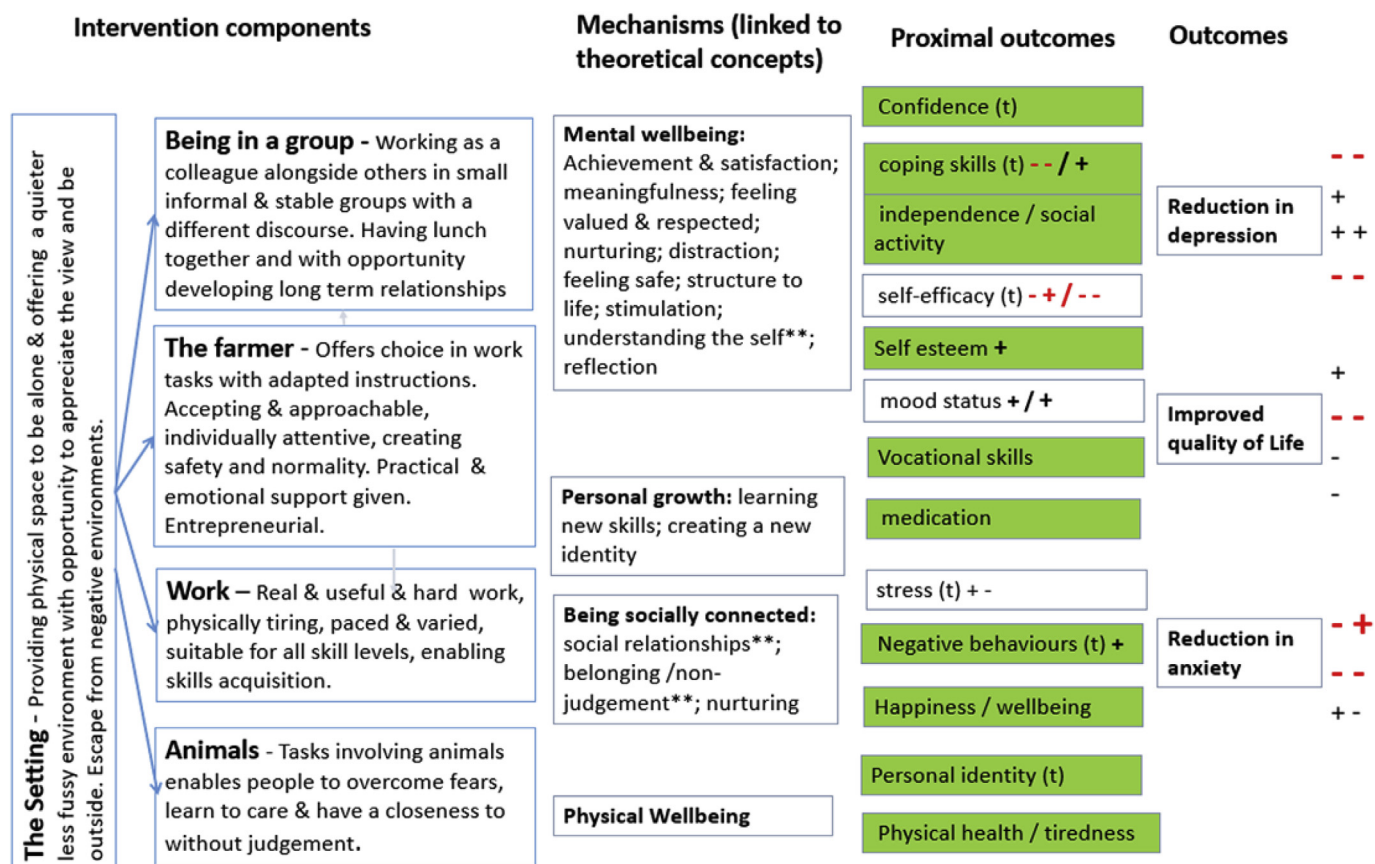
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2019.102156>

Received 22 November 2018; Received in revised form 3 May 2019; Accepted 18 June 2019

Available online 10 July 2019

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t= theory based; green coloured proximal outcomes equates to evidence from qualitative literature; all mechanisms come from the qualitative findings \*\* mechanisms that were most frequently found and with greatest spread across studies; Red and black symbols = quantitative evidence where - is no significant difference and + is significant difference. Red = evidence from the two RCTs. Two symbols beside each other = different time points within the same study

Fig. 1. Care farm logic model (Elsey et al., 2018a)

for offenders and b) understand how probation services currently use care farming for offenders.

2. Methods

2.1. Sampling and recruitment

We conducted this research as part of a larger feasibility study to explore the cost effectiveness of care farming for improving quality of life and reducing reoffending in those undertaking a community sentence (Elsey et al., 2014; Elsey et al., 2018b). This involved working with three centres (termed 1, 2, and 3) in England, each of which comprised a probation service and their respective CFs. For the purposes of this qualitative study, we also engaged a further two CFs (termed Centres 4 and 5) but, due to resource restrictions in the study, not their related probation services. We aimed to purposively sample offenders who had spent time at their local CFs as part of their community sentence based on differences by gender, age range, employment status and responses to the quantitative questionnaires within our pilot study (Elsey et al., 2018b). Probation staff, who were involved in allocating offenders to local projects including CFs, were also sampled. Care farmers from the five farms were invited to participate. We used a range of face to face, letter, telephone, and mobile texting to make initial contact. All participants were given an information sheet and asked to sign a consent form. Interviews were conducted by three researchers (JM, ZR, RL) at CFs and probation service offices. Interviews lasted up to one and a half hours. We developed interview guides for each participant group based on theories of desistance (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986; Farrall and Calverley, 2006; Farrall and Bowling,

1999; Laub and Samson, 1993; Maruna, 2001, Lebel et al., 2008) and green care (i.e. nature based interventions) (Berget, 2006; Boardman, 2003; Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Kolb et al., 2001; Lebel, 2003; Peacock et al., 2007; Sempik and Spurgeon, 2006, Hine et al., 2009) and our logic model (Elsey et al., 2014). The guides included questions on what the CF aimed to achieve, the experience of being on a farm, the rehabilitation of offenders, the allocation process and how care farming fitted with the aims of probation.

2.2. Analytic process

We applied a theoretical approach to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) but were open to new potential themes not represented by the theories. Our analytic framework was based on theories of desistance and the components identified in our systematic review and summarised in our logic model for care farming (Fig. 1). Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by a member of the team not involved in the interviewing. For our analysis we (JM, HE, ZR, JC) individually read a selection of transcripts and then discussed potential codes and key observations. We used multiple coders to code the transcripts. Codes that were repeated across transcripts or appeared to be linked were grouped into initial themes and sub-themes. To understand potential relationships between themes we constructed visual maps. The themes were then reviewed against the original coded data and then against the dataset as a whole to ensure each theme represented a coherent story fitting within the aims of our study. During the process we discussed the emerging codes and findings with the wider research team. We looked for deviant cases comparing across probation services and CFs.

### 2.3. Informing the logic model

The themes were compared with the descriptions for each of the intervention components and mechanisms within the existing general logic model derived from our systematic review. This firstly involved extracting detailed descriptions for the components and mechanisms for the logic model from our systematic review findings (Elsey et al, 2018a) and placing them on a grid. We then extracted any available descriptions that related specifically to offenders at CFs into a separate grid. We aligned the two grids side by side to enable us to retain complete descriptions for intervention components and mechanisms whilst also enabling us to identify contrasting descriptions and gaps within the probation grid. We then began the process of translating the contents of the themes from the qualitative study into the offender grid. This was an iterative process moving back and forth between the content of the themes and the grid to ensure that findings representing possible intervention components and mechanisms within the theme were extracted. As our aim was to explain how care farming might work we looked for data that suggested an enabling process. Thus findings relating to for example lack of choice was disregarded as it did not suggest a mechanism to explain how CFs worked. After translating the qualitative findings in to the probation grid we then constructed a logic model purely for offenders and compared this to the intervention components and mechanisms of the pre-existing logic model.

### 2.4. Ethics

Approvals (Ethics - SoMREC/13/14) and permissions (NOMS - 2013-247) granted for the pilot study also covered the qualitative work.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Sample

We interviewed seven current offenders and one ex-probation offender, six care farm staff and five probation staff (Table 1) from the five centres (see Appendix 1 details about the farms). A further five

**Table 1**  
Details of the interviewees.

| Interviewees- Centre   | Details <sup>a</sup>   |
|------------------------|--|
| <b>Offenders</b>       |  |
| SU6-1                  | Age 31; ex-probation offender; Previously served 150 h CP at farm.   |
| SU42-1                 | Age 47; given 140 h CP part spent at farm and then re-allocated to other project after farm closure.   |
| SU1-2                  | Age 52; given 200 h CP.  |
| SU4-2                  | Age 20; given 80 h CP.   |
| SU5-2                  | Age 25; given 200 h CP.  |
| SU6-2                  | Age 31; given 150 h CP.  |
| SU305-3                | Age 30; given a SA requirement involving 25 sessions at farm plus supervision appointments at probation offices.   |
| SU311-3                | Age 22; given a SA requirement involving 25 sessions at farm plus supervision appointments at probation offices.   |
| <b>Care farmers</b>    |  |
| CF1-1                  | Mental health nurse. Acted as care farmer for 1.5 years.   |
| CF5-2                  | Manager for overall setting which included a farm. Limited involvement in farm itself but responsible for who worked on the farm.  |
| CF6-2                  | Volunteer. Retired accountant.   |
| CF3-4                  | Beef cattle farmer. Involved in care farming for seven years.  |
| CF4-4                  | Farmer's wife (of CF3), qualified teacher. Involved in care farming for seven years.   |
| CF2-5                  | Background in engineering and property management with later qualifications in child care.   |
| <b>Probation Staff</b> |  |
| PO1-1                  | Project officer for 4 years. Role to allocate offenders to CP projects.  |
| PO2-1                  | Female Probation Service Officer for one year. Role to allocate offenders to CP projects.  |
| PO3-2                  | Community Payback Supervisor for 4 years. Role to allocate offenders to CP projects.   |
| PO5-3                  | Probation Officer for 9 years. Role to assess offenders needs, suggest CO requirements and projects and make recommendations to court prior to sentencing.                 |
| PO4-3                  | Female Probation Service Officer for 11 years. Role to assess offenders needs, suggest CO requirements and projects and make recommendations to court prior to sentencing. |

a – all participants were male except where stated otherwise. CP = community payback/unpaid hours. SA = Specified activity i.e., an activity that is deemed to meet a particular need of the offender for example employment skills. CO = community order.

offenders declined to participate. While we planned to purposefully sample offenders to explore differences by gender, age range, employment status and responses to the quantitative questionnaires, the closure of one farm (just as we were organising the interviews), the limited access to service users at the second farm, along with low recruitment rates and a reliance on probation supervisors to select service users, forced us to use a convenience sample. Three interviews were conducted over the telephone with the remaining conducted face to face. All the offenders were male; no female offenders were in attendance at CFs at this time. Table 1 provides details of the recruited participants.

### 3.2. Themes

Themes emerging from the data were: easy environment; the farmer/supervisor; developing relationships; the animals; the work; belief in the farm; and personal growth and new identities.

**Easy environment:** The majority of offenders expressed an appreciation for the outdoors. They explained that the fresh air and open space created a sense of freedom and peace, allowing them to relax, escape the hectic pressures of life and reflect upon their stressful weeks. In addition, offenders at one farm (Centre 2) enjoyed being away from the public, not having to wear high visibility jackets and working in an environment where everyone was treated equally. However, one offender from a different farm (Centre 1) felt that the high visibility jackets should be worn as a punishment and even suggested to some it was a badge of honour.

It just gives me the open spaces you know, I keep repeating that but it's just the open fields and that, you know, you're not confined anywhere, just free, you really feel free. (SU1-1)

Care farmers considered that the farm offered a peaceful, judgement-free environment that enabled offenders to shed the 'tough personas' that they had developed to fit with their turbulent social circumstances. They considered that the open space of the outdoors created a sense of freedom which made it easier for offenders to open up, talk, be themselves and focus on their issues and personal development. One care farmer described the outdoors as a 'large classroom' that created a learning environment suitable for individuals who

struggled to learn in an enclosed classroom setting. Probation staff, with responsibility for discussing the various orders and projects with offenders, made little mention of the environment with only one (PO5) promoting the nature side of the farm with selected offenders at the time of allocation.

that's an important part because there's no barriers or nothing, we're out here, and it's just, people can't get it in to their heads, it just, there's no barrier, that's it, there's no barriers, cause there's no walls, we're not going to take you in to a little room and talk to you and do all these things ... ..it's far easier to counsel people through problems by doing sommat to start with and go outside and do it, not in a confined space. (CF1-1)

**The farmer/supervisor:** The farmer was core to the themes of developing relationships, the easy environment and personal growth which were all seen to enable the formation of a new identity. The majority of offenders spoke highly of the care farmers and probation supervisors. They commented that while they were authority figures, they were still welcoming, easy to talk to, offering guidance and wanting to help. This was particularly the case at Centres 1 and 3, where supervision was provided by care farmers, but at Centre 2 where the authority figures were staff from probation services, there were conflicting experiences.

Just nice people, just, you know, they want to help, they want to help, that's it, they want to help people. **SU305-3**

Care farmers had insight into the skills required for each farming task, balancing supervision with support and teaching to earn respect and trust. They described how the personality of care farmers and probation officers played an important role in care farming. Participants considered that care farmers should want to help offenders and be willing to devote time and effort to developing relationships.

So it's all about the delivery, about the person and are you passionate about nature, are you passionate about farming .... you've got to be passionate about people .... The passion will take you that extra mile, so yes I will say nature does work, and yes the farm does work, but you've got to have the right person delivering it to young, mental health, to every different parts of society there is, with passion. (CF3- 4)

Probation staff discussed supervisory skills in relation to matching offenders to the skills and requirements of the project supervisor (often talking about charity shop or warehouse supervisors) to ensure that orders were completed with minimal disruption. A number of probation staff were keen to ensure that they '*did not set people up to fail*' but for some this seemed less to do with rehabilitation and more about ensuring a smooth community order.

You've got to look at the individual themselves, they might be really needy, and they'd be ideal for a placement, but you just couldn't put that weight on a shop manager, so then you'd pair them up with a supervisor. (PO1-1)

**The work:** A wide variety of activities were undertaken at two of the farms (Centres 1 and 3). These activities enabled offenders to acquire new skills and use existing skills to contribute to the everyday working of the farm. The offenders at the farm in Centre 2 provided conflicting descriptions of activities, with most users indicating that they were predominantly involved in site maintenance and not in horticulture activities or contact with animals. Most offenders discussed the enjoyment they derived from the work they did on the farm. One service user at Centre 1 explained that he felt motivated by the work. Offenders at Centre 3 described how they enjoyed being able to do a variety of activities.

I liked the woodwork, quite a lot, cause we were always building something new but, I liked the mechanical side more, because we

was always, you know using the tools, driving around, and just having a bit of fun really, playing, well not playing up but having some fun like. (SU311-3)

The extent of enjoyment at the Centre 2 farm was very mixed. Two younger offenders explained that they just wanted to complete their order and move on with their lives – these individuals did not have much connection with nature during their stay at the farm, but still preferred the farm to other project types. The fact that the work was 'unpaid' was alluded to, re-enforcing their awareness of the order as a punishment. Care farmers provided detailed insight into how activities were planned and adapted to suit the skills, capabilities and anticipated behaviours of the offenders as well as the daily work requirements of the farm. This was partly to ensure the safety of the offenders but also to provide work which was deemed worthwhile (by the offenders) to maximise engagement. Farmers used their personal skills to decide when and how to introduce different activities that might either seem daunting (for example, sheep handling) or mundane but necessary, such as litter picking on-site. Probation staff based in Centre 3 considered the farm to be a 'massively productive way to spend the day' (PO5-3). This referred to the work and also the therapeutic support, the thinking skills and the support with job searching.

**The animals:** This theme consisted of discussions about the nature of interactions between offenders and animals. Offenders differed in their willingness to engage with animals but also in the extent to which they had access to them. Only one offender at Centre 2 found the experience of working with the cows therapeutic. He described how this created an avenue for him to interact with the non-farming staff on site and this facilitated a desire to change. Offenders at another farm described how feeding and caring for livestock had contributed to new qualifications. Here the link between the presence of animals and personal growth through the acquisition of new skills is clear. From the care farmers' perspectives animals were considered to exert positive influences in three ways: through the acquisition of skills; by developing a sense of responsibility through the meaningful activity of caring for the animals and by exposing fear in offenders which enabled their macho personas to be shed.

it's, when people are around certain animals it's very calming, because it's either respect for the animal that they can't be shouting or they frighten it, but people just adhere to it" (CF1-1)

the animals are good because you've got these lads coming out, or young men, and even ladies, who are talking machoness, some of them from violent backgrounds, been out fighting, stuff like that, and then you put like a chicken in front of them and they're scared of a chicken (CF3-4)

The novelty of working with animals created a stimulating environment supporting engagement and the acquisition of new skills. Animals were considered a calming influence that encouraged offenders to look beyond their own needs and desires and perceive their work to be meaningful. Probation staff in Centre 3 concurred that people enjoyed the contact with animals. This was despite interaction with animals and nature appearing to be a very limited part of their discussions with users during allocations.

Well it's what I said, feeding the cows and that, gives me a sense of worth and things like that, you know. (SU1 -2)

We've got things from like Chinese painted quails, a baby quail is about the size of a bumble bee, and you know when I look at the faces of these people that have never seen them it's like 'wow, what's that?', I say 'it's a quail', 'blimey', and these little things are running all over the place, you know, or then the Aylesbury duck, all fluffy aren't they, I put a chick in their hand and they're, 'wow'. (CF2-5)

**Developing relationships:** This theme revealed contrasting experiences particularly between the younger and the older offenders.

Positive relationships, although not necessarily friendships, developed between care farmers and the older offenders. However amongst the younger offenders there was unwillingness to make meaningful relationships with other offenders and they did not discuss any relationships with care farmers.

I don't really want to make friends, I get on with everyone, I don't really want to make friends on the course, because they're all on the course for the wrong reason, and it's just trouble isn't it, it's trouble you don't know ... You just keep to yourself. (SU4-2)

Care farmers were more positive about social interactions on the farms. They considered that actively working alongside others on the farm created the opportunity for people to develop relationships. They explained that this process helped alleviate the social isolation that some offenders may experience, especially those who were unemployed. They discussed the importance of creating a sense of community that extended beyond the time on the care farm.

I think they like coming here, they like the camaraderie, they like the enjoyment (CF6-2)

Probation staff were less familiar with the way in which offenders interacted with each other and the care farming staff. One Probation Officer did however seem to offer some explanation for how groups managed on the farm.

Once you get people there who are all there all committed they tend to drag each other along, and they know everybody is there to do, you know, they know everyone is there because they have to be there but they know the people are at least trying to change, and then it gets better I think as time goes on really (PO5-3)

**Belief in the care farm:** All but one of the offenders who attended the farms at Centres 1 and 3 mentioned that they were initially cynical and reluctant about attending a care farm but soon realised the benefits. They emphasised how much they had gained from and enjoyed their time on the care farm. Many expressed their wishes that more resources were available to the farm so it could expand and continue to help other offenders in the way it had benefitted them. Offenders in Centre 2 did not voice a belief in the care farm to the same extent as those at other farms. Probation staff in Centre 3 appeared to hold positive beliefs about the benefits of the CP projects more broadly and seemed to have particular favourite projects. In contrast the probation staff who worked with offenders undertaking unpaid hours did not seem to hold any special regard for the care farm over and above any of the other projects, possibly reflecting the fact that those with specific needs were already perceived to have been supported within other orders.

It's everything, just the niceness of the staff, and everything, just the whole thing ... on the first day I was like no I don't like this, I ain't doing it, I ain't going to no farm, I ain't planting no potatoes, and then for me to go through it from what I've gone through for the farm, you know, and for me to say I will come in here out of my own time and tell people hang on a minute bruv: A) I probably know you off the street, and B) I'm telling you now it's alright, [Care Farm] is alright man. (SU305-3)

**Personal growth and new identities:** This theme consisted of a number of sub-themes relating to 1) gaining skills and knowledge; 2) having a sense of worth and achievement; 3) feeling the change, and 4) breaking-up and making-up. Most offenders mentioned that they had acquired useful skills from working on the farms. However the younger offenders at the farm in Centre 2 who were both employed did not derive the same benefits.

The atmosphere is different, you can learn more things, you can get a trade if you thought about it, there's a lot of various things to do, you just need a push in the right direction (SU6-2)

Offenders described feeling a sense of worth and achievement

through completion of tasks and through the knowledge that they were contributing positively to the environment around them. They sensed a change in themselves by reflecting on their past lives with some re-counting the drug-use, homelessness, stress, chaos and unhappiness that characterised their lives prior to their convictions and presence on the CFs. They explained that at the time, they were carried away in these activities and could not see the pointlessness and selfishness of their behaviours, nor were they aware of their own unhappiness.

"Yeah, and you can't see a way out either, it's just a vicious circle, you don't know what you're doing, all your fiends are doing it, you don't see the bad in it, until afterwards, and now I think what was I doing?" SU4-2

All care farmers discussed seeing changes among offenders that had attended their CFs. The care farmer at Centre 1 recounted instances where former offenders used the skills they had acquired while on the care farm and set-up businesses which allowed them to earn a living without resorting to crime. Others reported how they observed a positive change in behaviours whilst on the farm.

I didn't have no moods and emotions, I didn't give a monkey's, I was taking amphetamines but getting psychosis, and was just, I didn't realise how unhappy you are, you don't realise how unhappy you are until sommat changes in your life. (SU6-2)

I've got lads now that have set up businesses and all they're doing is building benches they're building planters, they're earning a living and they're spending their time building, making, selling, than hoping, thieving, getting caught, you know, and they come back (CF1-1)

### 3.3. Informing the logic model for offenders

Many of the concepts identified in our systematic review and represented in the general care farm logic model for all care farm service users (Fig. 1) are consistent with those in the logic model specifically for offenders derived from these qualitative findings (Fig. 2). There are however some important differences. Avoiding contact with other offenders and restricting the development of relationships to the farmer contrasts sharply with the general model. The evidence synthesised as part of our systematic review showed how care farm users found value in working alongside others during their time at the care farm. Having motivating work, building trust and the breaking down of 'macho' personas feature strongly in the offender logic model but are not seen in the general model. Although these are labelled within the logic model as intervention components they can also be seen as important mechanisms that lead to more restricted and targeted proximal outcomes when compared to the general model.

## 4. Discussion

The care farm logic model for offenders offers evidence-based mechanisms for how care farming might work to support desistance. Key factors of the intervention components that are potentially unique to this particular group include avoiding contact with other offenders, developing trust, having motivating and engaging activities and working with animals. These components are very similar to those experienced and valued by youth with behavioural problems participating in a care farm in the Netherlands (Schreuder et al., 2014). In particular the avoidance of contact with disruptive peers and working with animals seemed to be key to enabling reflection and forming a new better identity. The model is complex insofar as the links within and between intervention components, mechanisms, process outcomes and outcomes are not visible and the weighting of factors within these is not understood. Nonetheless, some pathways through the model can be suggested. For example, avoiding contact with peers and building trust

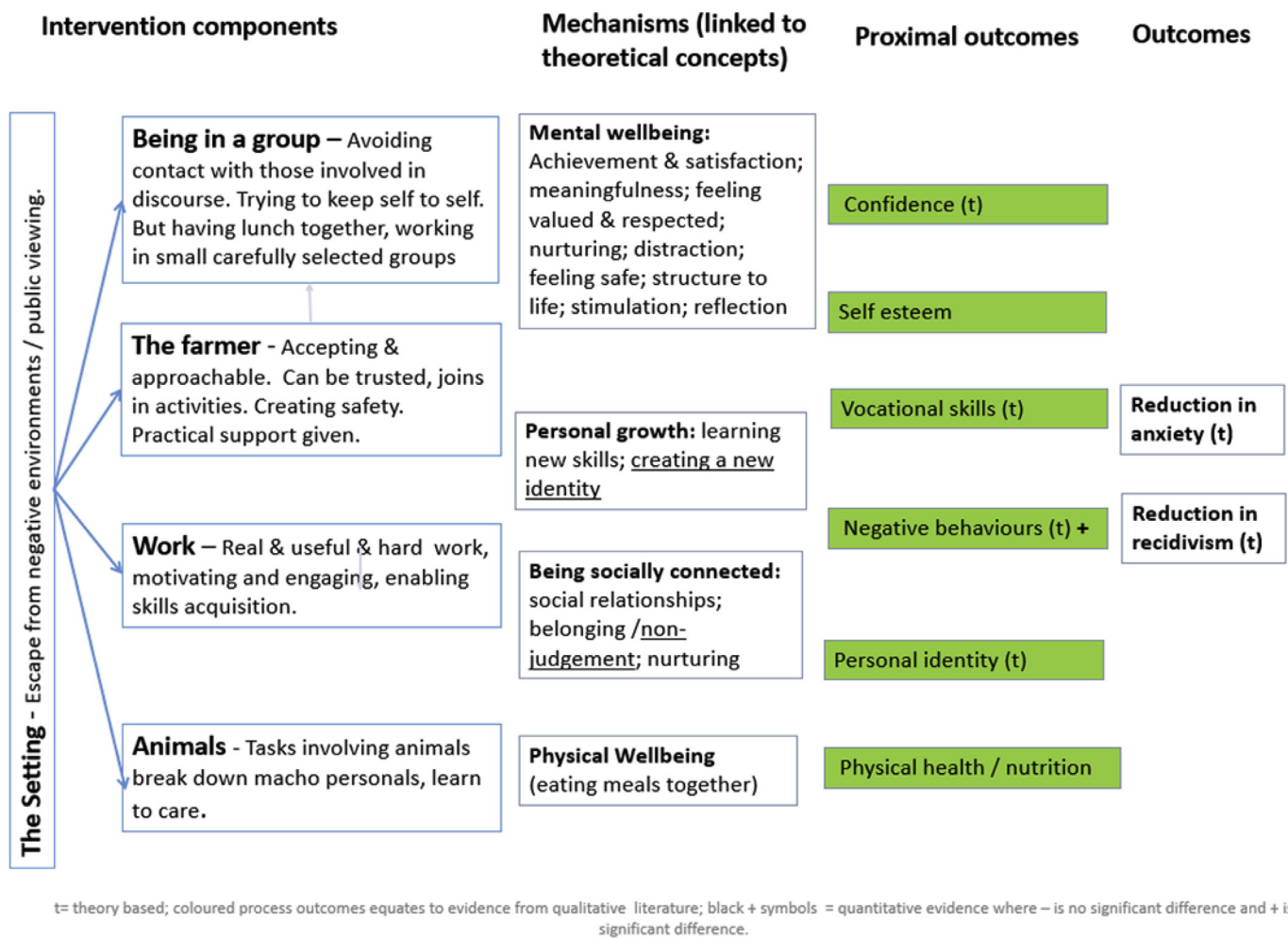


Fig. 2. Care farm logic model for offenders.

with a positive role model (the care farmer) could clearly represent a way of protecting the process of creating a new identity. The model also suggests a non-linear iterative path to positive outcomes. For example, working with animals supports the process of breaking down macho personas which may be re-enforced by feelings of achievement and stimulation leading to the acquisition of new skills. These concepts are clearly present within desistance theory. Robust evidence to support the role of any specified activity or punitive orders in desistance is lacking. Through this model, care farming offers a much clearer rationale to support its use as a rehabilitation option for offenders as compared with many other activity options.

This study showed that in some areas of the UK, probation services are using CFs within a punitive (unpaid hours) order. This is despite the practical and philosophical aims of care farming (to provide health, social or educational support) fitting well with desistance theories and therefore contributing towards offender rehabilitation. CFs as punitive orders have the potential to undermine the true value of care farming for individual offenders and dissuade other probation services from offering care farming as one of their rehabilitative projects. This is particularly important given the recent changes to probation services in the UK where privately run companies are paid by performance through demonstration of a reduction in reconviction rates (CPA, 2017). Key to achieving this goal will be a process that links offender needs with activities that target behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and emotions that are the root cause of reoffending. A clear understanding among probation staff of the projects that are on offer and how they can contribute to desistance will be fundamental to ensuring this linkage.

There was a general sense from all interviewees within Centre 3 that care farming offered structured rehabilitation, meeting the needs of offenders in a unique way. The positioning of care farming as a specified activity was well thought through with probation staff and care farmers closely aligned in their understanding of what care farming could offer and who would be suitable to attend. The views of the care farmer in Centre 1 appeared misaligned with probation services. Although offered as unpaid work and therefore viewed as a punishment, the care farmer talked about non judgement, social re-integration, safety, and nurturing; concepts that feature in desistance theories. It is unclear if offenders or probation staff in this Centre considered a need for rehabilitation. Furthermore as a punishment it is unclear if offenders felt less able to draw on the potential benefits of the CF because of the overriding message that it was there to punish rather than to support. Discussions between the care farmer and the probation staff about the positioning of care farming and its role in supporting targeted rehabilitation may well have been of value to offenders and probation staff. In Centre 2, it was clear that their overriding intention was to support their charitable efforts to help the homeless and that the farm was a means to do that with free labour from probation offenders. Unlike previous qualitative studies (Hassink et al., 2010; Pedersen et al., 2012; Leck et al., 2015), we have reported the negative experiences of service users at this centre. Here there was a less therapeutic environment with routine site maintenance being the main activity. Probation staff also did not seem to favour the care farm over and above any other unpaid work placement. In this respect, apart from the farm being labelled as a 'care farm', both the offenders and probation were

aligned in the views about this particular placement.

In general probation staff did not acknowledge the role of CFs in supporting reflection. This is despite desistance theory emphasising that ‘an environment conducive to reflection is an important early stage in the process of desistance’ (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986; Maruna and LeBel, 2003, Farrell and Calverley, 2006). This might suggest that probation staff do not place value on the process of reflection, perhaps, as seen in this study, focusing on ensuring that individuals complete their order. The fact that probation staff talked about matching skills of the supervisor to the offender in relation to completing orders supports a view that achieving desistance is a secondary aim to achieving completion of an order. This may be due to beliefs among probation staff that individual change is challenging but also may reflect system pressures to meet short-term metrics.

4.1. Strengths and limitations

Our qualitative study included care farmers, offenders and probation staff. We were only able to interview a small number of offenders and many of them were distrustful of authority figures. Although we attempted to interview people in neutral locations there was little motivation for people to take part outside their unpaid hours or supervision sessions. Thus the authoritarian setting of the probation offices became the setting for interviews. This created a natural divide between the interviewers and the offenders who appeared reluctant at times to reveal personal feelings. The changes in probation services and the closure of one farm during the implementation period of our study limited our ability to purposively sample offenders as originally planned. In particular the lack of female participants undermined our ability to explore perspectives by gender. The lack of female offenders allocated to CFs also highlights potential gender-biases within the probation service allocation processes.

By including care farmers we were able to gain insights from one individual about many offenders. We were aware that care farmers could have only referred to the positive aspects of care farming but they did allude to offenders who were unsuited to the farm and were asked to leave. This was supported by probation staff who also talked about offenders dropping out and not completing their time at the farm. The additional benefit of including care farmers was their capacity to observe changes in offenders who appeared to lack insight into the changes in themselves. So for example, while care farmers observed the

breaking down of macho personas (deliberately manipulated through the animal work), offenders did not allude to this. Care farmers suggested that offenders were not always aware that care farmers were ‘working on them’ through specific interactions such as presenting a sheep to them (to break down the macho persona) or even sitting down to eat a hot meal together (to create a social environment). This insight and different perspective has enriched the data collected in this study.

5. Conclusions

The findings from this study informed the development of an evidence and theory-based logic model to explain how care farming works for adult offenders in probation. It confirmed that for this particular population, working on a CF with animals and the farmer, appears to aid personal growth through meaningful, motivating, stimulating and calming interactions that enable offenders to see beyond their own needs and more practically, develop new skills. These changes appear to be the precursors to changing behaviours that contribute to a reduction in desistance. Currently there is variability in both the extent to which CFs appear to address care farming philosophies and in how probation services understand and use CFs. Key to the success of care farming for offenders is a shared view of the role of CFs that is compatible with both the aims of probation services and the philosophies of care farming. The logic model could be a valuable practical tool to facilitate a successful collaboration.

Funding & disclaimer

This project was funded by the National Institute for Health Research Public Health Research Programme (project number 11/3050/08).

The views and opinions expressed therein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Public Health Research Programme, NIHR, NHS or the Department of Health.

Acknowledgements

We thank David Brennan for transcribing the audio recordings and the probation services, care farmers and probation offenders that took part or assisted with our study. We also thank Zoe Richardson and Rachel Lunt for assisting with the interviews.

Appendix 1. The care farms.

| Centre         | Contract with probation service   | Activities   | Aims & outcomes   |
|----------------|---|--|---|
| 1              | CP requirement managed by mental health nurse. The farm was a social enterprise. Role of probation officer is to inform offenders of their allocation and to receive information on attendance.   | Working with pigs, chickens and fish; hydroponics; horticulture; manual site maintenance and wood work. Offenders make own way to the farm. Hot meals provided and eating together encouraged. | Set up to support vulnerable members of the community. No formal recognition of skills gained.  |
| 2              | Part <sup>a</sup> of a CP requirement managed by head of religious organisation with a volunteer. Supervision also done by probation staff on site, alongside volunteer.  | Digging, planting, harvesting, driving the tractor, sweeping the yard and recycling. Probation staff bring offenders to the farm. Hot meals provided and eating together encouraged.           | Set up to grow vegetables for preparing meals for the homeless. Staff viewed workers as valuable assets in supporting their charitable efforts. No formal recognition of skills gained.   |
| 3 <sup>b</sup> | Activity requirement for unemployed individuals managed by a farmer. Role of probation officer is to allocate offender through discussion of needs assessment to various activities. Farmer works with probation services to ensure that probation officers understand the services provided at the care farm and entry criteria. | Working with livestock and wood and metal work were the main activities. Farmer drives offenders to the farm. Hot meals provided and eating together encouraged.                               | Set up to help vulnerable people addressing building social relationships, encouraging change and providing skills based qualifications relating to farming activities. Formal recognition of completion of programme through a certificate and small ceremony. |
| 4 <sup>b</sup> | Activity requirement for unemployed individuals managed by a farmer. Role of probation officer as in Centre 3. Little discussion between the farmer and probation services about who should attend and the needs of the care farm.  | Usual farming activities, specifically working with animals. Farmer drives offenders to the farm. Food provided.   | Set up as a fully functioning cattle farm diversified to bring in and support vulnerable offenders. No formal recognition of skills gained  |

|   |   |  |   |
|---|---|--|---|
| 5 | No formal contract with probation. Offenders sent on ad hoc basis by individual probation officers. No other details available. | Range of 'food to fork' activities from the early stages of calf rearing to slaughter. Unclear how offenders arrived at farm. Food provided. | Set up for a range of vulnerable adults and adolescents. Offenders were kept separate from the other service users. No formal recognition of skills gained. |
|---|---|--|---|

CP = community payback (also known as unpaid hours). <sup>a</sup> Offenders attended various CP requirement sites during their community order. <sup>b</sup> Centre 3 and Centre 4 farms worked with the same probation service.

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2019.102156>.

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