

## **The Brae**

### **Chairperson's report for year April 2017 - March 2018**

This year has probably been the most challenging for The Brae so far. We started with two members of staff down and were aware that filling their positions was not going to be straightforward. Not having a qualified CPTRH physiotherapist meant that we could not provide certain sessions, particularly back riding which had an impact on the number of sessions we were able to deliver. Our Centre Manager, Mary, decided to take up the offer of a new challenge and our Stable Manager, Jessica, retired for full time Granny duties, we wish them well in their new roles. We were also very unlucky to lose two of our beloved, long serving larger ponies, Prince and Mickey, leaving a considerable gap in our lessons.

After 9 years of little change in our staffing, everything happened in a relatively short period of time. This required us to review our provision, consider staffing levels and find ways to maintain and improve the service that we aim to provide. Every challenge can be a new opportunity. We offered a member of staff, Emma, the opportunity to be seconded into the post of chief instructor with the support and training required to achieve the necessary qualification, she worked very hard and passed in February. We created a new post of Assistant Stable Manager to redress the imbalance in staffing between stable and administration areas and advertised the remaining posts. We also revised our timetable of sessions to ensure better use of staff time and coverage.

The good news is that by 31st March, we had employed 3 new members of staff, Heather Thomson as Centre Manager, Grant Dudgeon, as Assistant Stable Manager, Bea Finlayson as Physiotherapist and our new Stable Manager, Cara Martin, was starting the following month, bringing us back to a full compliment. Welcome to the team everyone. We would particularly like to thank our 2 remaining members of staff, Emma and Cindy for their commitment and support throughout this difficult time.

In amongst this, we continued to deliver sessions across 6 days per week, renewed our Volunteer Friendly Award, 30 volunteers helped at Camperdown's Dreamnight in July, we hosted a Vaulting training day in July, a Para riding event in November, we held our usual volunteer training and also First Aid and Safeguarding.

In September we had a volunteer forum and provided the results of our volunteer survey which showed that

- 98% of our volunteers were happy with the level of support they received
- 93% felt valued for the contribution they made to the organisation
- 89% felt that their skills had increased

We nominated a number of volunteers for awards with Molly Urquhart receiving the Rotary Endeavour Award and Ed Young achieving an RDA Over and Above Award. We held the Equestrian element of the Discovery Games in September and our well acclaimed Christmas Play attracted over 200 people, happy to wrap up warm and watch some of our riders, our volunteers and our horses remind us of what Christmas is all about, particular thanks to Wendy for writing and directing another outstanding success. There wasn't a dry eye in the house.

The carriage driving team had a successful year, with Paddy becoming a fully fledged driving pony and taking his first client in June. He has proved to be worth his weight in gold. Nathalie Thomas passed her assessment to be a carriage driving coach and two of our clients, Neil Muir and Wendy French passed their Grade 2 carriage driving tests in the autumn, no mean feat, as the externally assessed tests include both theory and driving, and both of them not only passed but gained very nearly full marks.

The team also enjoyed a couple of days in the countryside. The annual picnic was held in Crombie Park in July in brilliant sunshine, and was as usual very successful and enjoyed by all, clients and volunteers alike.

In June, The Brae carriage drivers were invited to participate in the Garioch Carriage Driving Group's celebrations of their 40th anniversary. 4 members of the team joined them in a drive in the grounds of Balmoral Castle.

We were also incredibly proud of one of our young vaulters, who took part in the RDA National Championships in Hartbury. He joined the Berwickshire team and competed both in the team and the individual event. Kyle said -

"It was my first competition and I really enjoyed it. I was sixth in the individual event and we came first in the team event. I would like to thank everyone at The Brae for letting me go and Margaret, Rebecca and their team for their help and letting me ride their amazing horses.

IT WAS ALL GREAT."

We did our usual variety of fundraising events from raffles and tombolas to a quiz night, pop up charity shop, bingo night and annual Rotary swimathon, thank you to everyone that took part or helped out in these events. We were charity partners with TSB branches in Broughty Ferry and Carnoustie and benefitted from the Co-op Community Fund. We have also had the support from the local Rotary groups and lots of other small groups keen to help including Hannah Craig's generous donation providing the new field shelter.

We were extremely fortunate to have the support of the Dundee staff of Digby Brown again this year. Not only did they fund a replacement for our exhausted scissor lift, an extremely vital piece of equipment, but also arranged to have a promotional video created for us. This was filmed on a sunny Saturday showing the Brae at its very best. Comments captured were -

"It's such a special place to be with a real community feel",

"You get to meet lots of new people of all different ages and get to work with the children and see such a vast improvement, it is really rewarding to come here"

Mum Elaine pointed out " There are very few places, where if you have a child with additional support needs, that you can get a hobby with specialised attention that you can do from a very young age right up to adulthood. To be able to start something and do it lifelong is absolutely fantastic".

It is at this point that I, as usual, thank our amazing band of loyal volunteers. Every year I say that we couldn't do it without them. This year has been our hardest year yet and they have stood by us, giving us their support, dedication, enthusiasm and commitment, not to mention determination to beat the Beast from the East and get here to make sure the horses were well cared for. So, a huge big thank you to all our volunteers, our staff and my fellow directors, we have all worked extremely hard and deserve a very big pat on the back for what we have achieved.

Thank you all!

Alison Doyle  
Chairperson