



A smile is worth a thousand words



South Region Chair's Report for 2026



It's been a bit of a wait for this newsletter! It's landing a little later than usual because we wanted to make sure we captured all of your summer news - including the heatwave! That might feel like a distant memory by now, but hopefully you'll enjoy looking back on all the fantastic events from Regionals, Nationals and everything in between.

I can't quite believe I'm now two years into my role as Regional Chair, and I have to say... I'm absolutely loving it. One of the best parts of the role is getting to see so many of you in action and experiencing the incredible variety across our groups.

From swanky purpose-built yards (you know who you are!), to dedicated volunteers hacking or transporting ponies through every kind of weather, to simple fields where participants can enjoy those wonderful connections with ponies, coaches and volunteers - every single one of you is making a difference. Together, you're bringing joy, physical therapy, confidence and a real sense of achievement to hundreds of participants across the South Region.

Sally Merrick and Midge Hargreaves have been honoured with the prestigious RDA President's Award for individuals who have shown unparalleled dedication and service for three decades or more. Sally has volunteered at Windsor and Ascot Driving Group for over 30 years, and Midge, firstly at RDA Harrow Weald and then at the Bramshaw Group, for an amazing 42 years. Huge congratulations to them both.

Many of you will have seen the RDA Impact Report, which was presented at last year's AGM following research carried out in 2025. If you missed it, here's a snapshot of the findings.

The results won't come as a surprise to those of us involved in our groups, because we see the impact every day, but they're still a fascinating read. They're also incredibly useful when talking to potential funders and supporters.

Just under 1,300 people were surveyed, including riders, drivers, parents, carers and volunteers.

- " 95% of participants feel calm and focused during sessions.
- " 63% report a long-term improvement in mood.
- " 72% are better able to regulate their emotions.

- " 82% feel more connected to others.
- " 98% feel more confident about themselves.
- " 95% are proud of what they have achieved.
- " 88% have improved balance, posture and coordination.
- " 71% have improved fine and gross motor skills.
- " 71% of children are more relaxed and settled at school because of RDA.
- " 80% of parents and carers believe these positive changes wouldn't have happened without RDA.

We witness these outcomes every day, and it's wonderful to have the evidence to support what we already know. If you'd like a copy of the full report, just drop me a line and I'll happily email it to you.

The region has also been packed with some fabulous events this year. Our Conference back in April was a brilliant opportunity to get together, catch up and network. I hope you'll agree we were inspired by some incredible speakers. There was plenty of learning, plenty of laughter, and I especially enjoyed Michael's panel interview with our medal winners - what a treat!



We know there were a few things that could have been better, particularly the catering and some of the accessibility arrangements, and we'll certainly take those lessons on board. Next time we'll make it even bigger and even better. A huge thank you once again to the amazing team who made it all happen and who dug deep into their little black books to bring together such fantastic speakers and contributors.

From back left to right: Paige Parsons (County Chair, Hampshire), Katy Lake (South Region Publicity Officer), Frances Lochrane (County Coach Berkshire and Coach Developer), Moo Nowell-Smith (County Chair, Oxfordshire), Diane Lee (Regional Chair), Anne Coney (South Region Driving Representative) and Felicity Smettem (County Coach, Buckinghamshire). Missing from the photo is Tiggi Bentley, County Coach for Oxfordshire... she must have been at the bar! ??

Then came the Regionals on Saturday 17 May 2026. Despite a weather forecast that looked decidedly changeable in the days running up to the event, we were once again blessed with good conditions on the day itself - continuing what is fast becoming a happy tradition for our show.



Eight RDA groups, 50 riders and 24 horses from across the South Region came together for a day of dressage and Countryside Challenge competitions, with riders of all ages and grades putting in fantastic performances. There were smiles everywhere - from the competitors themselves to the parents, helpers, volunteers and supporters cheering them on.

Our outstanding event secretary, Cassilda Courtier-Dutton (Newbury RDA), has decided, after several years of impeccable organisation, to step down. We are indebted to her for her cheerful demeanour and phenomenal organisational skills. She is hoping to bring her own riders next year so Leanne Cottrell (South Bucks) is stepping into the breach. Big shoes to fill and she will have support from Alice Summersbee and Emma Packford-Garrett (AIM RDA) plus Emma MacDonald. Thank you for taking this on guys and securing the future of the event!



And then Nationals... wow, was it hot! National Office once again issued excellent safety guidance, which everyone followed. While a few groups understandably decided not to travel, many did make the journey, and I can't wait to read all about your experiences in the pages that follow.

Looking ahead, here are a few dates for your diary:

- " Windsor Lions Sponsored Ride - 5-6 September 2026
- " Coach Training, Newbury - 26 September 2026- How to Progress Your Riders
- " Coach Training, Abingdon - 25 October 2026 - Content TBC
- " South Region Qualifier - 16 May 2027
- " National Championships - 9-11 July 2027

We'll also be adding more training opportunities throughout the year, so keep an eye on your emails and the South Region group chat and socials for further dates.

I hope you enjoy reading about everything that's been happening across the South Region. Thank you, as always, for everything you do - you really do make a difference. Now, on to the exciting part... what have you all been up to?

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cassilda'.



New Yatt riders visit some very special Shire Horses

During the Easter holiday, Coach Pauline Barlow and Chair Annie Cripps took some of our riders and carers/families to visit the Shire horses at Hook Norton Brewery.

These wonderful 'workhorses' have been an integral part of brewery life since its founding day back in 1849. At present, the brewery has three Shire horses, Brigadier, Balmoral and Cromwell.

Coachmen Nick and Alystare introduced the children to the Shires and showed them around their stables. The children then had the opportunity to groom the horses and hold one of their large shoes. The two horses were then prepared with the special tack to deliver beer to local pubs by horse drawn dray, after sharing a pint of Best Bitter.

A wonderful time was had by everyone.



False Economies

New Yatt RDA have enjoyed the Andrews Bowen surface in their Arena since it was installed in 2007 and topped up in 2009 and 2015. We had gone for a thinner option initially, but it turned out to be a false economy so in 2019 3" depth of Andrews Bowen Propel was added.

Although the team here, led by volunteers Derek and Andy, diligently harrow it twice a week, over the years the fibre has broken down and has separated, so it was lying on top of a very compacted surface. It had got so compacted that the tool used was bent trying to push it into the surface. The surface was also uneven in depth, especially in the corners.



Following the lockdown the annual maintenance overhaul that we all knew about, got put off every year until this Easter, when MC Equine Surfaces were invited to come and regrade and level the surface, then go over with a deep power harrow / rota-spike to ease the significant over-compaction.

There were no arena sessions for two days, but the result has been really impressive, and we are all agreed that we will take care of it annually in future, partly funded by the income from our arena hires, for what is left of its life.



Tea with a Pony

We have recently launched Tea with a Pony here at New Yatt.

These sessions create a calm, welcoming space for people living with dementia and other long term conditions - a chance to relax, connect and simply enjoy the moment.

Behind each of these moments are our volunteers helping to make it possible, creating spaces where connection, confidence and community can grow.





AIM RDA: A Year in the Life of the South Region's Newest Group

The months have gone by very quickly since we introduced ourselves in the last issue of South Region News, but those same months have been as full and exciting as they have been fast. We are very proud of all we have achieved in our first full year as a registered RDA group, and of the fun we've had among the ups, downs, and endless unseen graft which will be familiar to all who run RDA groups.

May 2025 brought us to our first Regional Qualifier, a proud team effort ending in all of our competing riders qualifying for the National Championships. It was no straightforward task getting us there, and the levels of achievement were beyond anything we could have hoped for.

Members of our group enjoyed representing RDAUK at Badminton Horse Trials, and in one case making a surprise appearance as an extra at Royal Windsor in the "Around the World" fancy dress class.

We were also on the road in June at Swindon Armed Forces Day, accompanying the Armed Forces Equine Charity (who operate our largest location) and spreading the word about all the good happening in our RDA community.





July was one of our biggest months yet, as we celebrated our first birthday with a party for more than a hundred, and only a week later headed off to Hartpury to begin our group's National Championships history. The weekend really did turn out to be one for the books, as our riders brought home some amazing results, with five overall class titles, three pieces of silverware, and some brilliant personal bests and memories. Our co-chair Alice Summersbee was also presented with her award for RDAUK Coach Mentor of the Year, and we enjoyed all this very special weekend has to offer to the full. Our only hope was it would be a bit cooler in 2026...

September 2025 opened a new chapter for us with the purchase of our first horse. Lakelands Prince (Ruairi to his friends) is a 15hh grey Connemara who won us over with

his kind nature and exciting potential to be a fantastic RDA horse. Ruairi lives at our Shrivenham site and is used and cared for by our riding school hosts. Horse ownership is rarely plain sailing, and we have already experienced this, but we are feeling positive about Ruairi's future in his very special job, and are hoping to see him begin his RDA competitive career at this year's qualifiers.

The autumn also saw the first anniversary of our partnership with Shrivenham Equestrian Centre, to whom we are indebted for their support of our RDA ventures. We run sessions at Shrivenham on Wednesdays and Sundays, and have been able to expand our offering to include private lessons for more advanced riders and a monthly Pony Club session for younger participants, providing opportunities to learn about horse care in a fun and inclusive environment.

Our volunteers enjoyed another opportunity to represent RDAUK at Blenheim Horse Trials, even giving a mechanical horse ride to actor Joe Ashman.

We ran a very popular pub quiz fundraiser at Halloween, and celebrated the success of our participants in the Virtual Championships. Two participants riding their very first dressage tests were Class Champions in very busy led dressage classes, and the

opportunity to provide new opportunities and stretch comfort zones benefited many others.

We ended the year with a visit from RDAUK CEO Michael Bishop, and a coach trip bursting with festive spirit to London International Horse Show. These events and visits have become a highlight of AIM's calendar, bringing together participants, volunteers and families from across the group. Maintaining a group culture which is inclusive and fun beyond the arena or stable yard has been important to us from the very beginning, and everyone is enjoying it.

The group has continued its rhythm in the first few months of 2026: our three days of riding sessions and one of unmounted groundwork and therapy feel well-established now, supported by strong and diverse volunteer networks. We have welcomed a seventh member to our board of trustees, and are looking forward to expanding our fundraising and events calendar to continue supporting our activities. In February, we were also pleased

to host a visit to our Wednesday evening sessions from Mark Lygo, Chair of Oxfordshire County Council, and to share the developments in RDA provision we have been able to bring to the area.

April 2026 marked our second year of collaboration with Lambourn RDA, whose site and horses we use for our Saturday sessions. AIM also collaborates with Lambourn to run unmounted groundwork sessions on Fridays, which have seen a successful year at the hands of a team of dedicated, thoughtful volunteers. The team at Lambourn remain incredibly supportive, understanding hosts, and we are very grateful for all they do for us.

A year in RDA is never without its challenges, as all of us know, but we have come away from the last 12 months with so much proof of why those challenges are worth facing. We are proud to be staying true to our ethos of "Ability, Independence, Motivation" as part of South Region RDA, and to be having so much fun with it.



Broadlands

2025 Broadlands 70th Anniversary Year

What a year this turned out to be! At the start of 2025, we formed an expanded Events Committee with the ambitious goal of raising an additional £30,000. With an aging herd in mind, we committed to purchasing three new ponies.

A wide range of fundraising events took place, including an online auction, summer party, car boot sale, wreath making, food demonstration, and even a visit to a specialist car showroom. We also received proceeds from a local cricket day. Supporters went above and beyond — one ran the London Marathon, another walked Hadrian's Wall, and a parent completed a skydive.

Thanks to these incredible efforts, we raised over £31,500!

We were delighted to welcome two new ponies, Mia and Rocky, who have settled in wonderfully and have quickly become favourites among our participants. We are still searching for a third pony - ideally a reliable 14.2 "bombproof" pony.



February 2026 - Power Supply Upgrade



After several years of planning, Broadlands successfully connected to its own power supply from the National network.

For over 50 years, electricity had been supplied via a domestic consumer unit, presenting a potential risk to business continuity. With support from EHDC Rural Projects funding, and thanks to the tireless work of our volunteer Maintenance team - who collaborated closely with SSE and the District Council - the project became a reality.

In February, the new power supply was switched on, marking a significant milestone for Broadlands.

March 2026 – Community Hub Opening



We are incredibly proud to open our brand-new Community Hub!

After six months of dedication, planning, and teamwork, this welcoming space has been created to bring people together. It offers a safe and inclusive environment for participants, families, staff, and visitors to socialise, learn, and grow.

Whether you're connecting with others, developing new skills, or simply enjoying a friendly atmosphere, the hub is open to all. A heartfelt thank you goes to East Hants District Council for their support in making this project possible.

April 2026 – Training and Development

Training remains a key priority at Broadlands. We are committed to ensuring our staff, volunteers, and trustees stay up to date with best practices, new developments, and shared experiences.

Activity Leaders

Several volunteers have successfully completed the Horse Knowledge e-learning module as they continue their journey towards becoming RDA Activity Leaders.

April 7th – Hampshire Training Day

We hosted a fantastic and highly practical training day at Broadlands. Participants painted the main muscle groups on Fee, helping deepen understanding of equine anatomy. The session also explored how a rider's balance influences a horse's movement — an invaluable learning experience for all involved.



21st April – South Region RDA Conference

A strong turnout from staff, volunteers, and trustees made for an informative and enjoyable day at the South Region RDA Conference. It was a great opportunity to learn, connect, and share experiences.



2026 - Fundraising Events

We are excited to offer a wide range of events this year, with something for everyone!

So far, we've hosted:

- Talks
- A singing workshop
- Quiz night
- Easter wreath making

Upcoming events include:

- Visit to Kingsclere racing yard
- Wine tasting evening
- Monthly "Tea at 3"
- Tea with the ponies
- Summer drinks party
- Sip and paint evening
- Bridge afternoon

For full details, please visit:

www.broadlandsgrouprda.org.uk/events

General Updates

With the arrival of better weather, we are delighted to move riding sessions outdoors, allowing participants to enjoy the beautiful countryside. Ground-based activities are also now taking place in the sunshine.

Our ponies are looking fit, healthy, and thoroughly enjoying their first taste of spring grass.

We also welcomed visitors to our Open Day on 2nd May.

As always, we are incredibly grateful to our dedicated volunteers, whose continued support makes everything we do possible.

Looking Ahead

2026 is shaping up to be another fantastic year for Broadlands. Thank you to everyone who continues to support our community - we couldn't do it without you!



This rider has been with us for many years and is becoming very proficient.

During the Autumn last year we held a very well-supported Quiz Night and raised some very welcome funds. It was a fun evening and the committee provided a delicious lasagne supper. Some of the questions were relating to RDA which one or two of us found rather daunting!

Although Christmas seems a long time ago, Wantage RDA volunteers and our riders had an exciting and enjoyable visit from Father Christmas. Before he arrived, the riders collected baubles and tinsel to put on our Christmas tree.

He brought a gift for each rider which was a decorated bauble with

a photo of them on the pony that they ride.

Hannah Thetford has now qualified as an Instructor after a lot of hard work and effort, well done Hannah.

The storage cupboard which we use had become very old and in the wet weather, very damp too.

Several members of our Committee applied for a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to use for that and also our 50th Tea Party last year, with success. The new cupboard has now been installed with lighting and padlocks. Thank you so much to the Lottery Fund and also those who worked so hard to obtain the funding.

Ravenswood

Barbara Scarfe 1956-2026

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Barbara Scarfe from Ravenswood RDA. Barbara passed away peacefully at Thames Hospice, Maidenhead on Saturday 14th March 2026.

Barbara worked at Ravenswood RDA for many years, and as a qualified riding coach and carriage driver, she put her whole heart and soul into her work, displaying great empathy and compassion for all those she came in contact with. She had a real knack for putting nervous newcomers at their ease, developed a very successful equine therapy programme for early onset dementia sufferers and also conducted her riding and driving sessions with patience, understanding and always a sense of fun. In short, Barbara was a perfect fit for RDA work.

We will miss her warm smile and the wonderful rapport she developed with the residents of Ravenswood, external clients, our volunteers and, perhaps most of all, with her beloved horses, Bertie, Tom (pictured), Molly, and Gloria. Rest in peace, dear Barbara.



Windsor and Ascot Driving Group

Windsor and Ascot Driving Group took part in the summer carriage driving event in August 2025 organised by RDA South Region. It was very kindly hosted by Windsor Park Equestrian Club (WPEC) and held in Windsor Great Park. The competition comprised of dressage and cones with four of our participants, Trish, Daniel, Maria and Zoe taking part. It was the first competition for three of our participants and one coach so everyone was very nervous and excited. It was also the first competition for our pony Blue, who was an absolute star. Our other pony, Sweet Pea, is an old hand at competitions and took it all in her stride. Both ponies and all our competitors did really well and enjoyed the event.



Apart from WPEC's support, we really appreciated all the effort and planning that went in to organising the event, including our own Group Organiser Sarah Clunie, who was in charge of checking tack and achieved a record step count running between the arenas! We're looking forward to the next one in October 2026.

Our ponies go on holiday for two weeks in June when our fields become a heliport for Royal Ascot.

As we can't drive during this time, some volunteers and participants went for a picnic at Dukes Ride in Windsor Great Park.



This is where the Royal family and guests swap from cars to carriages on their way to Ascot Racecourse. Everyone had a great view of the beautiful Windsor Greys, the fabulous carriages and, of course, the dignitaries including the King, Queen and the Prince and Princess of Wales.



Shifford Carriage Driving Group



2025 was our Year of the Horse

TOMMY ZOOM

The original Tommy Zoom was a CBeebie's cartoon character. A little boy hero on roller skates who always turned up quickly and saved the day.

Our Tommy has zoomed in with similar flair. He passed his RDA assessment in June 2025 barely a week before our eldest equine, Freddy, needed to take a break to recover from lameness. Tommy stepped forward into Freddy's shoes to pull our 4 wheel carriage. He has delighted our participants who credit him with "power steering" just on a head collar.

Tommy is not the standard RDA carriage driving equine. He is an American Standard Bred Pacer. He has additional gears and sometimes moves laterally (like a

camel) rather than diagonally. Since he was acquired by our Chair two years ago, he has been surprised to learn that we like him to go slowly. As he is now 18 years of age he has not objected to the more relaxed pace of life.

Tommy is versatile. He is a ride and drive. In September 2025 he completed the Abingdon RDA sponsored ride round the Blenheim estate with our Chair and accompanied by another volunteer on her horse. Between them, as well as supporting Abingdon RDA, they raised an amazing £1,278.00 for our small group.

LADY



Lady is our longest serving pony and has worked giving pleasure to our participants for over 16 years. In the last two years, and now 21 years of age, she has had to adapt

to changes to group routines and her accommodation. She is an energetic girl and is very enthusiastic about her work to the extent that she often rushes to load up into the trailer on driving days. In 2025 Lady won the RDA Equine of the Year Award and we were delighted to attend the National Championships on her behalf to collect her award.



FREDDY

Freddy is 25 years of age. He had a varied and unusual career pre his RDA assessment seven years ago. He is also a ride and drive. He has attended battle re-enactments and acquitted himself well in a cavalry line, facing pike blocks, drums, musket and cannon fire. He has taken our Chairman on several long distance rides including trekking from Cornwall to Oxfordshire. In early 2025 he was happy to give Michael Bishop his first carriage driving experience. We are delighted that he (Freddy

not Michael) has recovered well from lameness. Freddy has done the occasional drive during the 2026 driving season. He occasionally substitutes for Tommy in the 4 wheel carriage.

As a group we are very proud of the 2025 achievements of our trio of equine volunteers.

2026

We have been busy recruiting and training more volunteers and are working towards being able to offer additional activities to our participants in the future.

Over the winter of 2025/26, courtesy of Abingdon RDA, for which we are very grateful, we began familiarising Tommy Zoom and Lady with working in an arena. We have now identified a local arena large enough for carriage driving and will soon begin training our coaches and equines for cones and dressage driving.

We have also been in discussions with local landowners/estates with a view to arranging off road pleasure drives and picnics via private roads and Byways. This is still a work in progress.

We have ambitions to sign some of our participants up for the Endurance League once we can identify suitable useable routes.

South Buckinghamshire



The cold, wet days of winter feel like a distant memory after the long hot summer! During the Spring our participants enjoyed our outdoor Countryside Challenge course; we held an in-house competition and everyone loved receiving their rosettes. During the hotter weather we have been so lucky to be able to make use of the woodland that surrounds South Bucks RDA – cool hacks in the shade of the trees were appreciated by all.



In May a merry band of riders, staff and volunteers took part in The RDA Fancy Dress Class at Royal Windsor Horse Show. The theme was 'Space' and we had a great time creating our 'Ziggy Stardust,

Spiders from Mars' costumes and soaking up the atmosphere of Windsor. We were awarded 2nd place and had a wonderful day.

A number of riders also attended the South Region Qualifiers and seven riders qualified for the National Championships in July. It was a wonderful weekend at Hartpury University and College in Gloucestershire and we are very proud of our riders Anna, Thomas (Class Champion), Sam, Elish, Mya, Harry and Teagan and of course our fabulous horses Chequers, Harpa and Duke.

We welcomed a lovely group of visitors from the local community as part of the Chalfont St Peter Fringe Festival – our 'tea and tour' gave the group a chance to enjoy an afternoon at South Bucks RDA, benefitting from our 'magic' – we look forward to hosting more events such as this in the future. Our fundraising team has also been 'out and about' at local fetes, raising money from our popular tombola and games.

Two special training events have also been held. The first in our lecture series in conjunction with Iain McKenzie Equine Practice was attended by over 30 people. The topic was "Raising awareness over laminitis, EMS and PPID".



Further dates will be announced soon – follow us on Facebook to find out more. A Longlining Clinic with Ashleigh Sanderson was organised in July for volunteers and staff – it was a fantastic day giving our team the chance to learn something new.

We are all also extremely proud of our Chair Di Redfern who was awarded an MBE in the King's Birthday Honours in recognition of her services to disabled riders. Her voluntary work has focused on ensuring that disabled people receive the highest quality coaching and support, tailored to their individual needs. Through her leadership, guidance and commitment, she has made a lasting contribution both to South Bucks RDA and to the wider RDA movement, helping to promote and develop equestrian opportunities for disabled riders.

Di has always championed every rider, embodying one of the RDA's guiding principles: "It's what you can do that counts."



Bank Farm

After 40 successful years, sadly the decision was made to close Bank Farm RDA. With annual cost of £30,000 it became very obvious that raising this was not possible.

It has been a wonderful 40 years starting with one rider in September 1986 to the 42 riders in our last week. During our time we ran 21 National residential riding holidays for eight children and 14 four day carriage driving holidays for six turnouts. Our lovely ponies have found great homes in RDA groups or families with disabled children.

My sincere thanks go to everyone who have supported our work coaches, trustees, volunteers, many D of E students, and local organisations and individuals.

Rossway

Another very busy term - but when is it otherwise in RDA?

Main news always feels like the 'new' happenings which for Rossway are:

- starting more sessions – we now have a 'new' day on Monday mornings
- having to cancel two Thursday sessions due to heat!
- taking 4 horses to the Regionals, rather than just 2 as previously
- holding our AGM AND Open Day on consecutive weeks in July!!!

For ALL of the above, we absolutely could not do this without our brilliant Volunteers - thank you, thank you, thank you.



Stable Futures

No one misses out: Stable Futures hosts its very first prom for young people.

For many young people, attending their school prom is an exciting milestone. But for some children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), attending a traditional school prom isn't always possible. At Stable Futures, an Alternative Provision run by Amegreen Children's Services, no one was going to miss out.

At Stable Futures, our partnership with Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) enables children and young people to experience the incredible benefits that horses can bring through a range of equine learning pathways. Whether participating in equine groundwork, mounted riding sessions or achieving ASDAN Short Course accreditations in Small Animal Care and equine-related learning, our learners develop confidence, resilience, communication skills and emotional wellbeing alongside our remarkable horses and ponies.

As the summer term drew to a close, it felt only fitting to celebrate our learners' achievements in a way that recognised the special bond they have built with our equine herd throughout the year. Horses are extraordinary teachers; they offer acceptance without judgement, encourage trust, build confidence

and help young people discover strengths they never knew they had. For many of our learners, their chosen horse or pony has been an important part of their journey, making it the perfect companion to stand proudly beside them for their end-of-summer prom photographs as they celebrated another year of success.

Dressed in smart suits, elegant dresses and lots of sparkles, the young people celebrated with the Stable Futures team to make this prom one they will all remember – even the horses were in their best finery! But the day was more than just dressing up. It was an opportunity for the young people to celebrate their achievements and show their families what a positive impact Stable Futures has had on them.

Rachel Redgwell, director of Amegreen Children's Services, said: "Every child deserves the chance to celebrate life's important milestones. We know that for some of our young people, attending a mainstream prom simply isn't possible. That's why creating this event was so important to us. Seeing our students arrive looking so proud, confident and excited, and watching families share in those special moments, reminded us why inclusion matters. These are memories that will stay with our young people and their loved ones for years to come."

The prom is just one example of what Stable Futures, part of Amegreen Children's Services, sets out to do every day – giving children and young people a calm, nurturing place to learn away from the pressures of a traditional classroom. Through equine-assisted learning and time spent outdoors with horses and small animals, every child is supported to make academic progress, build confidence, develop life skills and enjoy the experiences many young people take for granted.



Wing

New riders for Wing Group RDA

We've seen some change at Wing Group over the last year as we have been working with youngsters from a school new to us. They are older than the primary schools we have previously worked with, which our ponies, coaches and volunteers adapted to after only a few weeks of liaison with the school and care team. The school have commented on a "remarkable difference" in that their "young people have have grown in confidence and become more communicative".

In July, Mursley Hall Farm Equestrian Centre (where we are based) hosted a fundraising "handy pony" event for us. Pupils from the riding school collected sponsorship money to participate in the event, which included prizes awarded for the best fancy dress (on a Disney or green theme), the fastest round and the highest amount of sponsorship. They raised an amazing £1,300!

Two of the youngsters from MacIntyre School (the new school) also participated in the event, after practising the obstacles in their regular weekly riding sessions. This was a big achievement for them. They were thrilled to ride the ponies they knew, complete the handy pony course and to receive rosettes as they finished. Happy faces all round!

Our group has enjoyed a happy year of riding at Waterstock Riding School. We have two sessions a week with eight children coming from two local schools. Both days have a separate band of volunteers, but some happily step in when one session is short.

We are so fortunate that Tiggi Bentley has filled the coaching breach when first Tamsin Woods and then Suzy Crwys Williams fell ill. She has agreed to continue teaching both groups when we start our new term in September which is wonderful news.

Our Monday group have had a fantastic year achieving their Grade 2 Proficiency badges on our last session in July. They were thrilled to receive beautiful rosettes made by one of our volunteers, Lyn Shew. Their improvement in one year's riding has been amazing and one or two have shown real talent.

We are lucky to have four kind ponies who have grown into RDA mode as the months go by and do a great job for us. The children have found so much joy from their weekly time in the company of the ponies.



Our one independent rider, Daisy Britnell, has had a great year competing at the National Championships and, by invitation, at a Para competition since. Her family have been hugely supportive of the group with fund raising.

One of our volunteers, Katie Nellist, spoke on her journey with RDA at the regional conference we held in June. She has been very involved with SEND and has even journeyed to Westminster to talk to MPs.

We are blessed with a great team of volunteers and some new members have put our workforce on a much steadier footing. The volunteers for the two sessions came together for our annual lunch and AGM which was chaired by our Chairman Waveney Luke.

Baughurst



We have had a very successful end of year for our six little participants from Mapel Ridge school. All the children showed their skills to parents and staff and were awarded Grade 1 certificates in Riding and Horse Care. They were also given Baughurst RDA sweat shirts and rosettes. We celebrated in the indoor school with a picnic due to the hot weather!! It was sad to say goodbye to the lovely group of children who did so well but we look forward to our next group in September.



The weekend before we had a 'Clear Round Event' to help raise money for our group. We raised £805 with all the different stalls and entries. We are delighted as we have some major expenses in the next few months! Although it was a very hot day, it was very well attended by all ages and sizes. The much needed refreshment tent kept our volunteers busy with cold drinks, teas and coffees and a great selection of cakes!! We had wonderful raffle prizes presented by one of our volunteers. It was a very successful day and thanks to our wonderful volunteer group who did everything from parking to putting up jumps and giving help and directions. Thank you to you all.



Lambourn

It's been a busy year so far at the Lambourn group of the RDA, with the major challenge being the weather! It started with a very cold, frosty and snowy start which resulted in a delay to the start of the new term. Then in February and March it was the rain and wind that meant numerous sessions were cancelled. We looked forward to some drier weather not knowing we would be faced with the hottest, driest June and July to follow with more sessions being cancelled. All the cancellations have a big impact on all our participants and although some of our coaches have come up with great alternative activities, these can't replace the physical benefits of riding.

As always, we have been out and about promoting our group, including giving presentations, taking part in a Flower Festival and attending volunteer recruitment events. Some of our volunteers also helped to run the RDA Stand at the Badminton Horse Trials. As a result, we now have the highest number of participants and volunteers registered with our group, which is fantastic, but it also means we have a waiting list, although we try to fit in as many people as possible.

We celebrated Volunteers Week in June and had a summer drinks party in August to say thank you to our incredible team of volunteers. As part of the 'Racing Together' Community Week, two teams of volunteers came to help around the yard. A big thank you to 'Racing Together' for arranging it and we look forward to taking part next year.



Fundraising is never far from our minds. In January we had a Race Night which was fully booked, as was the annual Bridge Lunch in March. In April we were at the Lambourn Open Day organising a fun dog show and selling homemade cakes and bakes. We have had two "Tea with a Pony" sessions with people coming from a local day care centre, a stroke group and some individuals. These are such wonderful, happy occasions for everyone involved.

Looking ahead to the rest of the year, we plan to run as many sessions as possible and continue to fundraise. In September we will have a stand at a local horse show, and we will be cheering on one of our Trustees who is running the Richmond Half marathon to raise funds for our group. In December we will be at a Christmas Fair, and we will also have a stand at the Hungerford Extravaganza!

Thank you to everyone who makes it happen at Lambourn RDA!

Brockenhurst

Long-Serving Chair Steps Down After Nearly Three Decades of Service

Brockenhurst Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) has paid tribute to its long-serving Chair, Sue Lynes, who stepped down on 1 July after around 28 years of dedicated service to the local charity.

Sue has been at the heart of Brockenhurst RDA for almost three decades, helping to shape the group into the thriving charity it is today. During her time as Chair, hundreds of local children have benefited from the confidence, enjoyment and independence that therapeutic riding can bring.

Among Sue's many achievements, she was instrumental in securing the funding and support needed to create Brockenhurst RDA's base at Ford Farm. Working alongside fellow volunteers and supporters, she helped establish the indoor riding arena that now enables the group to provide riding sessions throughout the year, whatever the weather. The facility has transformed what the group is able to offer and will continue to benefit local children for many years to come.



The committee and volunteers would like to express their sincere thanks to Sue for her vision, leadership and unwavering commitment over nearly three decades.

While she may be stepping down as Chair, the legacy she leaves through the facilities she helped create, the volunteers she has inspired and the countless children whose lives have been enriched by Brockenhurst RDA, will continue for many years to come.

I wonder how many articles in this edition of the South Region Newsletter will begin with a comment about the weather? Well, here's another one! It has certainly been a scorcher. Unfortunately, all our ponies have one major design flaw – they can't take their coats off! With three of ours sporting jet-black coats, we've been pulling out all the stops to keep them comfortable, from apple and carrot ice lollies to regular hose-downs and gentle walks through the woods instead of working during the hottest part of the day.

Our participants have been brilliant throughout the heatwave. They have really appreciated us staying open and have been incredibly understanding about changes to lesson times and activities. Like us, they always put the welfare of our ponies first.

It has not been the easiest 12 months at Wyfold. We have faced multiple soundness issues, eye watering veterinary bills and, sadly, we have had to say goodbye to three much-loved members of the herd. Wynne, Big Bob and Sweet Pea have all gone to that heavenly pasture in the sky. Losing them has been difficult, not only for our volunteers and coaches, but also for the participants who loved them dearly.

As a result, Regionals and Nationals simply were not possible for us this year. Instead, we focused on regrouping, rebuilding and finding some additional pony power. The good news is that we have succeeded. We now have eight sound ponies in work and are looking forward to the future with renewed optimism.

We have welcomed Banjo to the herd. He has joined us on loan from a wonderfully kind lady in Baughurst. Standing at 12.3hh, he looks remarkably like Big Joe and is every bit as cheeky.

In the photo below you can see Banjo and Joe enjoying breakfast together. Can you tell them apart?

Hint: Banjo is on the right...although it's not as easy as you might think!

He knows his job inside and out, having previously worked as an RDA pony with Baughurst.





Last week we welcomed another new addition to the herd and, hopefully, the last newcomer for a little while. A warm Wyfold welcome to Dollar, a beautiful six-year-old, 14hh Connemara mare. She is a very different shape and colour from the rest of our hairy cobs and absolutely stunning. Here she is on her very first day, meeting Darcy for the first time.

As she is still young, we are going to take our time with

Dollar and introduce her gradually to RDA activities. She needs time to build strength, gain confidence and become familiar with her new surroundings.

We have also had a super-busy summer away from the arena. On 14 June we celebrated the grand opening of our newly refurbished Wyfold Room, welcoming many of our wonderful supporters, along with the Mayor of Henley, Ian Reissmann, who has kindly chosen Wyfold as one of his charities for the year.



We were especially delighted that our greatest champion, Michael Skinner, officially cut the ribbon before everyone raised a glass of fizz to celebrate our fantastic new space.

No sooner had one project finished than another began. Our leaky hay barn was next on the list and should

be completed by the time you read this. With these improvements in place, our infrastructure is secure for many years to come and we are in a strong position for the future.



The weekend of 11–12 July perfectly captured our favourite motto: *"It's what you can do that counts."* We were treated to a wonderful Jazz at the Yard afternoon with the Bader Heritage Band, followed by a lively ceilidh at Shiplake Memorial Hall,

with both events raising much-needed funds for Wyfold.

The Bader Heritage Band is made up of disabled and non-disabled musicians from across the country who share exactly the same philosophy as we do. They were absolutely outstanding and, although the ceilidh left us with a few sweaty brows (thanks again, weather!), it was tremendous fun from start to finish.

Our last piece of exciting news is that we have been nominated for the BBC Radio Berkshire Make a Difference Awards and we are about to welcome journalists to the yard to interview and publicise us on the radio before the winners are announced at a ceremony in September. Keep everything crossed for us!!

Looking back, this year has tested us in ways we could not have anticipated. Yet it has also reminded us of the strength of the Wyfold community. From volunteers, participants and supporters to our wonderful ponies, everyone has pulled together to help us navigate the challenges and emerge stronger on the other side. We are excited about what lies ahead and look forward to seeing what the next 12 months will bring.



Pony News

There have been a few changes to our herd of ponies this year as some of them started showing signs of lameness or just got to their retirement age. Goldie and Rio, both aged 22, have gone to lovely local retirement homes after a combined 17 years of dedicated service to Newbury RDA. Inca and Dougal returned to their owners.

So Alvie, Tatty and Joey have joined us this year, costing us a total of £14,000. Alvie is a 15 year old, 14.3hh chestnut Irish cob. He has lots of Pony Club experience and has also spent time at a trekking centre in



Ireland. He is unflustered and friendly—an ideal partner for riders building skills. Joey is very good-looking 14.1hh liver chestnut, part-bred Welsh, and an all-round superstar. He has done everything from Pony Club to hunting, but now, aged 19, prefers a gentler pace. Tatty is a striking 14.3hh sabino with cream skin and black spots. Bought in June 2026 aged just 6, she's done plenty of in-hand showing and previously had a cream-and-white foal. Her official name is Champagne Rae, but we thought Tatty (as in Taittinger) was more RDA friendly. She's settling in beautifully and learning the RDA ropes with calmness and curiosity. Our herd now consists of Alvie, Tatty and Joey as well as Ted, Billy, Elvis, Rosie, Wiggle and Willow.



Competition Entries - South Region Qualifier

We took five riders to the South Regional Qualifiers in May this year. Seren competed in Dressage; Jaydon and Emily competed in the Countryside Challenge and Clara and Albie competed in both the Dressage and Countryside Challenge. We also had entries in the Arts & Crafts Competition from Clara, Albie, Eliza and Alice. All our competitors did really well, as did our lovely ponies, Billy and Wiggle. Jaydon, Clara and Albie qualified for the RDA Champs.

Proficiency Tests and Grades

Amongst those who have completed their tests and grades this year are three of our Friday morning riders who received their Grade 1 Horsecare and Grade 1 Riding certificates at the end of the Summer term.



Tea with a Pony

Newbury RDA started offering 'Tea with a Pony' this Summer, with thanks to a grant from the Bothwell Trust. One of our volunteers, Emma, wrote the following report about our last Tea with a Pony session:

Our guests started their visit with a gentle walk around Wyld Court to enjoy the views and our facilities. They visited the beautiful Victorian stables, where volunteers shared some of the history of Wyld Court when it was a working stud. A stop in the tack room gave everyone the opportunity to handle the saddles and bridles, prompting plenty of conversation and shared memories. They then spent time stroking and talking to some of our ponies. One guest had been a keen horsewoman in her younger days and thoroughly enjoyed talking about riding in Ireland while stroking and spending time with the ponies. Another guest had never taken part in any of the care home's outings before, but came to us because she used to volunteer for the RDA and she had a lovely time talking to the ponies and to us.

Everyone then gathered in our marquee, which looked lovely decorated with fresh flowers, for a traditional afternoon tea prepared by our volunteers. The menu included cucumber and egg sandwiches, homemade cakes, and scones with jam and cream.

One gentleman living with dementia found it difficult to remember everyday things and wasn't even sure whether he took sugar in his coffee. During a conversation about our favourite things about horses, one volunteer mentioned their whiskers. That simple comment led us into singing 'My Favourite Things' from The Sound of Music. Before long, everyone had joined in, including the gentleman, who knew every word. It was one of those unexpected moments that made the afternoon so special.

Fundraising Events

We've had some really fun and successful, fundraising events so far this year which will help us raise our target of £80,000 for 2026.

We held a Bingo Night in Goring in March which raised £7,600, then a Plant and Cake Sale in Yatteondon in May which raised £3,700. We held our Golf Day at Huntercombe Golf Court in June and raised just under the amazing amount we got two years ago, bringing in £26,500. We held our first Open Day for many years in July which was a great community event with a second hand tack sale, a clothing sale, plus cakes, a BBQ, games and quizzes which raised £2,000.

Our next fundraising event is our Autumn Gift Fair on Thursday 1st October. Please come along between 9.30am and 4pm to the Tythe Barn in Yattendon. We'll have lots of lovely stalls selling great gifts from homewares to food and drink to clothing and lots more. We'll also have our popular cake stall, tombola and raffle. Entry is £5 (children free). Buy your tickets in advance here: <https://buytickets.at/newburyridingforthedisabled/2296882>

We'll be holding our third annual Carol Service in St Peter & St Paul's Church, Yattendon at 6.30pm on Wednesday 9th December.





The past few months have been quite a rollercoaster for Maidensgrove RDA but, as always, we have kept smiling and enjoying life with our wonderful horses, riders and volunteers!

The much-loved Frank, our big, dependable cob, gave us a fright when he went down with colic and took an emergency trip to the Royal Veterinary College. Thankfully, he didn't need surgery and was soon back up on his giant hooves. Phew! Frank's recovery was a huge relief to everyone who knows and loves him.



We also said a sad goodbye to coach Siobhan McKee, who died in April after a long illness. Siobhan remained involved with RDA right up to her final weeks, demonstrating the incredible strength and resilience that characterised her approach to life. She cared passionately about the difference RDA makes to people, and she continues to inspire us as we carry on the work she did – including the tradition of singing at the start of sessions!



During the summer term, our riders enjoyed lots of fun activities, including hacking out in the woods and fields. Everyone has achieved things that might once have seemed impossible – for some of our youngest riders, the challenge of putting on a riding hat and sitting on a pony for the very first time was daunting – but they did it!

We've recently enjoyed some social outings, including a lovely visit to The Horse Trust in Speen, as well as coffee meet-ups. Our planned Countryside Challenge summer event unfortunately had to be cancelled because of the extreme heat.

Although this was disappointing, the welfare of our ponies must always come first, and we are grateful to everyone for understanding.

Every summer, the committee organises an afternoon tea for our volunteers, and this year's event in July was a great success. It is our small way of saying a huge thank you to the people who make Maidensgrove RDA such a happy and inclusive group. Our riders often tell us that RDA is the highlight of their week, and we simply couldn't make it so special without our amazing volunteer team.

So, despite a few ups and downs, we have plenty to smile about at Maidensgrove RDA. We're looking forward to being back in the saddle after the summer break and continuing to support our riders as they grow in confidence, discover their potential and, of course, have lots of fun.









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The Lions Club of Windsor would like to thank our generous patron **The Shanly Foundation** for their continued support.



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2027 Dates for your diary

May 16th - South Region Qualifier to be held at The Berkshire College of Agriculture.

July 9th -11th RDA National Championships at Hartpury.

TBC Windsor Lions Sponsored Ride, Windsor Great Park. check their website for further information.
www.windsorlions.co.uk/sponsored-horseride

**If you would like to help with RDA
in any way by volunteering or fund
raising please contact any of
the people listed below:**

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