

DIGSWELL PLACE GROUP RIDING FOR DISABLED CIO

KNOWN AS DIGSWELL PLACE RDA

Charity Number: 1163233

Trustees' Annual Report

From 1st September 2023 to 31st August 2024



"We have so many more facilities now, but the lovely family atmosphere is just the same"

Said Jacqui who's volunteered at Digswell since 1983, when interviewed about the changes at Digswell Place. Fifty years ago Digswell Place began with 2 borrowed ponies and a handful of volunteers. This year 135 volunteers and 14 very special equines **delivered a record 2,123** equine therapy sessions from our purpose built Yard.

The family atmosphere, special bond between horse and human, and the dedication of volunteers & supporters is summarised in recent feedback ***"Its a place of pure joy"***.

That strong family atmosphere remains core to what we do for all in our community as we move forward, thanks to all who make Digswell Place so special.

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 therapeutic 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. Participants can be referred by medical professionals, educational bodies or apply direct. Applicants are assessed in line with RDA UK practices and policies, to ensure that it is safe and beneficial for them to participate.

Ridden and non ridden activities offered

In addition to riding therapy we now offer non ridden activities for those who may not want to ride, or who are outside our safety criteria for ridden activities. Demand for these services grew following Covid and are areas identified for future development.

Every therapeutic activity delivers tailored benefits for individual participant needs:

Therapeutic Riding	Horse care	Tea with a Pony
Physio and physiological benefits through the movement of the horse and acquiring a new skill.	Quality time with horses grooming, leading and learning horse care and equine welfare knowledge.	A safe and supportive activity for people with disabilities or long-term conditions, such as dementia.
Aids mobility, core strength and balance	Promotes physical and emotional wellbeing	Multi -sensory
Improves general fitness and health	Skills development	Good for memory, alertness & engagement
Opportunities to progress and compete		Intergenerational for participants, families & carers

All underpinned by additional benefits:

Learning opportunities	Social development skills	Outdoor exercise
Challenges & encourages achievement.	Confidence building through learning new skills.	Two outdoor schools surrounded by fields and trees.
Achievements recognised through RDA accredited awards.	Combating anxiety through connecting with horses & ponies.	Hacks in local woods provide access to nature for those whose mobility may otherwise make such activities challenging.
Lessons include fun learning activities alongside equestrian skills.	Interaction with other participants, carers, volunteers and coaches.	Safe walkway for non ridden
	Involvement in fundraising & Digswell Community activities.	

		activities.
--	--	-------------

We provide up to 100 therapeutic sessions per week in two outdoor arenas or in the adjacent woods. Sessions are run by 14 RDA UK Accredited volunteer coaches and 135 volunteer helpers, trained to RDA UK standards. Attendees come from local specialist schools and we also cater for children supported in attending from mainstream schools & colleges together with private adult attendees.

Our equines are at the heart of what we do

Our 14 specially trained horses and ponies are loved by all at Digswell Place, and every care is taken to ensure their health and well being:

- Allocated pony carers (minders) look after each horse on a one to one basis, and exercise and school them outside their activities with participants
- Our 17 acre site offers plenty of grazing and turn out exercise and local bridle paths provide off site hacking
- RDA UK is a signatory to The Charter for The Horse and activities are carried out in compliance with RDA UK Equine welfare policies
- The Royal Veterinary College provides on call service whenever needed and specialist equine masseurs, farriers, dentists and saddlers attend the Yard
- Specialist tack is available, if needed, to improve rider and horse comfort
- All Coaches and volunteers complete RDA UK accredited equine knowledge and welfare training
- Riders and horses are matched according to prescribed safety and comfort limits for rider weight, height, and temperament
- Participant sessions last for a half an hour on weekdays and term time only to ensure rest and recreation time for the horses
- Our Yard Manager and paid Equine Manager and Deputy provide professional support to the volunteer teams at all times.

We are a volunteer led organisation

Without our 135 volunteers we could not achieve our charitable aims their commitment enables us to operate at the level we do. Volunteer helpers prepare the horses and ponies, lead the ponies, side walk and Coach. As well as ensuring the day to day needs of their allocated ponies are met, minders contribute a small amount to the upkeep of their pony and volunteer in session/fundraising roles. In the spirit of inclusivity, members of the Management Committee and Trustees are also helpers, coaches, participants and pony carers. The volunteer maintenance team keeps the Yard safe and serviceable by maintaining fencing, paddock & facilities.

With a family atmosphere

Many volunteers have been involved since our early years and happily share their experience with new and younger volunteers. Feedback shows volunteers value and benefit from their involvement with our Digswell family too. As an inclusive organisation, our RDA UK insurance now covers volunteers up to age 90. Whether directly involved with horses and participants or with tea making, fundraising and ground activities there's plenty of opportunities for volunteers to develop and continue their time with the Group.

Involvement benefits volunteers too

Learning new skills Equine skills not a prerequisite to joining	• Learn or improve equine skills • RDA UK accredited training provided • Access to specialist training to support participants • Progression opportunities within the Group and across RDA nationally
Socialising Intergenerational across participants & other volunteers	• Meeting new people • Combating social isolation • Working as part of a team • Helping at & attending fundraising events
Outdoor exercise Reaching those who may not otherwise access exercise facilities	• Interacting with horses • Preparing ponies and clearing stables • Walking in the woods or the arena with participants • Maintaining the Yard and fields

All new volunteers undergo an application process, reference and DBS checks in line with RDA UK Safeguarding Policies. In addition to our own volunteers, when able, we welcome placement students, and host working parties to assist with larger maintenance & facilities projects. This year we welcomed 5 work experience students.

Supporting the core volunteer base we have; a freelance advanced Coach, a full time employed Equine Manager and a part time Deputy Equine Manager for cover. These paid roles are critical to the charity in ensuring continuity in delivering its charitable aims and public benefit.

Every session provided is subsidised by our own fundraising

The true cost of providing a session is not passed on to our participants. We aim to be an affordable, inclusive and accessible organisation. The cost of each session provided in the year was £43, participants are asked to contribute 27% of that cost at £14 per session. The remainder is funded by our own fundraising. Bursaries are also 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. Our latest survey showed that 100% of our community agreed that our services provide value for money.

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.

2. Achievements, performance and impact

A record 2,123 therapeutic sessions delivered

- Exceeding previous high of 2,064 in 2018
- 33 first time riders
- Continued demand for our services with a waiting list at year end

All key metrics improved: *Source Digswell Place Survey August 2024*

What our community says:	2024	2022
Agrees we're meeting our charitable purpose	95%	89%
Very satisfied/satisfied with the service we provide	96%	92%
Agrees our service provides value for money	100%	81%
Finds Digswell a welcoming, inclusive & friendly place	97%	96%

Our impact in their own words:

From participants and parents & carers *feedback from Digswell Place survey 2024*

Progress & learning	In an inclusive safe environment
<i>Very positive and encouraging environment where even tiny steps of progress are celebrated.</i> <i>The people have really helped provide a very positive place for me to develop all kinds of skills. Huge thanks!</i> <i>My son is so calm after riding and often doesn't want to get off</i> <i>Thank you so much for your continued patience and understanding of my needs over the past few years. It is greatly appreciated. I only ever feel peaceful and relaxed when im around the ponies so thank you for providing me that opportunity each week</i> <i>Riding is the highlight of our week. My boys have grown in confidence socially from experiencing the unconditionally warm and welcoming vibe at Digswell. Thank you everyone!</i> <i>I am really enjoying my riding lessons as I like learning new skills and learning about different parts of the horses. As this helps me to earn new badges</i>	<i>All staff and volunteers at the RDA are welcoming and very attentive to the needs of the Riders</i> <i>Everyone is so friendly I love riding here it is my happy place</i> <i>Such a wonderful stables everybody at the stables are so lovely and helpful. My son has only just started but he absolutely loves coming to ride already.</i> <i>The RDA and the team of people who run it always ensure person centred care is given and cater to each individuals needs. They make the experience fun and safe for all.</i>

And from our volunteers: feedback from Digswell Place survey 2024

Thank you for the great work you do and for fulfilling my hope of contributing to a wonderful service

All working and volunteering are so friendly. It's an absolute pleasure to volunteer and the zen time of my week

Volunteering is great fun. Ponies are lovely and everyone at Digswell is great to take part with

I love coming to volunteer, I totally enjoy the people who volunteer with me, we have been together as a group for many years and I think that says a lot in itself

I've been volunteering for a year and I was welcomed from the beginning. The care of the ponies, clients and volunteers is excellent

Achievements - Continually extending outreach and profile through:

Welcoming high profile visitors; The President RDA, HRH The Princess Royal visited in September to mark our 50th year and in summer, Annie Brewster The High Sherriff of Hertfordshire visited in support of her Sport for All initiative.



Increasing social media presence; keeping our community of volunteers, participants and supporters engaged with regular updates and news via X and Facebook. **1,400** people now follow our Facebook page, up from 1300 last year.

Bi annual Open days; 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.

Achievements - Net fundraising up by 4.8%

Along with our regular established events the hugely successful annual ball, Dogs & Daffs at Hatfield House and grants, legacy gifts and one off donations from supporters, additional fundraising came from:

- A Swimathon arranged by St Albans Rotary Club.
- Support from Cannaccord Genuity Wealth Management as their Charity of the Year
- New engagement and fundraising events a barn dance and quiz night

Sponsor a Pony

Recognising that our core fundraising was heavily reliant on a few large physical events, Sponsor a Pony was launched in 2023 to generate regular donation income. Having seen some positive results this is something we'll continue to focus on in 2024/2025.

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 2024 together with comparable figures for the previous year. These have been independently examined, are included at page 11 and should be read in conjunction with this review.

Overall performance

2023/2024 was yet another year of focussing on "doing what we can with what we have". Having strengthened our reserves by £23k in 2022/2023 we were unable to replicate this outturn in 2023/2024 with reserves increasing by £10k. This was better than expected at the beginning of the year when a deficit was budgeted for (as there was no certainty over income from donations) and enabled us to fund our end of year horse purchase from reserves rather than securing external grant funding.

Principal sources of funding

Overall, the Group saw a 3% (£4k) fall in total income (net of fundraising costs), resulting in the main from a reduction in sources outside its control: donations and legacies. The hardening environment around grant making was also more testing in 2023/2024 and as it looks set to continue is something we need to manage as a Group.

Net income from our core activities was stable and in line with the previous year at £28k which was encouraging. Minder income also remained consistent with last year.

Our fundraising events and activities continue to be well received and supported by our local communities. Net fundraising income was up 4.8% on previous years at £43k. The bulk of that increase was attributable to our Sponsor a Pony funding scheme (introduced at the end of 2022/2023), something we will continue to focus on growing in 2024/2025.

2023/2024 was an exceptional year for the Group in terms of donations received and grant funding secured and therefore the drop in funds of 22% (£8k) in 2023/2024 was not unexpected. Legacies and one-off donations are by their very nature non-recurring, and unpredictable, and securing grant funding for running costs is becoming an ever increasing challenge for established charities and not for profit organisations. Notwithstanding the above, we were again extremely fortunate to be supported by individuals and communities we currently work with or have done so in the past and received donations and legacies totalling £24k. We also successfully secured a grant of £5k towards the maintenance costs included in our five year plan of estates spend. The Group is indebted to a wide network of volunteers who leverage support from their communities and who themselves participate in fundraising activities which benefit the Group.

Cost per ride

Having increased the cost of rides to participants in 2022/2023 to £14 a session, Trustees agreed to defer any further increase until 2024/2025. Tracking the average cost per rides over the last 11 years shows that rides are now costing on average £43. This includes costs for one and a half permanent staff who coach and look after the yard and our stock, but excludes any estimate of the cost of the majority of our coaches, our session volunteers and those responsible for the Group's governance – a total of 135 volunteers whose goodwill in

terms of time commitment is fundamental to the smooth and cost-effective running of the Group.

Whilst our participants contribute to 27% of that average cost of £43, we look to our fundraising and other income generating activities and sources to generate sufficient funds to cover the remaining 73%.

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 eleven years we have experienced an increase in the average cost per ride from £30 to today's average of £43.06. Annual running costs eleven years ago were £55.2k compared to £104.4k in 2023/2024. This is in part due to inflationary cost pressures, a change in our operating model, and environmental and regulatory challenges which have been imposed upon us. Over 50 years we have seen an increase in demand for our sessions and complexity of the needs of participants. Although our operations are still based around school terms, our participant numbers have increased by nearly 10% in the last 11 years and we now offer morning and afternoon sessions focussed on the requirements of our participants, four and a half days a week. The growth in service levels and the associated regulatory rigours of the environment in which we operate demands consistency in our approach to service delivery and a sustainable strategic business model to avoid letting down our participants and volunteers. Trustees believe this is best delivered through a balanced combination of employees and appropriately trained volunteers and remain focussed on achieving suitable sources of funding and responsible financial controls to meet the associated costs to ensure that the Group's activities remain accessible to those in need of them.

Statement of assets and liabilities

As at 31 August 2024 we had cash reserves of £165k (2022/2023 £155k), an increase of 6% over the previous year's closing reserves, a reduction in the level of growth compared to the previous year but an improvement on the reduction in reserves the Group had budgeted for at the beginning of the year.

Policy notes

Reserves Policy As noted in this Annual Report, the Group, in common with many organisations in the sector faces a challenging operating and funding environment. Having adopted a Reserves Policy in May 2018 which determined that 18 months core activity expenditure should be held in reserve in case of a catastrophic loss of income (which reflected an increase at that time from one year). Trustees have, in the light of our outturn on 2023/2024 and draft budgets for 2024/2025, reviewed the appropriateness of that policy and decided in favour of revising the Group's reserves policy to include more specific information about our unrestricted reserves, distinguishing those which are designated by Trustees for specific purposes and those which are free reserves.

It was decided that in the light of the current operating and funding environment, the Group would not reduce the overall level of reserves required for sustainability.

It was agreed that, in principle, designated reserves would allow the Group to operate for one year and provide for the costs of closure (should the need arise). For 2024/2025, the level of designated reserves was agreed at 1.7 times the budgeted operating shortfall i.e. the extent to which the Group expects to draw on its reserves based on the 2024/2025 budget. The balance will be free reserves.

With budgeted operating expenses and overheads totalling £136k and controllable income of £44k, the budgeted draw down at 31 August 2025 would be £92k. Using the agreed formula above, designated reserves at 31 August 2024 would total £156k, leaving free reserves of £8.6k. This is obviously based on the best information at the point at which the budget is approved and will be subject to bi annual review by Trustees.

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 the RDA UK member group's 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.

As at 31 August 2024 there were 8 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.

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 15/12/23	
Bridget Johnstone	Trustee & Group Secretary	Re elected AGM 15/12/23 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 15/12/23 as Trustee & Treasurer	
Sarah Southern	Trustee	Elected AGM 6/1/23	
Jo Clarke Bould	Trustee	Appointed 8/6/24	Trustees
Barbara Fitzsimon	Trustee	Appointed 6/8/24	Trustees
Annette Ponniah	Trustee & Safeguarding Officer	Retired AGM 15/12/23	

Declarations

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

Signature(s)	S. Clarke	J. Redford
Full name(s)	Susan Clarke	Jennie Redford

Position	Chair Trustees	Treasurer
----------	----------------	-----------

Date **21 November 2024**

Signed:	S.Clarke	Chair Trustees	21/11/24
	J.Redford	Treasurer	21/11/24



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 2024

Charity no (if any)

1163233

Set out on pages

11

(remember to include the page numbers of additional sheets)

Responsibilities and basis of report

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended 31/12/2024.

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:

16/11/2024

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.