



Dear Friend of Ride High,

I'm emailing as we approach another milestone in Ride High's history - I am stepping down as its Chief Executive after 11 years. It may seem surprising so I thought that I would take the opportunity to explain. First a bit of history

During the summer of 2008 I had a crazy idea that I could set up a charity which would use horses to transform the lives of disadvantaged children. It was crazy because although I knew quite a lot about horses, I knew next to nothing about children - my only qualification was having had a difficult childhood myself but that was a very long time ago. Not only that, I knew nothing about the charity sector.

So with naïve enthusiasm I assembled 5 volunteers and on November 8th 2008 Ride High was "born". In the following April we started working with just 6 children – each week we rented a clubroom for 2 hours and bought one group riding lesson at what was then Loughton Manor Equestrian Centre.

And yet, even with such small beginnings we had a big vision. This is from the minutes of our first committee meeting:

“It is hoped that Ride High might eventually open its own riding facility so that it can expand the range of activities available to children such as NVQ training and work experience”

Despite those grand words, little did I imagine that 11 years on we would be working with 88 children a week and 37 acres in the centre of Milton Keynes would be The Ride High Equestrian Centre. Now it is the forever home for the charity and home to the equestrian centre business without which we couldn't afford to have this amazing place – in 2020 for the first time it will generate profit that will support the charity's work.

Although on the face of it is just a commercial equestrian centre it is unlike any other in the UK. In addition to offering riding lessons for the public and for Ride High children we:

- Run programmes for young people with learning difficulties
- Work with children on the autism spectrum
- Support companies with teambuilding and leadership training
- Run corporate team away and CSR days

It is a matter of great pride that Ride High's spirit and ethos run through the equestrian centre as well..... our mission to develop, coach and nurture people lies at the heart of everything we do across the whole organisation.

So here we are in 2020. As public funding has been decimated in recent years, the work of the charity has become more and more important. We have a waiting list of 60 children and we prioritise those who need us most - those who are in desperate straits and yet who have little or no professional support. It is no small task to work with nearly 90 children a week and it's a real achievement to have helped over 1500 children find hope, self-confidence and a better path in life. And yet of course it's never enough and every year we try to increase the number of children we help.

For every child there comes a time when he or she is strong enough to leave Ride High and fly by themselves. For Ride High itself, that time has come. On 28th January, after 11 incredible years, I will hand over to a new Chief Executive knowing that this amazing organisation will go from strength to strength. In Olivia Sugdon we have a person with huge experience and skills and on top of all that she has real enthusiasm and passion for Ride High - she even has horses of her own. She has added her comments below.

My plans are to remain closely connected with the charity as an ambassador - after a rest in the form of a 3 month sabbatical. I won't be working onsite but can be contacted via the charity and on my Ride High email address.

At this momentous time I want to recognise that it is not possible to have created Ride High without huge amounts of help from all quarters. As with any small business there have been dark days when it all seemed impossible and the thing that kept me going were the people who have helped us along the way of this extraordinary journey, who have given so much in various ways.

I am most proud of those who work with us day in, day out, to change lives for the better. Everyone who works with us is "a Ride High person" - someone who goes the extra mile and digs in when things are tough, who despite that, smiles for every visitor, who looks out for every colleague and volunteer and who believes passionately in what we do.

And then there are the volunteers and supporters without whom Ride High would not exist. There are quite literally thousands of people who have supported us with either their time, goods or money and have made the seemingly impossible happen – together we have created an organisation out of nothing.

I am personally immensely grateful. It has been a privilege to work with so many of you to change so many lives for the better.

With very best wishes,



Rachel Medill MBE
Founder of Ride High

Message from Olivia Sugdon

Hello,

I feel incredibly honoured and privileged to have been appointed Rachel's successor in the role of CEO at Ride High.

My childhood years were spent riding, growing up in the Pony Club and later experiencing a good spectrum of horse disciplines including Polo, Eventing and Dressage. Today, I'm still competing in Dressage around work and family.

Ride High resonates with me, not only from the Equine side, but also as a Mother, and someone who understands the benefit of a stable, encouraging environment.

From a successful commercial career in Healthcare, I am delighted to enter this new chapter at Ride High. Exciting times are ahead, and I look forward, not only to building on Rachel's phenomenal success, but also working with you all to help many more children in the coming years.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Olivia Sugdon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Olivia Sugdon
CEO Ride High