



Cheltenham Racecourse A Partnership Through Time – Cotswold Riding For The Disabled

RACING TOGETHER COMMUNITY AWARD

“The racecourse’s ongoing commitment at so many levels is essential to the success of the operation whether that is through the provision land, skilled resource, volunteers, equipment, helping us build awareness or providing opportunities to assist us fund-raising activities is truly invaluable. The Cotswold RDA could not deliver what it does today without the racecourse’s on-going generosity and involvement.” Debbie Powell, General Manager Cotswold RDA Category

Proudly partnered by



Objectives



The community partnership between Cotswold Riding for the Disabled (RDA) was developed with the objective of improving the health and wellbeing of people living with physical and mental disabilities in Gloucestershire by riding and spending time with ponies. Cotswold RDA commenced operation 60 years ago this year, with just 12 riders however re-locating to Cheltenham Racecourse in August, 1981, enabled the charitable operation to go from strength-to-strength.

Princess Anne formerly opened the Cheltenham Racecourse Cotswold RDA. Since the day the ground was gifted by the racecourse to the RDA, operation of the business has been in the form of collaborative partnership between the small on-site RDA team and the racecourse team, with support and resourcing an on-going, a day-to-day occurrence.

The racecourse and the RDA's long-term vision to provide a safe and friendly environment for people of all ages living with a disability has been now been realised and truly established. The facility has grown to become one of the largest RDA's in the country, with an indoor and outdoor area, 10 stables and sensory garden. It offers lessons, weekend riding, after school riding and holiday activities.

This submission is to celebrate **a partnership through time**, over 40 years, of working hand in hand with the Cotswold RDA, to deliver countless smiles and moments of incredible pride.

The RDA currently has over 200 volunteers, many of them racecourse staff, some of whom have been with the RDA since the beginning. The racecourse grounds team barn is located adjacent to the RDA facility, and the team are constantly on-hand and encouraged to assist with all maintenance issues and lending of equipment. Every single member of the Racecourse team is engaged in some way with the RDA and view our collaboration as part of their everyday responsibility.

Some charitable partnerships come and go, this one has stood the test of time and continues to grow.

Delivery



Every week, Cotswold RDA deliver transformative equine-based experiences to 144 children and 32 adults. These activities enable participants to improve their physical fitness, develop confidence, communication, and relationship-building skills, and experience the joy of interaction with ponies. Demand for the services continues to grow, and as of August 2025 there are over 130 people on the waiting list. The current session commitment equates to over 7000 sessions per year to participants from the ages of 4 to 101.

Racecourse staff provided have provided an estimated 600 hours of contribution in assistance to the RDA over the last 12-months.

Key RDA regular rider/volunteer activities supported by the racecourse and its staff:

► **“The Peaceful Paddock”** held in the Sensory Garden built as part of a week-long project by volunteers from the Cheltenham racecourse office team. Sessions are accessible to anyone living with a disability. Participants can enjoy stroking and grooming the ponies or even help to clean tack in our beautiful, tranquil sensory walk with views out to the racecourse and Cleeve Hill.

► **“Tea with a Pony”** sessions for people living with dementia are a simple but incredibly powerful activity.

Joined by carers and family members, people living with dementia watch a riding lesson while enjoying tea and cake. This is a favourite of the racecourse staff volunteers.

► **“Giddyupforgood” sessions** for children cared for the racecourse charity partner WellChild. Children enduring complicated times medically enjoy the chance to spend time with a pony and if able to, sit on their back, hosted at the racecourse.

► **“Box4Kids” sessions** Occasional event with children being treated by the Barrie Wells Trust are all hosted by racecourse staff on a visit to the RDA.

► **“Racing Realm”** The Racing Realm was a 2025 Festival activation that attracted over 20,000 visitors. It incorporated a stable with an RDA pony to raise funds and build awareness. It was co-manned by racecourse staff throughout the event.

► **“Bucket Collections”** Over one million pounds has been raised through bucket collection on New Years Day and Gold Cup day for the Cotswold RDA since 1981. The racecourse “Shop & Drop” also provides funds to the RDA. Countryside Day 2025 raised £30,000

Results

Cotswold RDA's riders and their carers testify to the difference the experience makes. The six key, monitored areas are: Communication, Confidence, Enjoyment, Horsemanship, Physical Changes, and Relationships.

The ripple effect of the RDA work benefits the wider community. Parents get a rare moment of respite from their caring responsibilities and forge supportive friendships and the 220 Volunteers have reported reduced isolation, increased sense of purpose, improved mental health and self-confidence. Racecourse staff get great satisfaction from their involvement.

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Giddy Up For Good at the Racecourse



Sensory Garden built by racecourse staff



Volunteers on Gold Cup Day



Supporting Information

Cotswold RDA Winter 2025 Newsletter demonstrates the many links between the racecourse and the RDA

FUNDRAISING FOCUS

BUCKET COLLECTING ON FRIDAY 14TH MARCH

What a result for our bucket collection this year, we raised a fantastic £15,017.05!

A huge thank you to all the collectors who braved the cold and crowds to fundraise for Cotswold RDA.

COTSWOLD RDA AT THE CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL

PONY MEET AND GREET STAND

Over all four days of the Festival, we had the fantastic opportunity to have a stand inside the North Entrance plaza, the main draw of course being a pony to meet and greet the crowds. Enter Toffee the Shetland pony!

Toffee was our ambassador, drawing in the crowds who could then find out more about us and chat with our staff. Toffee was an absolute star the whole week, and loved every bit of attention he received (and there was a lot). Thank you so much to Toffee's owner Ann, who made the journey from Bath to Cheltenham to help us out. It was an absolute pleasure working with Toffee, we hope our paths cross again!

THE TOTAL RAISED FROM TOFFEE'S STAND AND OUR SHOP AND DROP STALL WAS £681.30!

SHOP AND DROP

After the success of our stand at the November meet last year, the Racecourse kindly offered us the same setup for the duration of the Festival. Thank you to all the volunteers who gave their time to man the stall!

EASTER FUN WITH WellChild

On Tuesday 15th April we were delighted to welcome the staff and families from WellChild back to our arena, for a day of themed activities and pony riding!

Thank you to all our volunteers who helped deliver the equine element of the day, preparing ponies and supporting riders during their sessions.

It's always a pleasure to offer our facilities (and ponies!) to you all for the day, and we look forward to seeing you again next year!



Racecourse takes National Racehorse Week 2025 to Cotswold RDA

Acknowledgement on Cotswold RDA website re: the Sensory Garden created by Jockey Club volunteers

Sensory Garden Renovation



Team Cotswold with Sir A P McCoy, Andre Klein, WellChild staff and volunteers, The Jockey Club and O'Brien-McPherson Racing volunteers.

From 29th May to 2nd June Cotswold RDA were delighted to be the recipients of a Helping Hands project by WellChild, which was funded by The Charles Irving Trust. It has been a pleasure working alongside the WellChild team, including volunteers from The Jockey Club and O'Brien-McPherson Racing. Thank you to everyone who worked hard to complete the project, you are all amazing!

The new area will greatly enhance what we can offer at Cotswold RDA, and we can't wait to welcome new and returning clients to see it for themselves. Do visit the new garden when you next come to the arena!

Supporting Information

Video Evidence

Debbie Powell –from the RDA introduces the great partnership with Cheltenham Racecourse (30 seconds)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Xh4qfBqch8g6_z7PKDMCjVPNHnN62eR5/view?usp=sharing

Cheltenham Racecourse Staff – Discuss the RDA Relationship (1 mins 30 seconds)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1d5xQZIJm5CWv4aDkVuWFPvMNzReQqa9Q/view?usp=sharing>

Tea with a
Pony



Racing Realm at Festival 2025 featuring
RDA Stable. Pony “Meet & Greet”



Box4Kids Event with
racecourse staff at RDA



Former
Racecourse
GM, Edward
Gilliespie now
Vice President
RDA

