

Annual Review
2018 19

Epsom RDA

CHAIR REVIEW

2018/19 proved to be a year of highs and lows.

The summer period was sadly overshadowed by the events of August 15th, 2018 when intruders broke in and attacked two RDA ponies, Marigold and Buffy, and Wing Bo Chan's para horse, Sam. This sadly resulted in the euthanasia of Sam in September and Buffy in January. Our local community rallied round to offer support, donations and help in many ways - for this Epsom RDA is eternally grateful. The camaraderie, coffee, and cakes that are the essence of our weekly sessions enabled the Epsom RDA family to support each other through this difficult period and continue running sessions seven days a week throughout the year.

The determination and enthusiasm of our riders, coaches and session volunteers is exemplary. A new RDA coaching pathway was launched in October 2018 and embraced by our in-house training team and Group coaches. Congratulations to all those who have passed their new assessments. The commitment of our volunteers to supporting our riders to reach their personal goals, whatever they may be, is much appreciated.

As we entered 2019, we began to celebrate our 50th year. In 1969 we had four volunteers and a Shetland pony called Bubbles: 50 years on we are able to provide the services described in this report. With no central funding, or paid staff, none of this would be possible without the generous and consistent help from our fantastic team of volunteers. Thank you to each and every one of you!

The Trustees spent much of the year putting in place foundations for Epsom RDA to continue to thrive and grow, through two major projects:

Indoor School

We are delighted that planning permission for a new car park and indoor school has now been granted. The building work is subject to funding being secured, but the aim is to start construction in Summer 2021 with some enabling works in 2020.

Governance

Following a unanimous Members vote, Epsom RDA is now a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. This enables the charity to own the legal title to our home, St Ebba's Farm, and enter into contracts as an organisation. The modernisation of our Governance structure should help us with the succession planning and future recruitment of Trustees.

Although outside of the reporting period we should take this opportunity to note that in May 2019 our long standing Chair Stella Milne decided to retire from Epsom RDA. Stella served Epsom RDA with great enthusiasm and passion for over 20 years initially as a volunteer and then as Chair for over 15 years. The Trustees wish her well in her retirement.

We look forward to realising the advantages of the foundations laid during this year as we move forward to improve our facilities so we can continue to provide disabled people with the opportunity to ride to benefit their health and wellbeing.

Gill McPherson -Interim Chair

September 2019

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

We run riding sessions every day of the week including weekends. The majority are held in the mornings but we also have Monday and Wednesday evening sessions, and a Saturday afternoon session.

Each session is unique in the types of riders they have and therefore adapt their coaching to be most effective for the individual challenges their riders face. The main objective of the riding sessions is to ensure the riders enjoy themselves and from that enjoyment gain the physical, social, educational benefits that horse riding provides.

Monday Morning

Monday mornings at Epsom RDA continue to bring joy to riders and volunteers alike. Achievements this year ranged from an autistic rider from West Ewell Primary School being able to get through their lesson for the first time without the comfort of Bob the dinosaur, through to all three of our independent riders achieving the qualifying score for the Dressage Anywhere online RDA National Championships. External recognition came in the form of the Epsom and Ewell Mayor's Young Champions Award for one of our riders – Amelie Russell - who raised over £1500 by completing a sponsored walk. All of these special moments made us equally proud, which is part of what makes RDA special - it really is what you can do that counts. In the words of one of our Wandle Valley riders "it's awesome!"

Monday Evening

One of the highlights of the year for the Monday evening session was our in-house dressage event. Three riders took part, wearing formal dressage jackets and numbers and all received a custom-made rosette on completion of their test. This event gave the riders a chance to experience a whole new element of riding in an unpressured and fun way. The event also presented volunteers with new and exciting opportunities, such as plaiting the horse's hair and making sure they looked their best as well as experiencing what it's like to be a dressage judge. The riders thoroughly enjoyed trying something new and were very pleased with their rosettes. Proud parents watched on snapping countless pictures, with one rider remarking 'I feel like I'm famous!'

"it's awesome!"

Monday AM Rider

Tuesday

The Tuesday session has 2 sessions for riders from Linden Bridge School which caters for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. There are 4 classes of up to 8 riders rotating each term. We also have a third session comprising 7 riders of different ages and disabilities who ride all year round. One of

these riders is Matt and his mother says: "Riding at Epsom RDA has given my son Matt a unique opportunity to partake in an activity that, with the help of your staff and volunteers, he can partake in independently. He loves riding and finds it calming and relaxing. Riding has increased his confidence, improved his balance and has strengthened his core muscles. Your friendly and supportive staff make this possible for him and we're grateful to you all."

Wednesday Morning

The Wednesday morning session has 2 rides. The first lesson is for the pupils of Dysart School from the upper quadrant of the school and consists of up to 8 participants aged 11 and upward, who have a range of special needs, mainly Autism and physical disabilities. Our second lesson is for adult participants from the local community who mainly have Autism and physical disabilities.

Our aim for both rides is to encourage the riders to speak to their ponies, control their balance, improve their co-ordination and concentration through a variety of coaching techniques and games, but most of all to try and make the session fun for all!

We have a range of fantastic volunteers from one who started in 1979 to others who have recently joined us. We also look after Pete the Farrier by keeping him topped up with tea and appreciate his expertise and good nature with both the horses and us!

"He loves riding and finds it calming and relaxing. Riding has increased his confidence, improved his balance and has strengthened his core muscles."

Tuesday Rider Parent

Wednesday Evening

The Wednesday evening session has a small but diverse team of riders who come from a variety of backgrounds representing a wide age range with varied physical and intellectual disabilities. The report is written by one of the riders, Anna.

"From a young age, I was always taken by horse riding and so when I got sick and consequently found I couldn't participate easily in most sports, I was overjoyed to be given the opportunity to ride with Epsom RDA on a Wednesday evening.

It has continued to be the one sport that I have been able to participate in as part of my ongoing rehabilitation (regaining core strength and stability) and for that I am so grateful. It is an added bonus that (along with the horse riding), the atmosphere created by the volunteers is one where it is easy to make friends and have fun. It continues to amaze me how kind everyone who volunteers for the organisation is (and the variety in age of the volunteers as well as riders) - in turning up every week, rain or shine, sun or snow, to give people with varied disabilities the chance to participate in

something that others may not think possible. I will truly miss it (the place, the people and, of course, the horses!) while I am at university.”

Thursday

This session provides therapeutic riding for children from two special needs schools and two adults who come from their homes. Our children are all on the Autistic Spectrum but with varied degrees of anxiety, challenging behavior and at times wonderful smiling happy faces. The noise of the tractor, the smells which are ever present in a yard and the wearing of a riding hat may create sensory overloads and then ‘melt down”. We are aware that every child is different and work with them as individuals. The reason for us spending ages stood on our mounting block attempting to get a child to mount the pony shines through. We spent considerable time over two school years with a child who according to his parents really did want to ride. The hat wearing and walking up the ramp took one half term, getting up but not moving took us past the first school year, then walking around the school for one circuit followed by the child riding for the whole session and achieving his Grade 1 certificate.

We have opened our door to a local care home who run a ‘Grant a Wish’ scheme and approached us with a request to bring one of their elderly residents who wanted to see and stroke horses again as she had in her youth. It was a great success and we have been approached by another care home who wanted to bring maybe 10 residents, but we currently don’t have the facilities to safely manage this. Who knows in the future through!

“It is good for them physically, for their concentration, for their speech, their attention and for their coordination.”

Retired Physiotherapist & Friday volunteer

Friday

One Friday morning group is made up of riders aged from 4-18 years from The Children’s Trust. Volunteer, Belinda, was a physiotherapist with the Trust and says: “These young people from all over the UK are receiving intensive rehabilitation for their Acquired Brain Injury. Their disabilities are quite varied. Riding forms part of their therapy programmes and they attend with their own therapist. For many years before my retirement I brought the young people to Epsom RDA. For most of the children it is their first opportunity to participate in a sport after their brain Injury. It is good for them physically, for their concentration, for their speech, their attention and for their coordination. For children who live in the city it may be their first contact with horses. Their own recognition of their achievements is very exciting to see. Quite a few of the children will continue to ride at their local RDA when they are discharged from The Children’s Trust. As a result, since my retirement I decided to volunteer on Friday.”

Saturday Morning

Saturday Session welcomed a new Session Leader this year with the Deputy Session Leader stepping up into the role. Change is always a challenge but seeing the enjoyment from the riders makes it worthwhile.

There has been fun to be had with our joint events with the Saturday afternoon session. The sun shone for the summer BBQ and there was also a bit of sunshine when Father Christmas came to the Christmas Party.

Riders, Felicity, Leo, Tyriq, Ari, Jon & Matt all travelled to the RDA Regional Dressage Competition. Felicity, Leo, Jon and Matt then went on to ride at the RDA National Championships. There was some last-minute change of ponies for everyone. It was a great weekend with good scores. Jon and Matt had to ride a horse from another RDA, with a 10 minute practice session – Thank you Bear! Felicity came first in her class, congratulations to her.

Other riders from the session also had success in taking their Grade tests in horse riding and stable management: Grade 1 riding - Charlie, Matti, Joseph, and Hannah, Grade 2 riding – Lucie, Charlie and Lucie.

The plan for the Session next year is to concentrate on the stable management part of the Grades and even have some riders taking their Grade 4.

“the atmosphere created by the volunteers is one where it is easy to make friends and have fun”

Anna – Wednesday Evening Rider

Saturday Afternoon

The Epsom RDA Horse Show this year fell on a Saturday, so instead of cancelling our riders we invited them to take part and we were indebted to a team of helpers, here from the early hours, beautifying our ponies. The Saturday (and indeed weekend sessions) often have a mixture of riders as they attend independently – the very young to adults; Autism and sensory diagnoses to pure physical disabilities; those with static conditions to those with symptoms that will make riding impossible over time. We were proud that we were able to offer the opportunity for our riders to experience an open Horse Show, to compete alongside other riders as equals and to represent their own riding organisation – they each did us proud

Sunday 1

This year has seen lots of change on the Sunday 1 session as Judy Solomon retired as Session Leader having led the session for over 17 years, and one of the Session Group Coaches went travelling in South America! (She volunteered with the Ecuadorian RDA whilst on her travels so we are sharing knowledge across the world!)

We have taken on some super new riders, all of whom are already making great progress. Our challenge is managing the different riding abilities and ages of our riders and ensuring that lessons are stimulating and fun. We spend time setting achievable goals for them every year.

At Christmas we did our first ever sing and sign session! Three lovely ladies from TinyTalk Baby and Toddler Signing came and taught us Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer in British Sign Language and, although we know there was room for improvement, we learnt it and performed as a group which was great fun!

“The different surfaces of the Sensory Track are unique; we like to pretend we are at the beach, whatever the time of year or the weather!”

Sunday 2 Session Leader

Sunday 2

Sunday 2 has fifteen riders at the present time, their ages range from 6 to 64. We try to tailor the three rides to suit each individual rider, but this does depend upon the weather and the amount of help we have on the day.

Some people ride the same pony each time: our two youngest riders enjoy being on Thor and Shona. Older riders are more suited to Romeo and Dazz and if a rider needs side walkers, we choose a pony who is happy with this. There are some riders who enjoy riding different ponies. Kate is one of those and she does well on whoever she is asked to ride and we do (often) say that it is good to try a different mount!

One rider did very well in her first dressage competition in 2018. Emily rode Moss in the in-house Harold Newton competition and Marigold at the RDA Regional Championships, where she came first in her class and qualified for the RDA National Championships. At the last minute Marigold was unwell so Emily rode Milton at the Nationals, a pony she had not ridden before and she came fourth in a large class.

The Sensory Track has been very well received, the different surfaces of the Sensory Track are unique; we like to pretend we are at the beach, whatever the time of year or the weather!

Holiday Rides

During the summer holidays we have a holiday riding scheme to replace the various school groups which usually attend our midweek sessions. The majority of these riders are from InterAKtive, a support group for families of children with ASD, with whom we have worked for a number of years. During August we ran 9 special sessions for these children, many of whom were new to riding and enjoyed it so much that they are now on our waiting list.

We also hosted for the third year 2 sessions for sight impaired children from Sight for Surrey

EPSOM RDA – VITAL STATISTICS



4,064 Rides

330 Riders

275 Volunteers

14 Ponies

16 Acres

1 Indoor Arena

1 Outdoor Arena

SUPPORT TEAMS

Horses and Ponies – The Year According to Thor

As the oldest member of the herd I have been asked this year to write the annual review of the horses and ponies. There have been the usual comings and goings this year – I have seen it all before – young upstarts coming in thinking they know it all – they always come to me for advice in the end about how it all works!

In May 2018 we had a trip to Hickstead for the RDA Regional Dressage Championships. I have never been (it's not really my thing) but Marigold, Milton, Moss and Sam went with 11 of our riders. They did amazingly well with 8 first places and 8 qualifiers for the RDA National Championships in July. Moss qualified, but apparently has decided he's a bit old for the journey to Hartpury College in Gloucestershire. Marigold, Milton and Sam were supposed to go but due to being a bit poorly, in the end it was Milton and Alicia who went. Alicia was a bit nervous as it was her first outing to an RDA competition, but I coached before she went and good old Milton looked after her well.

June 2018 saw our second endurance competition with riders competing over 1, 2 and 3 km courses. I'm a bit old for all that but I enjoyed watching the others having a go – all the riders looked like they had a great time!

The summer was a bad time for us horses, I don't like to dwell on it so I will just say that I was very sad to see Marigold, Buffy and Sam in such a state and even sadder when we lost Buffy and Sam later in the year. I was glad that Marigold made a full recovery.

During the Autumn a few of those young upstarts I mentioned started to arrive. Willow, Tommy, Guinness and Silver all came on board. Willow and Tommy thought they knew it all, but it turned out they weren't quite right for the job so have gone to new homes/ Guinness and Silver seem to be doing OK – with my help of course!

The rest of the team carry on doing a great job looking our riders every day of the week. Ria, Narla, Briony, Sinatra, Shona, Romeo and Dazz all keep the place ticking over, with of course, yours truly to offer advice whenever it's needed.

Training Team

The Training Committee has endeavored to provide its usual service to the Volunteers and Coaches within the organisation – 2 formal volunteer training sessions and 2 Coaching training sessions with 2 peer-group meetings. A new Coaching Pathway was launched by RDA National in the Autumn of 2018 so our Coaches were busy receiving our new 'passports' and appreciating the support that our Regional Coaches were providing to work out our 'next steps'. On reviewing some of the training that is required within the pathway the Training Committee agreed to open up the Volunteer Training

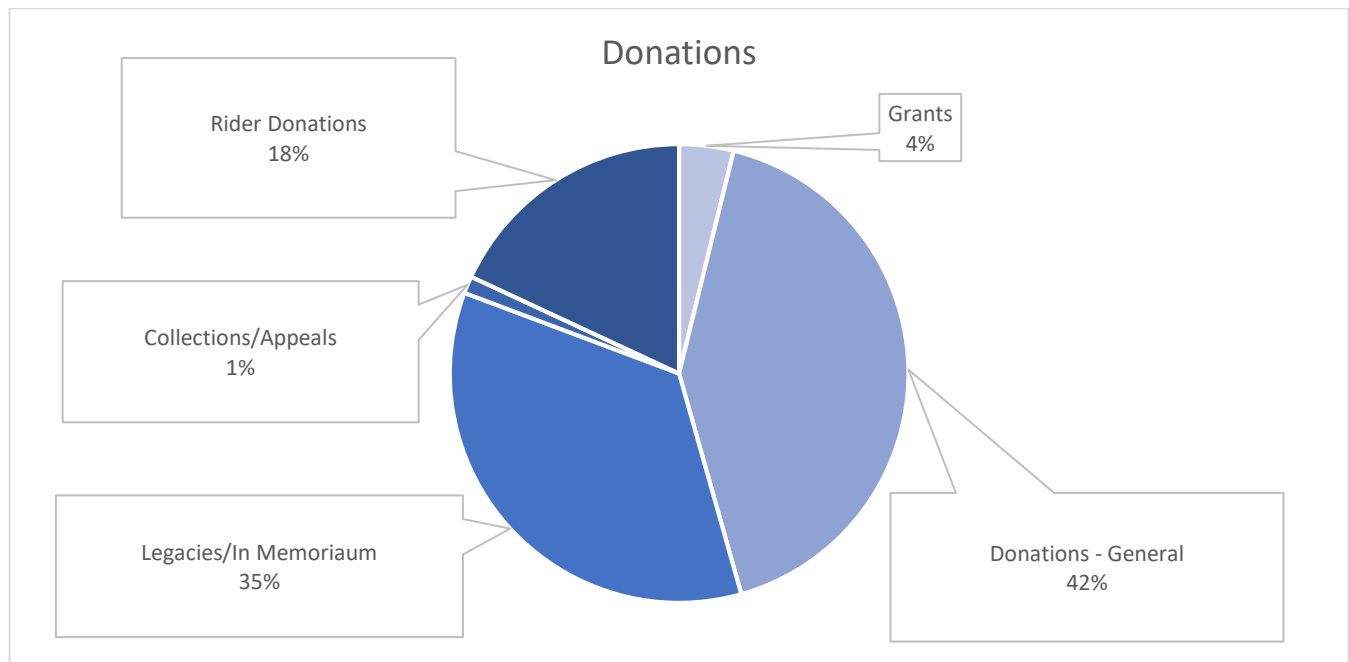
modules to delegates external to Epsom RDA – the feedback so far has been hugely positive and it has been refreshing to have new opinions and experience within the sessions. We look forward to further developing our training modules and opening up our training courses and facilities to other RDA Groups.

Fundraising

The funds raised to meet the cost of running Epsom RDA (£103,794 in 2018/19) are divided into two main areas:

- Donations

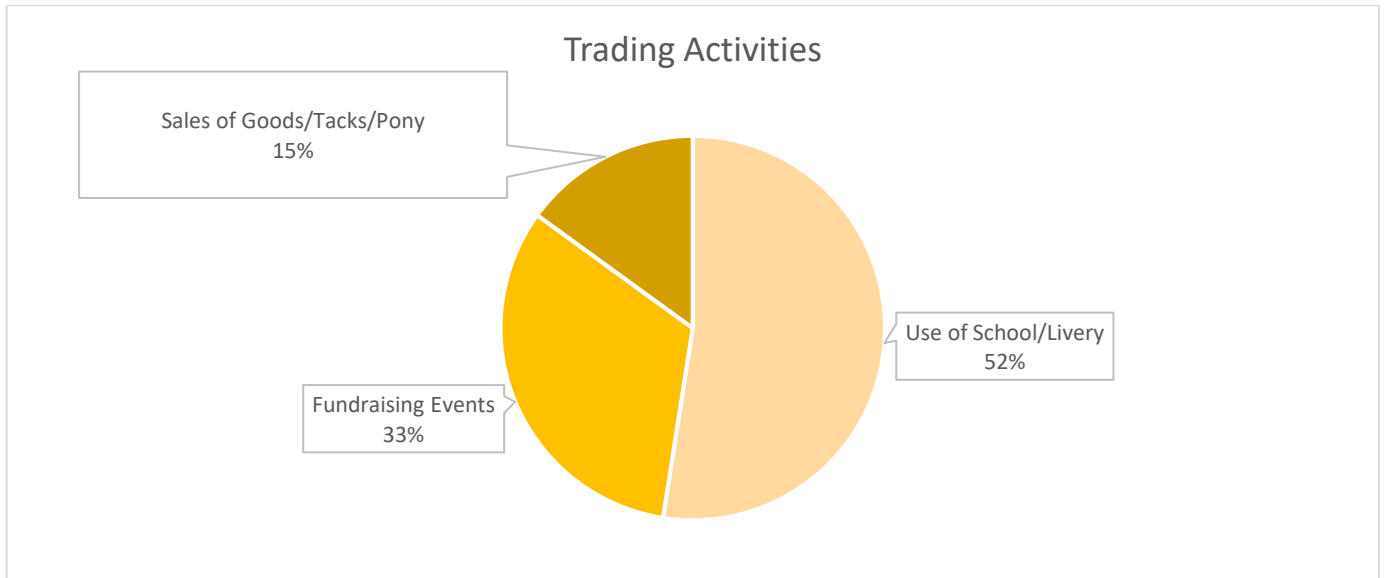
This year saw a notable increase in the number and value of General Donations as our local community and those further afield responded to support us following the break in to our property in August 2018. We received donations from a huge variety of fundraising events including: the Christmas Lights House switch on, cake and lemonade sales, school and church collections, social events in cafes and bars, and shop collections, in addition to the donations made by individuals. As a result we were able to meet the unexpected and significant increase in costs for items such as additional vet bills and the upgrade to our on-site security and continue to meet the costs of our day to day activities. We were overwhelmed by the generosity and remain grateful to each and every donor.



- Trading Activities

Fundraising Events are one of the cornerstones of our trading activities The events this year included a fabulous barn dance for supporters and volunteers, as well as equine events like the unaffiliated dressage competitions, a fun ride and a lecture from International Grand Prix Rider Sarah Sjolholm

Patience. Besides raising valuable funds from entry fees and strengthening our ties with local equine the events give an opportunity to open up our fantastic facilities for the local equine community to enjoy.



Property

This has been another busy year for the Property Team. We worked closely with the Pony Welfare Team to ensure the site meets the needs of our ponies as well as our riders and volunteers including changing the field layouts and ordering and building new shelters. This is on top of the day to day work maintaining the fields, schools and the buildings.

This year we have been upgrading the security around the site including the addition of CCTV, warning signs around the buildings and we are looking at changes to the front gate. Improvements have also been made to the Sensory Track, and the Rotary Club of Epsom donated seating for the outdoor school.

We have had a series of groups from local organisations and companies providing extra workforce including our local Rotary group, All Saints Church, Toyota GB, Waitrose Banstead and SGN. The time and labour they donate to us is invaluable in supporting our small Property and Maintenance team to keep our site in good order and undertaking projects over and above the day to day running of a busy equine property.