From First Ride to National Champion – Mya’s Journey with the RDA.

Four years ago, my daughter Mya (now aged 8) began her journey with SBRDA. At that time, we had no idea just how life-changing this experience would be. From her very first session, something special happened. She found her place, a place where she felt safe, supported, seen, and where she could truly learn to shine.

RDA has become so much more than a weekly riding session. It’s the highlight of her week, something she really looks forward to. The ponies, the coaches, and the volunteers and staff have all become part of her extended family, offering not just skills, but love, consistency, and a sense of belonging that means the world to her, and to us.

For Mya, RDA is her sanctuary. It’s a place where she can truly be herself, free from the pressures and expectations of the outside world. Here, she doesn’t have to mask or hide who she is. She can simply enjoy the moment, connect with the ponies, and experience the joy of being part of a supportive and inclusive community. This space has given her not just the tools for growth, but a sense of peace and acceptance that she’s not always able to find elsewhere.

Over these four years, we have watched her confidence grow. Her self-esteem has flourished, her social skills have developed, and she’s become stronger both physically and emotionally. Riding has helped with her core strength, balance, sensory processing, and coordination. But beyond all that, it’s given her a  true sense of purpose and passion. She absolutely loves to ride, she takes it seriously, but also finds so much fun init. You can see the pride in her face every time she’s in the saddle.

This year, Mya took on her biggest challenge yet by entering the Junior Countryside Challenge, starting with the Virtual Nationals, then progressing through to the Regionals, and, to our surprise, qualifying for the RDA National Championships for the very first time. We were already so enormously proud to see her reach the final stage, butt hen came the incredible news: she had achieved 1st place in her class and was named a National Champion! It was a moment of pure joy, pride, and disbelief. As her parents, we were totally overwhelmed. Mya took it all in her stride. Upon receiving her sash, rosettes, trophy, and keyring. She said, “I’ve never come 1st at anything.” To hear her say that, after achieving so much, was a moment we will always hold dear. She was so proud, and rightly so. It is a milestone we will treasure forever.

This incredible achievement is not just a reflection of her hard work and determination; it isa testament to the dedication and skill of her coaches and the entire SBRDA team. The care, time, and effort that must go on behind the scenes is not easy to comprehend, and certainly not something we take for granted. Every session is made possible by a special team of people who give their all, quietly, consistently, tirelessly, and wholeheartedly — to help children like Mya grow and thrive.

A special and heartfelt thank you must go to her coaches, Theresa and Alison, who have not only taught and guided Mya every step of the way, but also stood beside her as her leads and side walkers in the competitions. Their knowledge, patience, and unwavering belief in her have been instrumental in her progress and achievements. Quite simply, Mya wouldn’t be where she is today without them.

And of course, we can’t forget the ponies — especially her first and most beloved, Pip. From day one, Mya formed a strong bond with Pip, and that connection has only grown deeper. He has been there for her through so much, including helping her push through and qualify at the Regionals.  Mya absolutely adores him, and he has given her so much confidence and joy over the years.  Mya has ridden other lovely ponies too — Freddie, Bailey, Rosie and Chequers, all of whom have also helped shape her journey.  But her heart will always belong to Pip.

At the Nationals, Saxon RDA showed incredible kindness and community spirit by generously loaning Mya their pony, Dolly, making it possible for her to compete. Without their kind support, Mya may not have been able to take part in this unforgettable event. We are deeply grateful for their generosity, a true example of the RDA family pulling together to lift one another up.

RDA offers more than just equine therapy. It is a holistic, deeply supportive environment that nurtures the whole child. The kindness and encouragement that surround Mya every week help her believe in herself and what she can do. She feels included, accepted, and truly part of something very special. We are endlessly grateful to the RDA and everyone involved — the coaches, staff, volunteers, admin teams, and of course, the wonderful ponies. They have helped our daughter not only find her strength, but her sparkle. With their help, she isn’t just learning to ride she’s learning to believe in herself. And that is the most powerful gift of all. And as she continues to grow, we hope she’ll keep building on these amazing achievements, rising to new challenges, and discovering just how far she can go.

Thank you to each and every one of you at SBRDA for all you have done and continue to do to support Mya, and all the children who attend.

Samantha x