



**Down on her Therapy Farm, Hannah Clarke is using the compassion of dogs, cats - and even geese, goats and a turkey - to help children who've faced tough times**

By Katharine Wootton

All pet lovers know the power of animals to help make us feel better, from just sitting on our laps, to when they do something silly when we're feeling down. But now one woman is harnessing this animal sensitivity to help children who've been through incredibly difficult times in her work running the Therapy Farm.

Hannah Clarke had long worked with children, first as a teacher and later as a psychotherapist, when she had a unique experience that changed everything.

"The mum of a child I was working with asked if I wanted to attend an event about how horses could be used as therapy," says Hannah (49). "I used to ride as a child, but my memories were generally of riding teachers shouting at me and, as I was quite a shy child, I used to get terrified. However, that got mixed up inside me and I wrongly thought I was scared of horses."

When I went to this event, I met a giant Hanoverian horse who had been badly abused by humans and the memory of being scared came back, but this horse just came straight up to me and put his nose



# 'Animals are so healing'

You are AMAZING



on my forehead and breathed calmly. It was as though he was saying he knew how I felt being shouted at by people, because he'd also had that experience. It was such a powerful connection and I thought this could be a great experience for young people, especially those struggling to deal with their emotions or feelings."

So Hannah set about finding out more about the science behind the influence animals can have on people, studying the subject in America before returning to set up her own therapy farm in 2017.

"All of the children have experienced some level of abuse or early childhood trauma so many are dealing with anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. They quite often struggle to make friends and don't read social situations well. But animals can teach them about managing their emotions, understanding body language and

becoming someone's Christmas dinner, plus Colin, the over-friendly, belly-rub-adoring pig.

The idea is that Hannah helps children, who mainly have been adopted or taken into foster care, to study and discuss the behaviours and personalities of the animals to better understand themselves and their interactions with other people.

"The turkey is an interesting one as often children have never



All creatures great and small... Hannah with some of her animals



"One young woman came with high anxiety and self-harming behaviour, terrified of life and disconnected from everyone. But when she came here she created a really strong bond with my dog, Sigh. Sigh became her best friend and gave her the motivation to navigate all the other things she was scared of. Eventually I referred her for an autism diagnosis and this helped her understand herself better and get the support she needed, but Sigh had the most profound impact."

"When my animals change someone's life in this way it

can be really emotional. Because the connection between animal and child is non-verbal, it's a great tool for helping children heal and is a good starting point for them being able to trust people again."

Hannah also works with the RSPCA delivering a programme about responsible pet ownership to children living in foster placements with animals. She's also now planning a programme where she'll train other people in animal therapy with the hope more therapy farms might pop up around the country. "I now just want to help as many children as possible," she says.

To find out more about the Therapy Farm visit [www.headsightservices.com](http://www.headsightservices.com) and Colin the pig's Instagram address is @colinthepig

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how to have happy relationships." And each animal on the farm plays a unique part in that process, even though the children will typically bond to one specific animal.

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**'All the work we do is on the terms of the animal and they choose if they want to take part in the session'**

encountered one before and are a bit scared. Because he's a double-breasted turkey, and so struggles to walk, he helps children who are a bit clumsy or feel like they don't like their bodies as they discuss how he looks and have empathy for him, sometimes

even getting to a point where they can stroke him.

"All the work we do is completely on the terms of the animal and they choose if they want to take part in the session. For example if the dog doesn't want to talk to you that day, it's all part of the process and we'll discuss how the children manage disappointment. For children who are used to rushing into inappropriate relationships, we teach them about taking a step back and noticing body language. Anything that happens here we explore in the context of a relationship in their lives outside here."

Hannah has seen some amazing transformations.



Colin the pig snuggles up to Hannah with a feline friend