

Case Study



Carriage Driving

In May 1974 the press reported that Prince Phillip had commented that he would like to see disabled children take up driving ponies as an extension of the work of the Riding for the Disabled Association. The call was taken up by RDA groups across the country. There are now almost 80 groups involved, including Woodbridge and District, giving opportunities to over 1,000 drivers. RDA volunteers sit alongside the driver to offer assistance and tuition as and when it is required.



Carriage driving provides a unique opportunity to clients whose disabilities may prevent them from riding a horse. It is a discipline that offers many of the same benefits as riding, including improved co-ordination and balance, relaxation through rhythmic movement, along with the joy of being out in the open air. When viewing clients setting off on their carriage drive, it is evident that a huge amount of enjoyment is derived from each trip. Even those who are non-verbal very obviously gain from the experience with one client clapping as the horse begins to trot and others heard making appreciative sounds as they travel.

Woodbridge and District RDA is fortunate to have three horses that are fully trained carriage horses. They are also able to be ridden by clients which shows just how talented and versatile these equine therapists are. Mr. Tom, Amber and Dolly are able to be driven with the help of a team of volunteers who have the skills to support the activity. Each carriage contains a coach who has been fully trained and assessed. There are also willing volunteers who travel in front and behind on bicycles to ensure safety at all times. You certainly have to be fit to keep up with the carriages when providing an escort! Carriage driving is not just confined to term time but happens throughout the year until it becomes too cold for clients to be outdoors. This is generally by the end of November. Everyone is able to enjoy witnessing the changing seasons from aboard as they travel along the lanes and specially developed trails.



The groups that attend the carriage driving sessions are very appreciative of what the yard manager, and her volunteers provide. One carer stated what a difference their regular attendance makes saying, ***'it is so sensory- holding the reins and feeling the movement- and it provides such a lot of independence that would not otherwise be experienced. Our clients really enjoy greeting the horses and all the volunteers are polite, helpful and welcoming to us'***.

Ensuring the horses are kept fit, trained and able to draw the carriages is an on-going task as is looking after the vehicles and the harnesses. However, the dedication of the volunteers is such that they ensure carriage driving is an activity that is offered to those who wish to participate. The joy on clients' faces is sufficient reward for everyone who so freely gives of their time and energy and it is hoped that this activity will continue for many years to come.

