

The RfS July Update – an open letter from the Chair of the Trustees, Dr. Geoff Cutts

“I Have a Dream, a song to sing. To help me cope, with anything” Abba.

It is just six years since Stephanie had a dream, an idea. An idea that there was a way to put a smile on the faces of children, young people, and adults who are disabled and vulnerable.

Stephanie shared that idea with Sharon, proprietor of the Coloured Cob Equestrian Centre, and together they set about making that dream come true. The first children started to come along to the stables supported by Coloured Cob, and we saw their smiles. In 2017 Riding for Smiles was born as the charity to develop the dream.

RfS developed and grew steadily and then the virus came. That was not in the dream!

None of us could imagine a pandemic of the size caused by the corona virus. Could anyone have predicted the effect on everyone. How could any of us envisaged the growth in numbers of children and young people who needed to find their smile?

Riding for Smiles worked hard through the lock downs developing and revising the business plan, updating all their policies and procedures, getting training up to date and seeking funding to help us survive and indeed develop. We emerged in very good shape.

The figures demonstrate the strong position of Riding for Smiles and our delivery partner the Coloured Cob Equestrian Centre as together we had sprung into action whenever the rules allowed.

12 months, April 2019 – March 2020, we delivered 650 experiences approx.

5 months, April 2020 – August 2020 we delivered zero experiences.

3 months, Sept. 2020 – Nov 2020 we delivered 210 experiences.

4 months, Dec 2020 – March 2021 we delivered zero experiences.

In the first 4 months from April 2021 – July 2021 we delivered 643 experiences which includes 54 carriage experiences.

Riding for Smiles on behalf of each and every child, young person or adult who has been able to visit the stables wants to say

“Thank you, thank you for helping put a smile on a face.”

We know that for many their visit provides the opportunity to smile, to dream, to shout and sing and the development of skills to cope with many new things.

“Thank you”

To Coloured Cob Equestrian Centre, to Sharron and all her staff and volunteers, and to the awesome ponies and horses many of whom have become favourites and besties with the children.

To Stephanie who is the architect and inspiration of RfS, she is always there, she knows every child, she is our engine.

To every school or group that supports the children, young people, and adults by being brave enough to bring them to the stables, by finding time in the busy school week, by taking that time to come along and to everyone who comes along to participate. I want to especially thanks every member of staff from every school that makes it happen, you are awesome.

To our funders who make it all possible.

To the Trustees who gladly give their time to plan, monitor, budget, review, look for grant opportunities, write those bids and more.

So where do we find RfS in August 2021?

Absolutely thrilled as what we have collectively achieved. However, the financial cupboard has been raided and stretched so we will be working hard through August planning, budgeting, and submitting bids.

The funds given to support adults is healthy especially as the number of adults coming along is small. Just the group we are still supporting after the funding from MIND was exhausted.

The funds given to support schools and groups from South Yorkshire is good. The numbers are modest, so funding is secure for the immediate future.

The funds for the Mental Health Project are running low. However, there is a small surplus from phase 1 and phase 2 which starts in September is promised £10,000 from The National Lottery. The Trustees have agreed to make up the funds from donations from local companies, which will secure attendance by schools taking part through to Easter, 2022.

RfS is in very detailed discussions with The National Lottery. If the bid is successful, the amount will fund the project through to Easter 2025.

The funds in our Deprivation budget are low. The remaining funds topped up from reserves have been allocated and arrangements made with school for only the first half term from September.

The National Lottery has part funded this budget through its Awards for All programme. This programme has now been targeted at after school activities with strong parental

involvement. However, the National Lottery is looking to find funding of £10,000 per year for three years towards the Deprivation budget. We have work to do to secure this funding.

In addition, RfS is in early discussions with Children in Need to part fund attendance by the special schools . This bid is being developed with the schools and needs to be submitted by mid-October. If successful funding will be available from early 2022 and last for three years.

Together this will still leave the deprivation budget short by around £20,000 per year.

This just funds continuation of where we find ourselves in July 2021. What about those schools and children who would love to join? It is not a position we ever envisaged. It is not a financial equation one can ever balance, but with your help and support we will give it a jolly good go.

Thank you,
Dr Geoff Cutts
Chair, Riding for Smiles, Trustees