

The Brae RDA Partnership

AGM 20th October 2009

Chairman's report for year April 2008 – March 2009

On 16th April 2008 The Brae held its first riding session for clients. It had taken over 11 years of planning, fundraising and nothing short of blood, sweat and tears to get to this point, but, as we all know, this was just the beginning.

Now, The Brae truly started to exist: we had our brand new centre, 8 horses, two full time paid employees, a small band of enthusiastic volunteers and a huge amount of work to do. Systems and procedures had to be put in place, rotas to cover 7 days per week, promotion of the centre, developing the web site, training for instructors and volunteers, assessments of client's abilities, timetabling of sessions, never mind the mountain of paper work that had to be generated and dealt with.

We quickly realised that tasks had to be shared and created sub-committees to deal with Horses and related issues, Health & Safety, Volunteer Management, Fundraising local and Fundraising Trust related.

We developed links with local organisations, talked to a variety of groups and held two very successful open days/evenings which attracted a lot of attention and raised the public profile.

The Centre

We have had to face various issues in our first year of operations, perhaps the biggest being the issues around our grazing. We have striven to work with our landlord and intend to continue developing our relations with him.

We quickly realised that although we had the best sand available, it was causing difficulties due to it being so soft underfoot, we investigated, sourced and bought fibres that immediately improved this, though to maintain them effectively required regular soaking which was costly. We'd like to thank the local Fire Brigade who stepped in to assist us with watering our indoor arena several times over the year.

We also discovered that our intended dismounting procedure required some changes which led to another set of steps and a handrail being added to the indoor arena. We also installed an overhead hoist to assist clients with limited weight bearing in mounting.

Throughout the year, there have been numerous tasks that involved the skills of not only our volunteers but some willing helpers, particular thanks goes to Colin and Craig Sneddon for joinery/handyman work and George Shearer for groundsman work.

Horses

We have seen quite a change in The Brae horses as some have moved on and new ones have taken their place. It appears that this is normal due to the slow, repetitive work that they are required to do everyday with the utmost of patience. To create longer breaks it was decided to have 'horse holidays' four weeks a year, including the 2 week Christmas Holiday.

Clients

We have made contact with many individuals and organisations and by the end of March 2009, over had 220 individual clients had experienced riding with us, some on a regular basis. These clients range in age from under 5 to over 70 and have a range of disabilities. We have also had individuals from Whitetop visit to enjoy the sensory experience.

Training

We have carried out a variety of training sessions over the year, initial volunteer training, horse care, stable management, tacking up, side helping etc as well as very successful Makaton sessions delivered free of charge by Speech & Language Therapist, Bernie Brophy-Arnot. Our Centre Manager and instructors have also attended a variety of meetings and training courses this year to increase their skills and we would like to thank Felicity Ivory and Valerie Roy of RDA for their support and guidance over the year.

Carriage Driving

It has always been our intention to offer carriage driving to clients who are unable to sit on a horse. Carriage driving can provide a totally new experience to wheelchair bound individuals, allow them to access areas normally denied to them and view the world from a different perspective. We were successful in a bid to BBC Children in Need to help us develop this project by paying for a horse, carriage and funds towards training our instructor and volunteers to become able whips etc. As is often the case, to become a registered, fully trained centre was going to be more involved than initially thought. We have made steady progress this year, with sessions to start in the next financial year.

Web Site

This has been a major source of information to many people, with updates, information and photographs being added weekly. We were able to buy a new digital camera from funds raised through the tablet making skills of a kind volunteer. The web site has involved a huge amount of work, hampered by a difficult system; our thanks go to Katie and Mary for keeping it so interesting. We have had many discussions on how to get the best from a web site and the development of a new, easier system is to be progressed.

Volunteers

We have a truly wonderful army of individuals, aged 14 to over 80, from all walks of life, with a vast range of experience who willingly give up their time to do whatever we ask of them with the best of humour thrown in. We could not run this centre without them. We started with a small group and by the end of this financial year had over 60 active volunteers. We try to take every opportunity possible to promote their good work and were delighted when Suzanne McGiffen won the RDA Regional Volunteer of the Year Award and when Dan Mitchell won the Evening Telegraph Overcoming Disability Award and Gold MV Award.

Local Groups & Employee Volunteering

We have been delighted to welcome a variety of groups to the centre to see what we do and often help with tasks that require a lot of hands eg stone clearing the grazing areas. Not only has this helped with big jobs needing done but it has also raised the public awareness of who we are and what we do. These groups have included The Job Centre, The Tax Credit Office, UPS Delivery Services, The Territorial Army,

Treasurer

Under the heading of volunteers, I am delighted that Lesley Fullerton responded to my plea for a treasurer. She is a full time lecturer in accountancy at Dundee College and has taken a lot of work off my shoulders in dealing with the accounts and payroll.

External Fundraisers

We have been extremely fortunate to have had several groups raise funds for us through sponsored walks, car washes, an indulgence evening, Scottish country dance evenings to name a few.

Local fundraising

The local fundraising committee have done an amazing amount of work this year, they have had us can collecting, bag packing, serving coffees, stretching our memories in quiz nights, strutting our stuff on the catwalk, musical appreciation, ceilidh dancing, all great fun with the bonus of bringing in much needed funds to keep the centre running.

Trust Fundraising

We were successful in our bid to Lloyds TSB for a Capacity Building Grant which allowed us to carry out an organisational review, run a trustee awareness programme, implement a trustee code of conduct and develop our strategic planning.

We received £10,000 from the Robertson Trust towards general running costs and made a successful bid to the Big Lottery to fund a Volunteer Development Project which will start next financial year.

Research

Whilst we all know the benefits of horse riding, there is not a great deal of research evidence to support it. To this end we decided to approach the NHS Endowments Fund to request funding to employ a part time research physiotherapist. We were delighted to have this bid granted enabling us to start this project at the beginning of our next financial year.

Highlights

One of our main highlights was The Brae appearing on Des a Nis, a BBC children's gaelic programme which came about through the previously mentioned BBC Children in Need funding. Not only was it amazing to see ourselves on television, it was also great fun having the film crew around all day. It was also interesting to see several of our clients and volunteers demonstrating star potential.

We had another opportunity to shine when John Letford, Lord Provost of Dundee hosted a civic reception to recognise the work carried out at The Brae and thank us for bringing such a valuable centre to the city.

Our main highlight however, had to be our official opening by HRH Princess Anne on 17th February. This involved a huge amount of organisation and support from many organisations and individuals. Thankfully, even though it had been the coldest snap of the year, the sun shone and 200 clients, volunteers and supporters thoroughly enjoyed our first royal visit.

All in all, our first year has been a resounding success and we intend to build upon our learning and continue to raise our public profile. I have mentioned some people by name so as to give examples of our successes. In truth, The Brae is so very lucky to have so many individuals and organisations who are genuinely interested in supporting us to succeed in our aim to provide opportunities for such a large number of people.

Our volunteers are the best, they are one big happy family and we are incredibly fortunate to have them, thank you to you all.

I also want to thank Christina our yard manager for her enthusiasm and patience, she is a wonderful instructor who has a natural ability to get the best from our riders. We have watched her progression this year and I know there is still more to come.

To be a good team, we need a good leader and we have that in our Centre Manager. Mary has worked her socks off, done everything we asked of her plus more, and more and then even more! She has developed skills she didn't even know she had and still makes me smile when I over hear her discussing horse issues. We certainly could not have reached this point without her.

And finally, my fellow directors: we are a great team, different personalities, different foibles, different backgrounds, but what we do have in common is our passion for The Brae. We've worked hard this year and it shows, thank you for all your hard work.

Alison Doyle
Chairperson