

Together Fund Centre Case Study

British Equestrian  SPORT ENGLAND
Together Fund



Enborne Equestrian Centre Newbury, Berkshire

An impactful collaboration

A unique collaboration between Sport England's Together Fund through British Equestrian (BEF), mental health charity Sport in Mind, and Enborne Equestrian Centre, has provided opportunities to help those struggling with mental health through the power of horses.

The funding has enabled Enborne Equestrian Centre, a British Horse Society approved centre, to open its doors to the wider community in the Newbury area. A total of 12 participants enjoyed free weekly riding lessons over six consecutive weeks, with one group of juniors and one of adults.

This collaboration has shown the potential to open up the opportunity for the wider population to receive the many benefits of building relationships with horses, as well as becoming more active in a non-pressured social environment.



**Sport
In Mind**



Together Fund: Enborne Equestrian Centre



Ruth Gardiner and her team from Enborne Equestrian Centre have found their involvement with the project immensely rewarding: "I would definitely recommend other equestrian centres doing this. When you see the smiles on the riders' faces and see what they get out of it, you know it's super worthwhile.

"My aim is to build confidence. The participants may be a little fearful and anxious to start with - a lot of them haven't sat on a horse before - but it's something they want to do, so they learn, 'This is alright, we can do it.' It's a massive sense of achievement.

"You watch them slowly go from being quite nervous about climbing on a horse to, 'Oh, look, we're trotting, we can steer.' Their personality starts to shine through.

"Riding is about communicating with your horse. When you ride, you're basically speaking a language to the horse, and that is what the participants are learning. There's a huge benefit to fitness as riding is physical. You have to use your core muscles and subtle movements; it's about controlling your body. It takes your mind off everything else."



Sport in Mind is a charity which delivers a host of sport and physical activities across the south-east to help improve mental and physical health, this is the first time they have provided an activity involving animals.

This project has even turned out to have unexpected benefits for the supportive Sport in Mind staff and volunteers, providing new experiences, boosting activity levels by leading horses and getting the feel-good factor of helping those taking part in the sessions.

One Sport in Mind staff member enjoying the experience is volunteer coordinator Ellie Hopson: "I was horsey as a kid, then I stopped riding, but last year I started again. When this came up, I thought, why not?"

"It's not a team sport in the same way as badminton or tennis, but it is a team activity. There's something special about animals, being around a completely independent being. It's uplifting and this location is so peaceful. You leave buzzing. It's the highlight of my week."



One of the volunteers has also been feeling the benefits of getting involved: "I've not ridden in 40 years and it's nice to reconnect with horses. This is certainly helping my fitness, leading the ponies, without a shadow of a doubt.

"I started volunteering for Sport in Mind helping with yoga. This is different in several ways. Yoga is relaxing while I would describe this more as calming. It is outdoors. It's calming for people to be connected with nature and the horses are calming. It also builds a different level of fitness compared to yoga."

Together Fund: Enborne EC adult sessions

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One of the participants explains how taking part in these sessions has helped her gain confidence and feel part of a group, "I don't want it to end. I'm 75 and I'm getting a little of me back. My husband has multiple sclerosis and I am his sole carer. We moved from Kent eight or so years ago to be near my daughter after I had periods of illness, I don't know anyone here. My life looking after my husband is isolating and I've also had a couple of accidents. When this came up in the Berkshire village magazine, I thought it was absolutely ideal as I had horses about 30 years ago.

"Slowly it is becoming easier. The first time, I struggled to get on and off the horse; it was frightening. To dismount, I had to have one person pushing me on one side and another catching me on the other side.

"Coming here has helped me physically and mentally and I want to do more. I was spending my spare time sitting down reading books, but now I want to go out for walks. Part of doing this is also to socialise, to gain confidence socially."



Another participant has also felt the benefits, "Outside of work I feel isolated and end up worrying about work. Being in nature, with horses and the people here, there's no pressure on me. I have an ongoing issue talking to people, so it's weird that've I've managed to come here when I didn't know anybody. I found out about it on the Sport in Mind Facebook page. I had ridden 30 years ago and always found it a bit scary, but here I can go at my pace."

Together Fund: Enborne EC youth sessions

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"Thank you for the opportunity for my child to do horseriding. She has really enjoyed the sessions, the interaction with the horses and the centre provides a safe environment."

"I have always wanted to do horse riding lessons and now I have the opportunity to ride through Sport in Mind. It is amazing, and I love riding my favourite pony, Reggie. The staff and helpers are very kind. "

"Fridays are now my most favourite day of the week, I can't wait to get to the stables and see my favourite horse, Millie. I am having the best time and I'm loving learning how to ride. Thank you to Enborne Stables and Sport In Mind for this wonderful opportunity."

One participant who was unable to attend her own riding sessions turned to volunteering to lead horses in the youth session, has benefitted from still being a part of the group, demonstrating the value of being involved in all ways, whether a rider or helper.

