

# Confidence, strength and freedom

The life-changing impact of RDA  
on disabled people's lives

## Executive Summary



Emma Insley & Joana Caldeira  
Martinho from Insley Consulting,  
on behalf of RDA UK

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# About RDA

RDA harnesses the power of horses to enrich lives. We support disabled people of all ages through programmes that improve wellbeing, physical health, independence and confidence.

“When I’m riding, I feel like I’m flying and part of the horse. It’s beautiful.”

– Young participant at Park Lane RDA, interviewee

Disabled people face many barriers that limit their full participation in community life, education and employment, negatively affecting their overall health and wellbeing.



RDA’s transformative work, drawing on the powerful connection between equines and people, helps to overcome these barriers. RDA’s core activities, delivered in every corner of the UK by dedicated volunteers and coaches, through a network of RDA Groups and Approved Centres, includes:

- Therapeutic horse riding and carriage driving
- Equine-assisted activities like horsecare and quiet corners
- Equestrian National, Regional and Virtual Championships
- Educational awards and activities

## How RDA’s impact was evaluated

RDA UK commissioned Insley Consulting to deliver an **independent impact evaluation** of its activities, to evidence the difference made to disabled participants through its Groups and Approved Centres.

This is a summary of the RDA’s 2025 Impact Report.

1,290

people took part in surveys, interviews and focus groups, enabling evaluators to confirm findings across different sources and perspectives.



# A national movement with local impact

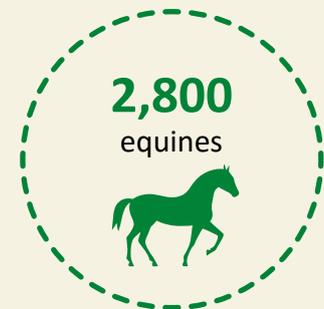
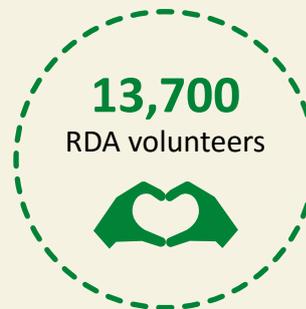
RDA supports people of all ages and abilities with physical and learning disabilities, sensory impairments, long-term health conditions and neurodivergent differences.

In 2024/25, RDA reached...

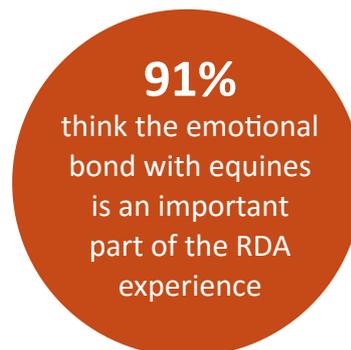
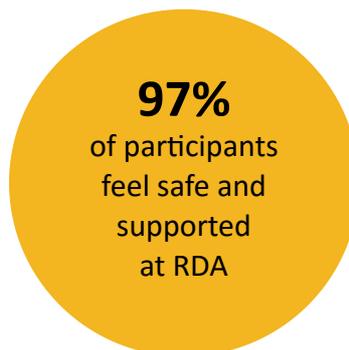
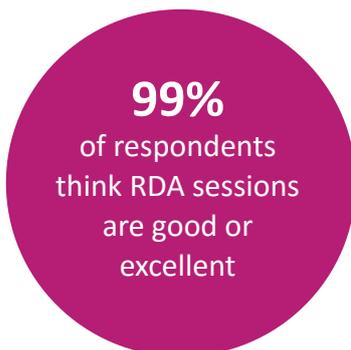


**“We feel so blessed that my daughter can attend RDA. It is the highlight of her week.”**  
– Parent of adult participant  
at Bryanston RDA

## RDA participants were supported by...



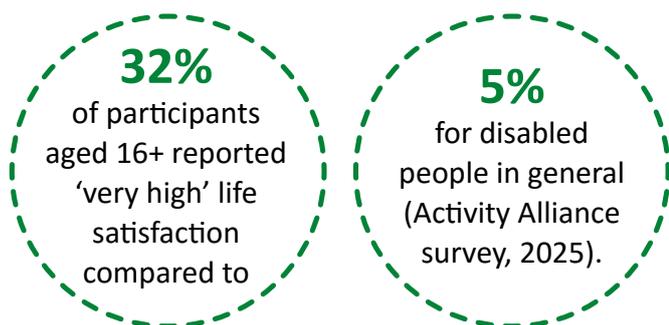
## An inclusive and supportive experience



# What difference does RDA make to participants?

## Significantly improved wellbeing

RDA participants report significantly higher life satisfaction and happiness than disabled people nationally.



People consulted through the evaluation consistently highlighted three elements that improve participants' mental wellbeing:

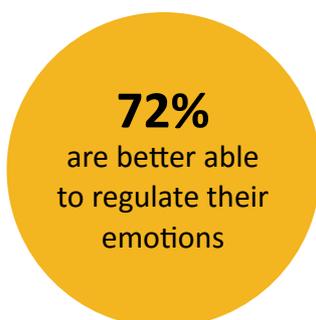
1. The calming presence of horses
2. Supportive relationships with volunteers and coaches
3. Time outdoors and in nature

**"I think it is the interaction between my son and the horse specifically that has calmed him. He really looks forward to his lesson and has excelled at listening and completing instructions."**

– Parent of adult participant at the Unicorn Centre, survey respondent

## Horse Rangers Association Participant story – Eva, age 15

Through RDA, Eva discovered a passion for horses, which has helped her **move through grief after the loss of her Dad**. Despite a fear of heights and spatial awareness challenges, Eva **"took straight to riding and is now confidently cantering"**. Eva's mum explained how **"horses had such a good understanding of Eva's grief"** and how this trusted bond has led to Eva's increased confidence within and beyond the arena, including participating in new sports such as football and cricket.



## Increased connection

RDA tackles the social isolation experienced by many disabled people by offering safe, inclusive spaces where people make friends and feel connected to others and nature. Families feel less isolated and enjoy calmer relationships at home.

**“It’s the only time I go out during the week. It gets me out of the house and gives me something to look forward to.”**

– Adult participant, Horse Rangers RDA



**82%**

of RDA participants feel more connected to others

**65%**

have made friends through RDA

**68%**

of RDA participants have improved communication skills

**70%**

feel more connected to or interested in nature



## Park Lane RDA Participant story – Dexter, age 43

**“Working hard”** looking after the horses at Park Lane Stables RDA has led to Dexter **feeling fitter and part of the local community**. Although Dexter, who has Down syndrome and a hearing impairment, was living independently before RDA, he was isolated and didn’t go out much. Attending and helping out at his local RDA Group has given Dexter a sense of pride and belonging, leading him to feeling **less isolated and happier with his living situation**.

## Increased independence, confidence and self-esteem

RDA helps participants feel accepted, build self-belief and discover new aspirations – from animal care careers to taking part in other activities outside of the arena.

“RDA has completely changed my life for the better. I’m not as dependent on my wheelchair. It improves my mental health.”

– Young participant at Wyfold Group

90%

of RDA participants feel more confident about themselves

95%

are proud of what they have achieved

67%

have developed new interests or aspirations because of RDA

71%

are more independent

### Fairlight Hall RDA Participant story – Josh, age 16

Through “talking to Henna”, his favourite horse, and the volunteers at Fairlight Hall RDA, Josh has become a **more confident communicator and more independent**. Before RDA, Josh, who is autistic and home educated, admitted he was fairly inactive. Now he does karate, **trains at the gym independently and is considering attending the local farming college**.



## Increased physical activity and ability

To help disabled people become more physically active, RDA provides participants with a unique opportunity for them to move while doing something they enjoy – and this **measurably improves their activity levels.**

**28%**

of RDA participants aged 16+ are inactive compared to 41% nationally

**48%**

are more physically active outside of RDA after engaging in sessions

Horse riding naturally engages the core muscles, improves balance and posture, and offers movement that mimics walking – making it especially beneficial for those who face barriers to other forms of exercise. For many participants with physical disabilities or co-ordination difficulties, **attending RDA is also a vital part of their physiotherapy.**

**88%**

have better posture, balance and co-ordination

**71%**

of participants have improved fine and/or gross motor skills



### Peterborough & District RDA participant story – T, aged 10

T, who is autistic, has ADHD and hypermobility, has significantly improved her strength and co-ordination since attending RDA. Connecting with horses helps T feel calm and communicate more with others. She now engages with school differently – the core strength developed through riding has meant that T can now sit down on a chair at school, which previously wasn't possible.



# Improved engagement with education

Attending RDA is an opportunity for many disabled children to experience learning in a completely different and transformative way. Educators observed that RDA sessions notably improved children and young people's confidence and engagement with school – they became more relaxed, patient and resilient, which in turn contributed to better participation in lessons and engagement with peers.

**“The confidence the children build at RDA translates to school. Suddenly, they are different children.”**

– Katie Aldred, Headteacher at Bagshot Infant School, who attend Sandhurst RDA

**71%**

of children are more relaxed and settled at school or college because of RDA

**11,502**

awards and qualifications were awarded by RDA Groups to participants in 2024

**80%**

of parents/carers surveyed think the changes in participants wouldn't have happened without RDA

## Conclusions

This independent evaluation provides strong evidence that RDA delivers meaningful, lasting change for disabled people. Through inclusive and engaging equine-assisted activities, RDA consistently improves mental wellbeing, strengthens social connection, builds confidence and independence, and supports physical ability. There is also emerging evidence that RDA enhances engagement with education.

The evidence shows that these outcomes would not have happened without RDA.

RDA's unique contribution lies in the combination of:

- A trusted national federation with strong local roots.
- Skilled coaches and dedicated volunteers who deliver high-quality, person-centred activities.
- The powerful and irreplaceable connection between people and horses.

At a time when demand for RDA's activities is rising, and the needs of participants are becoming more complex, this work is more important than ever. With over 3,800 people already on an RDA Group waiting list, there is significant potential to reach more disabled people, broaden inclusive practice (particularly for neurodivergent participants), and influence national policy on inclusion in sport, leisure and education.

The evaluation demonstrates that RDA is uniquely placed to break down barriers and create opportunities that transform lives. Continued investment, collaboration and advocacy will ensure that even more disabled people can experience confidence, strength and freedom through RDA.



# Thank you from RDA

RDA UK would like to express their heartfelt thanks to:

- All the participants, parents and carers, educators and volunteers who supported this evaluation by generously providing their insight through the national survey, interviews and participation in focus groups.
- All RDA Groups and Approved Centres, and the staff, coaches and volunteers that run them, who deliver RDA's life-changing experiences. A special thanks to the RDA Groups who hosted the evaluators' visits and provided data via the RDA Annual Return.
- RDA UK staff, who supports the network of Groups and Approved Centres and supported evaluation design and data collection.
- Our incredible donors, who enable RDA UK and RDA Groups to continue to support as many disabled people across the UK as possible.
- The evaluation team at Insley Consulting – Emma Insley, Joana Caldeira Martinho and Megan Stephenson.

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**rda.org.uk**  
**info@rda.org.uk**  
**01926 492915**

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