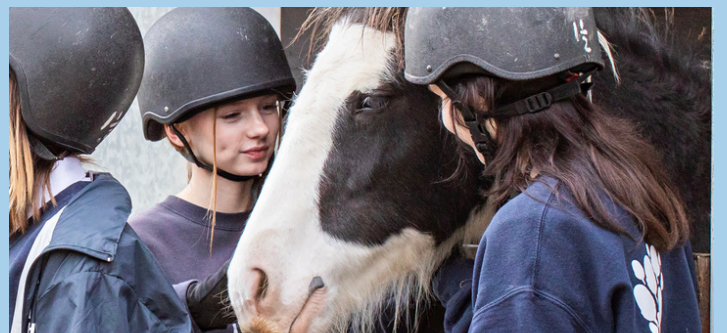
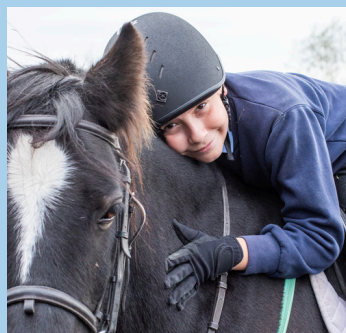




# Impact Report 2024



# Welcome

We are proud to present Ride High's 2024 Impact Report.

In an ever-changing and increasingly challenging environment, we remain steadfast in our mission to transform the lives of vulnerable young people in Milton Keynes and the surrounding areas. This year's report highlights not only the continued strength and impact of our work but also the exciting steps we are taking to extend our reach.

Despite the pressures faced by the sector, we have maintained our high standards and delivered lasting change for the children we support. Our outcomes data, combined with feedback from our members, their families, and our referral partners, continues to demonstrate the positive influence Ride High has on building confidence, resilience, and improving the mental health and wellbeing of our beneficiaries.

In 2024, we exceeded the expanded capacity achieved in 2023, reaching 379 children in need. Our team remains stronger and more resilient, having adapted to the increased demand with dedication and care. We have also continued to deepen our partnerships with local businesses and organisations, ensuring that our presence and impact are felt throughout the community.

What's more, we are now on the cusp of an exciting new chapter. Building on the confidence shown in our model by both local and national partners, we are preparing to establish a new site in the north western region of the country. This particular expansion will allow us to bring the Ride High programme to even more children. Even more exciting is that this is just one of two potential new sites planned for the next three years!

As we look back on another year of remarkable achievements, we also look forward with optimism and ambition. We are deeply grateful to all those who have supported us on this journey — our partners, funders, volunteers, and the entire Ride High community. Your continued belief in our mission is what makes this progress possible.

We invite you to join us as we take these exciting next steps. Together, we can continue to make a lasting difference in the lives of vulnerable children.

We hope you enjoy reading our 2024 Impact Report.



Established in

**2009**

We've supported

**2,380+**

children in total



Winner of  
'Outstanding Local Charity'



*Olivia Sugdon*  
Olivia Sugdon  
CEO



*Phil Zeidler*  
Phil Zeidler  
Chair of Trustees



# From waiting to wellbeing

Milton Keynes is a vibrant and growing city, and we are proud to play an important role in supporting its young people. However, the challenges faced by vulnerable children and families continue to rise. Increasing numbers of young people are struggling with poor mental health triggered by a variety of causes including poverty, trauma, abuse and neglect.

Unfortunately, demand for mental health services far exceeds capacity, leaving many children waiting too long for the support they desperately need. At the time of writing, Ride High has over 150 children on its waiting list. Our aim is to bring these children into the programme within three to six months, ensuring they receive the stability and support they need before their challenges escalate.

By offering early intervention, Ride High helps to plug this critical service gap. Our work not only supports children through a difficult period but also reduces the likelihood of their problems worsening over time — alleviating pressure on already overstretched services like CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), both now and in the future.

Our programme goes beyond emotional and mental wellbeing by promoting physical activity and encouraging a healthy lifestyle. Time spent outdoors with horses provides children with a unique opportunity to connect with nature, build positive relationships, and develop essential life skills.

The transformations we witness are truly inspiring. By intervening early and addressing multiple challenges at once, we empower young people to grow in confidence, resilience, and self-worth, giving them the best possible chance of a brighter future.

## Expansion on the horizon

Ride High has a proven track record of transforming young lives. Our continued success has led to growing demand, with increased referrals from medical professionals, social services, and schools, alongside long-term grants from major funders such as the National Lottery, the Henry Smith Foundation and Children in Need.

To meet this rising need, our Trustees are committed to expanding our services to reach more vulnerable children. We are excited to be developing a new site in the north west region of the country, with plans for a potential third site closer to home.

### Vital Signs in MK

**32%**

of children in MK are living in poverty

**25%**

of pupils aged 11-16 said they had a mental health problem

**26%**

of secondary school students missed 10% of school in 2023

**Anxiety**

is the biggest reason for low attendance

The average wait for an assessment from CAMHS is

**20 weeks**

and for a follow-up is

**27 weeks**

**50%+**

of pupils aged 11-16 are not active for the recommended 60 minutes a day

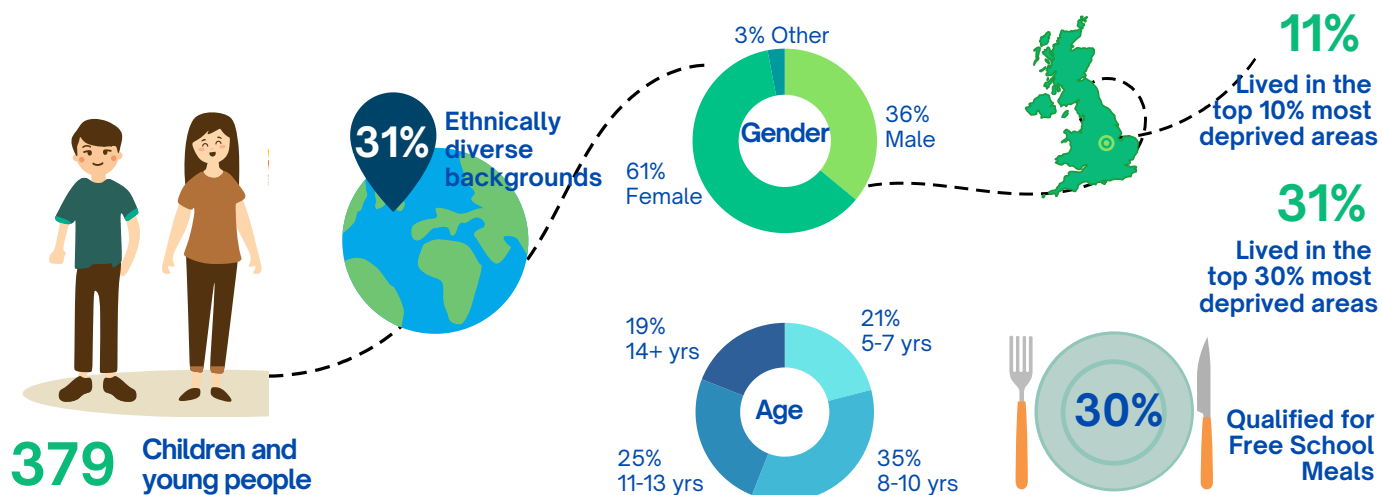
\*Vital Signs Report 2024 & 2025.  
MK Community Foundation.



# Impact

*"I have loved coming to Ride High. I've made so many friends and I feel more confident and I feel important. These things make me very happy".*

Ride High Member.



## Did you know?

All children are referred to Ride High by professionals.

**55%** are referred individually, but schools and agencies also refer groups of children they identify as needing additional support.

Referrals were received from  
**53**  
agencies

**13**  
Schools  
took part in our  
Schools Programme

## Reasons for referral

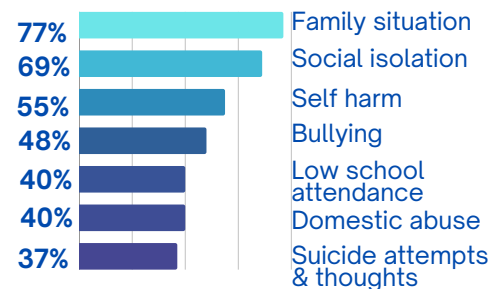


**65%**

have

**Mental Health**

**Challenges...** and several other mountains to overcome.



14-year-old Layla struggled with extreme anxiety and OCD, which worsened during COVID. Her fear of contamination led to excessive washing, avoiding touch, and refusing food, causing her to withdraw from school and become very isolated.

Despite these challenges, Layla found comfort in her love of animals, with her pets helping to manage her anxiety. After months of waiting for mental health support, Layla was referred to Ride High. Attending took immense courage, but it enabled her to rebuild her confidence and begin her journey toward healing.

*"We've seen Layla flourish since she's been here. She was lonely and frightened and in a really dark place. Now each week she comes out of Ride High having learnt a new skill, having overcome a new challenge and gaining a new friend. The support from the team has been instrumental in her thriving and it's like she's come alive again. Ride High has given Layla her life back".* Layla's mum.

## Layla





# Outcomes



**Attendance**  
**89%**

This is exceptional given that many of our members are not in full time education.



**99%**  
of members achieved the **Ride High Award**

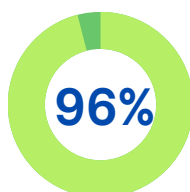


**270**  
Children participated in **additional activities**

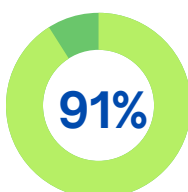


**74%**  
Attained a **Positive destination** on leaving Ride High

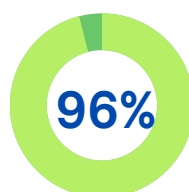
*"I enjoy being with the horses and riding has really helped my confidence. It makes me happy and I have achieved so much. I was struggling with my mental health, but now I'm doing much better. I'm even enjoying school now. It's made me a better person."* Ride High Member.



Look forward to coming to Ride High



Have friends at Ride High



Feel they can talk to staff about their troubles

In January we launched a two-year partnership with MK-based mental health service Arthur Ellis.

After starting at Ride High we often find children want to open-up about their challenges. This partnership allows us to provide additional wellbeing and resilience support to our members at a time that is right for them.



**61**  
Engaged in support activities



**27**  
Individual online counselling sessions



**Arthur Ellis**

Like many teenagers, Andy's mental health declined during COVID, and by the time her GCSEs came around, she was really struggling. With school attendance at just 27%, and despite receiving therapy, her mental health continued to deteriorate. At just 15, Andy made a second attempt on her life.

After being referred to Ride High by CAMHS, Andy joined a 12-week programme. From her first day, she bonded with Smartie, one of our ponies, finding comfort in whispering her worries to him. Over the weeks, Andy's time with Smartie, support from the team, and connection with other group members brought a positive shift. She transformed into a confident, vibrant young person - a stark contrast to the Andy who first arrived.

Since leaving Ride High, Andy has thrived and is studying at equine college. Andy courageously shared her story with over 200 guests at the Ride High Ball, receiving a standing ovation for her inspiring story.



# Outcomes

At Ride High, we carefully track the progress of the children we support using a variety of methods, including our Wellbeing Measure. This tool helps members reflect on their achievements while allowing us to identify areas where they need the most support. Progress is monitored regularly, with a focus on six key areas - often, self-esteem, confidence, and emotional resilience emerge as the most common areas where our members need support.

Our data consistently shows that children with the greatest needs make the most significant progress, and younger members often benefit the most.



Mixed groups	School groups
99%	100%
Made progress in one or more of their target areas	Made progress in one or more of their target areas




## Where children made the most progress

79%	Communication	67%
74%	Self-esteem and confidence	68%
71%	Relationships	69%
73%	Self-awareness & control	69%
75%	Contribution	66%
77%	Emotional resilience	77%

## Level of progress achieved by those with the highest need

The two highlighted areas are the foundation upon which all others are built.



87%

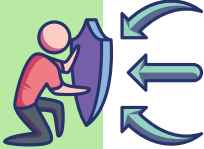
Made excellent or good progress

Self-esteem & confidence

93%

Made excellent or good progress

Emotional resilience



82%


Made excellent or good progress

Self-esteem & confidence

94%

Made excellent or good progress

Emotional resilience





When 16-year-old Cameron first joined Ride High, he was extremely anxious. Living with Autism Spectrum Condition, anxiety, and a moderate learning disability, he worried no one would like him — and wasn't sure he'd be able to get on a horse. But from his very first session, Cameron surprised himself, and his confidence steadily grew.

Through the clubroom sessions he began to share his thoughts and make friends, showing incredible kindness to everyone around him. Riding didn't come easily at first, but with encouragement, Cameron mastered rising trot — and soon he was able to trot independently, beaming with pride.

Cameron's journey at Ride High was transformational. He overcame his self-doubt, built strong friendships, and developed a belief in himself that he hadn't felt before. As he said with a huge smile, *"They really do like me."* His mum told us: *"I can't thank you enough — you've changed Cameron's life, and he will cherish his time at Ride High forever."*

## Cameron



When Rosie was bullied at school, she became anxious and started to question her self-worth. With nowhere to turn for support, Rosie felt let down and isolated. Her mental health was suffering and after a visit to A&E where she couldn't even be seen, her family felt helpless. Then, someone mentioned Ride High—and everything changed.

From the moment she found out she had a place, Rosie had something to look forward to. Meeting Mark and the team, who instantly understood and connected with her, gave her a sense of belonging, and she was able to build new friendships. The horses, especially her favourite Norbert, project work in the clubroom, and the consistent routine of her weekly visit helped her to thrive. Rosie never missed a session — even when unwell — and always returned home with lots of stories to share.

Ride High gave Rosie confidence, stability, and joy and had a profound impact on her whole family. *"After such a difficult time, we can't thank you enough for everything you have done"*, mum and dad said. *"It's been life changing"*.

## Rosie



*"At Priory Common School, we have been privileged to work with Ride High for the past three years, providing our vulnerable pupils with unique experiences in riding and working with horses. These sessions have significantly contributed to our pupils' resilience and self-confidence, perfectly aligning with our school motto: 'We take Pride, we Care, we are Successful.' The Ride High staff are exceptional, consistently adapting to the individual needs of each pupil, ensuring that every child benefits from this enriching experience."*

Gill Cash, Head of Priory Common School.



# Our people

## Our volunteers

Our incredible volunteers are an essential part of the Ride High family. Week after week, they provide support to our members during their riding and clubroom sessions, offering a friendly and trustworthy presence that helps children feel safe, valued, and encouraged.

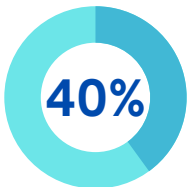
The impact of our volunteers goes beyond their time and commitment — they create a positive and nurturing environment where children can thrive. In return, many of our volunteers describe their experience at Ride High as deeply rewarding, knowing they are playing a vital role in transforming young lives.

Our volunteers are truly at the heart of everything we do. Their dedication and compassion make it possible for us to continue delivering life-changing support to the children who need it most.

*"The main highlights for me come at random moments when I see particular young people developing in confidence or altering their attitudes and behaviours in a more positive way. I benefit personally by getting a real sense of achievement from the responses of the young people and the staff. The team could not be more welcoming and friendly."* Sue, Ride High Volunteer.



50 Regular volunteers



Have been volunteering for 4+ years



Volunteers donated over 3,000 hours in 2024



96% say it supports their mental health & wellbeing

### How volunteers benefit from volunteering at Ride High



## Our team

We are incredibly proud to have a friendly, compassionate, and highly skilled team at the heart of Ride High. Their unwavering dedication ensures that we continue to support the children with the highest needs in our community.

In 2024, we were especially delighted to celebrate a remarkable milestone — Hannah, our Children’s Manager, marked 10 years with Ride High. Her dedication and passion over the past decade have made a lasting impact on countless young lives, and we are so grateful for her continued commitment to our mission.

Together, our team remains the driving force behind everything we do, ensuring that Ride High continues to make a real difference in the lives of vulnerable children.





# Our supporters

We are incredibly grateful for the continued support from businesses and organisations across Milton Keynes, whose passion for transforming young lives mirrors our own. Our corporate partners go beyond financial contributions, offering their time, expertise, and resources to create meaningful and lasting impact.

In 2024, Ride High hosted several Corporate Social Responsibility days, welcoming teams from Santander, Aggregate Industries UK, SIS, BSI, and Pragmatiq to name a few. These teams took on various projects to help maintain and improve our site, ensuring a safe and pleasant environment for our members. Other organisations including Pluxee enabled their employees to use their volunteer days over a 12-week period, providing consistent weekly support to the children on our programme. This regular involvement allowed volunteers to build strong relationships with the children and witness the positive impact of their contributions firsthand.

We were also delighted to welcome Niftylift, whose team delivered engaging STE (Science, Technology, and Engineering) projects in our clubroom. These unique sessions sparked curiosity and inspiration, opening our children's eyes to exciting future possibilities.

These partnerships not only enrich the experiences of our members but also offer employees a rewarding opportunity to make a genuine difference — and we look forward to building on these relationships in the future.

*"At Cranswick it is our aim to raise the living standards across our local community through various charitable and social ventures. Since late 2023 we have grown our partnership with Ride High in various ways from providing funds through our Sports Grant to purchase new helmets for school holiday camps, to sponsoring, supporting and participating in fundraising events.*

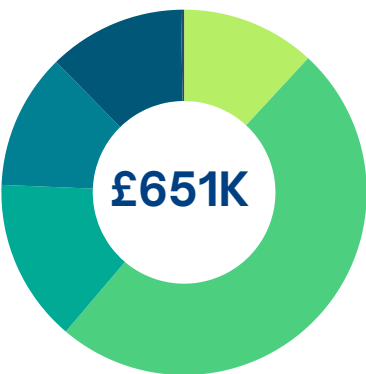
*Our position as one of the UK's largest food manufacturers has also allowed us to work with Ride High's younger members to expand the children's understanding of a healthy and balanced diet, while having some fun at the same time! We're extremely proud to support Ride High and we look forward to expanding our partnership in the future."*

Adam Cook  
Senior Category Marketing Manager



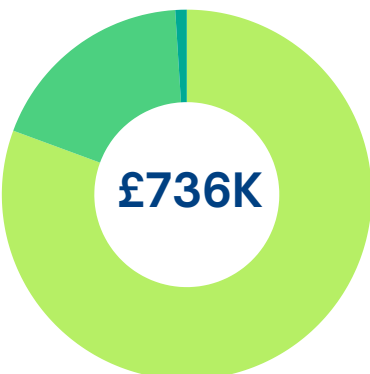
# Funding our mission

## Income



- Grants 49.33%
- Fundraising events 14.44%
- Donations 11.88%
- Rent & Investments 12.07%
- Schools Programme 12.01%
- Other 0.27%

## Expenditure



- Direct charitable activities (including horse sessions) 80.66%
- Raising funds 18.39%
- Ensuring good governance 0.94%

**81p**

of every £1 donated goes directly to

**charitable activities**

**Our Social value\***

Improved confidence and self-esteem

**£278,559**

Improved social skills

**£258,750**

\* We've begun using the HACT Social Value Bank Methodology to help measure the broader impact of our work. This currently reflects just two key outcomes. Our overall impact is far greater, but not all our outcomes currently align with those in the HACT model. We're committed to growing our use of social value reporting as part of our impact measurement.

# Grant funders

A grid of logos for various grant funders, including:

- ANNE DUCHESS OF WESTMINSTER'S FUND
- BERNARD SUNLEY FOUNDATION
- cashforkids
- COMMUNITY FUND
- GO
- Hays Travel FOUNDATION
- KidsOut THE FUN & HAPPINESS CHARITY
- Masonic Charitable Foundation
- NEWBY TRUST
- one stop
- SHANLY FOUNDATION
- SMK
- THE 7 STARS FOUNDATION
- THE CHILDWICK TRUST
- The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust
- THE GOSLING FOUNDATION
- THE HARGREAVES FOUNDATION
- The Henry Smith Charity
- The Hobson Charity
- THE VOICE OF RACING
- FOUNDATION
- TOYOTA
- THE TRANSPETROL FOUNDATION
- THE GOSLING FOUNDATION



# Fundraising

In 2024 fundraising events were diverse and supported by a wide variety of individuals and partners. Our Diamonds Are Forever-themed Ride High Annual Charity Ball dazzled guests, while our third Charity Golf Day at Woburn Golf Club proved another great success. We also welcomed cyclists back for our third Ride High Cycle Challenge and cheered on our runners participating in the Milton Keynes Marathon Weekend.

Beyond our own events, dedicated supporters took on personal challenges, including the London Landmarks Half Marathon, to raise vital funds for Ride High. We also launched our Gather and Graze for Good campaign, encouraging communities to come together in support of our cause.

We participated in Big Give match funding campaigns for the third year running. Giving our donors the opportunity to have their donations doubled for free.


We're incredibly grateful to everyone who contributed—whether by attending events, taking on challenges, or donating.








 [www.ridehigh.org](http://www.ridehigh.org)

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 [info@ridehigh.org](mailto:info@ridehigh.org)

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Find us on social media via @RideHighMK



Ride High Registered Charity Number: 1138260