**RDA: Transforming lives across the UK**

**Strategy Q&A**

**What is the RDA strategy?**

The RDA Strategy is our plan for how RDA UK is run and the things we will do for the next 3 years (2022-2025)

**Why is this important to me and my RDA group?**

As members of RDA UK, all RDA groups are a vital part of the big impact we have - and every group will in some way be affected by (and can benefit from) our plans.

**Why are we planning to help more people when we are still recovering from lockdown?**

Like many organisations, RDA is still feeling the negative impact of COVID and lockdown. As we launch our strategy, participant numbers are down by 25% and volunteer numbers by 14%. Some groups haven’t been able to open yet, and some are still establishing a ‘new normal’ having used lockdown as a time for reflection and change.

That said, the past two years have also demonstrated the vital need for our activities, and with disabled people disproportionately affected by the pandemic, we have an imperative to try to meet this demand.

Lockdown also taught us a lot about our ability to adapt – encouraging groups to introduce new activities and ways of supporting participants, many of which will continue and have formed a key part of our future plans.

We may be still in recovery, but we have an opportunity to come out of lockdown even stronger.

**We want to increase our participant numbers – how does the new strategy help us?**

As part of helping us reach our target of 10,000 more participants by 2025, groups will ideally be increasing their current participant numbers by 15% and we will be doing everything we can to support this goal.

Part of this will mean tackling the key barriers to growth that many groups face (not enough volunteers, horses and coaches). We will also be developing and promoting new and adapted activities that will allow groups to support more participants without necessarily needing more resources (eg Tea With a Pony or groundwork).

We will build partnerships with organisations that want to benefit from our activities – including expanding our scope into mental health support, dementia and other conditions.

Our participant engagement plan and our publicity efforts will ensure that more people understand the benefits of what RDA can do to support them or someone they know, encouraging more people to reach out to us for support.

We will increase the profile of RDA as an important partner for social prescribing, encouraging health professionals to recommend RDA for health and wellbeing.

**Why is RDA trying to make my group grow when we are happy as we are?**

We do want to support more people and we are not shy of that ambition. That said, RDA’s strength lies in the ability of all our member groups to operate in the way that best meets the needs of their local community. We are not trying to make all groups grow – we are trying to encourage all groups to plan ahead, to use their membership of RDA to get the support they need – whether that means trying to help more people, or having the strength and sustainability to continue at the same size for many years to come.

**What does the plan do to resolve the shortage of suitable horses?**

We know there is a national shortage of suitable equines for RDA, exacerbated by the pandemic. Our equine plan is being developed to find practical solutions to help address this. We have a group of equine-specialist RDA volunteers working on it, and the plan will be launched soon.

In the meantime, we are already actively publicising the need for suitable horses and ponies – and challenging perceptions of what makes a good RDA equine.

**How does the strategy address the need for more volunteers?**

Since COVID, volunteer numbers across RDA are down by approximately 14% and we understand the need to tackle this area. We will develop and deliver a specific plan to recruit and retain volunteers, including a pilot scheme to create regional hubs, which will provide tailored local support to meet the differing needs of groups. In addition, our marketing and PR activity will raise awareness of our work to help encourage new supporters.

A key element of our plans is the introduction and expansion of un-mounted activities, which are potentially less volunteer-intensive and also will provide new ways for volunteers to support their groups.

We will increase the profile of RDA as an important partner for social prescribing, encouraging health professionals to recommend volunteering with RDA for health and wellbeing.

**How does the strategy address the need for more coaches?**

As we look to expand the range of activities we offer, we are mindful of the impact of this on coaches – many of whom already fulfil multiple roles within their group.

As part of our volunteering plan, we will ensure that the Coaching Pathway supports the recruitment and retention of coaches. Our pilot scheme to create regional hubs will support the delivery of training and recruitment of coaches to meet the specific needs of local groups.

The expansion of un-mounted activities in RDA will enable participants to benefit with the support of a suitably qualified activity leader - not necessarily a fully qualified coach in every session.

**What is being done to involve participants more in all areas of RDA?**

Our Participant Plan will ensure that our participants have more of a say about how RDA is run, and more of an opportunity to give feedback about their experience with us. We will conduct regular impact and experience research to help us understand the difference we make and how we can improve our services. Our participant consultation groups will allow us to gather regular feedback and input on new projects and activities. Our Regional Participant Reps will be better supported to help ensure that the views of participants are voiced on regional committees and across the organisation.

**Regional and County volunteers are already giving a lot of time and often have several roles – how does the strategy address this?**

RDA UK volunteers give a huge amount of time to RDA, and we know that in several cases this is unsustainable. We are committed to remaining volunteer-led, and expect our regional teams to still play a vital part in the success of our plans.

We will pilot a programme of regional structure change, including increasing the capacity for local support and redefining RDA UK roles where necessary. We will pilot regional hubs to understand how we can increase the support to member groups, while at the same time supporting our RDA UK volunteers. A pilot project to have a paid regional coordinator is already underway as part of this project.

**How is RDA going to help us with our fundraising?**

We know that fundraising is easier when people already know about RDA and the difference we make. Our strategy will see us increasing our external PR and publicity, so that more of your potential donors will hear out about our work.

We will support your fundraising efforts with a strong brand toolkit that will help you attract new supporters. Our impact research will help you make the case for support.

Our pilot scheme to create regional hubs will help us build local knowledge of funders, corporates, trusts and foundations that may want to support your group. It will also help us to work more effectively in partnership with our Regional teams.

**What will RDA do to improve internal communication?**

Because of the structure of RDA, we don’t have the contact details of everyone involved in our groups and that can often create a barrier to the free-flow of information. We will replace RDA Magazine (which was halted during lockdown) with a subscription enewsletter, while continuing to support groups with operational information on a weekly basis.

Our data services plan will see us investigate the need for more direct contact with our network – and the feasibility of doing so. As part of this, we will also be looking at the volunteer-specific website, MyRDA, to improve the user-experience.

**How much is this going to cost?**

We know that delivering all our plans will cost more money and we are investing in fundraising to meet that need. We do not have a precise figure now for the cost of everything we want to do, as much of it will depend on the outcome of some of the pilot projects and further research that will take place in the first year. Importantly, we will be increasing our income with new money from new sources.

**Have you got a different question for us?**

Email us at info@rda.org.uk