



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Scheme giving children the chance to connect with nature expands into Wales**

“Unforgettable”, “brilliant” and “changed my view of nature” are just some of the comments from children who have taken part in a pioneering initiative to help get them outdoors and into the countryside, which is now being extended into Wales.

Through The OWL Collaboration, launched in 2021, seven Outdoor Learning Centres across England have been providing a week’s residential visit to children, many from schools in deprived areas.

The OWL Collaboration is run by national educational charity The Ernest Cook Trust, which provides funding for each ‘Outdoor Week of Learning’ or OWL residential. This includes the cost of transporting children to and from their locations, many of which are in inner cities or areas of deprivation, and the week does not require a financial contribution from parents.

The OWL Collaboration is now being extended into Wales for the first time, thanks to a new partnership between The Ernest Cook Trust and Farms for City Children, which has come on board to become OWL’s latest Outdoor Learning Centre provider. From September, OWL visits will be running at Farms for City Children’s Pembrokeshire base, at Lower Treginnis Farm, near St David’s.

“We’re about to go into our second year of The OWL Collaboration and it is proving to be a great success, reaching children who might not otherwise have an opportunity to spend time on a residential, in the countryside and learning about the natural environment,” said Suzie Paton, Head of Grants at The Ernest Cook Trust.

“However, OWL is far more than just a nice week away. We have been measuring the impact on children, which shows that they become more connected with nature and that they have positive improvements in their wellbeing. The schools also tell us they see changes in children, who become much more engaged in learning. We are proud of how The OWL Collaboration has reached children from diverse backgrounds, and the opportunities that have arisen for them as a result.

*“It’s great news that Farms for City Children has joined The OWL Collaboration, enabling us to extend this tremendous programme into Wales and we are looking forward to a successful partnership.”*

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“We are looking forward to growing the programme, with further funding for other collaborators.”

Donna Marie Edmonds, Chief Executive at Farms for City Children, said: “The whole team at Farms for City Children could not be more delighted to have been embraced by The Ernest Cook Trust and The OWL Collaboration. To share our expertise of delivering outdoor learning during the last five decades with such reputable and innovative partners will be a privilege. To collaborate and advocate together enables us to share our mission to remove barriers that prevent access to the natural world for children and young people, and we are grateful for the support of the Trust in aiding our work specifically in Wales to bring the Farms for City Children experience to more young people across the country.”

Farms for City Children now joins the existing OWL providers, which are:

- Bore Place, The Commonwork Trust, Edenbridge, Kent
- Countryside Education Trust, Beaulieu, Hampshire
- Jamie’s Farm, with locations in Bath, Hereford, Lewes and Monmouth
- Lambourne End Centre, Lambourne End, Essex
- Magdalen Farm, Chard, Somerset
- Ufton Court, Englefield, Berkshire
- The Shallowford Trust, Newton Abbot, Devon

Each OWL residential is bespoke to the school children taking part, but activities can include everything from feeding and mucking out farm animals to walks in the countryside.

The comments from teachers and pupils alike have been very positive.

One teacher said: “The children in our school have mostly spent their lives in a deprived inner city council estate with little access to travel and their life is lived in an urban setting - full of concrete with parks for green space. Very few had any experience of rural life, let alone an organic farm.”

Another said: “It cannot be put into quantifiable data what this experience has meant to the whole team and all the children that were able to participate in this experience, it is so far from their normal and has been so inspiring for the children, lets them know there is a different life outside of what they have known all their lives.”

One child said: “It was a great experience and something I’ll remember for the rest of my life.”

And another added: “It was a brilliant experience and changed my view of nature.”

The Ernest Cook Trust, now in its 70th year, is a UK educational charity committed to helping young people and their communities develop a lifelong journey of learning, appreciation and respect for the countryside through a range of outdoor learning experiences.

The Trust delivers programmes on its own estates and with partner estates. Through grant-giving, it supports other organisations in the field of outdoor learning, and awards some £2m in a range of grants programmes each year.

An Outdoor Week of Learning is available to eligible primary, secondary and special schools. For more information, visit <https://ernestcooktrust.org.uk/>. To find out more about Farms for City Children, visit <https://farmsforcitychildren.org/>.