Stepney Bank Stables

Young People Creating Connections
and Confidence through Horses



Annual Report 2025/26

STEPNEY VALUES & MISSION

Our Values:

Fun, Kindness, Collaboration, Excellence, Accountability

The Stepney Mission:

To bring joy and positively impact the lasting life chances of children and young people who are growing up in challenging situations through caring for and riding horses.


'Buskers in the Barn' at Top Yard


A Team Developement Day (Larry modeling the insights map)

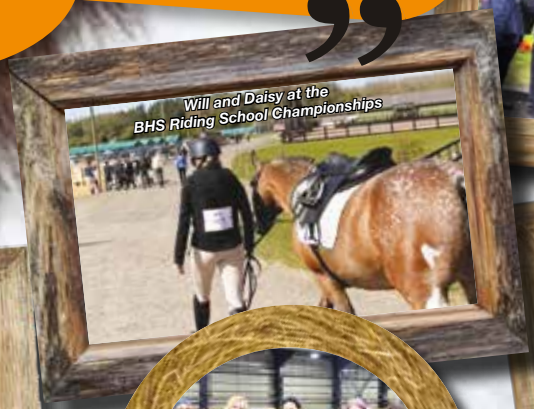

A Vistit to The Johnson Racing Stables

"Volunteering at Stepney has really increased my confidence and made me step out of my comfort zone.... Mental health has always been a big struggle for me and Stepney has given me the stability I needed. I am very passionate about horses and their welfare."

Young Attendee


April & Jerry at the BHS Riding School Qualifiers


A Trip to Newcastle Racecourse


Will and Daisy at the BHS Riding School Championships


A Staff Training Day Led by Paula


with Nicola from the International Horse Agility Club



April with her BHS Stage 1 Certificates

Words from OUR CHAIR

Looking back over the last year at Stepney Bank Stables, I think what strikes me most is just how much of what we have been working towards over the last few years is now really starting to come together.

We've made some big changes during that time. Not all of them have been easy, but they've always been made with the same things in mind: the young people we support, the welfare of our horses, the wellbeing of our team, and making sure Stepney is here and thriving for many years to come.

This year, I think we can genuinely see the results.

Our Alternative Provision and Changing Lives Through Horses programme continues to grow and make a real difference. 80% of our 2026 AP leavers moved on to positive next steps in education, and 100% of young people reported feeling more confident since starting the programme.

They're fantastic numbers, but behind every one is a young person who has found confidence, friendships, responsibility, a sense of belonging, or simply somewhere they feel safe and want to be. For me, that's what Stepney is really about.

We've continued to invest in Stepney itself too. Reception and our offices have been transformed, the Top Yard has really come back to life, and we're making much better use of the fantastic spaces we have, while finding new ways for people and businesses to engage with and support us. It's great to see some of these spaces being enjoyed again and Stepney feeling increasingly vibrant and welcoming.

We're also becoming a more sustainable and resilient organisation. Diversifying what we do isn't about moving away from what Stepney has always been — quite the opposite. It's about making the most of what we have and generating the income and support that allows us to do even more for our young people and horses.

Alongside that, we've worked hard to become much clearer about where we're going and, importantly, how we're going to get there. We now have solid business plans sitting behind our strategy, with clear priorities, outcomes, and measures of success.

That gives us confidence as a Board, but importantly it also gives confidence to those who choose to support us. We're increasingly able to have conversations with significant funders and donors from a position of real confidence — demonstrating not just why Stepney matters, but what their support can actually help us achieve.

Our volunteers continue to be a massive part of Stepney too. This year we've had 167 active volunteers across our young people's and adult programmes, with our 12–18-year-olds alone contributing more than 9,600 hours. That's pretty incredible, and a reminder that Stepney isn't simply a riding school or an education provider — it's a community.

I've also continued to evolve our Board of Trustees, making sure we have the right mix of skills, experience, and perspectives to best support the charity as it grows. We've strengthened our expertise across areas including Youth & Education, HR, Governance and Legal, complementing the skills we already have and giving Sara and the team a strong Board around them to support, advise and challenge where needed.

Of course, none of this happens by accident.

I can't thank Sara and the whole team enough for their hard work, creativity, resilience and absolute commitment to our young people and horses. It's particularly pleasing to see staff satisfaction increase again this year and such a significant improvement in how strongly colleagues feel the team works together.

A massive thank you too to our volunteers, supporters, donors, and corporate partners, and of course my fellow Trustees, who continue to give their time, experience, and support to Stepney.

When we created our strategy back in 2023, we knew Stepney needed to change if it was going to fulfil its potential. Three years on, I think we can be genuinely proud of how far we've come, and our Stable Lives 2025–2030 plan gives us a clear roadmap for what comes next.

There's still plenty to do — there always will be — but I feel more confident than ever about Stepney's future.

It's always been an incredibly special place. What excites me most now is that we're building an organisation capable of making sure it stays that way for generations of young people to come.

Graeme Fletcher

Chair of the Board of Trustees



The Board of Trustees meet Max

CEO STATEMENT



It's been a transformative year at Stepney in so many ways. From individual, personal transformations in confidence and hopefulness, to big changes in the look and functionality of the facilities, to transforming the staff structure and the ways that we work together. We hope that every horse and human coming through our doors feels the positive impact of these significant changes.

As a staff team, we've assessed how we communicate both internally and externally and developed more effective systems. Communication (or lack of) can often be a point of frustration and, whilst we've by no means found all the answers just yet, we've made significant progress in 12 months. Recruiting a team of fabulous office volunteers has made a MASSIVE difference, enabling more timely communication with clients and stakeholders whilst freeing up staff time to tackle other tasks. Defining our offer into strands, each with their own branding, has helped us clarify how different user groups can engage with us and clearly communicate our offer. We'll continue to develop and embed the new branding as time and budgets allow, over the coming 12 months.

Completing the Yorkshire 3 peaks alongside colleagues to raise funds for Stepney was a personal highlight and a reminder of how important it is to challenge yourself, as the boost you get from achieving something you didn't think you could do is so powerful. This was reflected in the residential we delivered at the end of the summer where 19 young people took on climbing, kayaking and zip wiring adventures over 3 days, finishing tired, proud and with closer bonds of friendship formed.

It was amazing to be browsing social media whilst on holiday to see young people from Stepney announce the dressage and eventing teams for the World Championships on the British Equestrian feed. Even more special to hear our Patron Adam Short would be heading to the World Championships to groom for Tom McEwan and JL Dublin and EVEN more special when they brought home team gold!

Among many other firsts this year, we've held live music events at our gorgeous Top Yard and a Horse history walk with Ouseburn Trust. The Top Yard is such a special site, with it's history dating back to the 1800s and so many people's (including my own) childhood memories shaped by time spent there. It's wonderful to see the space come back to life and be enjoyed by a wide range of people once more.

Challenges have continued to come thick and fast, with issues relating to the global economy and climate change having a significant effect. This year we've seen forage prices continue to skyrocket along with fuel. Our welfare model involves driving horses to grazing, so fuel prices have a big impact. For the first time ever, we had to put hay out in July as the drought stopped grass growth, further increasing forage costs. We also battled ringworm which meant closing for ten days over summer. Prolonged warm weather is making diseases like ringworm more prevalent.

This year it has hit home more than ever how much Stepney Bank Stables is needed by young people. Our programmes for young people continue to be significantly oversubscribed and we hear so many heartbreaking stories of young people who are struggling to find any sense of hope for their future, places outside of their home where they feel safe, or a sense of community and belonging. But we do know that, once we get them through our doors, so many young people find that sense of safety, community and belonging here. We measure our success by the way people feel. The kindness, encouragement and genuine care our team shares with each other, our volunteers and our attendees create a culture that extends to every horse in our care. That same spirit is now reflected in the facilities we are proud to provide.

Leading this impactful, unique and essential organisation is such a privilege. To guide, support and cheerlead such a talented, passionate staff and volunteer team who consistently go above and beyond for the young people and horses in their care is a joy, as is working with the brave, funny and kind young people we're lucky enough to support.

Sara Newson
CEO

Over the past 12 months, our Alternative Provision and Changing Lives Through Horses (CLtH) programme has continued to grow, helping young people who have struggled with traditional education to re-engage in a safe, supportive and practical environment. Through trusted relationships, time with horses and meaningful equine activities, young people have made strong progress in confidence, communication, teamwork, relationships, perseverance and responsibility.

Young people have told us they feel more confident, are better able to ask for help, work with others and keep going when things are difficult. For many, attending regularly, building trust and beginning to see themselves as capable learners are significant achievements. Young people's feedback shows that horses are a powerful motivator for engagement, confidence and relationship-building, with riding and spending time with horses among the most valued activities. As one young person said, their favourite part of the programme was "being with the horses."

Over the coming year, we will build on this success by developing clearer pathways into accredited learning, vocational opportunities and employment. We plan to introduce accredited English and maths/Functional Skills alongside CLtH, while continuing to expand equestrian accreditation and practical employability skills. Our ambition is to offer a joined-up pathway where young people can build confidence and life skills, gain qualifications and progress towards further education, apprenticeships or employment.

Philippa Compson AP Lead


At the NE Youth Awards


Peer Mentors with their Yeti cups

"Horses have become my everything and I have gained so many friendships from riding and volunteering at Stepney and being surrounded by such amazing animals who have taught me so much about not only them but myself really helped me to know what I wanted to do in the future especially when I had to pick GCSE options, and that was working with them."

Young attendee


It's all about those magic moment of connection


Young Volunteers at the anniversay celebrations


With the Castle House Saddlery team, Jack Mantel & Jack Thomas Watson at Bramham Horse Trials


Meeting a professional jockey

The Social & Economic Impact of Alternative Provision at Stepney

Stepney Bank Stables provides practical, structured learning in an equine and community setting, helping young people develop confidence, skills, relationships and a renewed connection with learning. A key measure of this impact is what happens after Year 11.

80% of Stepney Bank Stables' alternative provision students continued into education or training after Year 11, compared with a national benchmark of approximately 55%.

This represents a 25 percentage-point difference in post-16 participation.

What this means for a typical Stepney cohort
Stepney Bank Stables supports approximately 30 students each year.

If the 25 percentage-point difference were maintained across a cohort of 30 students, approximately **7 additional young people** would progress into education or training compared with the national benchmark.

Using Government estimates of the economic consequences associated with young people experiencing NEET status, this additional participation has a substantial potential economic value.

Annual cohort of 30 students	Indicative impact
Additional young people retained in education/training	~7
Indicative lifetime earnings protected	~£364,000
Indicative public-finance benefit	~£203,000

The lifetime earnings estimate is based on an indicative £52,000 average earnings loss associated with one year of NEET status, while the public-finance estimate uses an indicative £29,000 cost per year. These figures are Government estimates and are applied here as an economic-value illustration rather than as a claim that each outcome is directly caused by Stepney Bank Stables.

The wider social return

The value of Stepney's work extends beyond post-16 destinations.

For young people who have struggled within conventional education, successful alternative provision can provide a crucial opportunity to:

- Re-engage with learning through practical and meaningful activity;
- Develop confidence, resilience and self-belief;
- Build positive relationships with adults and peers;
- Develop vocational, employability and life skills;
- Experience responsibility, routine and achievement;
- Progress towards further education, training and employment; and
- Reduce the risk of longer-term disengagement from education and the labour market.

A small programme with potentially significant long-term value

Over five years, supporting approximately 150 young people at the same level of participation would correspond to an indicative **£1.82 million in protected lifetime earnings and £1 million in public-finance value.**

These figures illustrate the potential scale of the long-term economic value associated with keeping young people engaged in education and training. They sit alongside the less easily monetised — but equally important — social benefits of giving young people a safe, purposeful environment in which they can succeed.

Stepney Bank Stables is therefore not simply providing an alternative educational experience. It is helping young people maintain a pathway into education, training and employment at a critical transition point in their lives.

Sustainability and longevity for Stepney Bank Stables means diversification has had to be an active focus for 2025/2026, without compromising our purpose.

All of the following activities have been carefully thought out to compliment Stepney's core offering, rather than replace it, and of course our horses and ponies are present at everything we do. To be able to use our spaces and the expertise within Stepney's team to provide alternative income streams means that more young people and our community can benefit from what we do.

'Time with Us', created this year as part of our revamped brand strategy, is about people and businesses accessing us through a selective set of activities to secure financial contribution and goodwill.

Key achievements 2025 - 2026

Development Projects

- Full refurbishment of reception, offices, decor and backyard to enhance a safe and welcoming environment
- Refurbishment of Top Yard to create multifunctional spaces, whilst maintaining the integrity of the heritage and housing for horses.
- Refurbishment of the 'Jackson room' to prepare to enable us to welcome businesses for paid for meetings and facilitated learning and development workshops
- Corporate volunteer days directly impacting standards and aesthetic (Top Yard and Jackson Room painting, outside weeding and tidying)
- Aligned to the physical revamp of reception, our Operations Manager recruited, trained and begun to implement customer practices and projects to drive efficiency and a warm welcome for all

Events

- Two fundraising busker-style music events at TopYard which has resulted in a planned series of summer music sessions for 2027
- Two ridden demonstrations in the main arena with a third planned for October
- Birthday parties launched utilising both Top and main yard spaces and activities including Max the mechanical horse
- Our first Horse History walk, celebrating how horses have shaped the world around us

Corporate Partnerships and Sponsorship

- We currently work with a small number of corporate partners and monthly donors who go above and beyond to provide financial and practical support to Stepney.
- Our Youth Project Coordinator balances providing skills and experiences for the young volunteers with challenging cost constraints, therefore sponsorship of events such as those secured this year for the Awards Night and Residential Trip are crucial for those events to take place and were very welcome

Emma Findlay Centre Lead


The annual Stepney Awards


with William Fox Pitt & Jack Thomas Watson taking part in The Healing Power of the Horse

> *"Stepney is absolutely X's happy place. A place where she can be herself, have the confidence to talk and make friends (neither of which she can do at school). I actually don't know where she would be if it wasn't for the stables and the connection she has with the horses, the staff and the other young people."*
>
> Parent


Young Volunteers on a litter picking mission

Ride with Us

Over recent months, we've made a number of positive improvements across reception, the office, and our weekly timetable, all designed to enhance the experience for clients, volunteers, and staff.

Reception has undergone significant renovation, and the former large office has now been redesigned into two functional spaces — the main office and the operations office. Both rooms now offer comfortable, well organised working environments that support smoother day to day operations. Alongside this, we have introduced our new Stepney Bank Stables branding, which clearly showcases each strand of our services: Time with Us, Learn with Us, Ride with Us and Grow with Us. The refreshed visual identity helps visitors understand the breadth of what we offer from the moment they arrive. Dave the painter, has also been busy bringing the building to life with a fresh coat of paint throughout, giving the whole site a brighter, more welcoming feel.

We have welcomed a new team of office volunteers who support daily operations, assist with client enquiries, and help maintain a smooth front of house experience. Their time, energy, and commitment have already made a noticeable difference, and we are truly appreciative of everything they contribute.

We've also expanded our programme of sessions. The new Pony Play Schemes focuses on stable management skills such as grooming, mucking out, feeding routines, and understanding pony behaviour — offering a valuable alternative for those who want to learn more about horses without riding. In addition, we have introduced BHS Stage 1 and 2 Care training with Leanne giving participants a structured pathway to develop recognised industry skills and progress through formal equine qualifications.

Sundays have been restructured to better meet demand. We now offer fewer group lessons and have increased the availability of private lessons, which continue to be extremely popular at weekends. We've also launched our Mini Pony Play Scheme for children aged 3 to 6, giving the young people an opportunity to be introduced to stable management, pony care, and hands on time with our lovely ponies in a safe, nurturing environment.

'Time with Us', created this year as part of our revamped brand strategy, is about people and businesses accessing us through a selective set of activities to secure financial contribution and goodwill.

Heather Topacho Operations Manager


Students from Northumberland college come for a tour and a chat about enrichment



Reception gets a revamp


The beautiful new reception area


Resurfacing the back yard


The adults volunteers enjoying pizza and mechanical horse lessons



> *Being part of the Stepney family has been life changing for our daughter. Thank you all*

The Year in Numbers

62 active volunteers in the 12-18's group, **58** in 8-11's, **47** adult volunteers

Stepney students came **3rd** in the Educators Cup – an International competition in Horse Agility

80% of our 2026 Alternative Provision leavers moved on to positive next steps in education

9610 volunteering hours completed by the 12-18's.

Overall staff satisfaction rose from 90% in 2025 to **92%** in 2026.

Belief that 'the team works well together' improved by **32%** from 2025-2026.

93% of clients scored horse welfare excellent or good.

100% of young people reported feeling more confident since starting Alternative Provision.

Perseverance **(4.67/5)** and responsibility **(4.83/5)** were also particularly strong, with young people developing practical horse-care and life skills.

CASE STUDY SOPHIE



Dressage riders Beau & Sophie putting on a demonstration

Sophie had struggled to engage with mainstream education throughout her school life. After joining Stepney Bank Stables through our Alternative Provision and Changing Lives Through Horses programme, she began to thrive in an environment where she felt supported, valued and able to learn through practical experiences.

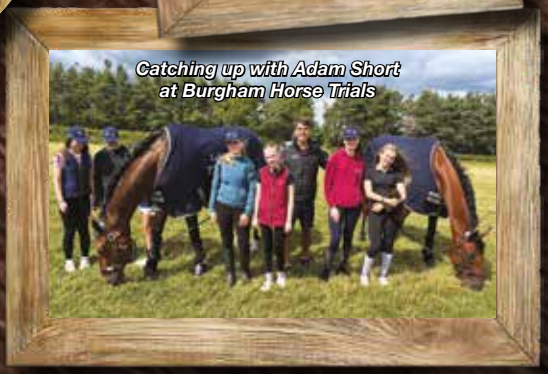
During her time at Stepney, Sophie developed her confidence, built positive friendships and developed a strong range of practical equestrian skills. She also achieved recognised accreditation, giving her the qualifications and confidence to take her next steps in education.

This progression has enabled Sophie to move on to the Foundation Course at the National Horse Racing College, where she is currently studying. Sophie's journey demonstrates how the right environment, trusted relationships and meaningful practical learning can help a young person re-engage with education and progress towards their future goals.


Olympian Craig Heap cuts the ribbon on the refurbished Mechanical Horse room


Christmas Jumping Joy!


Former attendees and stars of CBBC's The Stables reflect on their childhoods at Stepney


Catching up with Adam Short at Burgham Horse Trials

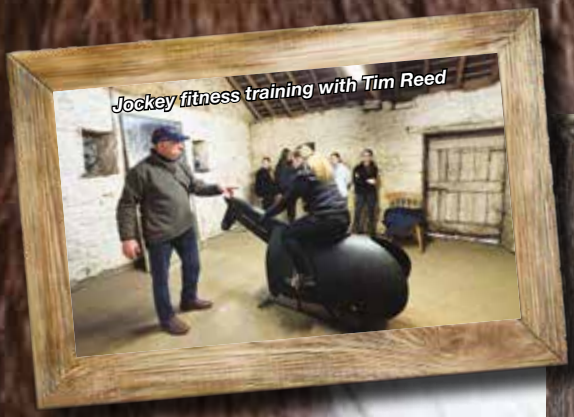

Current and former attendees talk about what makes Stepney special


Ella taking part in a Q and A about Stepney Western


Exploring the Victoria Tunnel


Dream gets a dental


Dancing at Top Yard


Jockey fitness training with Tim Reed


Enjoying the Christmas lights

"I like volunteering at Stepney because it offers you a range of different skills to learn and it has helped me with socialising with people. Stepney has opened so many opportunities for me and all the other volunteers and is a safe and welcoming place to go.
Since joining Stepney I have had a lot more confidence in myself and made lots of friends"

Young Attendee

Grow with Us

> *Everything is going good. Got my day off today. It's getting easier every day. Riding has had some knocks here and there but that will happen. Just gotta keep going.*
>
> Message from a former AP student now at Doncaster racing College

Over the last 12 months, we've seen so many young people grow in confidence, believe in themselves and achieve things they may not have thought possible. 76% of young people reported always feeling better when at the stables, and it's been incredibly rewarding to see their progress and be part of their journey.

This year, 7 young people completed their Ride Safe, 6 achieved their BHS Stage 1 complete, 1 their Stage 1 Care, and 2 young people progressed through to BHS Stage 2 Care and Lunge. We also gave 19 young people the opportunity to take part in a three-day residential, building independence, confidence and creating new experiences and memories together.

30 young people took part in our Pony Prom, while our Award Show welcomed more than 70 people, making it a fantastic celebration of everything they had achieved. Across the night, 21 trophies and 90 certificates were awarded, recognising the hard work, commitment and progress of our young people.

But don't just take our word for it. Here's what some of our parents have said:

"Could not love this place or staff anymore! It's been absolutely amazing for my daughter, thank you!"

"Coming to Stepney has absolutely changed X's life. I actually don't know where she would be without you all. She has grown in confidence so much since becoming a volunteer. She has shown care and responsibility for the horses, made strong friendships and learned to be comfortable talking to adults and peers. You have literally saved her, and I feel grateful every day for the safe space Stepney gives."

These words reflect what we see every day: when young people are given the right support, opportunities and a safe space to be themselves, they can thrive.

Moving forward, we want to keep building on this, giving even more young people the support, opportunities and belief they need to keep growing, challenging themselves and supporting one another.

Thomas Stoneman Youth Project Coordinator



Training for the BHS Riding School Championships with a local arena hire for practice



The Board of Trustees meet Max



Leanne delivering a 'training the Event Horse demo'



Pony Club at the regional Horse and Pony Care competition



Former volunteer, mentor and staff member Aaron starting Vet school



Training with Lisa Ashton as part of the ABRS+ Equicentric Futures Project



Longstanding volunteer Michael at the 25th anniversary celebrations



long serving volunteer Mark at our 25th anniversary celebrations

> *Her face lights up when she talks about Stepney. She wants to be there all the time which is a huge stride forward for a girl who didn't want to leave the house.*
>
> Teacher



Meeting event rider Laura Collett



Meeting some very special horses



Meeting eventing legend William Fox Pitt at Belsay Horse Trials



A Pony Club attendee seeing coach Jade competing at the County Show



Meeting one of Sophie Isaac's dressage horses



Brooke ready to take on the dreaded drain clean

LOVELY LETTER

To

Frecks and Philipa

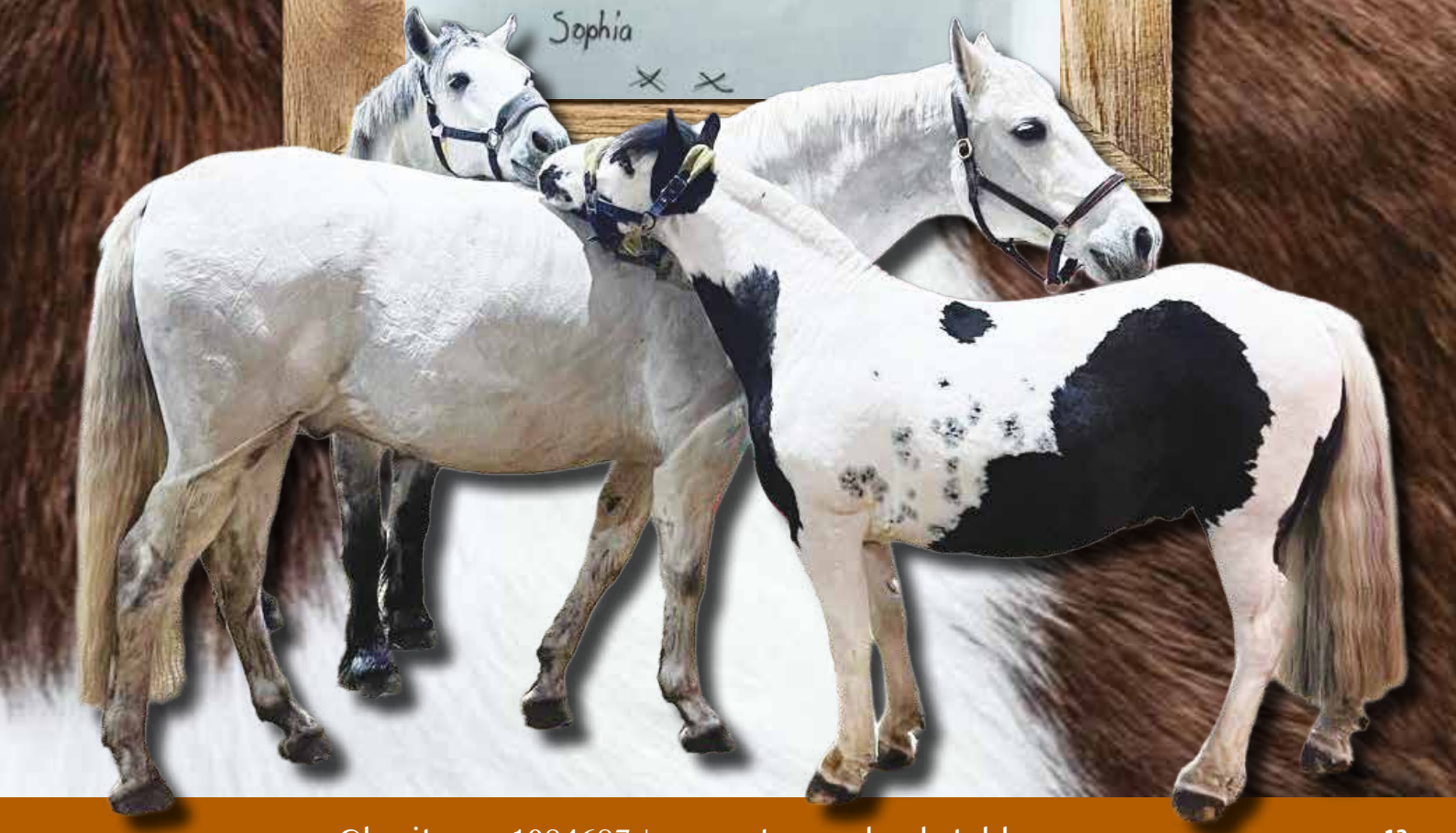
Freckles, I think I can speak for everyone by saying I truly will miss you so much. For most riders including myself you have been such a confidence boost. Walking calmly while new riders find their balance, trotting steadily through lessons. For months you've been a gentle partner for so many of us. I will miss looking for your familiar, friendly face. I am so so greatful I got the chance to ride you. I would not be the rider I am today without you. I love you so much I can't explain it. A humungus thank you to Philipa for letting us all ride, care and love your incredible horse. Freckles is truly one in a million. I will miss every aspect of her even the lovely hair everywhere

Love you both

lots and lots

Sophia

X X





Phoebe and Aimee delivering a session to Stage 1 scholars



Ringworm bringing disruption and financial challenges



Recieving a cheque from Chaser Communications



Peer Mentors taking part in Safeguarding training



Pony Prom



Rafting on residential





Staff and volunteers record their first radio show with Radio Ouseburn

"Stepney is a place where I have grown not just as a rider, but as a person, surrounded by supportive instructors and wonderful horses that inspire me to always do my best."

Young Attendee



Some of the team tackle the Yorkshire 3 Peaks



River walk on resi



Some of the Stepney Award winners



Scholars with their Stage 1 certificates

THANK YOU'S

We are always very conscious that it takes an army of incredible people to keep Stepney going and make it the wonderful place that it is.

This year we've called on our community to support us in even more ways, with adult volunteers stepping in to support key reception and horse care tasks, local businesses helping us tackle jobs to keep the building in a good state of repair and individual donors enabling vital work.

We want to say a HUGE thank you everyone who's made the magic happen.

Our trustees, staff and volunteers.

The brilliant and inspiring young people we get to work alongside.

Our horse hero's – we can never thank them enough for what they do.

Our riding clients who contribute to our running costs and bring the place alive.



> *Paula was great and very knowledgeable. My daughter learnt a lot about how her body is influencing the horse. She really enjoyed the experience too.*
>
> Mechanical Horse Lesson Parent

Our Funders, Donors and Supporters:

Apartment Group

Bart Endean

The Community Foundation

Chaser Communications

The Emile Faurie Foundation

Frazer Trust

The Garfield Weston Foundation

Hadrian Trust

Sir James Knott Trust

The National Lottery Community Fund - Awards for All

The National Lottery Community Fund - Reaching Communities

St Nicholas Learning Trust

The Barbour Foundation

The Finn Family Fund

HDH Wills

Inspire Education

The Roy and Pixie Baker Trust

The Joicey Trust

The Loriners Charitable Foundation

The Ringtons Fund

Mrs D.M. France-Hayhurst Foundation

William Dean Countryside and Educational Trust

National Flues and Fireplaces

Wellmind Solutions.

The 1989 Willan Charitable Trust Fund

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Keep up with our activities via

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