

Trustees' Annual Report

From 1st September 2022 to 31st August 2023



Celebrating 50 years

Over 50 years ago our founders read an article on a new initiative called "Riding for the Disabled". With 2 borrowed ponies they began helping riders from a local specialist school. In 1973 Digswell Place was registered as an RDA Group. Fifty years on we offer ridden and non ridden sessions for up to 100 participants each week from purpose built facilities, with the help of 130 volunteers and 14 dedicated equines.

Digswell Place RDA has touched thousands of lives over the years, and last year alone delivered just under 2,000 sessions. It is thanks to; the vision and dedication of our founders, the wonderful equines and the hundreds of volunteers, the local community and RDA UK, that Digswell Place is the thriving Group it is today.
Sue Clarke Chair Trustees Digswell Place Group RDA

1. Objectives & Activities

Purpose - What we do

The purposes of the charity are set out in the RDA Member Group Constitution:

The objects for which the CIO is established are **to promote the objects of the Riding for the Disabled Association incorporating Carriage Driving a charity registered under charity number 244108 ("RDA") by providing disabled people with the opportunity to ride to benefit their health and well-being in the Welwyn, Hatfield, Stevenage, Hertford, St. Albans and surrounding area.**

Digswell Place RDA is a member group of RDA UK.

Our Activities

Operating from purpose built volunteer led facilities, provided exclusively for charitable purposes; we offer outdoor riding and equine based activities for children and adults with disabilities. Where there is capacity and with consideration to our Equine Welfare Policy, we support any adult or child with a mental or physical disability who may benefit. Rider applicants are assessed in line with practices set out by RDA UK, to ensure that it is safe and beneficial for them to participate.

Participants gain physiological & physiotherapy benefits of exercise in the open air and mental health benefits from; learning new skills, increasing self-confidence & independence, improving their communication skills and the opportunity to meet and socialise with our RDA community.

Our **14 horses & ponies** provide **100 sessions per week** in two outdoor arenas or in the adjacent woods. Sessions are run by **13 RDA UK Accredited volunteer coaches** and **117 volunteer helpers**, trained to RDA UK standards. Attendees come from local specialist schools, children supported in attending from mainstream schools & colleges and private adult attendees.

Every session is subsidised by our own fundraising activities, the true cost of providing a session is not passed on to our participants. We aim to be an affordable, inclusive and accessible organisation. Bursaries are available to offset all or part of a rider's contribution so that financial hardship is not a barrier to benefiting from our activities. Two bursaries were awarded in accordance with our Bursary Policy during the financial year.

We confirm that the trustees of Digswell Place RDA have complied with their duty to have due regard to the guidance on public benefit published by the Commission in exercising their powers or duties.

We are a volunteer led organisation

Without our 130 volunteers we could not achieve our charitable aims, they are at the heart of what we deliver and enable us to operate at the level we do. Volunteer helpers prepare the horses and ponies, lead the ponies, side walk and Coach. Pony carers (minders) ensure the day to day needs of their allocated ponies are met by exercising & schooling the ponies outside working sessions. They contribute a small amount to the upkeep of their pony and volunteer in session/fundraising roles. Members of the management Committee and

Trustees are also helpers, coaches, riders and minders. The volunteer maintenance team keeps the Yard safe and serviceable by maintaining fencing, paddock & facilities.

Supporting the core volunteer base we have; a freelance advanced Coach, a full time employed Equine Manager and a part time Deputy Equity Manger to provide cover for the Equine Manager. These paid roles are critical to the charity continuing to deliver its charitable aims and public benefit. In addition to our own volunteers, when able to, we welcome placement students and host working parties to assist with larger maintenance & facilities projects.

2. Achievements, performance and impact

Having worked within our Strategic Plan framework over the past few years to extend our public benefit, the year was focussed on full Covid recovery whilst bedding in, and delivering, our vision:

Our vision "To offer more & different opportunities to experience Digswell Place as a rider, volunteer or supporter. This will be delivered from our existing site with additional coaching facilities, 14 happy and healthy equines & a mix of volunteer and paid staff".

Delivering that vision with; 2 arenas, a full complement of 14 equines, 14 coaches, 2 activity leaders, 2 staff, 130 volunteers and RDA UK sign off for new activities we increased the number and type of sessions offered at Digswell Place.

Increased **number** of sessions delivered:

- **1,998 sessions delivered**, up 15% from 1,734 last year
- 38 first time participants
- Continued demand for services with waiting list at year end

Impact - testimonial from a Face book post 23/2/23

"Thank you to all at Digswell RDA.. you do a super job.. Appreciated by all the families involved.. so happy to see my great niece riding so well with the lovely volunteers, 🥰🐾.. A loves her horse riding and thanks to the dedication and devotion from the rda volunteers she is able to ride weekly, enabling her to strengthen her core muscles..which is so important for her development. 🥰🐾..Thank you all.. K xx"

Increased **types** of session delivered

- **Tea with a pony** enables those unable to ride to benefit from; non ridden horse therapy, fresh air and light exercise, using our all weather walkway and shelter to spend time with the horses and chat with volunteers.

Impact - testimonials from Tea with a pony participants

"I thought the session was very good and cannot wait to come again". "Enjoyed my tea and stroking the ponies very much"
"Lovely friendly staff and they make a lovely cup of tea". "She really enjoyed it and thought you were all wonderful. Thanks for making her so happy." "Feeling calm I enjoy the session"

- **Non ridden horse care sessions** assists those who may not want to ride, or who are outside our safety criteria for ridden activities, to experience some fresh air and quiet time working with a horse.

Extended our community outreach

We know from Covid experience and feedback that it's not only service users who benefit from our activities, our 130 volunteers value it too. In their own words, from our 2022 survey our volunteers said:

"Think I've already said it but the morning I volunteer is the highlight of my week" and "As a volunteer it is so rewarding and a happy place to be"

During the year we strengthened our community outreach through:

- **Increased social media presence;** keeping our community of volunteers, participants and supporters engaged with regular updates and news via Twitter and Face book. **1,300 people** now follow our Face book page.
- **Summer Open day;** a chance for all in our community, including local residents, parents, carers, volunteers and their families to visit the Yard, watch ridden demonstrations, take part in family activities and learn more about the Group.
- **Coffee at the Gate;** a regular fundraising and social event for participants, volunteers, local residents and local walkers to enjoy cake and a chat.

Full return to major fundraising events

Although our major fundraiser, the annual ball returned in 2021, our other major events were impacted by the tail end of Covid lockdowns early that year. This year we welcomed the full, and successful, return of our regular physical events; the Race Night and Dogs & Daffs at Hatfield House. In addition our annual Christmas hamper raffle continued to grow in popularity and success.

New regular fundraiser launched

Recognising that our fundraising is heavily reliant on a few large physical events, we developed a new fundraising programme - **Sponsor a Pony** to generate regular donation income. This was launched at the end of the year with a soft launch to test the systems and processes and will grow during the 2023/2024 year as awareness and promotion builds.

Royal recognition of our 50th year

As President of Riding for the Disabled Association, HRH The Princess Royal visited in early September to mark our 50th year as an RDA group. HRH met participants, their families and carers, and volunteers and awarded 2 ponies with their long service awards. The Vice Lord Lieutenant and local dignitaries also attended, increasing our profile across and within the local community.



3. Financial Review

As in prior years we financed all expenditure from available cash funds: our underlying principle is to ensure we do not pass on any debt to future years.

We have used the Charity Commission's template Receipts and Payments statement and Statement of Assets and Liabilities to record the charity's receipts and payments for the year ended 31 August 2023 together with comparable figures for the previous year. These have been independently examined, are included at pages 8 and 9 and should be read in conjunction with this review.

Overall performance

2022/2023 saw a strengthening of our reserves: we generated a net surplus of £23k which was well above budget, and an improvement on the deficit of the previous year. Last year saw us investing in infrastructure for new activities and repairing old infrastructure in line with our capital plan. 2023 was all about focussing on "doing what we can with what we have" reducing total running costs by £40k.

Principal sources of funding

Net income from our core activities was up by £8k from £20k as a result of delivering more rides and increasing the price of the rides. Minder income also remained strong up 10% on last year.

Our fundraising events and activities continue to be well received and supported. Net fundraising income was broadly similar to the previous year at £40k. Our newly introduced funding scheme, Sponsor a Pony, should provide us with more certain recurring income once it has bedded in, in the next twelve months and beyond.

We were again extremely fortunate to receive funding via donations and legacies from individuals and communities we currently work with or have done so in the past. The majority of these are non-recurring but overall this funding amounted to £36k.

As in the previous year, we had to replace one of our ponies and were able to secure funding for that purchase, including vetting, tack and a year's worth of bedding and feed, totalling £15k, by approaching a charitable trust.

Cost per ride

At the end of last year, Trustees decided to increase the cost of rides for 2022/23 from £12 to £14 a session to help mitigate against some of the cost increases we were facing due to inflationary pressures on our suppliers.

We continue to use average cost per ride numbers for decision making as this sits better with our cash accounting systems and peaky cost profile. In the last ten years we have experienced an increase in the average cost per ride from £30 to £42. Running costs ten years ago were £55.2k and now average £76.9k. The improvement in the average cost per ride over the last year is testimony to the success of our strategic focus on bedding in and delivering our vision.

Statement of assets and liabilities

As at 31 August 2023 we had cash reserves of £155k, which included £3k of restricted funds, an increase of 17.3% over the previous year's closing reserves.

Policy notes

Reserves Policy In May 2018 the Trustees adopted a Reserves Policy and agreed 18 months core activity expenditure should be held in reserve in case of a catastrophic loss of income. This was increased from one year to give time to strengthen our operating position and develop a sustainable fundraising programme to enhance our core deliverables. The cost of our rides are heavily subsidised by our events programme and one off donations and legacies. Whilst we have some degree of control over the former, the latter is outside our control and tends to be lumpy in nature. We have an increasing cost base due to the current economic climate and will have commitments to our staff and the welfare of our equines if there were to be any run down of the service. With an establishment of 14 equines that will take time and be costly. 18 months reserves helped Digswell Place through Covid disruptions, and with the ongoing health and economic uncertainty the UK faces, is a prudent policy which Trustees reviewed and agreed to retain for the foreseeable future.

Assets and Liabilities In 1996 the freehold of the land was purchased by RDA UK with Lottery Sports Funding. The land is leased to Digswell Place RDA at a peppercorn rent. The stables and classroom are insured at cost plus RICS inflation. They will have little realisable value and in the event that the charity ceases to be viable they will pass to RDA UK under the terms of the group membership agreement.

4. Structure, Governance and Management

Structure

Digswell Place RDA is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales. The CIO was entered on the Charity Commission Register of Charities on 20 August 2015 with the Registered Charity number 1163233.

The merger of Digswell Place Group Riding for the Disabled 1074341 was registered on 12 November 2015 with a transfer date of 11 November 2015.

The charity is a member group of RDA UK. All member groups are governed by a Membership Agreement with RDA UK. Digswell Place Group Riding for the Disabled Association CIO's purpose is set out in RDA UK member group constitution. The Group is part of the Herts RDA Group and the RDA Eastern Region.

Governance & management

Digswell Place RDA CIO is governed by a Board of Trustees. The original Board of Trustees all stood for election in December 2016 at the inaugural AGM, as required by the CIO constitution. Additional trustees are sought from those actively involved in promoting the objectives of the Group. All trustees are required to have an enhanced DBS check where appropriate.

At August 2023 there were 7 trustees; minuted meetings are held at least 4 times p.a. or more often if needed. No person or body external to the charity is entitled to appoint any of the trustees.

The RDA UK document "the Essentials of Membership" sets out the standards and procedures by which the charity operates. In this way we ensure that at any time, all activity is guided and supervised by an appropriate person and the highest standards of safety and welfare are maintained. The charity is accountable to RDA UK and is required to submit returns annually.

A range of guidance produced by the RDA UK including the “Welcome pack for trustees” is supplied to each trustee. Relevant guidance and news releases from the Charity Commission are brought to the attention of Trustees and support and advice from RDA UK is provided by staff at national and regional level, and via the RDA UK website.

5. Reference and Administrative Details

Charity name	Digswell Place Group Riding for the Disabled Association	
Other names charity is known by	Digswell Place RDA	
Registered charity number	1163233	
Charity's principal address	Digswell Place Stables	
	Rectory Road	
	Welwyn	
	AL8 7SU	

Names of the charity trustees who manage the charity

Trustee name	Office (if any)	Dates acted if not for whole year	Name of person (or body) entitled to appoint trustee (if any)
Sue Clarke	Chair Trustees & Trustee	Re-elected AGM 6/1/23	
Bridget Johnstone	Trustee & Group Secretary	Re elected AGM 17/12/21 as Trustee & Group Secretary	
Carol Redgment	Trustee & Vice Chair	Re Elected AGM 6/1/23 as Trustee & Vice Chair	
Tom Gough	Trustee	Re Elected AGM 6/1/23	
Jennie Redford	Treasurer & Trustee	Re elected AGM 16/12/20 as Trustee & Treasurer	
Annette Ponniah	Trustee & Safeguarding Officer	Re elected AGM 17/12/21	
Sarah Southern	Trustee	Elected AGM 6/1/23	

Declarations

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.
Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

Signature(s)	<i>S. Clarke</i>	<i>J. Redford</i>
Full name(s)	Susan Clarke	Jennie Redford
Position	Chair Trustees	Treasurer
Date	<i>25th November 2023</i>	

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Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period						
				Unrestricted Funds	Restricted funds	Endowment funds
Categories	Details			To the nearest £	To the nearest £	To the nearest £
B1 Cash funds	HSBC Current A/C			17,390	3,281	0
	Cash			30	0	0
	PayPal account			120	0	0
	HSBC Deposit A/C			60,683	0	0
	Shawbrook CAF account 60 day fixed term			73,607	0	0
	Total cash funds			151,830	3,281	0
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))					
	Details			Unrestricted Funds	Restricted funds	Endowment funds
B2 Other monetary assets	Debtors			0	0	0
				Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B3 Investment assets				0	0	0
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use				0	0	0
				Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
B5 Liabilities				0	0	0
Signed by one or two trustees on behalf of all the trustees						
		Signature		Print name		Date of approval
				Sue Clarke, Chair of Trustees		
				Jennie Redford, Treasurer		

Signed:

S.Clarke
J.Redford

Chair Trustees 25/11/23
Treasurer 25/11/23



CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Independent examiner's report on the accounts

Section A

Independent Examiner's Report

Report to the trustees

Charity Name

DIGSWELL PLACE GROUP RIDING FOR DISABLED CIO

On accounts for the year ended

31 August 2023

**Charity no
(if any)**

1163233

Set out on pages

8 & 9

(remember to include the page numbers of additional sheets)

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended 31/12/2022.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity's trustees, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement

[The charity's gross income exceeded £250,000 and I am qualified to undertake the examination by being a qualified member of [insert name of applicable listed body]]. *Delete [] if not applicable.*

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination (other than that disclosed below *) which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- the accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act; or
- the accounts did not accord with the accounting records; or
- the accounts did not comply with the applicable requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair' view which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

** Please delete the words in the brackets if they do not apply.*

Signed: *A Bailey*

Date: 22/11/2023

Name: Alexandra Bailey

Relevant professional qualification(s) or body (if any):

ACCA

Address: 10 Densley Close

Welwyn Garden City

AL8 7JX

Section B

Disclosure

Only complete if the examiner needs to highlight material matters of concern (see CC32, Independent examination of charity accounts: directions and guidance for examiners).

Give here brief details of any items that the examiner wishes to disclose.