LEARNING THROUGH HORSES
...learning for life

Recognising and rewarding achievement
Recently, children from our school benefited from a couple of terms' placement at Avon Riding Centre – a worthwhile rewarding experience for children and staff.

Many of our children are largely non-ambulant and non-verbal, but stable staff ensured them to handle and interact with horses in the roof room, from hay, straw, and feed, to comb and brushes. After an initial week having no understanding of the task, one child showed he remembered his previous visit, choosing a brush and reaching towards his pony’s mane. Other children began to make slow choices, showing preferences for small, materials, and activities.

We saw great progress within just six weekly visits for a group of quiet, thoughtful children who sometimes struggled to find their voices among more verbally confident students. After initially approaching horses with caution, two spent grooming and bonding with their children’s confidence. Another exciting development was that the visits encouraged communication; animated conversations could be heard on the minds – and we noted coinciding improvements in self-esteem.

Over 60% of RDA groups now offer an initial day of any of our medical therapy services. There are now over 12000 participants every year in RDA, around 28,000 people with physical and learning difficulties are helped to achieve personal goals, through riding, vaulting, and carriage driving each year. People with learning difficulties are helped to achieve proficiency in, and a learning environment, in an engaging, supportive, rewarding, and fun environment.

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RDA provides therapeutic riding to thousands of children, young people and adults living with every type of disability, each year. In 2013, we brought together a panel of therapy experts to create the RDA Tracker – a simple-to-use, holistic tool for recording and measuring evidence of changes and outcomes achieved through attending RDA sessions.

The Tracker is now even more user-friendly. RDA Groups can track participants at any time in the opportunity to provide wider UK reports, providing their group, as well as the partnership schools with a personalised report for each pupil.

Immediate benefits for Groups

Having access to evidence about the benefits of RDA activities is proving invaluable for many RDA Groups when submitting grant applications and taking part in fundraising and publicity. Tracker ‘scores’ are collected from RDA Groups and analysed in UK-wide reports, to highlight what RDA does well and potential areas for change.

No limit to the possible changes outside RDA sessions

The Tracker shows, at a glance, where and how much change has taken place during the time spent in RDA activities. This information can help to identify future goals, allowing RDA Coaches and therapists to tailor lessons and activities to individual needs.

Working with the Tracker encourages volunteers to be more observant and engage more closely with riders, bringing social and emotional benefits to all involved. The observations, made by teachers, parents, therapists, coaches and side walkers are all combined to tell the story of the participant’s RDA journey. Insights can be shared with family, carers, and schools – not only providing the opportunity for participants to share their achievements – but also for others to build on any positive changes and test a tool for measuring change in individual riders. The resulting solutions are often used to help individuals achieve success regardless of disabilities or difficulties. It can be awarded for something as simple as sitting still, holding reins, or learning rising trot, which can be quite an achievement. As well as a certificate, they receive a badge, which is worn with great pride. I have had the pleasure of presenting Endeavour Awards, so I know how much this achievement means...

Our RDA Group has a session for specific learning difficulties (SLD) adults. Each term we present the riders with an Endeavour Award. The mother of a new rider was moved to tears as her 52-year-old daughter Susan had never won any award or had any achievement recognised in that way before...

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Why offer the Endeavour Award?

◗ Resources provided free: RDA Groups can choose from eye-catching certificates, colourful badges, and iron-on embroidered patches.

◗ No tests and no set syllabus: Groups create their own goals with participants. You decide how to make the award!

◗ No limitations: More than one award can be given and groups can set the pace and the timescale. Goals can be short-term, to be awarded after a couple of weeks, or perhaps something more long-term, to steadily work towards over a school term.

◗ Confidence boost: The awards are fantastic for boosting self-confidence and esteem.

◗ Something for everyone: Everyone can achieve the award and there are no restrictions for participants for whom traditional proficiency tests or even ASDAN aren’t an option.

Endeavour and schools: Offering extra opportunities for participants to achieve and be recognised helps to demonstrate to OFSTED that the sessions are high value, as pupils are not only riding, vaulting or carriage driving, but are also meeting targets, developing and progressing physically, socially and in an educational capacity.

Because it’s what you can do that counts
Did you know?

1. A choice of attractive pin badges or iron-on patches are available for Riding and Horse Care Proficiency Tests

2. Level 1 can be delivered and assessed within your own Group, at your own pace

3. Proficiency tests and ASDAN projects can be completed simultaneously, as many of the activities are easily transferable

An opportunity to rise to the challenge

RDA Proficiency Tests, which have been carefully developed by RDA Coaching experts, provide participants the opportunity to gain useful, practical knowledge, even at a basic level, and to enjoy a challenge which is accessible, within the scope of their ability.

Awards are available for achievements in:
- Riding
- Horse Care
- Showjumping
- Carriage Driving
- Vaulting
- Endurance

When we found we couldn’t do carriage driving due to awful weather, a group of our older drivers decided to meet at one of their houses, with their carers, to create an entry for the Arts and Crafts competition. It was entirely their own idea, and they spent a busy afternoon, chatting about RDA, how much they loved carriage driving – and making a beautiful collage! What a great way to keep their RDA time going, even though they couldn’t actually drive! That’s the RDA effect!

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F orming part of the RDA National Championships, the annual Arts & Crafts Competition is always an incredibly popular event. Not only does the competition provide a brilliant opportunity for riders, vaulters and carriage drivers to express themselves through art, but also, as it is open to participants of all ages, it gives everyone the chance to take part in a national competition in some way, and to achieve recognition.

In RDA, we’re always amazed by entrants’ creativity and imagination, and the passion and excitement each has for RDA is clear to see. Each entry class is offered for both individual and group artwork, and these can be drawings, paintings, collages or montages – or even textile creations.

The competition is a fantastic opportunity to involve families, schools, colleges or care centres, too, as participants are encouraged to create their artwork at any time, in RDA sessions, in the classroom, or even at home.

Thank you! RDA is extremely grateful to Life with Art for its generous sponsorship of the Arts & Crafts Competition, see www.lifewithart.co.uk

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ASDAN is a pioneering curriculum development organisation and awarding body, offering programmes and qualifications that nurture skills for learning, employment and life.

Recording and sharing the journey

RDA has been working with ASDAN since 2005, and in just over a decade that partnership has given hundreds of RDA riders, vaulters and carriage drivers the opportunity to show off their skills, share experiences, and have their achievements recognised with accredited, internationally-respected certificates.

ASDAN’s Preparing for Adulthood programmes are designed for those with moderate, severe, complex, profound or multiple learning difficulties. RDA currently offers two of these programmes: Towards Independence: Animal Care and Transition Challenge*. Covering key curriculum areas, they allow for inclusion and achievement at all levels – from having a sensory experience of the activities, through to being able to complete and record tasks unaided.

Photographs, writing, worksheets, drawings, and collages can all be used to show just what’s been accomplished. The aim is to be creative and collect a file of evidence, in an attractive and appealing format.

*New Sensory version of Transition Challenge now available

We love ASDAN programmes because

- They allow participants of all ages and abilities to be rewarded for activities and achievements, even sensory experiences
- Activities help develop key, curriculum-supportive skills, such as numeracy and language skills. They also build social awareness, confidence, and self esteem
- Workbook projects can form a simple, useful basis for lesson plans – and they’re great fun!
- They enable parents, carers, teachers and assistants to really get involved with riders’ development by helping with the projects at home or in school
- ASDAN is highly respected by schools and colleges, who can use participants’ achievements as valuable evidence for OFSTED
- Finished projects are something special to keep and share, as a ‘diary’ of time spent in RDA. They can be shown off to the school or college, family and friends, and are something to be really proud of!
- They help to make the most of the RDA experience
- They can foster friendships and interaction between participants

MORE INFO
Contact Marisa Bretherton-Mackay e: marisa@rda.org.uk / t: 01926 405973 www.asdan.org.uk

Animal Care Short Course

A course with 10-60 hours of activities, involving caring for animals ranging from RDA equines or pets, farm animals and wildlife, to learning about more exotic species at zoos or wildlife centres.

Challenge descriptions can be adapted, and the course can be carried out in a variety of settings, over a time period to suit the participant/Group.

Aimed at young people of all abilities, mainly 13-19 years (but also adults/younger learners, where appropriate), the focus is on completing challenges and skills development according to individual ability, rather than attainment at a specific level. Certificates can be issued throughout the year, after internal moderation.