

Impact and cost-effectiveness of care farms on health and well-being of offenders on probation: a pilot study

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research, or similar, and may contain language which offends some readers.

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Care farms (CFs) use all or part of a farm to provide health, social or educational care for different people. Our study assessed whether or not it is possible (feasible) to collect the data needed to see if CFs can benefit people serving community orders. We also synthesised existing research on the benefits of CFs. We found 1659 research articles; 27 could be included. The quantitative evidence was limited but showed that CFs may improve mental well-being. We developed four diagrams showing how CFs may lead to improvements.

Our pilot study was conducted in three probation regions, each with a CF and another probation site. We recruited 134 service users, fewer than our planned recruitment of 300. Pilot studies are not normally designed to assess impact, so 134 people were enough to assess feasibility. Recruitment was challenging as a result of changes in probation and the closure of one CF. Participants at CFs were more likely to be male, smokers and substance users, had a higher risk of reoffending and had more missing answers to questionnaire questions. Despite these differences, the use of statistical analysis can facilitate comparison.

We were able to follow up 52% of respondents and link probation and reconviction data to them for 90%. We collected health and social care use cost data. Qualitatively, we found that some probation services emphasised CFs as rehabilitation and others emphasised them as punishment.

Changes in probation presented challenges, although recruitment may be feasible with stability in probation services. Using existing reconvictions data is more feasible than following up participants to fill in questionnaires. CFs have potential to improve well-being; however, larger studies are needed to assess impact.

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