



Riding for the Disabled (Woodbridge & District Group)

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

A reference manual

Contents

Hello and welcome to our Group	4
The basics everyone needs to know	5
Volunteer and staff behaviours	5
Safeguarding Code of Conduct.....	6
Getting started	8
Hints on clothing	9
Branded clothing	9
Tea, coffee and cake	10
Carrots	10
Volunteering roles.....	11
Yard work	11
Indoor work.....	13
Equipment store	14
Maintenance work	14
‘Non-horsey’ volunteering (for want of a better term...)	15
Getting ready for our participants	17
Hats and boots.....	17
Basic Training.....	18
Working in the stalls	19
Turning out and bringing in safely.....	21
Preparing a pony for a riding session	23
Grooming	23
Tacking up	25
Saddle	25
Bridle	25
Untacking	27
What to expect in a session.....	27
Warming up and tack check.....	27
Mounting	28
Helping to mount (as part of the mounting team)	29
The ride.....	30
Dismounting	30
Helping to dismount (as part of the dismounting team)	30

The riding part of the session.....	31
Points to note when leading in sessions or to another place... ..	33
Side Walking.....	33
The inevitable poo	34
A hack out	34
After a riding session – checklist.....	34
School Shapes	39
Carriage Driving.....	41
Carriage driving – checklist.	43
Equine Activities (EA)	44
Vaulting	45
Changing Lives Through Horses	46
Tea with a Pony.....	47
Summer holiday activities.....	48
Activity days.....	48
Stable Management courses	48
Volunteer training - continual professional development (CPD).....	48
Training notes: - Understanding our Horses.....	49
Developing and refreshing your horse knowledge.....	49
Working with our participants	50
Inclusive communication.....	50
Group vision, values, safety procedures and governance	50
Vision and Values.....	50
Our Vision	50
Our Values	51
Our Behaviours.....	51
Fire safety.....	52
Accidents.....	53
Falls	53
Feedback.....	55
Complaints	55
Policies	55
Group Governance Structure.	56
Glossary	57

About the horse.....	57
Horse paces.....	57
Horse equipment.....	58
Clothing.....	58
On the yard	59

Hello and welcome to our Group.

Hello, welcome, and thanks for volunteering with Woodbridge & District RDA Group. We hope you have a great time helping our participants; spending time with our horses and ponies and making some new friends.

This guide outlines the many ways you can get involved, with training opportunities available if you'd like to learn new skills or take on a different role.

It also gives essential guidance on appropriate clothing and footwear, supporting sessions, and the safe handling of horses.

In addition, the guide introduces our Behaviour Charter and, as we work with children and vulnerable adults, explains our Safeguarding Code of Conduct and the standards we all follow to help ensure a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment.

Towards the end we look at how the group is organised; the various activities on offer; and what to do if you have a problem or want to complain. The guide is quite long because it aims to cover most of the things that you might get involved with. Don't be alarmed, you can always just dip into the bits you're interested in. By the way, in this guide we use the words 'horse' and 'pony' interchangeably.



The basics everyone needs to know

This section sets out our Behaviours Charter. That might sound a bit serious, but it's simply about making sure everyone understands what's expected. When we all work to the same standards, we create a safe, welcoming and supportive environment for our participants, volunteers, staff, visitors and horses.

You'll also find important information about safeguarding. Because we work with children and vulnerable adults, everyone has a responsibility to help keep people safe and to know what to do if they have a concern.

These are the foundations of volunteering with us. They help make sure that everyone enjoys their time at the centre, feels respected and supported, and can play their part with confidence.

Volunteer and staff behaviours

Welcome Everyone

- Greet new volunteers warmly and introduce them to others.
- Use inclusive language in conversations and materials.
- Offer flexible opportunities so people with different needs can participate.

Value Every Voice

- Encourage quieter members to share their thoughts.
- Acknowledge contributions publicly, even small ones.
- Avoid interrupting; let people finish their ideas.

Adapt with Empathy

- Adjust communication style depending on someone's comfort level.
- Be patient with different learning speeds.
- Ask "What works best for you?" when planning tasks.

Collaborate Generously

- Invite others to join in tasks rather than working alone.
- Share credit for successes as a team.
- Offer help proactively when you see someone struggling.

Support with Courage

- Speak up if you see someone being excluded or treated unfairly.
- Offer guidance without taking over tasks.
- Encourage people to try, even if mistakes happen.

Respect at the Core

- Be honest and transparent in communication.
- Listen actively and avoid dismissing ideas.
- Respect boundaries and confidentiality when someone shares personal information.

Encourage Growth

- Share knowledge and skills with others.
- Suggest training opportunities or resources.
- Celebrate progress, not just outcomes.

Create Safe Spaces

- Respond kindly when someone asks for help.
- Normalise mistakes as part of learning.
- Intervene if gossip or negativity arises.

Practise Understanding

- Take time to clarify instructions rather than rushing.
- Show genuine interest in people's perspectives and experiences.
- Recognise that there may be multiple valid approaches to a situation.

Celebrate Together

- Recognise achievements with group celebrations or simple thank-yous.
- Share positive stories and successes regularly.
- Encourage laughter, camaraderie, and pride in being part of the team.

Safeguarding Code of Conduct

The RDA Code of Conduct outlines the expected behaviours to create a safe and enjoyable environment for everyone involved in RDA. Regardless of role, all personnel will work to the highest standards of safeguarding practice, considering any specific issues listed below, which are included in their work.

- Treat everyone equally, with respect and dignity and never engage in deliberately hurtful behaviour.
- Bullying will not be tolerated in any form.
- Everyone associated with RDA has a duty of care towards each other.
- Never abuse any position of trust you may hold and always act within appropriate boundaries, even in difficult circumstances.
- Set an example you wish others to follow and remember everybody is a role model at all times, inside and outside of RDA. Physical contact should only be made with a child, young person or adult at risk in response to their needs at the time, and this should be appropriate to their age, gender, ethnicity and ability. Always explain your actions first and ensure you have consent.
- Never allow or engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, and refrain from making sexually suggestive remarks, even in fun.
- Inappropriate language should always be challenged.

- Parents/carers are responsible for an individual's personal care, such as using the toilet. Never do things of a personal nature that someone can do for themselves.
- Other than parents or guardians, never be alone with a child, young person or adult at risk when not in sight and hearing of others.
- Other than parents or guardians, never take a child, young person or vulnerable adult to your house where they will be alone with you, or transport them from one location to another by yourself. Please refer to the RDA Transportation Policy on guidance for transportation.
- Staff and volunteers must never give their personal phone numbers, personal email addresses, or social media details to children or vulnerable adults.
- Staff and volunteers must not engage in private, unmonitored messaging with a child or vulnerable adult; any such communication must include a manager parent or carer.
- Always ensure an appropriate level of supervision. Children, young people and adults at risk should always have a responsible adult supervising their activity.
- Dress in a safe and appropriate manner for your time within RDA.
- No one should be under the influence of alcohol/illegal substances whilst active within an RDA environment or acting in a capacity for RDA.

Always inform the Safeguarding Officer immediately if you:

- have any allegations or complaints made about you or have any concerns yourself.
- feel someone else has misinterpreted what you have said or done.
- have had to restrain or accidentally hurt a child, young person or adult at risk.
- think you may have breached the Code of Conduct.

You should never plan to be in a situation where you are alone with one child, young person or adult at risk. Should an emergency occur, you must consider what action you are able to take, to ensure the situation is as safe as possible for everyone involved.

I understand that by accepting a voluntary role with RDA and Woodbridge & District I am agreeing to abide by this Code of Conduct.

Failure to comply with the Code of Conduct could result in your volunteering status being subject to review in line with our Safeguarding and Volunteering policies.

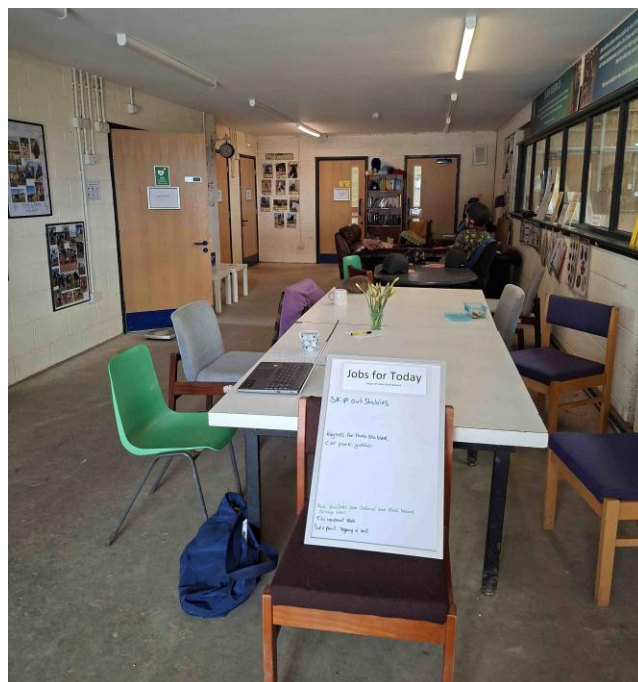
Group Safeguarding Contact

Our Group Safeguarding Officer (GSO) and Designated Safeguarding Lead Sharon Waldron can be contacted at safeguarding@rdawoodbridge.org.uk

Getting started

Let's start with some need-to-know information...

- The group has over 100 volunteers, more than 70 participants, 7 staff, and 15 horses. Although the horses are here 24/7, everyone else comes and goes at different times and on different days. Which can make communication and sharing information a little tricky - hence this volunteer handbook. There's also a handbook for participants and another for coaches. (The horses have everything down to a fine art and don't need a handbook).
- Joking aside, please sign in when you arrive and out when you leave.
- If you're volunteering with or coaching a session, please arrive well before before the session starts so you can help get everything ready.
- And if you can't make your usual volunteering session, please phone the office as soon as possible on 01473 737087 and leave a message. The staff might need to ask others to cover so the session can go ahead.
- There are availability sheets on the wall and it really helps the coaches if they know who's around to help with each session. Please mark up your availability, including any sessions you know you can't make; you can always change it later if you need to.
- The very nature of our group means there are lots of children and vulnerable adults around and so naturally Safeguarding is a top priority. If you've got any concerns about the safety or welfare of anyone at the Group, be that participants or volunteers, please tell our Safeguarding Officer, Head Coach or Centre Manager straightaway. The Safeguarding Officer's details are on the noticeboard in the community room.



Community room

- We expect everyone to follow our policies such as Safeguarding, Health & Safety etc. There are copies on the volunteer noticeboard in the community room or you can ask the Volunteer Co-Ordinator or Centre Manager for a copy by emailing volunteers@rdawoodbridge.org.uk or centremanager@rdawoodbridge.org.uk
- If you ever find yourself a bit unhappy, worried or concerned about something, talk to our Volunteer Co-ordinator, Head Coach or Centre Manager. Often a quick chat can help; we want everyone to have a great experience volunteering with the group.
- And remember... the whole group is really grateful to all our volunteers; the bottom line is we can't operate without you. But if the time comes when you decide to leave, please can give us as much notice as possible. That so we have time to find cover, carry on delivering sessions for participants, and taking good care of the horses.

And now to the more practical things...

Hints on clothing

What to wear...

- ✓ Strong, comfy shoes or boots. Wellies are essential in wet weather.
- ✓ Long, comfy trousers, jeans, jodhpurs.
- ✓ T-shirts, jumpers or sweatshirts.
- ✓ A coat, jacket or gilet which can be done up.
- ✓ Gloves and a hat. Sun cream on sunny days as there's not a lot of shade around.
- ✓ And if you've got long hair, please tie it up for safety.

And what not to wear....

- ✗ High heeled shoes, sandals or flimsy shoes
- ✗ Skirts, shorts, long scarves and hoodies if working around the horses.
- ✗ Jewellery - it might get lost, caught up or tugged by someone.

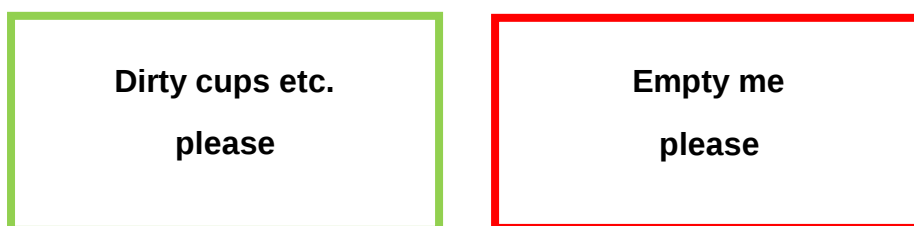
Branded clothing

We've got a range of optional branded clothing including T-shirts, polo shirts, sweatshirts, gilets and caps. Information about prices, sizes, and how to order are on the [order form](#) which is on the 'Already a volunteer?' section of the RDA Woodbridge website.

Tea, coffee and cake

Just like our lovely ponies, we need feeding and watering too. There's tea, coffee and squash in the kitchen along with milk and a supply of biscuits. These are free for volunteers. We grab a quick break between sessions when we can; this depends on the number of volunteers who are around and what's happening on the day. Lunch is normally about 12:00 noon to 1:00pm. There's a fridge for your packed lunch, a microwave, an air fryer and a freezer in the kitchen.

Please put dirty cups, mugs, plates and cutlery in the dishwasher, not in the sink or on the side, and if it's full – please switch it on. Dishwasher tablets are under the sink and the shortest program is plenty long enough to clean things. If you're lucky enough to come across the dishwasher when it's finished – please empty it! The signs say it all really.



Dishwasher signs - turn over when putting on and when it's been emptied

Carrots

Our horses and ponies love carrots, parsnips, apples and bananas, but rather than feeding them in-between meals, please just pop any fruit & veg goodies in the box near the signing in book. The staff will make sure they get them. And like us humans, horses and ponies can unfortunately put weight on, so we avoid sugary treats like polo mints.



Treats

Volunteering roles

Not every role involves horses—there are plenty of non-equestrian opportunities to explore too... Some are physical, others are more ‘behind the scenes’.

Yard work

Volunteers are very welcome to help with yard work but please don't do anything that's outside your comfort zone or physical capabilities.

Keeping our fields clean and well maintained is essential for the health and wellbeing of our horses and ponies. One of the most important daily jobs is poo picking. This is usually done in the morning and simply involves collecting droppings with a scoop, loading them into a wheelbarrow, and taking them to the muck heap.

There are also times when the horses need to be moved between fields or brought into their stables, and an extra pair of hands is always welcome.

Our horses get through an impressive amount of hay, so filling hay nets is another regular task that helps keep everything running smoothly. If you'd like to lend a hand with any of these jobs, just speak to one of the yard staff or coaches.



Filling haynets

And what goes in, must come out. Which brings us neatly to mucking out.

We try to turn out the horses and ponies as much as possible. But there are times when some or all of them have to be stabled. For example, when it's super cold or wet, or if they're happier in a stable. The stables have rubber matting on the floor, and then either chopped paper, chopped cardboard, wood chips or straw to absorb the urine and catch the poo. This needs mucking out every day and skipped out (removing the poo) at least once more. So

any help you can offer in this department is very welcome - and as an added bonus - it's a good workout!



Mucking out



On the muck heap

In the warmer months, we try to keep the fields and surrounding hedges free from ragwort. This is poisonous to horses and so removing young plants and cutting down flowering plants before they set seed is another ongoing job. The yard staff and coaches can help with identifying ragwort.



Ragwort rosette



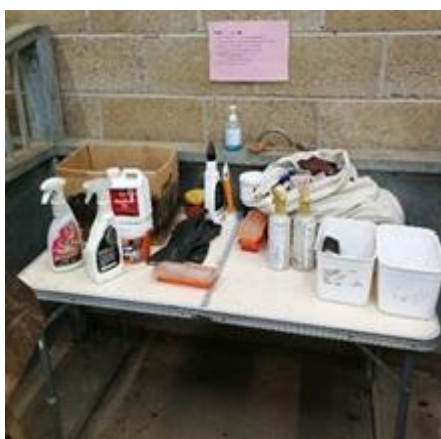
Ragwort in flower

Indoor work

Each horse has their own grooming kit and from time to time, the grooming boxes and their contents need a good clean – hot soapy water does the trick. There's a sink in the tack room. All grooming equipment should be clearly marked with the horse's name – so this is a great time to make sure the right stuff is in the right box, and to reapply names.

Leather headcollars, bridles, saddles, compensatory aids and all other tack benefits from a periodic deep clean. This means the buckles and keepers are undone the tack dismantled and the leather parts thoroughly cleaned. When done, it's all reassembled ready for use. Because this takes much longer to do than the wipe over at the end of each session, we tend to do the deep cleans during school holidays when sessions aren't running.

And then there's the table in the stalls area. It has all the cleaning cloths, sponges, saddle soap, and anti-bacterial spray etc. on it. Any impromptu cleaning here is very noticeable and appreciated.



Cleaning table

If you're handy with a needle and thread, rugs and fly masks often need running repairs; our lovely equines seem to think rugs are great for a bit of teeth-cleaning, dental flossing, or more realistically, they just enjoy tearing them.

Moving away from cleaning and mending, another important task is watering the indoor arena. Regular watering helps keep dust levels down and maintains a firm, safe surface for both horses and people.

When the arena isn't in use, a hosepipe and sprinkler are used to water the surface. The sprinkler needs to be moved around periodically to make sure the whole arena is covered, so there's a good chance you might get a little wet along the way!

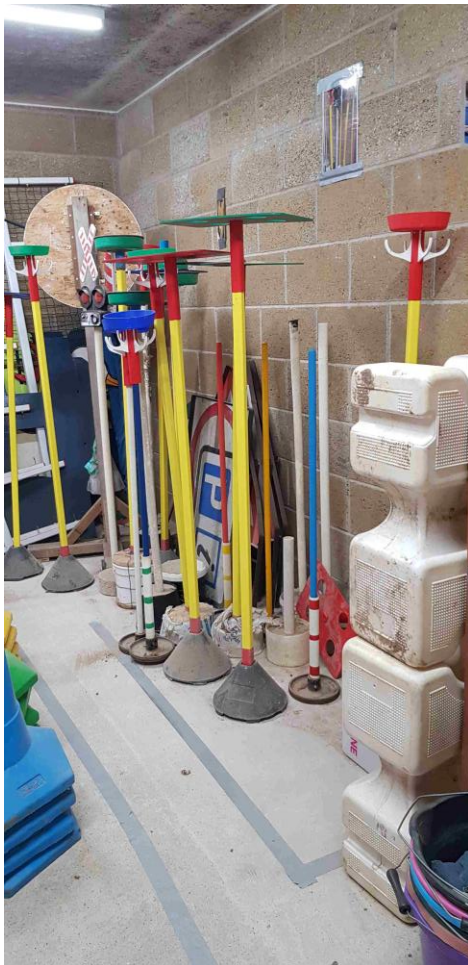


Sprinkler

Equipment store

Off to the side of the arena is the equipment store. It's full of a fabulous array of equipment, from the usual poles, cones, balls, bean bags, and soft toys to the more unexpected items such as a 'washing machine' for the sock game; groceries for a shopping game; fish for a (you've guessed it) fishing game, along with giant Jenga and Connect 4 games. This equipment is used in sessions on a daily basis to help participants increase their co-ordination, balance, core strength, confidence, manual dexterity etc.

Because it's so well-used, the equipment store inevitably needs regular tidying. So if you have some time spare and there are no horses in the arena, feel free to have a tidy up.



Equipment store



There are posters on the walls and lines on the floor to guide where things go.

Maintenance work

Cycles and carriages; sinks and shelves – all our equipment and structures need maintenance from time to time. Which means there's always jobs to do that keep the centre running as efficiently as possible.

It could be fixing a puncture, tightening some cycle brakes, sweeping the yard, putting up a shelf, doing a bit of painting, clearing mud from drainage channels, mending something, moving hay bales, cutting back vegetation, unblocking the sink... the list goes on.

If you can spare some time now and again, or even regularly that would be a huge help. By the way - you'll be covered on our insurance, so you don't need to worry about anything like that.

'Non-horsey' volunteering (for want of a better term...)

There are plenty of *behind-the-scenes* roles that are just as important as our horse-related ones. From fundraising and social media to event planning, crafting, baking and more, these roles help keep the group running, developing and thriving. Better still, many of them can be done from home or fitted around your own schedule.

If you have skills you'd like to put to good use, or would simply like to try something new, and can spare a little time, we'd love to hear from you. Have a chat with the Volunteer Coordinator or Centre Manager.

Here are just a few examples of how you could help:

- Business and administration: Writing grant applications, seeking sponsorship, fundraising, preparing risk assessments, developing policies and procedures, managing projects, or even becoming a trustee.
- IT and communications: Updating the website, creating social media content, writing newsletters or promotional copy, or helping to manage mailing lists.
- Events and community engagement: Organising open days, giving presentations, building links with local councils, or promoting RDA Woodbridge to other charities, community groups and organisations.
- Gardening and horticulture: Creating attractive planters, growing herbs for the horses, or cultivating and sourcing natural browsing materials such as willow, hazel and hawthorn.

Every contribution, whatever your skills or experience, helps us provide the best possible experience for our participants, other volunteers and horses.



Some non-horsey volunteer roles

Now let's take a closer look at the volunteering roles that involve working with our horses and supporting our participants.

Don't worry if it feels like there's a lot to take in; the information is there to give you some background and can be used as a reference guide whenever you need it.

Getting ready for our participants

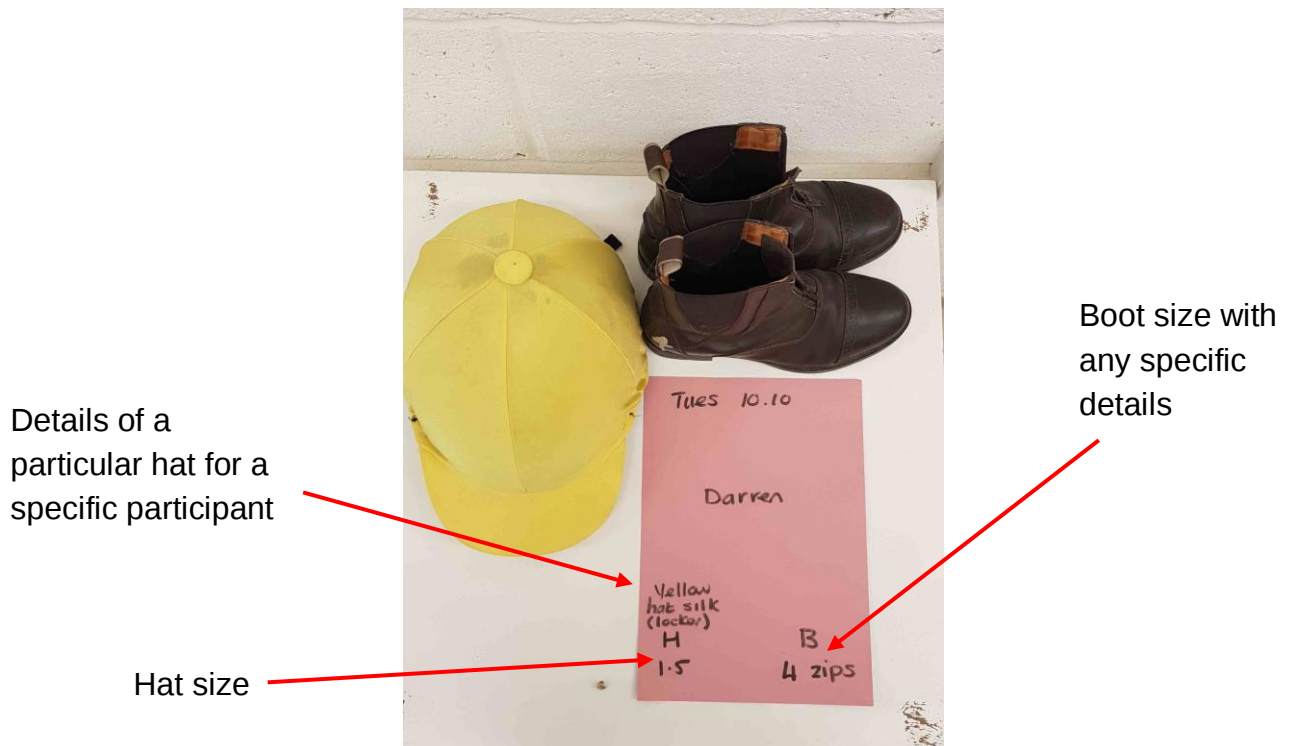
Hats and boots

Many participants borrow our hats and boots, and over the years we've developed a system which helps the participants find theirs quickly.

All participants have a coloured hat and boot card (in the folders in the kitchen) showing their name, the day and time of their session, and their hat and boot size. Riding participants have pink cards; Equine Activity (EA) participants have pale yellow, and Carriage Driving (CD) participants have green ones.

Generally first thing in the morning and first thing in the afternoon, volunteers put the cards hats and boots out in the community room for all the sessions. Cards and hats generally go on the tables or sofas; boots go on the floor.

Some participants have particular hats or boots and their coloured card will indicate this.



Rider card with hat and boot sizes

Some participants might need boots with zips; others might need a particular hat. These hats have a coloured hat silk on to distinguish them, and they're stored on top of the lockers in the hat and boot room.

Afterwards, volunteers disinfect hats and boots with anti-bacterial spray, and return them to the hat and boot room in size order. Any particular hats with hat silks go back on top of the lockers with their hat silk still in place.

From time to time, the hats and boots need their sizes re-painting on the outside; the boots benefit from a clean and polish; and the room itself looks so much better if it's swept after a session.



Hat on locker



Hat and boot room

Basic Training

All volunteers in all RDA groups have basic training before they can work unsupervised - this is so everyone knows how to work safely around horses. It's known as Green Card training. And as soon as a coach is happy you're safe and confident with handling horses, and things like tacking up, mounting & dismounting, they'll sign these elements off.

But that's only the start, training is an ongoing activity and the coaches are always willing to help with anything new, or give a refresher on previous training. The coaches themselves have regular training (known as CPD - Continuous Professional Development).

Around once a year, we check the information on the green cards and on your original application form is still correct and up to date. If any of your details change in between checks e.g. address, phone number, emergency contact etc., please let us know.

RDA VOLUNTEER BASIC TRAINING RECORD CARD	
Group	
Charity No.	
Chair	
Address	
Telephone No.	
Cardholders Name..... Cardholders Contact Number.....	
I have received appropriate induction training and an introduction to the group environment / activities and I acknowledge and understand the RDA Health and Safety Guidelines and Safeguarding Policy	
Signed Date / /	
Training Commenced / /	Training Completed / / Disclosure Check Completed ☐ date / /
First Aid Certificate (if applicable) ☐ date / /	First Aid Updates / / / /
Please add any qualifications and Training Days Attended to the Getting Started booklet.	
On completion of your Basic Training, please give your card to the appropriate person in your Group for them to keep safe.	
Riding for the Disabled Association incorporating Carriage Driving Registered Co. No. 1050395 Registered Charity No. 241108	

Green card

Working in the stalls

Safety comes first and the following points will help you work safely around the horses:

- Walk towards the pony's left shoulder, taking deliberate steps and never rushing.
- Talk to your pony as you approach and while working around them.
- Stroke and pat the pony's lower neck or shoulder. Use gentle yet assertive movements.
- Never kneel beside a pony - if the pony has a fright and spooks you might not be able to get out of the way quickly enough.
- It's best practise to walk around the front of the pony, but if you do have to go behind
 - Use your voice to let them know you're there
 - keep a hand on them so they know where you are
 - don't startle them or make them jump
- Always tie your pony to a single piece of binder twine with a quick release knot or use the 'Safe tie ring'. We'll explain how to do this when you join but please ask if you'd like a refresher at any time.



- As you look at the stalls area from the barn door, the stalls on the right hand side are deeper - so it's best to put the larger horses on that side
- If all the stalls are full, you can get ponies ready outside the barn door or inside the arena if it isn't being used.
- If you take rugs off, fold them up, put them on the floor at the edge of the stall, and put the grooming kit on top of the rug. That way we all know which rug belongs to which horse – they don't always have their names on them.
- As a precaution, the sliding barn door should be closed if working alone or, in warmer weather, place the grey barrier across the doorway. And the door between the stalls and gallery areas should be kept closed – just in case a horse gets free.
- Clear up any poo promptly and sweep the stalls area when you're done. If the wheelbarrow is full, please empty it on the muck heap.



Grooming kit on rug



Emptying the wheelbarrow

Turning out and bringing in safely

As ever, safety comes first – horses can be startled or can occasionally be difficult to manage. The most important point to note is that if you're an inexperienced volunteer then please go with someone else who can open & close the gate for you, and then you can focus on leading your horse.

Turning out:

- ⌚ Ideally go with another volunteer when turning out.
- ⌚ When going to the field lead the pony in their field headcollar and have a firm hold on the lead rope. Please wear gloves; if the horse pulls your hands are protected.
- ⌚ Open the gate, lead the pony in and turn to face the gate while you close it.
- ⌚ Lead the pony a short distance away from the gate and then turn the pony to face the gate again. **Important:** When turning, make sure you turn the pony away from you; this means you're showing the pony you're in control, and they're less likely to tread on your feet.



Note how the pony is being turned away from the leader

- ⌚ Undo the headcollar - if several ponies are being turned out at the same time, do this all together - then walk calmly back to the gate.
- ⌚ Put the field headcollar and the lead rope in the black storage box near the field.



Box for headcollars etc.

Catching & bringing in

- Take the field headcollar & lead rope out of the black storage box, and approach the pony from the left-hand side.
- Put on the headcollar, and lead the pony to the gate.
- Open the gate, pass through and close the gate behind you, making sure you turn the pony away from you when manoeuvring.
- The ponies and horses will sometimes have an opportunistic grab at the grass – be ready for this, and don't let them eat. Be firm. Feel free to ask one of the coaches for help, and top tips to manage this. And if you're not ready to catch a horse on your own, again just ask another volunteer, a coach, the Head Coach or Centre Manager.

Preparing a pony for a riding session

Grooming

Before tacking up the horses will need grooming – and in wet weather they seem to delight in getting very grubby, so it can take a bit of time. Each horse has their own named grooming kit that is stored just outside the tack room.

- Start with the feet and pick out each hoof.
 - If you're doing it in the arena, pick out into a bucket so the mud isn't mixed into the arena surface.
- Then move on to cleaning and grooming the head, neck, body and legs.
 - But if you're short of time, focus on the areas where the tack will be in contact with the horse, namely the bridle, saddle and girth areas.
 - Any mud or dirt left in these areas can be uncomfortable and may cause sore spots.



Grooming kit



Grooming

- Collect the leather headcollar from the horse's hook, their tack and any compensatory aids e.g. Bunny Ears, couplings, alternative reins or stirrups etc. from the tack room.
 - That sounds easy, but it's not always quite that straightforward. Many horses have more than one bridle. The way to spot the RDA bridle is to look for the one without a noseband. If you're not sure just ask one of the coaches or another volunteer.



RDA Bridle - no noseband



Hacking Bridle - with noseband

- If a participant uses compensatory aids, the details are on the whiteboard outside the tack room. That's also where the stirrup leather length is written up. Again, any queries please just ask.



Bunny Ears



Coupling

- You can put tack on the wooden saddle stands - that's the safest place for a saddle when it's not on the horse!

Tacking up

Saddle

- If a breastplate is needed, put that on first. (You'll know if one is needed as it'll be written up on the whiteboard)
- Push the numnah well up into the gullet of the saddle. Or for ponies that use a non-slip pad, place this on the pony's back just behind the withers.
- Gently place the saddle well forward on the withers and slide it back into position. If you're struggling with a larger horse, then use the step stool. (All the horses and ponies are used to it.)
- Attach the girth on the right hand side first. Use the straps under the saddle flap which are marked with tape. Note: make sure the girth straps pass through the loops on the numnah – this helps keep it in position.
- Then gently do the left side. Carefully pull the buckle guard down so it's flat and covers the buckles. This protects the underside of the saddle flap.



Numnah well up



Girth straps through the numnah



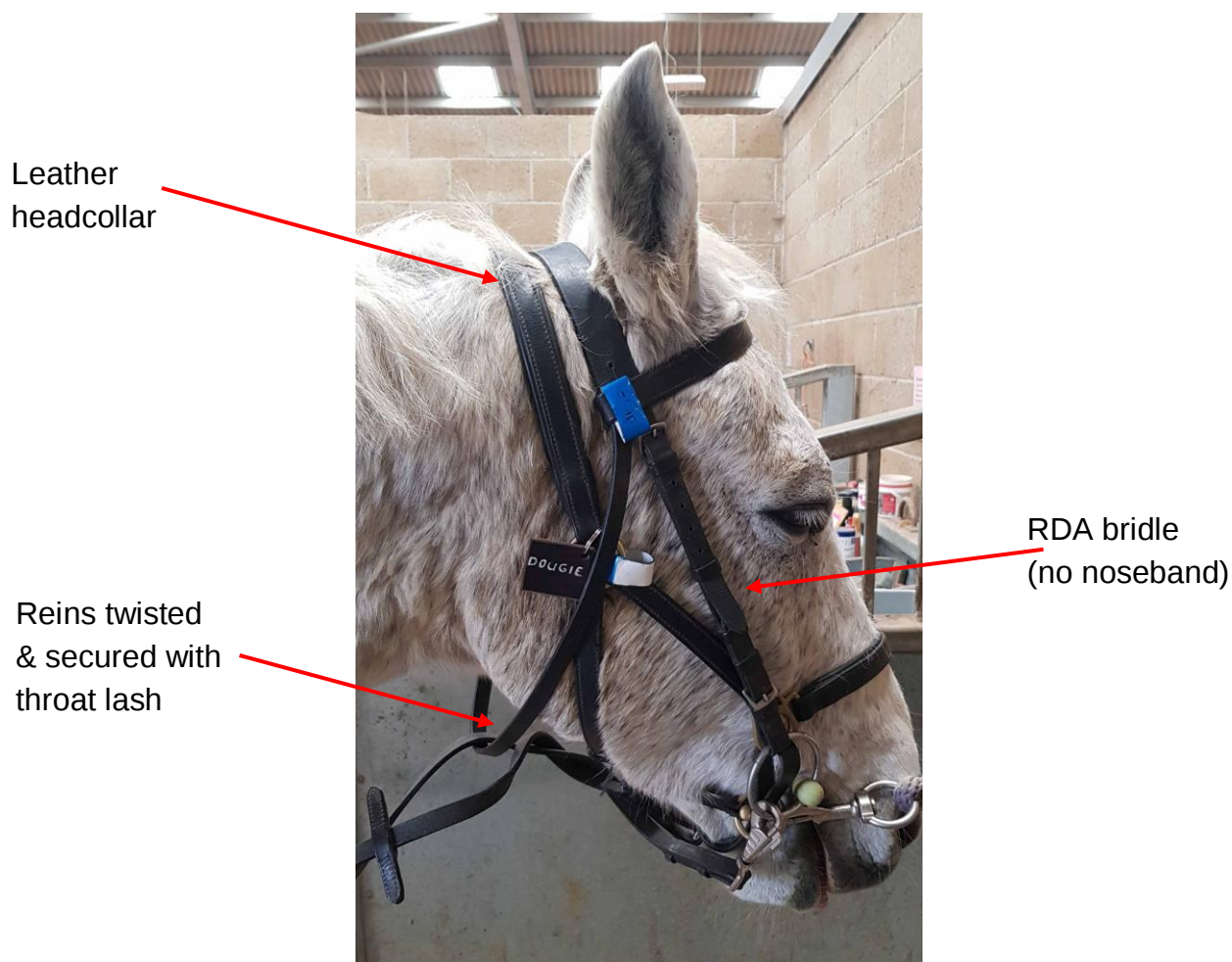
Tape showing which straps to use and the buckle guard covering the buckles

- Adjust the stirrups so they're the correct length – details are on the whiteboard outside the tack room or ask if you need some support.
- Then 'run up' or cross the stirrups over the withers - this is to prevent them catching on anything. Ask if you'd like some help.

Bridle

- From the left-hand side, undo the field headcollar and fasten around the horse's neck.
- Put the leather headcollar on and buckle it up so
 - there's two fingers width below the protruding bony cheekbone

- you can slide at least two fingers between the headcollar and the horse's face
- The noseband of the headcollar should sit halfway between the corner of the mouth and the protruding bony cheekbone. That's so it's on the firm part of the nose and won't interfere with breathing
- Recheck the bridle is the one for RDA use (as a reminder... it has no noseband) and undo the reins from the throat lash.
- Place the bridle on the pony, ease the bit gently into the mouth and gently put the right ear through the headpiece. Doing the right ear first reduces the chance of the bridle poking the pony in the eye. Then put the left ear through the headpiece and make sure the forelock and mane are sitting comfortably as shown below.
- Twist the reins together underneath the neck and hold them in position with the throat lash. Buckle the throat lash so you can fit the palm of your hand (4 fingers width) between the leather and the pony's face.



Leather head collar, RDA bridle, reins twisted and secured

-
- Clip the lead rope to the leather headcollar and remove the field headcollar.

- If the coach asks for a coupling to be used, take it with you into the arena and put it on the bit when you've lined up for the tack check
- **Safety point:** *Never* tie a horse up with a lead rope attached to the coupling. If the horse pulls back it could, in a worst-case scenario, break their jaw.



Untacking

- Take any couplings off while still in the arena.
- Tie the horse up using the field headcollar around the neck and lead rope.
- Undo the girth completely and place it over the saddle; then gently lift the saddle from the horse's back.
- Undo throat lash and gently ease the bridle off the horse, taking care that the bit doesn't bang their teeth. Now remove the leather headcollar and put on the field headcollar.

What to expect in a session

Note: For safety:

- All gates and doors to the arena must be closed during sessions.
- Leaders should wear gloves when leading horses to reduce the risk of a rope burn. But we know that's not always possible, so just have a chat with the coach and explain the situation.

Warming up and tack check

Leaders take the horses into the arena ideally 10 minutes before a session starts. If you're the last one in, close the gates behind you.

- Walk and trot your horse on both reins; this is to warm the horse up and so the coach can check that each equine is sound. You'll need to run when the horse is trotting – if that's difficult, let the coach know and someone else will trot up for you. It's important you're comfortable with what you can do in a session.
- When you've finished warming up, line up on the centre line facing the gallery.

- Untwist the reins and refasten the throat lash so you can fit the palm of your hand (4 fingers' width) between the lash and the horse's face.
- Then tighten the girth gently, being careful not to pinch your horse. You should just be able to slide 3 fingers in between the girth and the horse's body. If the girth is too loose the saddle may move, if it's too tight it will cause discomfort as the horse breathes
- If a coupling is to be used - attach it to the bit, move the lead rope to the coupling ring, and clip the reins onto the headcollar.



Tack check

- The coach will check the tack including any compensatory aids, and make any adjustments needed.
- If you're leading the horse, you're responsible for it during the mounting, riding, and dismounting parts of the session. At least two coaches or volunteers are needed for mounting and dismounting – and extra training is on offer if you'd like to become part of a 'mounting and dismounting' team.

Mounting

- The coach will decide the mounting order and when your horse is called, lead it quietly around and into the channel between the gallery and the mounting block.
 - You'll need to walk backwards at this point. Although the horses are trained to stand still at the mounting block, they'll often look towards the gallery and sniff before standing.

- The horse should be positioned as close to the gallery as possible because that's the safest place for the participant to mount.
- Stand in front of the horse's head blocking any forward movement, and either hold the reins on each side, or maybe just the lead rope. Each horse is different, and you'll soon get to know their personalities and what works best for them.
- The others in the 'mounting team' will help the participant mount, and when the coach is satisfied, will let you know when to move off.
- Talk to your rider, ask them if they are ready and encourage them to say, 'walk on' and move forwards in a straight line. Walk around the arena, giving the mounting block a wide berth, while other participants are mounting

Helping to mount (as part of the mounting team)

- As a reminder, the coach is responsible for the mounting process. They will normally help the participant mount from the gallery. The leader looks guides the horse into position, and a mounting assistant helps the participant from the mounting block side.



Getting into position



Close to the gallery edge

- If you're assisting with mounting, you'll need to be on the mounting block.
- When the horse has halted in position, pull the stirrup down and check which hole the girth is done up on. The coach will say if they want the girth tightening; if so, you may have to pull it up your side. Do this slowly and be careful not to pinch the horse.
- Have a quick look to check the reins are untwisted and fastened to the bit or headcollar. The trigger clips should be pointing outwards. The whole team quietly does this – that way the bridle gets checked 3 times.
- The coach will encourage the participant to mount as independently as possible, normally by 'stepping over' to get on.

- As the participant mounts, depending on their flexibility and stability, you may need to receive their right leg, help it into position, and pop their foot into the stirrup. Remember to ask if it's okay before touching a participant, and to keep any physical contact to a minimum. You may need to reassure a participant, especially if they're anxious.

The ride

The whole session, including mounting and dismounting lasts 30 minutes. There's more information below about what to expect during the riding part of the session, but first let's look at dismounting.

Dismounting

- The coach will ask the participants to line up on the centre line. If you're leading, stand in front on the horse facing them, to prevent any forward movement.
- Encourage the participant to stay on the horse with their feet in the stirrups.
- The 'dismounting team', namely a coach and an assistant will help the participant dismount. The leader's role is to make sure the horse doesn't move.
- The dismounting team moves to another participant, and you can help your participant run up their stirrups. Guide the participant around the front of the pony, never behind, and encourage them to pat and stroke the horse if they want to.
- Ideally another volunteer will guide the participant to the gate where they can leave the arena.
- All horses must remain on the centre line until all participants have left the arena and the gate is closed.

Helping to dismount (as part of the dismounting team)

- There are three people required for dismounting, all of whom have received training: the leader and one person each side of the horse and rider. If you're assisting with dismounting, you'll normally go to the right side of the horse near the participant's right leg. The coach will be on the other side of the horse and will explain to the participant how to dismount.
- The participant will dismount as independently as possible. *Note:* Normally the coach will be on the left side managing the dismount, but if for some reason you're assisting on the left side, you may need to make sure the participant doesn't just slide off and end up under the horse, or lose their balance and either fall over or sit down.
- However, if you're on the right side, you might need to help the participant take their foot out of the stirrup
- You may need to encourage the participant to lean forward and look towards you - this helps with balance during the physical dismount
- We encourage participants to run up their stirrups; sometimes they might need a bit of help. It's a good idea for everyone (namely the coach, the assistant and the leader) to

make sure the participant moves around the front of the pony when running up stirrups or giving the horse a pat.

- Depending on the number of volunteers in the arena, you may have to guide the participant to the exit gate.
- Occasionally participants have to dismount in different ways, for example at the block. The coach will be aware of this, and you'll have some extra training to help you to support the coach and participant.

The riding part of the session

You might be involved with a therapeutic ride, where the leader is in charge of the pony, or you might be helping with a progressive riding session, where participants become increasingly independent riders.

To cater for these differing situations there are three different positions which the leader will need to be familiar with:

Stage 1 (Leader controls the horse)

The leader has control of the horse and does what the coach, and sometimes the participants ask them to do. In stage 1 leading, the leader stands between the shoulder and head of the horse and has enough contact on the lead rope so they're in control. There should be a small 'smile' in the lead rope.



Stage 1 leading. Leader controls the horse by holding fairly close to the pony's head

Stage 2 (Control shared between leader and participant)

The participant is working to control the horse in walk or trot and practicing working independently. The leader is positioned at the horse's shoulder; the lead rope is longer and held with a lighter contact than at Stage 1, allowing the rider to direct the horse. The lead rope will have a bigger 'smile'.



Stage 2 leading. Control is shared between participant and leader. Note the 'smile' in the lead rope

Stage 3 (Rider controls the horse)

The leader is positioned beside the rider's leg and although still on the lead rope, the rider controls the horse. The lead rope is long, held near the end, and has a big 'smile'. The



Stage 3 leading. Participant has control. Note the leader is at the end of the lead rope

leader is primarily there to give confidence to the participant; to help with giving aids if needed; and to support the progression to independent riding off the lead rope.

Points to note when leading in sessions or to another place...

- No matter what stage of leading, **never** wrap the rope around your hand. If the horse pulls back your hand or fingers could get injured
- When turning, prepare the horse and turn them away from you. This way they'll be more balanced and less likely to tread on you.
- Encourage an active walk as this is better for the participant. But if the horse is in 'go-slow' mode, a determined active walk from yourself, where you grow tall and march exaggeratedly with your shoulders, often does the trick. *Top tip* - keep looking forward, don't look back at the horse
- Listen to the coach and make sure your participant is ready for any change of pace.
- Keep the horse's movements smooth, no sudden turns or stops.
- Keep a safe distance - usually a horse's length - from the horse in front.
- And be prepared to stop if your participant becomes unbalanced or has a problem.

Side Walking

Side walkers give a participant some extra support and/or confidence. If you're side walking:

- Stand in line with participant's legs but about 1m away.
- You can support the ankle if required. This helps keep the lower leg in a good place, which in turn, can help keep the upper body in a better position. But tell the participant what you're doing beforehand and check that it's okay to do that.
- If there are two side walkers, only one communicates with the participant e.g. encouraging, repeating or re-interpreting instructions. But both side walkers make sure the participant is safe e.g. holding reins, Bunny Ears, or other compensatory aids, and that their feet are in the stirrups.
- Be patient. Some participants take time to process what they should be doing. Give them plenty of time and as much independence as possible.
- Tell the leader if your rider is unbalanced or not ready for a change of pace.
- You can adjust a rider's position if needed; remember to keep any physical contact to a minimum.
- You need to look after your body too, so please don't raise your arms and hands above your shoulder height.

- Sometimes a horse just isn't keen on side-walkers. They'll probably let you know with a swish of their tail. If that happens just make sure you stay level with the participant's leg.
- If you've got any questions, concerns or are unsure about anything, ask the coach or another volunteer. We don't just help the participants; we all help and support each other.



Sidewalking - supporting the heel/ankle



Sidewalking - arms below shoulder height

The inevitable poo

At some point during the session the horses are going to poo. If you're free, please scoop it up promptly and pop it in the wheelbarrow in the stalls area. It helps keep the arena clean and in good condition.

A hack out

Hacking out along the drive, down Ruby Way, or down a nearby quiet lane adds variety to riding sessions. The coach, leaders and side walkers must wear Hi-Viz clothing; there's a selection hanging up in the stalls area.

After a riding session – checklist

- Lead horses into the stalls and tie up with a quick release knot (see earlier chapter). Please ask if you're not sure how to do this and someone will help you.
- Untack the horse if it's not being used in the next session. If you're unsure, then please ask.
 - If the horse is being used in the next session, check the board for the participant's stirrup length and any compensatory aids, and adjust as necessary. Again, ask if you're not sure.

- Pick feet out and brush the areas where the tack has been, so the hair lies comfortably flat.
- Put a rug on if required – ask if you're not sure.
- Change the leather headcollar for the field headcollar.

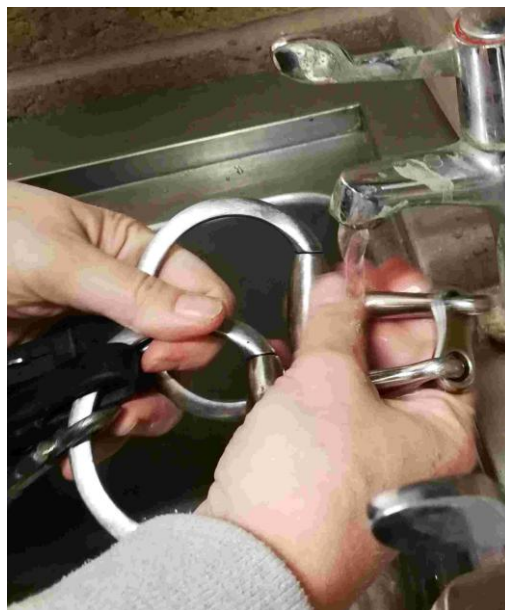
Session Horse	9-00 9-30	9-45 10-15	10-30 11-00	11-15 11-45	12-00 12-30	Lunch	CD	Bed time	SATURDAY		
Amber	/	/	/	/	/						
Bea	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			RUGS BACK ON:
Cooper				✓	✓	Right Fan		Long			Cooper, Dougie,
Dolly							✓	BB			Izzy, Sally, Lulu,
Dougie		✓	✓	Corral				Arena Field			Tom.
Fern	✓	✓	Stalls Pop up		✓			Hayfield			
Fizz	✓	BB						BB			
Izzy			✓	Big				Hayfield			
Jacko	✓	Stable						Long			
Lulu		✓	Stable					Hayfield			
Tom		✓	✓					Pond			
Pugs			✓	Stalls with Mead	✓			Long			
Sally				✓	Stable			Hayfield			
Swamy		✓		✓	Corral			Arena Field			

Who's going where after sessions

- Check the board to see where the horse goes when leaving the stalls. If you're turning out, then take someone with you to open and close gates, and if you don't feel confident to do this on your own.
- Take the horse to the field or stable, preferably in the company of others. If the horse will be on its own, please check with one of the coaches if that's okay. Some are all right on their own; others prefer to be with a companion.
- If the horse is in its stable, make sure he/she has hay and water - ask another volunteer, a coach or one of the staff if you're not sure where to find a haynet or how to put it up
- Clean leather tack and the leather headcollar with saddle soap; synthetic saddles need wiping over with tack cleaner spray.
- Wash the bit clean under the tap in the tack room making sure any residual grass, food and saliva is removed



Tack cleaning



Washing the bit thoroughly

- Loop and fasten the reins with the throat lash so they don't dangle on the floor. If you're not sure how to do this ask someone and they'll show you
- Put the saddle on the correct saddle rack and cover with the dust cover. Place the girth (which should be completely undone) over the saddle on top of the dust cover. Hang the bridle up over the saddle cantle

Girth undone and placed over saddle cover

Reins secured with throat lash

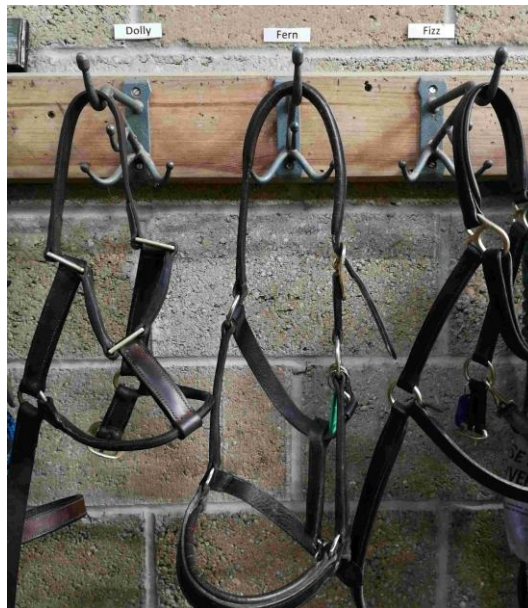


Bridle over the saddle cantle

Bit washed

Saddle & bridle put up correctly

- Return the leather headcollar back to the horse's hook outside the tack room. It's a good idea to check their name tag is still readable - if it isn't, or if it's missing altogether, have a word with one of the coaches



Leather headcollars

- Put compensatory aids back in the correct place.



Alternative reins



Alternative stirrups



Breastplates

- Once the horse is where it should be and the tack is all away, it's time for a quick clear up.
 - Sweep the floor
 - Put the cover on the grooming kit and then pop it back on the storage shelves outside the tack room

- Take any empty haynets to the hay barn
- If the arena isn't being used for a while, then put the water sprinkler on. This needs to be done all year round to firm up the surface and keep it in good condition. It's pretty straightforward. Attach the sprinkler on the tripod to the hose and then carry the tripod into the arena. Turn the tap on fully and the sprinkler will rotate. If it doesn't or if it gets stuck, it'll need cleaning at the point where the metal assembly screws into the tripod.



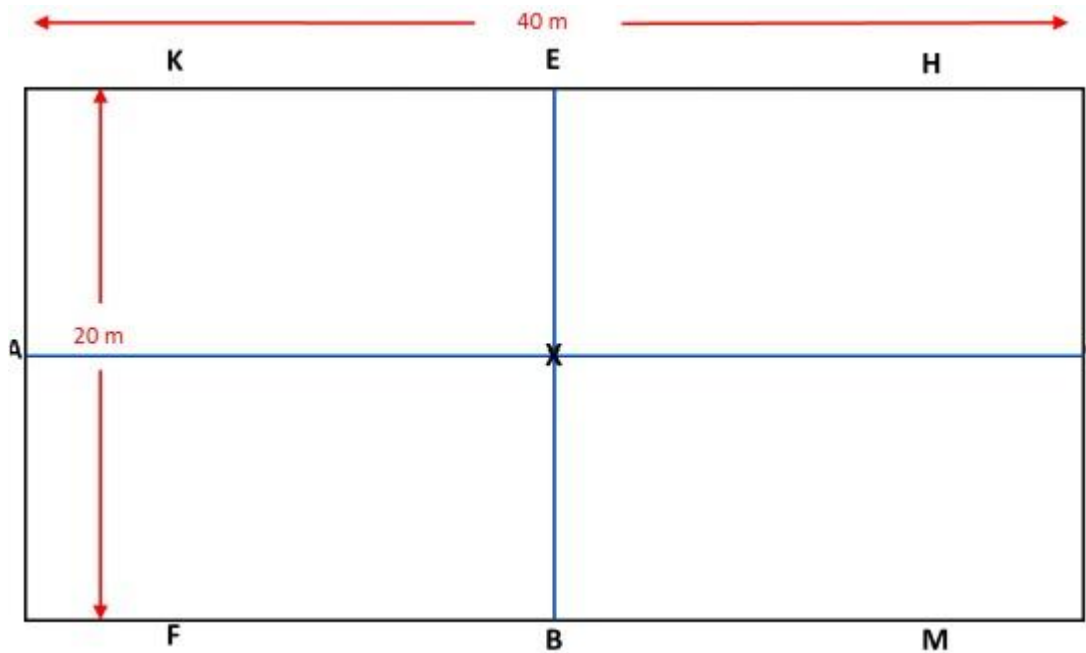
Watering the arena

School Shapes

Coaches will often ask participants to ride around the arena in certain directions and use letter markers to indicate where to go. The RDA Woodbridge Arena is a standard 20mx40m and has the same letters found in all arenas worldwide. A, K, E, H, C, M, B, and F. A little rhyme or mnemonic can help with remembering the order...

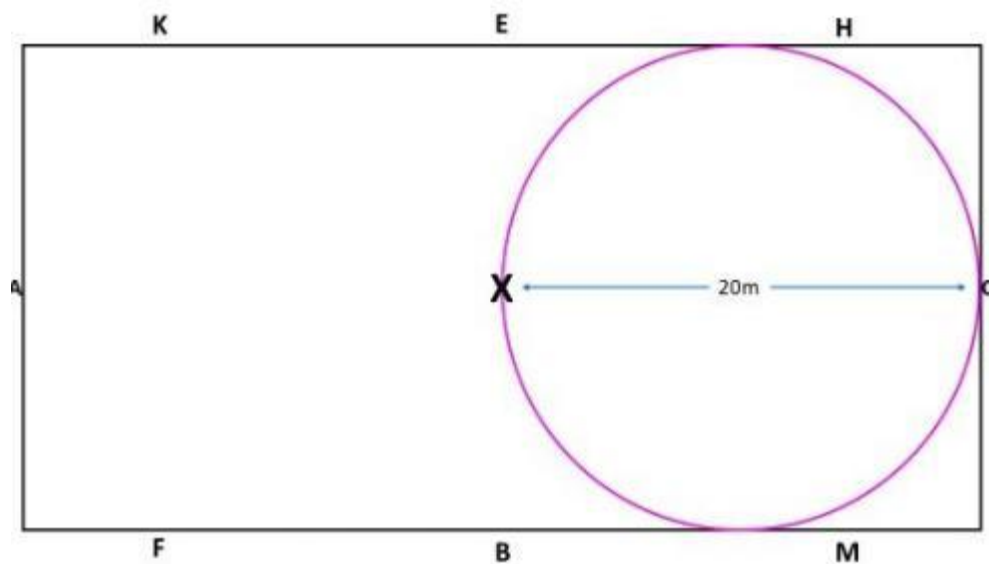
All King Edward's Horses Can Move Blinkin' Fast.

There's also a 'hidden' letter X, which is right in the middle.

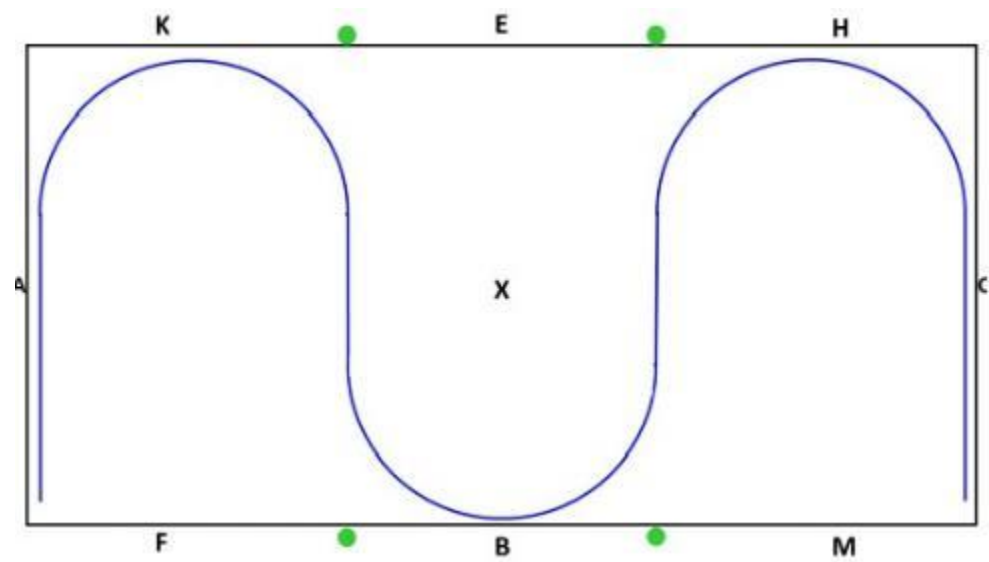


20m x 40m arena with letters

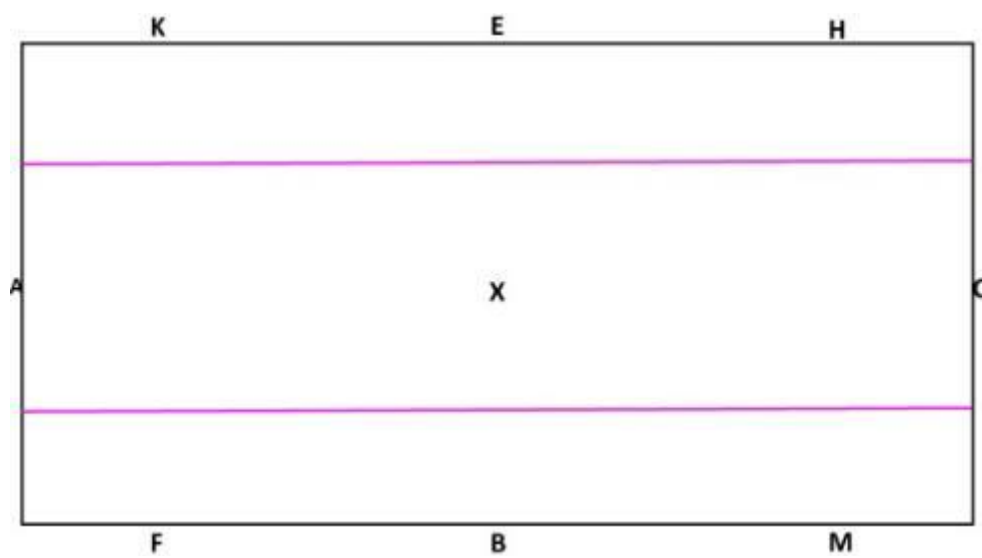
There are some very common shapes used in sessions; they usually have set sizes e.g. a 20m circle, and the idea is to ride them as accurately as possible.



20m circle



3 loop serpentine



3/4 lines

Carriage Driving

Carriage driving is a firm favourite of many of our participants, and weekday sessions run from April to November, only taking a break through the winter months because of the cold, wet weather. Saturday afternoon sessions are slightly different. They are term time only and do continue through the winter months.

Carriage driving is an extremely beneficial discipline, providing sensory benefits as well as physical and mental stimulus for our participants. While there might be only one participant on board, it takes a whole team of helpers to prepare the horse, prepare and load the carriage; accompany it on the drive; unload the participant, unharness, look after the horse, and clean the equipment.



These are busy 30-minute sessions that are led by a driving coach, and you can develop how you get involved as your confidence and experience improves. There are also critical roles such as meeting and greeting our participants and/or their carers and parents, providing hats and taking donations that don't involve travelling with or on the carriage. Key roles also include cycling with the carriage. Carriage rides must have at least 3 accompanying cyclists for wheelchair users; without them the carriage can't go out. Fortunately, the cycling is very straightforward - and as our little piece of Suffolk is nice and flat - the cycling is quite sedate and gentle but also fun and good for fitness. However, cyclists will receive training in the points of the harness so they can help the coach if required, and learn how to hold a horse should that become necessary at any point during the carriage drive.

Points to note.

- 🚲 We provide cycle helmets, and, for your own safety, we advise and prefer you to use them.
- 🚲 If you're cycling with a carriage, you must wear a Hi-Viz jacket so other road users can see you.
- 🚲 Use hand signals as per the Highway Code to let other road users know what you're doing.

If you're at the front:

- 🚲 Keep a safe distance ahead of the horse and carriage.
- 🚲 Allow enough room in case the horse move forward unexpectedly and give yourself space to pull over and stop if necessary.
- 🚲 Check the road ahead, warn other road users, and check the road is clear at junctions.
- 🚲 You carry the lead rope, and you're the person to hold the horse if needed on the drive.

If you're behind:

- 🚲 Keep an eye on the whip as this will indicate the speed of the carriage.
- 🚲 Keep a 'good' distance behind the carriage. Stay close enough to see and hear, but far enough away to stop without running into the back of the carriage. The carriage driving coach will advise you about distances.
- 🚲 Check for traffic coming up behind, warn people on board the carriage and thank motorists for slowing down.

If you're alongside:

- 🚲 Don't get too close; even the steadiest horse could be startled by overtaking bicycles.
- 🚲 If you need to pass, check there's enough room, warn those on board, and talk to the horse before and during passing. This is because the horse wears blinkers and can't see you from the side and we don't want to startle it.

All other roles in the carriage driving team will be covered in training sessions, and the coaches are always ready to help equip volunteers with the knowledge and skills needed. Talk to one of the coaches to find out more.

Carriage driving is great fun for the participants, carers, volunteers, and it's a great opportunity to work as part of a team.



Carriage driving



Carriage driving – checklist.

Getting the horse and carriage ready

- Check the board to find out which horse is to be used for carriage driving.
- Bring the horse into the stalls and prepare as in the earlier section '*preparing a horse.*'
- Collect the harness from the tack room – each horse has their own which is identified by the name and colour. Use the wheelbarrow to move the harness if taking it to the barn, using the towel to protect the leather.
- The coach will help with harnessing up, but it's really handy if you get to know the procedure.
- Bring carriages out of the carriage barn before the session to check the wheels and condition. Place the chocks around the wheels so the carriage doesn't roll away. Secure the shafts in an upright position with bungee straps if necessary.
- Bring bicycles, steps and the mounting block out of the barn and place close by ready for use.
- Cycle helmets are in the old freezer in the carriage barn along with the Hi-Viz jackets that carry a message warning road users that they are being filmed. All other Hi-Viz jackets are stored in the stalls.



Getting the ramp ready



Loading

- The coach leads the mounting team and explains to everyone what to do. Training will be given on how to assist a participant in a wheelchair and securing the equipment once on the carriage.

Getting ready for the participants

- Each participant will be measured for hats and boots when they join our Group; the sizes are recorded on a green sheet. The sheets together with the hats and boots need putting out in the community room before the participants arrive.
- One of the team will be nominated for 'Meet and Greet' which involves taking and recording payments from each participant when they arrive.

- Participants and their carers often have to wait for their turn in the carriage and you can offer refreshments. Whilst free for volunteers, unfortunately they're not free for participants and carers so please encourage donations by drawing attention to the donation boxes.
- Carers accompany the participants on the drive, since they retain responsibility for the participant in the event of a situation arising, and they too must have training and wear a hat.



Getting ready to go

After a driving session:

- The horse is released from the carriage and led back to the stalls to be unharnessed and cared for as per the *'After a riding session checklist'*.

Equine Activities (EA)

Some of our participants can't ride, vault or go out in a carriage. So, we have 30 minutes sessions where they can spend time with a pony, grooming, stroking, patting, and doing as much or as little as they'd like.

As these sessions are in the arena or stables, participants wear a hat. You can help with:

- Putting hats out for participants.
- Getting grooming kits out of the equipment store.
- Holding a horse.
- Helping the coach.
- Talking to participants and their carers.

EA sessions are run from the ground - there's no riding involved. This means no previous experience of horses is needed and so these sessions are ideal for almost anyone, even those who might be nervous around horses.



Equine Activities

Research shows that caring for and interacting with animals has many proven health benefits. Simply being around horses lowers blood pressure and heart rate, helping ease symptoms of stress and anxiety.

Many of the EA benefits are down to the nature of the ponies themselves. Ponies are naturally gentle and calm creatures and can mirror and respond to human behaviour. This means they can sense when a person is feeling tense or emotional, and work with them in a patient and non-judgemental manner.

People who struggle to say how they feel or trust others often find EA useful and many go on to achieve a strong bond and a level of closeness with 'their' horse. They enjoy affection, acceptance and mutual respect.

If you'd like to become an Equine Activity leader have a word with the Volunteer Co-ordinator, Head Coach or Centre Manager.

Vaulting

In Spring 2026 RDA Woodbridge added a new offering to participants....Vaulting... also known as gymnastics on horseback. Not only have we got a wonderful vaulting horse Bea, we've also got a simulator (called Martin) and a static barrel which participants use for training before progressing to the real live horse!

Vaulting help participants improve their balance, coordination, core strength, and confidence. It encourages independence, teamwork, and sensory integration through large rhythmic movements, and is a real alternative to traditional riding. In turn, this helps develop social skills, including communication, by talking to coaches and other vaulters.

We'd really like to further multi-skill our team so if you'd like to learn about vaulting, and maybe become a trained vaulting volunteer or even vaulting coach have a chat with the Centre Manager.



Training on the barrel...



...and then on the horse

Changing Lives Through Horses

This is a British Horse Society (BHS) alternative education programme, designed for 5–25 year olds, who are disengaged from mainstream education or who need extra support. The sessions run twice a week, each lasting 3 hours, and use horse-based, hands-on activities linked to the national curriculum. This means Key Stage 1-4 participants can develop knowledge and skills outside the traditional classroom.



Part of a Changing Lives through Horses session

Participants learn stable management, horse care as well as riding. Volunteers are key to making these sessions possible

If this is something you'd be interested in helping to support, please have a chat with the Head Coach or Centre Manager.

Tea with a Pony

Tea with a Pony is very special and is exactly as the name suggests. It's aimed at people living with dementia or other long-term conditions, and we give them the chance to enjoy a cup of tea/coffee and a slice of cake before meeting and spending time with one of our ponies.

Our ponies are very well trained and wonderfully patient; they love meeting the participants as much as the participants love meeting them. You might hold a pony; help a participant with stroking and grooming; or simply encourage participants to enjoy the therapeutic benefits of being around our ponies. This is a wonderful example of how the interaction and developing relationship between horse and human can really make a difference.



Tea with a Pony



Cake!

We love people who:

- Are willing to help out by getting the community room ready and popping the tablecloth on.
- Set out our best tea set ready to serve tea or coffee.
- Serve drinks and cake.
- Chat to and reminisce with our participants and carers.
- Clear away and load the dishwasher when the session is over.

This is one of the activities that doesn't involve lots of walking or cycling so really opens up volunteering to people of all abilities.

Summer holiday activities

Over the summer holidays, our normal timetable goes on hold, which then gives space for activity days and ad-hoc stable management courses.

Activity days

These are fabulous days where participants get the chance to ride, go for a carriage drive and do some grooming/stable management. They have a bring-your-own picnic at lunchtime with their carers and maybe some family members.

It's a super busy day for the coach who has to organise the logistics – and volunteers can really help with:

- Getting horses ready.
- Riding, carriage driving and grooming/stable management sessions.
- Putting up picnic tables (and taking them down again).
- Keeping an eye on visitors.
- Answering questions...the list is endless.

Have a chat with the organising coach if you'd like to give it a go.

Stable Management courses

These 2-hour sessions run on an ad-hoc basis over the summer holidays and cover a range of topics including learning about parts of tack, tacking up, what to feed, how to groom etc. Help from volunteers is vital and provides a great opportunity to interact with our participants in a different setting. Speak to the organising coach if you'd like to get involved with some or all of the session

Volunteer training - continual professional development (CPD)

In addition to the '*on the job training*', the coaching staff usually offer some free dedicated training sessions for volunteers during the summer break. These sessions can cover a wide range of horse-related topics and are a great opportunity to practise existing skills, try something new, learn more, build confidence, or simply ask questions about why things are done in certain ways. If there's something you're interested in, have a word with the centre manager, any of the coaches, or the volunteer co-ordinator.

Training notes: - Understanding our Horses.

Horses reflect the way they are handled – they learn good and bad manners - and as our horses are handled by many different people, trying to achieve consistency is really helpful. Horses and ponies are highly intuitive, and they readily pick up human moods through voice and expression, in similar ways that dogs communicate with their owners. And interestingly, horses respond more positively to people they've previously seen smiling and are wary of those who are scowling and unpleasant.

- Horses are wild animals that have been domesticated and trained but still possess their basic flight and fight instincts. They come into play because:
- Horses are prey animals, not predators.
- They don't logically work things out.
- Horses mirror our behaviour e.g. by being calm and confident this is reflected by the horse's own mannerisms. However, if we're tense or nervous the horse can show negative behavioural traits.
- Horses have instinctive defensive mechanisms that cause them to react unpredictably causing injury or even death.

In their natural environment they:

- roam grasslands, pastures, hills and moorlands in search of food and water.
- graze for 16-20 hours a day.
- live in a herd for safety, protected by the dominant stallion, who warns the herd of approaching danger.
- have a strict pecking order which is established and reinforced through subtle and not so subtle body language.
- have sharp hearing, excellent peripheral eyesight, a strong sense of smell, and quick reflexes; if cornered, horses will fight by rearing, kicking or biting.

Encouraging desirable habits

Your voice is a great way to reward good behaviour and challenge unwanted behaviour. And the tone you use is key. For example, a long soft 'Gooooo boy' is much more effective than trumpeting 'GOOD BOY' in a loud, shouty voice.

Some horse and pony behaviour can seem funny at first – like mouthing and nibbling clothing, pawing the ground, or nudging someone for attention. But if it's left unchecked this can sometimes escalate, so please discourage it. Ask one of the staff or coaches for some tips or if you have any concerns.

Developing and refreshing your horse knowledge

There's lots of information on the following websites.

- RDA - for online training www.rda-learning.org.uk
- RDA - for in person or 'Zoom' type training www.my-rda.org.uk/events/ (You'll need an account to login)
- Blue Cross www.bluecross.org.uk/advice/horse

- British Horse Society www.bhs.org.uk/horse-care-and-welfare
- World Horse Welfare www.worldhorsewelfare.org (Advice tab)
- British Driving Society www.britishdrivingsociety.co.uk/

Working with our participants

Inclusive communication

We want everyone to feel welcome and a part of the RDA Woodbridge family. A big step is being thoughtful about our language – especially when describing people. It's important that we're inclusive and respectful.

Please:

- Use a normal tone of voice, please don't patronise or talk down to people.
- Never attempt to speak or finish a sentence for the person you are talking to.
- Talk to a disabled person in the same way you talk to everyone else.
- Speak directly to a disabled person, even if they have an interpreter or companion with them.

Group vision, values, safety procedures and governance

Finally we take a look at the more serious stuff of running a fairly large organisation that has over 100 volunteers. We'll look at our vision, values and behaviours; run through the fire and accident procedures; touch on how to give feedback, make a complaint, view our policies, and lastly show you how the group is organised and fits within the larger National RDA structure.

Vision and Values

Our group's trustees, staff and volunteers came up with a vision, values and standards of behaviours. They underpin everything we do and we've all collectively signed up to them.

Let's take a look at the vision first

Our Vision

- Our Group will always be a place where participants' needs and wants are understood and come first.
- Our volunteers will be proud of that place and proud of all they contribute to it.
- Our employees will thrive and grow personally and professionally.
- Our horses will be at its heart.
- Ours will be a place where people can be at their best, where collaboration, support and respect are part of our culture.
- Our Group will be a place where opportunities are open to all, where inclusiveness is part of our daily approach and where all can be comfortable that *it is what you can do that counts*.
- This is our vision for now, for our future and the future of all we serve.

Moving on now to our values.

Our Values

People often wonder what 'value' means. In this case, it's the *ideal or moral guide* to our conduct and behaviour. Every volunteer and staff member helps create the welcoming, supportive and empowering environment our participants deserve.

Our shared values guide how we work together and how we treat each another. They are:

- Diversity
- Inclusivity
- Collaboration
- Support
- Respect
- Understanding

These values are more than words on the wall. They shape the everyday behaviours that make our group a safe, positive and joyful place to be.

Our Behaviours

These are set out at the beginning of the handbook and summarised here:

We expect everyone to

- **Welcome everyone** and remove barriers so all feel included.
- **Value every voice**, listening openly and recognising contributions.
- **Adapt with empathy**, understanding that everyone has different needs and experiences.
- **Collaborate generously**, sharing ideas, tasks and encouragement.
- **Support with courage**, standing up for one another and helping without judgment.
- **Show respect at the core**, protecting dignity, honesty and fairness.
- **Encourage growth**, celebrating progress and learning.
- **Create safe spaces**, where asking for help is always okay.
- **Practice understanding**, taking time and appreciating different perspectives.
- **Celebrate together**, building pride and belonging in our team.

We ask every volunteer and staff member to uphold these values and behaviours in all interactions. They're essential to the wellbeing of our participants, our horses, and each other.

If concerns arise, we'll address them with care, fairness, and in confidence.

Fire safety

Woodbridge RDA has a fire alarm system that will sound automatically if it detects a fire, and we also have regular fire drills. This is the fire evacuation procedure - copies of which are around the buildings. Please take the time to read and get to know what to do in the event of a fire or a drill.

ACTION IN THE EVENT OF A FIRE

In the main building the alarm will sound automatically.

Other buildings sound the alarm (air horn) or shout 'FIRE'.

Coach or person in authority

- Order evacuation. Person in authority to take the Visitors Book/Volunteers sign in sheet with them.
- Call the fire service on **999**.
- Address: The Bays, Monewden Road, Clopton, Woodbridge, IP13 6QL. Advise them to follow SATNAV for a further ½ mile.
- OS Number: TM 224 555 / what3words = Laptop.Celebrate.Splash
- Fire warden/s to wear Hi-Viz (at front door to main building) to check for persons inside/unaccounted for.
- Close doors and windows to contain the fire.
- Roll call.
- Direct Fire Service to the water hydrant (down Shop Road, from The Bays ¼ mile on the left opposite double silver field gates) or pond (dry in summer).

Carers/participants

- All Clients must have a carer with them at all times.
- Deaf clients must have a hearing carer with them at all times.
- Move to the assembly point at the corner of the field next to the car park.

Volunteers

- **If safe to do so**, move horses to the field furthest away from the fire. Remove tack and headcollars then move to the assembly point.

General

Remain at the Assembly Point until authorised to move

Other points to note:

- The fire alarm can be triggered by breaking the glass
- There are red (water) fire extinguishers located around the buildings. Only use if you're trained to do so, and never put yourself at risk



Examples of a manual break-glass fire alarm trigger and a fire extinguisher

- The water stop cocks are under the sink in the kitchen and in the private room to the left of the hat and boot room
- The electricity master switch and RCB unit is in the office on the wall above the centre managers desk
- Landline telephones are in the office. The office number is 01473 737087

Accidents

We record all accidents and 'near misses' in our accident book. Many volunteers and staff are trained first aiders - their names are on the main whiteboard in red ink.

There is an Automatic External Defibrillator on the wall in the Quiet Room.

If you need to call an ambulance, our address is

The Bays, Monewden Road, Woodbridge. IP13 6QL

What 3 words location **laptop.celebrate.splash**

Falls

Riding horses or ponies can very occasionally result in a fall. If this happens, there's a 'Rider Fall Protocol' set out on the following page.

RIDER FALL PROTOCOL

1. Make Area Safe

Secure the horse and ask other riders to halt / dismount as necessary.

2. First Aid Assessment

Follow First Aid Training – Response, Airway, Breathing, Circulation

ONLY IF the rider is clearly unhurt and not displaying any signs of injury, check if they want to remount

If remounting, consider if a change of horse is necessary.

3. First Aid

Any potential injuries must be assessed by a first aider and appropriate medical attention advised. **Dial 999 for an ambulance immediately if there is:**

- Loss of consciousness, confusion or unusual behaviour
- Severe neck or back pain
- Suspected spinal injury
- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain
- Severe bleeding
- Suspected pelvic injury
- A kick to the head, chest or abdomen
- Any concern that the casualty is deteriorating

If a Back or Neck injury is suspected, DO NOT MOVE the casualty, DO NOT remove riding hat!

4. Head Injury

If there is any chance of a head injury, riders should not remount, they should be observed and/or advised to seek medical assistance.

5. Accident Reporting

All accidents must be recorded in the accident book and reported to centre manager, if required, reported to RIDDOR

Maintain awareness of other riders and volunteer team at all times

Emergency Contact: Anna Hardwick 07709 121322

Feedback

We welcome, and encourage feedback and suggestions from everyone - participants, carers, visitors and volunteers. You can talk to the Volunteer Co-ordinator, one of the coaches, or use one of the feedback forms in the community room. If you want to remain anonymous, you don't have to give your name.

Feedback from different people who come to the centre on different days gives us a more complete picture of what we're doing well and where we could improve. We're interested in comments about the sessions; the coaching; the facilities; the behind-the-scenes organisation; your experience; the horses; the atmosphere; in fact, anything you like. We can't promise to act on every comment or suggestion (for example, we won't be getting any live giraffes to join the horses), but we will listen.

Complaints

We hope you get something out of volunteering and that the time you spend at RDA Woodbridge is happy and enjoyable. We encourage everyone in our Group to follow our Vision and Values mentioned earlier in this guide. However, we know there are times when things go wrong, or there are personality clashes, and you may need a bit of help or someone to talk to.

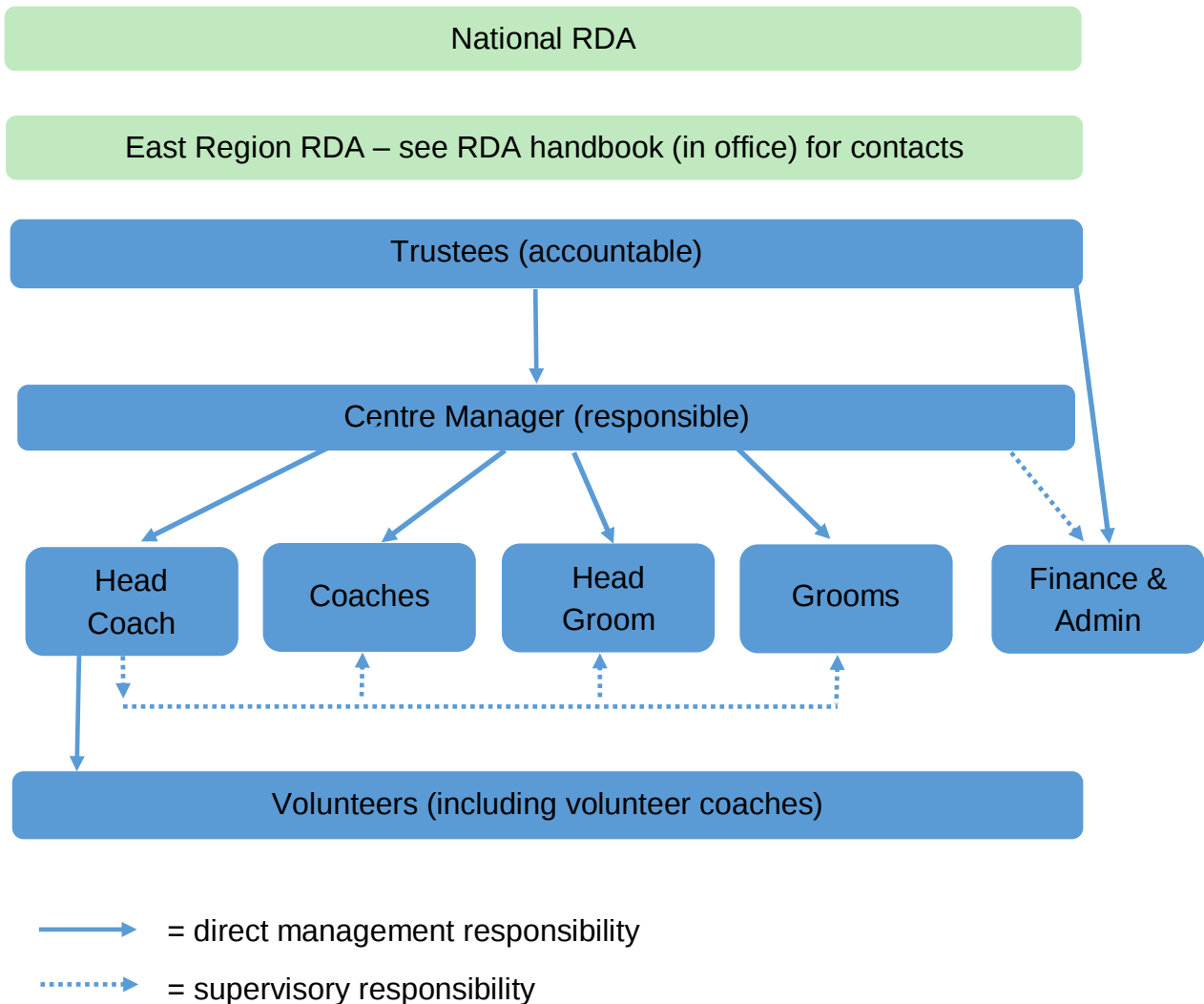
If there's something you feel uncomfortable about, please speak to the Volunteer Co-ordinator, Head Coach, or Centre Manager in the first instance. But if this isn't something you're happy doing and would prefer to raise it with the Trustees, then please email Trustees@rdawoodbridge.org.uk.

Policies

Please see the noticeboard for our policies, procedures such as fire safety, and 'need to know' contacts. If there is a particular policy or information that you need and can't find, then please ask the Volunteer Co-Ordinator, the Centre Manager or email centremanager@rdawoodbridge.org.uk

Group Governance Structure.

RDA (Woodbridge and District Group) is a charity and governed by a Board of Trustees. Our Group is part of the national RDA organisation.



- The Trustees are accountable for how the Group is run. If you'd like to see a copy of the constitution, please ask the Centre Manager. The Centre Manager reports to the Trustees.
- The Centre Manager has direct management responsibility for all employed, operational staff, namely the Head Coach, Coaches, Head Groom and Grooms, and some supervisory responsibility for the Finance/Admin staff member. The Centre Manager also has overall responsibility for our volunteers.
- The Head Coach has supervisory responsibility for our coaches, grooms, and volunteers.
- The Trustees also have direct line management responsibility for the Finance/Admin staff member

Glossary

Glossaries are tricky – what to include, what to leave out how much detail is needed. So, we've adapted this one, taken from British Equestrian

About the horse

Term	Description
Horse	A fully grown adult equine that's over 14.2 hands high
Pony	Fully grown adult equine that's 14.2 hands high and under
Foal	A young horse or pony that's under 1 year old
Mare	A female horse or pony
Gelding	A castrated male horse or pony
Hands high (hh)	The unit that horses and ponies are measured in, with one hand equalling four inches. The measurement is from the ground to the withers, which is the top of the horse's shoulder just in front of the saddle
Mane	The hair running down the length of the horse's neck
Forelock	The hair that grows over the forehead of the horse, between the ears. It's the horse equivalent to a human fringe
Hoof	The name for a horse's foot
Withers	The highest part of a horse's back, lying at the base of the neck above the shoulders

Horse paces

Term	Description
Walk	Gentle four beat gait that's approximately 4 mph
Trot	Two beat gait that's approximately 8 mph
Canter	Three beat gait that's approximately 10–17 mph
Gallop	Fast four beat gate that's approximately 20 – 30 mph

Horse equipment

Term	Description
Tack	The equipment used on horses. Putting tack onto a horse is called 'tacking up'
Headcollar	Headgear that is used to lead or tie up a horse. It fits behind the ears and around the muzzle
Lead rope	The rope attached to the headcollar for leading a horse or and tying the horse up
Bridle	The piece of tack placed on the horse's head when riding, which enables the rider to communicate with the horse e.g. which way to turn
Bit	The piece of tack attached to the bridle that sits in in the horse's mouth. They're normally metal, but can also be made from other materials such as plastic or rubber
Reins	The straps that the rider holds in their hands, which attach to the bit and loop over the horse's neck
Throat lash	A strap that holds a bridle in place, and is fastened under the horse's jaw
Saddle	The piece of tack placed on the horse's back where the rider sits
Stirrups	The metal accessories that the rider places their feet in. They're attached to the saddle by long, adjustable straps called stirrup leathers
To run up the stirrups	A method of safely securing stirrups so they can't get caught on anything. The rider is dismounted. Push the stirrup up the back of the stirrup leather all the way to the top. Thread the stirrup leather and any excess strap through the middle of the stirrup (where you would put your feet). The stirrup will stay nestled against the saddle.
To cross the stirrups	A method of positioning stirrups so they can't get caught on anything (often used if the stirrup leather has a twist in it to make it shorter). The rider is dismounted. Take the right stirrup and cross it over the horse's withers. Take the left stirrup and cross it over the withers – it will lie on top of the right stirrup leather.
Saddle pad/ numnah	A soft pad or cloth that sits under the saddle to provide cushioning for the horse and helps to keep the saddle in place
Girth	The thick strap that secures the saddle to the horse, running just behind the front legs

Clothing

Term	Description
Jodhpurs, breeches, riding tights	Trousers worn by riders that are normally close-fitting for safety and comfort. They have no seams along any areas in contact with the saddle, and will often have suede or grippy patches on the inside of the knees or on the seat to help the rider stay secure

Jodhpur boots	Specialist riding footwear that are ankle-high with a smooth sole and small heel
Riding boots	Specialist knee-high boots for riding that have a smooth sole and small heel
Riding gloves	Gloves designed specifically for riding, with extra grip and no seams in the areas that the rider holds the reins
Riding hat/helmet	These hats are designed specifically for horse riding. They have a hard outer shell over protective cushioning and three-point strap that fastens under the rider's chin. Some riding hats will have a peak at the front, while others – known as skull caps or jockey skulls – don't. However, some skull caps are fitted with a decorative covering or 'silk', which may include a soft, flexible peak. Hats should always conform the current safety standards.

On the yard

Term	Description
Yard	The area where horses are kept
Riding / equestrian centre / school	These are all terms used to describe a business that provides riding services, including use of horses and ponies
Field or paddock	The outdoor space where horses live and graze
Stable	The indoor space where horses live
Kick bolt	The lock used at the bottom of a stable door
Hay	Dried grass that horses eat
Horse feed	Highly nutritional food for horses, fed much more sparingly than grass, hay or haylage
Tack room	A secure room where horse tack and equipment are kept
Stalls	The area where horses are tied up safely so they can be prepared for sessions, groomed, tacked and untacked
Arena/school/ ménage	The space where you exercise horses, usually with a sand and/or fibre surface. It could either be outdoors with no cover, or indoors with a large roof cover
Hack/hacking	A form of exercise on horses outside of the arena, usually on fields, bridleways (public rights of way where horses are allowed) or quiet roads
Schooling	The name for exercise usually undertaken inside an arena to train the horse and rider
Mount	The action of getting on a horse

Dismount	The action of getting off a horse
Mounting block	A set of steps used for a rider to mount a horse, or for a coach / volunteer to stand on when assisting with mounting