

Riding for Smiles (RfS)

Annual Report - December 2020

Forward from the Chair, Trustees-RfS, Dr. Geoff Cutts

This report covers the seventeen-month period August 2019 to December 2020. The next report is planned to be compiled for the year 2021.

It has been an exceedingly difficult year for everyone including RfS as the charity was unable to receive any young people between April and August 2019 and then again in November and December 2019. In the ten months RfS was able to open, 780 equestrian experiences were delivered for disabled or disadvantaged children, young people, and vulnerable adults.

The amazing effort of the staff at the schools that did continue under such difficult condition such as year group bubbles, is acknowledged and very much appreciated.

RfS is using this enforced break to review and completely revise its future vision, mission, and strategy with the aid of external consultants; to review and update its policies and procedures; to develop a communications and marketing plan and to continue the mental health research project. All these activities are being funded by a grant from the lottery.

As chair, I am pleased to extend a huge thank you to Sharon Tolley, proprietor, and owner of Coloured Cob Equestrian Centre, who provide the experiences; to all the staff and horses at Coloured Cob and to the Trustees including two new trustees Helen Stuckley and Sarah Atkin. To Stephanie Hind, who provides the vital input into RfS as our resident Special Educational Needs advisor and schools liaison officer, an enormous thank you for your tireless effort making RfS a real success over the years.

Riding for Smiles has developed and grown significantly since August 2019 in terms of its provision, governance, and funding.

In summary, to date, over thirty children from our school have been fortunate enough to experience the joy offered through Riding for Smiles. Anxieties have been alleviated, confidence raised, negative behaviours successfully addressed, and the thrill of horse riding felt. We feel incredibly privileged, as a school, to have been offered these lessons and would encourage others to participate, should they be offered the opportunity; your children's lives will be richer for them.

Alison Pymm, Head Teacher, Creswell Junior School

A final big thank you to all our supporters and funders, without your support there would not be any Smiles.

Geoff Cutts

The report has been compiled by Stephanie Hind.

Partnerships

During 2019 we built good working relationships with many local mainstream and special schools and other charities, providing bespoke sessions for groups of children with a variety of special needs. Groups consisted of 8 pupils and 2 school staff and were split into 2 equal groups. Sessions included a half hour ride, either a hack or a lesson, and a half hour stable yard activity and packages usually offered sessions for 6-week blocks. Over the period between August 2019 and December 2020 we have provided sessions for groups from the following places:

- Hodthorpe Primary
- Stubbin Wood (Special School)
- Treeton Primary
- Barlborough Primary
- Brockley Primary
- Whitwell Primary
- Sparken Hill Primary
- Ashgate Croft (Special School)
- Endeavour (Charity)
- Whaley Thorns Primary
- Creswell Junior
- Creswell Church Breakfast Club
- MIND (Charity).

We believe in providing sessions aimed at developing identified skills and outcomes so have planned, with our partners, sessions which will deliver these rather than simply give an equestrian experience. The quality of our provision is therefore just as important as the number of users we bring through our doors.

Sessions

All our mainstream schools, who were offered free sessions, brought groups of junior children with additional needs including ASD, ADHD, anxiety, social/emotional/behavioural problems, dyspraxia, poor language, and learning delay. Most pupils were on the SEND register or in receipt of pupil premium money. Our programmes mainly concentrated on developing social/emotional, language and physical skills. Since a lot of these children are also from deprived backgrounds, our sessions provided much needed extra- curricular experience which widens horizons and outlooks. They also provided much needed therapeutic space, quietness, fresh air, and physical activity. The Special Schools paid a contribution and brought senior pupils (16-18) as part of their Animal Care course. In addition to having a ride they took part in practical skills which formed part of their course (grooming, safety, and wheelbarrow use) in addition to working on social/emotional and language skills.

In October 2019 MIND completed the "Get Set to Go" initiative with us. This had given 10 local adults with mental health issues 15 weeks of 1-hour sessions where they had a ride/carriage ride, a stable yard activity and a half hour drinks/chat session. MIND paid for most of the session, with Riding for Smiles subsidising a small amount. This project was hugely successful, with users developing resilience and social/emotional skills and becoming a support group helping each other. The sessions helped motivate individual to leave the house again and built their confidence and determination. For some it also set them on the road to weight loss and healthier eating as they

wanted to be able to ride rather than go in the carriage and needed to be under 15 stone. Most of the group members were devastated when the sessions ended. We have since raised funds ourselves via grants to continue sessions once covid restrictions allows.

In December 2019 we resumed work with Endeavour, offering free sessions for their secondary aged pupils. These young people are often challenging and have a wide range of difficulties due to their dysfunctional backgrounds. A lot of the pupils are Slovakian Roma who speak little English and are not familiar with our codes of conduct. Many have faced personal difficulties which have led to poor social/emotional skills, mental health, and behaviour issues. Many of these pupils take a while to engage but grow very much in confidence and self-esteem once they do.

In March 2020, the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown brought interruption and cancellation of our projects with Barlborough Primary, Treeton Primary, Stubbin Wood Special School, Endeavour, and MIND, all who had either just started or were due to start. Their sessions are currently being held to resume when possible.

In September 2020 permission was given by the Education Authority to begin sessions with the 2 local schools on the Mental Health Project and Deprivation/Additional Needs Project (Creswell Juniors and Whaley Thorns Primary) An in depth extra covid section had been devised and added to the current Risk Assessments and passed by the schools. These sessions took place between September and November but were again halted during the second lockdown. They are poised to begin again in January, Covid restrictions allowing.

Development work

Between March and September Riding for Smiles work concentrated on funding applications, reports, planning for future projects and charity development. In February 2020 we were notified by the National Lottery Communities that we had been successful in our bid for £20,000 over 2 years for a Mental Health Project and a £13,000 bid for Charity development. This allowed for planning of the Mental Health Project and enabled us to pay a Consultant (Anne Clarke of Connected Thinking) to meet with us and discuss ways forward and development of our charity. During the consultant day we looked at the strengths and weaknesses of Riding for Smiles and outlined the main areas for development as being funding (including unrestricted funding) for sustainability, a Business Plan, Website, and some areas of governance such as Policies, SLA, and Trustee roles. Work has now started on all of these and is in working progress. We are building links with a similar charity in the South of England who is more established than ourselves.

Mental Health Project

The Mental Health Project was planned in conjunction with Head Teachers from the 2 schools who are taking part. Children have been identified by schools and CAMHS as having specific mental health problems. The main aim of this Project is to address the individual issues and prevent them from escalating. Together we used a variety of material and information from the NHS, Education Authorities, MIND and CAMHS to formulate our plan which included identifying risk factors, identification of mental health issues, objectives and outcomes, delivery strategies, activities, and assessments. Children are to be assessed, using generic school assessment tools and our own devised questionnaires, at the beginning of the Project and again at the end. Monitoring, evaluation, and analysis will be done jointly between Riding for Smiles and the Schools on a regular basis. The main objectives of this Project are to raise confidence, self-esteem, and resilience, increase positive self- image and develop emotional literacy and effective social interaction.

Funding

This year we have been successful in our grant funding applications for both restricted and unrestricted funds. This is against the climate where donations and fund-raising events effectively stopped.

Awards for All 2 for Deprivation	£10,000
Talbot Trust for Mental Health	£5,000
Charity Ride for MIND	£300
Elmton Open Gardens for Breakfast Club	£230
Derbyshire County Council for Taster Sessions	£500
Bassetlaw District Council for MIND	£270
Healthy Bolsover for MIND	£2,000
Derbyshire County Council for Special School	£500
Lottery Community Fund Year 1 for Mental Health	£10,000
Lottery Development	£13,000
Jones Charitable Trust for MIND	£2,500
Awards for All 3 for Deprivation	£10,000
Toyota/Sport England for a Wheelchair friendly Carriage	£5,000

The total of restricted funding granted over the period is £59,300. We have a further £12,000 in successful grants which will be received in early 2021.

The Toyota / Sport England grant will enable us to offer truly inclusive sessions to Special Schools in the future and allow for so many more deserving young people to experience the joy of interaction with horses and being out in the countryside.

We are awaiting results on a grant funding application to Children in Need.

RfS has also raised a much needed £6,650 unrestricted funds from the UK Youth Fund, Derbyshire County Council, the Duke of Devonshire's Charitable Trust, and charitable donations. A further £6,500 has been secured for 2021.

Our growth in both restricted and unrestricted funding will allow us to continue offering our successful intervention sessions to many deserving children, young people and vulnerable adults and our aspects of development will ensure increased effectiveness in the future.

Stephanie Hind