

‘Tea with a Pony’

A guide for RDA groups



Meaningful equine activities for people living with dementia

www.rda.org.uk

Riding for the Disabled Association. Registered Charity No. 244108 and SCO39473



Summary

We hope this guide will help your RDA Group plan, set up and run unmounted activities for people living with dementia or other long-term life-changing conditions.

It has been put together by a team from several RDA Groups which, in different ways, already run such activities. No two Groups are the same – you will do it in whatever way works best for you! But however you approach it, we do suggest you keep it small and simple to start with. All resources in conjunction with this guide will be available on the 'Tea with a Pony' page on www.myrda.org.uk

Here we suggest ways to:

- find participants
- prepare carers and participants so they know what to expect
- make sure that your Centre is suitable for people with dementia
- train RDA volunteers for the new activity
- run the sessions smoothly and safely
- review and measure progress afterwards to get the best out of subsequent sessions

Introduction

This guide is to help RDA Groups plan, set up and run non ridden activities for people living with dementia or other long-term life-changing conditions.

You may be aware of a need in your area for more activities for people with long-term life-changing conditions. You may have volunteers or horses particularly suited to this sort of activity, or less suited to riding. You may be looking for additional income for your Group.

Whatever your reasons. Each group will run these activities in its own way, to fit its own circumstances. This guide is a collection of ideas and experiences which we hope will help you on your journey in your group.

Through these activities we want to give fulfilling and enriching experiences with horses to people living with dementia or other similar conditions, in a way which is supportive, safe and inclusive for the person living with a disability, their carers, our volunteers and our horses.

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Getting started

Before you start you will want to make sure you have the resources – volunteers, horses, space, time – to run these activities.

Sadly, in one way this is not difficult: as the UK's population is ageing, more people are living with dementia and other life-changing conditions. Nevertheless, it can be hard and slow to identify people who would benefit – you may need to be persistent!

Care homes should be relatively straightforward as they are always looking for affordable meaningful activities for their residents.

You can get in touch with potential participants who are living in care homes by approaching the homes themselves directly, or through the local network of care home activity coordinators, if there is one.

Finding participants who are being cared for at home by relatives or other carers is more challenging. One way may be through local organisations which support people living with dementia and their families and carers, for example the local branch of Age UK or the Alzheimer's Society.

Another way is to approach local GP practices, community centres and primary care centres, many of which are

developing 'social prescribing', whereby patients with dementia and their carers can be channelled to your group via a link worker or by simply advertising on their notice boards.

Social media is also a useful way to advertise your sessions, especially for those carers who care at home.

We suggest talking to a few care homes, either directly or through the network of activity coordinators, and to some of the support organisations for specific disabilities. You may also find it useful to compare notes with other RDA Groups providing similar services.

An alternative to charging people with dementia and their carers for sessions directly is to work in partnership with local doctors and social care services to access funds from the government. Grants might be to the Group to allow it to provide sessions free of charge or heavily subsidised, or to participants and carers who would not otherwise be able to afford it. Trusts might also be able to help fund transport to and from the sessions (often quoted by care homes as a barrier to attending).



Preparing participants and carers beforehand

Once you have sought participants and carer, they will want to know what to expect from the sessions. You need to be guided by what they actually want and need, rather than what you think they want. However, these activities will almost certainly be new to them, so you will need to give them some ideas to start a conversation. You will need to be clear what aspects are non-negotiable, for example for health and safety reasons. An offer of taster sessions free of charge or at reduced cost may be helpful in persuading care homes to sign up.

A typical session might look something like this:

- Arrival and welcome – issue name badges
- A short briefing to include Health & Safety
- Refreshments (before handling horses, for hygiene)
- Watch a lesson or other equine activity
- Opportunity to meet/stroke/groom a horse
- Departure

When designing the session it is important to note that dementia is a deteriorating condition which cannot be reversed. It is not appropriate therefore to include the sort of activities which test learning and memorising, as you might do in a more conventional horse care or stable management session. The task here is simply to provide a fun and meaningful activity.

Of course, if you do notice that a participant has remembered a new term or a routine, that's great: make a note of it for your evaluation of the effect of the session.

For safety reasons, we suggest that each participant should be accompanied by at least one carer. We have found that when participants can be accompanied by members of their family this can be especially enriching for all. Contact with horses can unlock memories and stories which the family member may never have heard before. Even if participants have never had anything to do with horses before, these sessions can make new shared experiences and memories.

We also suggest that you start small, with maybe a maximum of half a dozen visitors in total (that is, all participants and carers). You can always increase the numbers later.

Do send the paperwork to carers in advance, and ideally get it back in

advance too so there is as little as possible to deal with on the day. You may be able to adapt the contract you use for riding. You should be clear on your cancellation policy: it is not unusual for visits to be cancelled at late notice, through illness or transport problems

The participant form will need to be filled out—there is now a non-ridden participant form.

You may want to encourage carers to make a visit to your Group before the session day as they may wish to do their own risk assessment.

Carers will need to know in advance about practical things such as:

- location of your Group
- vehicle access/parking arrangements, including for disabled users
- wheelchair access
- suitable clothing and footwear for participants and carers
- toilet arrangements etc.
- Session length (1 hour max- 15 mins arrival/departure & 45 mins with horses)
- any special health & safety requirements. You may need to warn them that hats (provided by you) will need to be worn for certain activities e.g. grooming.





Practical preparation

You should not expect all your volunteers to become experts on dementia – the participants will be accompanied by carers who understand the condition in depth and know the individuals concerned. However, some understanding will give volunteers confidence and help them interact better with participants, which in turn will mean that the participants will have a more enjoyable experience.

You will need to check where you are holding the session is dementia-friendly. Making a place dementia-friendly is often helpful to people with other conditions too. The most basic requirement is that the environment is tidy and uncluttered, with clear signage. It needs to be light and the temperature control must be sensitive to the difficulty people with dementia have in regulating body temperature, for example try to

provide blankets and draft free areas. High visual contrast can help, for example using plain light coloured crockery on a dark plain tablecloth, black toilet seats on white toilets etc.

It is essential to always take the lead from the person with dementia. Go at their pace. Never confront or correct if they are disoriented in time, place or person.

For example, if a participant talks as if they are in the past, go with it. This is the best way to avoid stress/distress. The thoughts and memories may be very out of touch with what is happening but the feelings can be powerfully beneficial with this approach.

You will need to prepare at least the following paperwork in advance:

- All Volunteers are recommended to attend the free Dementia Friends online session.
- Signed extension of activity form – sent in to RDA National Office group support
- Attend the online risk assessment webinar specifically for Tea with a Pony and complete the Risk Assessment form
- A briefing sheet for the lead for the session to read out to participants and carers (fire and safety briefing, staying safe around horses, location of toilets etc.)
- A mobile device to fill out the session survey before and after the session

Building the team

In our experience, to run a successful session it is essential to have a dedicated team, quite separate from the team running any regular riding activities which may be going on at the same time. We suggest as a minimum you will need:

1. The Activity Leader for the session would be responsible for welcoming all participants and carers and guiding them through the activity from arrival to departure and the equine interaction
2. one or more people to look after the catering
3. extra volunteers (1 or 2) to help look after the participants, guided by their carers.





Running the session

You may want the participants to watch a regular lesson as part of their session.

You should consult the coach and brief the session volunteers in advance, especially if you want one of the horses from the lesson to meet the visitors. It will be important to make sure that an appropriate horse is chosen for this. Also, the coach needs to be aware that the visitors may distract the lesson (noise, movement), even if they have been briefed not to.

The session should be to no more than 1 hour, so not to overwhelm the participants. We recommend keeping

the catering simple. Tea, coffee and squash with a small selection of cakes and biscuits should be plenty.

You do not need to register as a food business or have a food hygiene certificate if your food service is occasional and small-scale – but you still have a duty of care to keep participants safe.

Even though many RDA volunteers bake wonderful homemade cakes, we strongly suggest that for these sessions you only offer bought cakes/biscuits. This makes it easy to keep track of Use By/Best Before dates and allergen information.

Carers should have given details of participants' dietary needs or allergies in advance on the participant form. If they need special products, for example gluten-free, they should bring their own.

You may like to prepare information packs for participants and carers to take away with them. They might contain information about other RDA activities; how to become a volunteer; sponsor a pony; leave a legacy to RDA.

Session Survey

There are two short surveys per participant (one for the participant and one for the carer/family member) to be filled out during each session.

The surveys consist of a few short questions based around the participants' feelings regarding the activity and also the carer/family member.

Providing this information will help us understand the benefits of these activities and develop them further. Each survey should be filled out as honestly possible, based on your perceptions of the participants' experience as well as your own experiences, it is important not to confuse this as it may not show a true picture.

More details can be found via www.myrda.org.uk

Afterwards

You might want to do a quick debrief with your volunteers immediately after the participants have gone – it would be appropriate for the lead for the session to ensure this happens. What went well? What would have been "even better if..."? Were there any incidents or near-misses? (If so, make careful notes at the time.) How did it feel for the volunteers – and the horses? Make sure someone writes all the answers down so they can be used for planning the next session and you also have filled out the session surveys

Keep an eye open for any volunteers who might have found the session upsetting or challenging in some way – for example, it may have brought back memories of a loved one who lived with dementia. Be prepared to offer support promptly but discreetly.

There is no right or wrong way to run these sessions. Every RDA is different and every session will be unique. Nevertheless, we hope this guide has given you some ideas on how to get started.





Next steps

- Read this guide and documents online and complete the training as described above
- Confirm your interest by filling out extension of activity form
- Go and enjoy your first session!

Thank yous

RDA would like to thank the following people for the creation of this guide and for their inspiration and commitment in bringing 'Tea with a Pony' to life:

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More information at

www.myrda.org.uk/runningyourgroup/tea-with-a-pony/

Or email Lucy Wake lwake@rda.org.uk

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OUR FAMOUS FIVE

WE HAVE FIVE
CORE VALUES

1

We believe it's
what you can do
that counts

2

We value the
input of everyone
involved

3

We recognise
and celebrate
achievement

4

We aim to deliver
an excellent
experience

5

We recognise
the part played
by our amazing
horses

