

Lowestoft Journal April 2017

At March's Health and Wellbeing Board in the Riverside Office at Lowestoft there was an absolutely fascinating presentation on the work of the Pathways Care Farm and I'd like to share with you how their work on the farm is making such a positive contribution to community safety in our county.

In previous articles I've mentioned that too much Police Officer time is occupied by dealing with mental health challenges, searching for missing people (including children) and tackling anti social behaviour. Re-offending rates are also too high - especially amongst young men under the age of 30, suggesting to me our current approach requires urgent reform. Far too many lives are wasted behind bars and it's just possible some of the work described in the presentation by Pathways could make such a difference to Suffolk.

My farming background has enabled me to see at first hand how some people can suddenly have their whole life transformed when they strike up a "relationship" with animals or plants. Personally, I've always found animal and plant husbandry quite therapeutic so I think making such opportunities available for many more people could well be very positive – particularly to those who for whatever reasons have a chaotic or complex lifestyle.

The work carried out at the farm, based near Lowestoft, caters for a very wide range of clients. The assistance provided for those who suffer from dementia and learning difficulties seems to be nothing short of miraculous. There's also a focus on the younger generation – sadly too many youngsters are brought up in

households where substance misuse is common, where nobody works and physical or domestic abuse frequently takes place. We all know how essential proper education and training is for children if they are to fulfil their potential in life and the farm courses help individuals recover their self-respect and esteem making them much more confident and productive in the workplace.

No scheme of course will be 100 per cent successful for every client, but I really do believe the care farm concept can make an enormous contribution to keeping society safer and making better use of police time. Reducing re-offending rates and helping the less fortunate in our communities is a key part of our new Police and Crime Plan so this could be exactly what Suffolk needs!