



Changing Lives Through Horses. Cases Study - The Willows Primary School

The importance of attending school cannot be overestimated and yet absence rates continue to remain stubbornly high for a variety of reasons. The British Horse Society's (BHS) programme, **Changing Lives through Horses (CLTH)** has been designed to help improve the lives of young, disengaged people, using horses as the inspiration for change. Horses have a way of teaching a range of invaluable key skills without us even knowing we are studying. The CLTH programme is a way to improve the self-esteem of young people, helping them to develop a sense of responsibility, encouraging teamwork and resilience, while fostering a calm and sensitive approach to another sentient being.

At RDA Woodbridge, our staff, volunteers and horses work together to provide a safe and supportive environment for children and young people who, for whatever reason, find emotional connections difficult in educational and social environments. The programme allows us to work with those aged between 7 and 25 who have additional needs in the widest sense.

Each week a group of primary aged children from The Willows Primary School, Ipswich, come to The Bays to ride the horses and ponies and to learn about stable management and general horse care. When asked what difference the sessions make, their accompanying teacher assistants stated: **'The visits motivate the children to come to school, and attendance has improved. They have grown from being nervous in the classroom to being visibly more emotionally secure as well as kind and thoughtful. They have blossomed. Some of the children don't show emotions, however when they are around the horses they can be seen smiling broadly while a child who rarely speaks in the school environment, is happy to chat to the volunteers and her pony. They have returned to school with rosettes and certificates after completing a series of exercises and they have taken a real pride in their awards and achievements. Our children would never have had the opportunity to experience being around such large animals had it not been for RDA Woodbridge and the Changing Lives Through Horses programme. It has made such a difference.'**

Conversations with young people often centre around the sense of belonging, trust, being listened to, safety and acceptance. Our equine facilitated learning at RDA Woodbridge provides an environment where physical and mental well-being are central. We provide opportunities for children and young people to experience what is often a life changing experience in a unique setting with the help of our four-legged friends and mentors. Horses have certainly changed the lives of the children from The Willows Primary School, as their teachers have testified, and we look forward to seeing further positive developments as they continue to attend and work their way through the specially devised curriculum.

June 2025