

The Brae

Chairperson's report for year April 2019 - March 2020

This was to be our most challenging year so far. Several members of staff moved on to new opportunities, the new housing development started around us, volunteer numbers were fluctuated for a variety of reasons and the year ended in lockdown due to Covid.

However, in true Brae determination we achieved many things to be proud of.

The year started with a well attended Volunteer Thank You night with positive feedback from everyone, thanks to the fundraising team for arranging this event. They also organised a Quiz, a Bag pack in Asda, the Charity shop, the Kilt walk team and Bingo night with all monies raised going to the general running of the centre.

Our new staff were all in place by the end of August and as staff and volunteer training is an ongoing activity, we held or attended sessions in First Aid, Safeguarding, Good Governance, Epilepsy Awareness, Mounting, Leading, Side Helping, Dismounting, RDA Tracker and proficiency tests.

RDA celebrated it's 50th Birthday in 2019 and we were involved in several ways: STV filmed some of our weekday riders, some of our Saturday riders took part by circling around a large birthday cake in the arena to music with the video sent to RDA and uploaded onto our Facebook page and one member of staff and one volunteer were chosen to attend the Scottish Celebration reception in Edinburgh.

We provided many school work experience placements for pupils over the year and were delighted when several of them chose to stay on and join our band of Saturday volunteers. Several groups of school pupils contacted us to showcase The Brae for the Young Philanthropic Initiative with one of the Grove groups coming second generating an award of £1k for us. Six of our young volunteers took part in the Rotary of Dundee Swimathon event in February and Volunteer Dundee presented us with a certificate to acknowledge our good work with the young people of Dundee. We presented Monica Strachan with an RDA Over and Above Award for her scrumptious cake baking which had raised a considerable amount over the years and Erin Glass received the Rotary Endeavour Award.

We had support from employee teams from BT and Argenta again this year, both in the form of pairs of hands to undertake maintenance type tasks and also financially as they raised funds to buy us extra equipment to make some tasks less onerous.

We held the Equestrian event for the Discovery Games in September and had visits from Orkney, Highland and Ravelrig RDA groups during the year.

Dixie and Tiny moved onto pastures new and we welcomed Harris to our flock.

We had been very aware for some time of the few opportunities for people with Dementia and Alzheimers to interact with ponies, so decided to introduce Tea with a Pony sessions, where individuals and their partner or carer could join us for afternoon tea and the chance to meet the ponies. We put a lot of thought into how this could be beneficial and enjoyable and with training from Alzheimers Scotland, we held our first session at the beginning of March. The feedback from attendees, their partners and our volunteers was all very positive and we plan to continue with this.

As always, it is very important to highlight how important our volunteers are to us. We could not do what we do without them. Not only do they turn out in all weathers to do whatever we ask of them but they are always so happy, enthusiastic and willing. The following feedback shows what a difference everyone makes.

- The Brae is the perfect environment for my son
- My son always says what a good stretch he got in his legs – excellent for the prevention of his ligaments from tightening
- The coaches and volunteers are so nurturing and supportive and it makes a huge positive difference – watching T at The Brae and seeing him progress and develop is one of the highlights of my week. Alex is particularly super.
- R has grown in confidence after initially being reluctant to even go near a horse. He looks forward to each week riding. The whole team pitch his lesson perfectly and this has been a successful block
- H has shown great progress and feels very comfortable on the horse. Her posture has improved considerably. She loves her lessons. She responds very well to the calm, positive approach of staff
- We would like to thank you wholeheartedly for the wonderful work you do at the Brae. Our teenage daughter was diagnosed with Functional Neurological Disorder in the spring of 2019 following a head injury. A very sporty and active girl, she progressively lost all sensation and control over her lower limbs and became confined to a wheelchair. We made contact with the Brae when she was discharged from hospital. The path to recovery seemed so long still... We had heard from fellow FND sufferers that trying various types of physiotherapy was extremely valuable and we hoped that adding, if possible, horse-riding to the more traditional physiotherapy sessions she was receiving daily then weekly as well as her hydrotherapy sessions could be beneficial. We were not disappointed! Our daughter was very lucky to be offered two blocks of weekly lessons in a row and has made huge progress during that time. The atmosphere is attentive and caring and the support provided was adapted seamlessly to match her evolving needs. Sharing lesson times with other riders with different needs was a very positive experience and our daughter never felt self-conscious. The environment is always safe with the number of helpers around the horse varying depending on the level of support required. Alex's lessons have been extremely enjoyable whilst providing varied and challenging workouts week on week and Romany has been a fantastic 'host'. There is no doubt in our mind that the Brae slots contributed significantly to our daughter's recovery. Almost a year on, and she is able to walk again completely unaided, is working on jumping and running and recently even started to feel it when something hot, cold or prickly touches her legs, and is now talking about volunteering at the Brae when she is fit again. We are so fortunate to have met you! We would highly recommend the Brae to any FND sufferer.

With all this positive activity and feedback, we are looking forward to returning to what we do well and continuing to make a difference to so many riders, carers and volunteers.

Thank You to everyone that supports us.
Alison Doyle
Chairperson