

The Brae Chairperson's report for year April 2015 - March 2016

Thankfully this has been a fairly steady year with no major upheavals, we have had no staff changes and our only newcomer was Dusty who joined us in April 15.

Riders

We have provided a total of 1,343 sessions this year made up of 1,125 riding, 116 carriage driving, 12 Vaulting and 90 Backriding. Numbers are good and we are constantly receiving enquiries from prospective riders.

We all know the wide ranging benefits of horse riding, Not only does it improve balance and co-ordination of movement, but it also encourages communication, develops self-discipline, improves self-image and above all, is good fun. One mum said "We cannot thank the Brae enough for supporting our daughter through chemotherapy. However tired and fed up she feels, the thought of riding and seeing Dusty brings a smile and energy to get on, even if she only manages a few minutes, thank you for everything"

Back riding

We have delivered 90 back riding sessions this year with excellent results. One client, who spent her first sessions having her head held at all times, progressed to completing a full half hour session without any head support at all and used her arms to help balance herself. She was able to take a much more active part in controlling her position and her parents were delighted her progress. It is becoming apparent that the work of the Brae is now being recognised in some medical circles and we are being approached directly by physiotherapists and doctors keen to refer their clients to us.

Vaulting

After several years of deliberation, we decided to extend our provision to include vaulting and, after training and support from Jenny Leggett and her team at Equibuddy, we ran a 12 week pilot in January with 4 young participants taking part. Vaulting starts off as basic gymnastics on the back of the horse but can range up to 2 participants on the horse together. It is a very beneficial activity which can improve communication, balance, co-ordination, team working, patience and also adds an element of excitement.

For those participants who are on the autistic spectrum and find it difficult to interact with others and read body language, the discipline of vaulting provides the opportunity to overcome these challenges through team work and interaction with other riders, volunteers and instructors. This can also transfer into their daily lives in school, social and family situations.

At the end of the pilot we were delighted with the response from the participants and their families. For one young lad, school has become less of a challenge as he is more confident and is

finding it less difficult to speak to others in his class, his teachers have said he is happier, more relaxed and his work has improved. His mum said "we cannot believe the difference vaulting has made to him. He has so much more confidence not just with the horses but with staff, volunteers and other riders. He really enjoys vaulting and is eager to progress and is proud of what he has achieved".

Volunteers

Along with vaulting training, we have provided 26 sessions from our usual wide range of volunteer training including visual awareness, child protection and our new Falls, fire and faffing about which focusses on health & safety. The team have also created some excellent short videos of training sessions that can be watched at the centre or accessed through our Volunteers' Facebook page. One volunteer said "I thought the fire training video was excellent - easy to take it all in in a quiet meeting room environment, less time taken from yard duties and quite efficient all round. Another said "I've had some experience of working in teams but I've never settled in anywhere as quickly. Everyone is really friendly and welcoming here and works as a team to get everything done, helping each other out along the way."

As with most organisations that rely heavily on volunteers to provide their service, we have had some fluctuations in numbers over the year and have often had to call on our stalwarts to help out with extra sessions. A special thank you to those who regularly step in to help us out when we are short.

We continue to provide short blocks of supported volunteering placements, sometimes to riders who are able to progress from riding to volunteering. We are also still working with a variety of organisations including Helm, Project Scotland, Triage, Barnardos and Job Centre Plus to provide work placements for individuals looking to improve their employability skills for the future.

Employment volunteering is a way for companies to demonstrate corporate social responsibility and we have been delighted to have several groups from organisations including Elanco, BT, Greggs and Department of Work and Pensions.

Maintenance

To keep our centre looking at its best we have an annual plan of work: this year saw 16 tonnes of surface laid on our access track to sort out the potholes, a new section of roof added to the hay shed, an electric roller shutter door from the inside arena to the outside arena, replacement of well worn fencing and the continuing sprucing up by grass cutting, weeding, trimming and sweeping.

Fundraising

Fundraising this year has been very successful with TSB Meadowside choosing us as charity of the year for 2015 and Digby Brown adopting us for 2016.

Our fundraising team ran a successful programme including a race night, a charity shop, coffee morning and bingo night.

Once again, we have been incredibly lucky to have so many individuals, groups, trusts and organisations support us through a wide range of fundraising activities from filling smartie tubes with coppers to not eating any smarties or chocolate, or cheese, to golfing, walking, running, dancing, mountain climbing, sky diving and the longest ever bike ride so far of 1,000 miles by Stewart Ramsay and friends to raise well over £6k, we thank you all!

Achievements and performance

Many of our Brae team have had the opportunity to appear in filming and photo shoots over the year through the RDA, People's Post Code Lottery and BBC Lifeline Appeal. Janey a Dundee University student extended her research project with us which involved some more filming and the chance for volunteers and staff to visit the labs to see the work carried out there.

We hosted the RDA Dressage Qualifiers with 21 riders taking part, 11 of them from the Brae and the Discovery Games with 23 riders, 16 of our own and others from Blairgowrie and Glenfarg. Our centre was used as a training day for para olympic riders and various pony club and dog agility sessions.

We've had lots of people visit to see what we are all about including, Trusts, supporters, councillors, MPs and the Rotary District Governor.

Judy McGreal won the Rotary Endeavour Award and was a finalist in the Dundee Sports Awards

We won the first ever Dundee Saltire Youth Friendly Organisation Award and Sarah achieved a Saltire Summit Award

Andi and 5 volunteers attended the RDA Scottish Supra conference in Oatridge where Becca was presented with an Over and Above award by HRH Princess Anne. Janet, one of our longest standing directors was nominated and won the RDA President's Award for 30 years service.

Claire won Dundee's Volunteer of the Year.

Andi took over as County Instructor from Felicity from September and we said goodbye to Valerie Roy who retired as Chair Person for RDA Grampian & Highland Region, we wish her well and thank her for her support over the years.

75 Brae riders and Mickey attended the Dreamnight event with help from staff and 30 Brae volunteers. We had a volunteer BBQ, umpteen birthday cakes and over 150 people wrapped up warm and attended the second Brae Nativity with riders, volunteers and ponies all dressed up for parts.

All in all another very successful year at The Brae, well done everyone. I would like to thank all our supporters, our 160 volunteers, our staff and my fellow directors for their hard work, dedication and enthusiasm in helping to keep The Brae the wonderful place that it is and as one volunteer said recently join the Brae, meet lots of wonderful people, get fit and save on the gym membership. That certainly is a win win situation, thank you and keep up the good work everyone!