



# **RDA: Transforming Lives Across the UK**

## **Strategic plan 2022-2025**

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Please Note: throughout this document we use the word disabled to mean someone who has a long-term health condition, impairment or illness that limits daily activities.

### **Introduction from RDA UK Chair of Trustees, Rachel Medill MBE**

#### **Strength, sustainability & growth**

For more than fifty years RDA has been transforming the lives of disabled people, using horses to bring happiness, improve physical and mental health and create a sense of aspiration.

During this time, our understanding of the profound impact of bringing people and horses together has grown, and we have evolved and adapted to meet the changing needs of communities across the length and breadth of the UK.

Over the last two years this trend has continued as we have witnessed the disproportionately negative impact that the pandemic has had on disabled people and other vulnerable groups.

Through a wider range of horse-centred programmes we are now supporting participants with a broader range of disabilities and long-term conditions, including dementia and mental health problems. There is huge unmet demand to provide this kind of specialist

support and with our UK-wide network we are uniquely placed and committed to meeting that demand.

In this strategy we present our plans to support an additional 10,000 children and adults by 2025.

We will do this by:

- Supporting our existing groups with resources they need to grow
- Introducing new and adapted activities
- Developing new centres and regional hubs
- Building partnerships with other organisations

We are realistic about the challenge. Post-pandemic, our participant numbers are down, so our first priority will be to rebuild confidence and bring people back to their previous levels of activity. At the same time, we need to build the strength and capacity of our network. Our groups will need localised, tailored support to build the strong foundations from which they can thrive and grow. We will also need the commitment of new volunteers and coaches and a strong supply of horses and ponies.

Our plan will deliver on these needs, tackling barriers to growth and creating opportunities for more people to benefit - more of the time.

RDA is uniquely placed to put horses at the heart of our nation's health, and I feel proud to be part of an organisation which has the vision and spirit to make that a reality.

### **RDA President, Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal**

This new strategy signals a moment of change and opportunity for all of us involved in RDA as we seek to re-build and resume our work following a difficult two years. United by our goal to bring the benefits of horses to as many disabled people as possible, we have a chance to make even more of a difference to communities all over the UK.

During my visits to RDA groups over my years as President, I have seen first-hand the life-changing impact of our activities, brought about by that unique combination of participant, horse and volunteer. Now, as we look to strengthen our groups and grow our reach, we will explore new ways for people to benefit - with horses at the heart of everything we do.

One of the great strengths of RDA is our ability to have a national influence on the world of disability sport, while maintaining a local network that reaches deep into the heart of our rural and urban communities. We are a national charity, but, as a federation, our individual member groups value their independence; choosing the activities and approach that best meet the needs of their local area.

As we look ahead, we will preserve this individuality, providing more support at regional and local levels to allow our groups to develop the activities they offer according to the needs of the communities they serve, and inspiring more people to get involved.

To the volunteers and staff who will be embarking on this new chapter in our history, I would like to say thank you for doing everything you can to help us achieve our ambition.

## **The changing nature of disability by Jess Cook RDA UK Trustee and Strategic Partnership Advisor for Activity Alliance**

RDA has a clear and vital part to play in helping to address the inequalities faced by disabled people when it comes to accessing activity and the natural environment.

Exacerbated by the pandemic, well-being rates for disabled people are consistently lower than for non-disabled people. In addition, there remain significant inequalities when it comes to access to activity for disabled people and people living with long-term health conditions, who are less active by 30% (Activity Alliance) and more than three times more likely to often feel lonely than non-disabled people (ONS 2020).

The UK Government's National Disability Strategy aims to widen participation in sport and transform the lives of all disabled people, including those with visible and invisible impairments and those who do not identify as disabled.

Our own groups report increasing demand for their services from those affected by long-term health conditions including mental health and dementia, and we are uniquely placed and trusted to support these participants.

## **Social Prescribing by Faye McKenning, RDA UK Head of Volunteering**

The 2021 launch of the National Academy for Social Prescribing – which links local provision to national targets - is an important innovation and an area where RDA already plays a significant part.

Our research 'Horses, Health & Happiness' highlighted the vital role we play in supporting the nation's health – both for our participants and our volunteers. We are well-placed to make social prescribing a reality in communities all over the UK, supporting people to take part in purposeful activity, overcome social isolation and loneliness and to benefit from the therapeutic effect of spending time with animals.

## **The impact of COVID**

The pandemic has shown (and/or exacerbated) some key inequalities:

- During the pandemic, disabled people were significantly less active than non-disabled people. In autumn 2020 less than one fifth of disabled people were seen to be doing at least 30 minutes of activity 5 times a week
- The ability for many disabled people to access activity has been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. It is likely that this will continue as confidence is much lower amongst disabled people (for example, the risk of death from Covid 19 is 3 times greater for disabled people)
- Covid has created far greater levels of anxiety about leaving the home for disabled people

## **Accessible activity**

- Riding remains one of the most popular and accessible forms of physical activity for disabled people. Recent research by Leonard Cheshire (2021) has shown that equestrian activities “are readily available across the country - predominantly thanks to the work of RDA”
- The Sport England *Active Lives* survey (2019) revealed that 24% of all people taking part in equestrian activity have a disability – a higher percentage than for any other sport

## **RDA today: making an impact**

RDA is the only major UK charity whose focus is squarely on the therapeutic and health benefits of bringing people and horses together. Over 50 years we have developed a strong track record for delivering personalised, goal-oriented programmes for our beneficiaries.

We make a difference. 85% of our participants say that RDA activity is their main way of accessing physical exercise, and we have a positive, long-term impact on confidence levels, relationship building, communication skills, enjoyment and physical ability.

Our activities are recommended by Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists, and the majority of our participants are referred to RDA by a medical professional. Regular riding improves core strength, balance and coordination and our welcoming groups help to combat isolation and loneliness and boost wellbeing and happiness.

## **Our strengths**

### **Volunteer-led**

We have a network of highly skilled and experienced volunteers, including almost 3,000 qualified coaches.

### **Local**

We are present in communities all over the UK: providing support for all ages, in every county, in rural and urban areas alike. We adapt and respond to local demand, directing resource and help where it is needed most.

### **Diverse**

RDA groups work with a diverse range of people, including those with the most profound physical and mental disabilities and those with other conditions such as dementia.

## **Our Vision**

To enrich the lives of disabled people through horses

## **Our Mission**

We strive to ensure that anyone with a disability can benefit from the unique bond between humans and horses

## **Our Ambition**

To grow and support 35,000 people by 2025

## **The RDA UK Federation: Our structure**

- RDA UK Board - 11 Trustees
- RDA UK Executive Team - 23 members of staff
- RDA UK specialist regional & county teams - 450+ volunteers
- RDA groups and their volunteers - 460 RDA groups in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, Supported by 18,000 volunteers
- Accessibility Mark Centres (commercial riding schools trained by RDA) - 55 AM Centres

## **The Journey to March 2025**

RDA is a national network of over 500 local groups and Accessibility Mark Centres (commercial riding centres accredited by RDA) and pre-COVID were supporting over 25,000 participants.

Reaching our target of 35,000 participants by 2025 means increasing the size of our network – and increasing participant numbers among existing groups.

### **Getting our existing participants back**

COVID had a disproportionate impact on disabled people and we know many of our riders and carriage drivers have experienced a loss of physical condition and confidence that continues to impact their ability to return to RDA.

We are now in a phase of recovery and confidence building, supporting our groups to get back to their usual levels of activity and ensuring our participants feel safe and comfortable to continue with their sessions.

### **Strengthening the RDA network**

We know that demand for RDA services varies across the UK and depends on many factors, but a significant number of our groups have more demand than they can meet - half describe themselves as 'full'. There are challenges we need to overcome in order to meet this demand:

#### **1. Providing critical resources to our groups**

To support more participants in a sustainable way we must address the need for more people (volunteers and coaches), horses and suitable venues.

#### **2. Connecting with our people**

Being better connected with our participants and volunteers for feedback, consultation and communication will enable more people to take a more active role in all areas of RDA life and create a stronger network of supporters and advocates.

### **New and adapted activities**

We will also unlock the potential of new and adapted activities, harnessing the benefits of spending meaningful time with horses. There is great scope in the delivery of non-ridden activities through our existing network, and we will support the development of these opportunities.

New or expanded services will include:

- Expansion and development of non-ridden activities
- Expansion of our dementia programme
- Development of programmes to support mental health
- Development of all forms of formal therapy (in partnership with qualified professionals)

### **Reaching new people**

We will develop services for people with a wider range of disabilities through:

- Working more closely with large care home and day care centre providers
- Licensing and delivering smaller local services through the RDA network
- Expanding the number of schools we work with
- New partnerships with impairment-specific organisations
- Partnerships with other human/equine interaction practitioners

### **Our target:**

- 40 new RDA groups
- 30 new AM Centres
- 15% more participants at RDA groups
- 50% more participants at AM Centres

## Roadmap

### **April 2022-2023: Back to strength**

Aim: Build back participant numbers to pre-pandemic levels (from 17,000-25,000)

- By supporting groups with more coaches, horses, volunteers and funding
- Through a more local approach
- By introducing unmounted activities that a broader range of participants can take part in

### **April 2023-2024: Sustainability and growth**

Aim: Growth in participant numbers to 32,000 through:

- Strengthening existing groups which have capacity to grow
- Creating new centres delivering a wider range of RDA programmes
- Pilot collaborations with other organisations
- Establishing a new Regional Hub providing local support, coaching, and access to the full range of RDA programmes

### **April 2024-2025: Steady expansion**

Aim: Growth in participant numbers to 35,000 due to:

- A strong pipeline of horses, coaches and volunteers, enabling existing groups to offer a wider range of activities to more people
- More referrals from social prescribing (for both participation and volunteering)
- Expanding the network of Regional Hubs providing a range of local services and support to groups
- Thriving partnerships with other organisations



## **Six core objectives will drive everything we do**

We are committed to driving change and ensuring the sustainability and growth of RDA throughout the UK.

### **1. Growth**

To support 35,000 people by providing a wider range of programmes through existing and new RDA groups as well as partnerships with other organisations.

#### **Outcomes**

- More people are benefitting from RDA support across the UK
- People have access to more programmes through RDA

#### **Key actions**

- Develop our capability to recruit new groups and AM Centres, focussing on areas of high demand and low supply
- Provide more direct support at regional and local level to our member groups and supporting them to thrive
- Build partnerships with organisations whose service users could benefit from our activities
- Increase our delivery of Equine Facilitates Learning (EFL), groundwork activities and formal therapeutic interventions (eg Hippotherapy)

### **2. Resources for RDA groups**

To strengthen our groups by providing a reliable supply of the key resources and skills they need to thrive.

#### **Outcomes**

- RDA groups are sustainable, confident and growing
- Our groups know what skills and resources they need to thrive

#### **Key actions**

- Deliver plans for a supply of critical resources, particularly horses, coaches, volunteers and venues
- Ensure that the coaching pathway supports the recruitment and retention of coaches at all levels
- Provide support groups to identify and overcome their own barriers to growth
- Provide enhanced training, advice and resources in key areas of governance that are new to many groups, eg. employment and accessing statutory funding

- Identify, prioritise and tackle key technical barriers to growth (eg. planning issues for capital projects) , bringing in specialist skills where necessary

### **3. Structure**

To have a robust organisational structure which supports groups and provides a framework for growth.

#### **Outcomes**

- RDA UK has sufficient people to provide the support needed at a local level
- Groups are able to access excellent and timely support from RDA UK

#### **Key actions**

- Create Regional Hubs to provide tailored, localised support
- Define, pilot and deliver regional structure change to create proactive teams and increase capacity for local support with clear roles for regional teams delivering the organisation's strategic objectives
- Introduce a Group Charter and review the membership model to acknowledge group differences
- Review and update our governing documents to reflect new programmes and new structures

### **4. Participants and volunteers**

To ensure our diverse community of participants and volunteers are respected, valued, heard and their ideas routinely contribute to the development of our work.

#### **Outcomes**

- There is an active dialogue between RDA UK and the participants and volunteers
- We can demonstrate both the need for, and impact of, all our programmes
- We are a diverse and inclusive organisation

#### **Key actions**

- Development and delivery of the Participant Engagement Plan
- Regular impact and experience surveys to participants and volunteers
- Creation of participant and 'young participant' panels
- Create partnerships with best-practice organisations
- Development and delivery of a data services plan
- Delivery of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Plan and training to groups/regions

## **5. Brand**

To have a brand that is relevant to our stakeholders and which is recognised for the impact we deliver and the part we play in the nation's health.

### **Outcomes**

- All participants and volunteers understand our brand values and promote the impact of our work
- More people (external to RDA) are clear about why our work is important and are drawn to support us
- We play an important and valued part in the development of the sector

### **Key actions**

- Develop and deliver a communications, marketing and PR strategy which will raise awareness of our work and encourage support
- Review and complete the brand research project and deliver a consistent, organisation-wide brand toolkit
- Develop a robust and responsive research capability, with clear research/impact strategy

## **6. Financial sustainability**

To be financially robust, with a diverse range of income streams to fund our ambitions at all levels of the organisation.

### **Outcomes**

- We are confident about our ability to fund our current work and our future ambitions
- We are generating income from a wider variety of sources

### **Key actions**

- Review of the fundraising strategy and income sources and setting income generation targets that will enable us to realise our strategic objectives
- Review of regional finances, including use of existing funds
- Review and develop our charitable income through services to groups, membership model and AM centres

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