

Case Study



Equine Activities

When RDA Woodbridge & District Group was approached by Suffolk Refugee Support to help their clients, coach Victoria Gallantree willingly agreed to develop and run an innovative small-scale programme. She freely admits that she has been surprised at the level of success achieved and the incredible difference it has made to the life of a young refugee from Afghanistan, named Abusufyan (known as Abu).



Abu is an unaccompanied asylum seeker who moved from his homeland, via Kent, to Suffolk and was experiencing profound mental health issues as a result of all he had been through on his journey. His support worker Natalie says that when she first met Abu, **'he was blank behind the eyes, never smiled and rarely spoke'**. After just a few sessions of equine therapy, Abu has opened up and can be heard laughing and joking with his coach and the RDA volunteers. As Natalie states, **'It's completely changed his life. It was the first time I saw him smile'**. Through the therapy sessions, Abu has grown in confidence and has even expressed his ambition to become a volunteer for the RDA in the future.

Coach Victoria is delighted with Abu's progress and says, **'he's like a sponge, soaking up information'**. He's hard working and a good listener and this, combined with his obvious affinity with horses has meant he has made rapid progress. He has moved from learning how to approach and handle a horse on the ground, to riding independently at walk and tackling an obstacle course, in just four weeks. When asked if Abu had ever met horses in his homeland, he says there were horses in his village but they were different to those at the RDA. However, as he says, **'when you love them, you love them'** and Abu clearly does.

The Equine Activities sessions developed by RDA Woodbridge have been a remarkable success enabling a troubled refugee, who has undoubtedly experienced much trauma, to be relaxed in the company of horses and strangers.



A glimpse of the difficulties Abu has faced can be discerned when he expresses surprise at how kind and accepting of him the staff and volunteers at the centre are. He smiles as he says he would one day like to compete at the Olympics. Who knows, with his determination and the help of those

supporting him, this young man's dream may one day become a reality. RDA is the only major UK charity whose focus is squarely on the therapeutic and health benefits of bringing people and horses together and as coach Victoria reminds us, 'It's what you can do that counts'.