

Alkham Valley Community Project

2010 Newsletter

Charity No. 1124733

For all of you who have been supported of our activities for ten years and more, many thanks for being patient, here is our first newsletter since the AVCP gained charitable status. Your support is just as important to us now as when we started, we hope you will enjoy this overview of our activities during 2010.

Woodland Walk Project Supported by AONB

Starting 2010 with great enthusiasm, the New Year saw the start of the work on the AVCP woodland walk. The Alkham Valley is designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, encouraged by funding support from Kent Downs AONB enthusiastic volunteers young and old got stuck into clearing trees and undergrowth to create a route to be used for AVCP horse riding sessions and walkers. The walk is the first section of a longer ride and drive track way which will give everybody the opportunity to leave the enclosed arena and experience the countryside from horseback or in a carriage, without the need to venture out onto the roads.



Bright Sparks Portacabin

Dover District Partnership Group supported us with 'Bright Spark' funding, the funding went towards the purchase of a classroom / social room facility. We bought a portacabin which afforded very welcome light and warmth. We have put the cabin to great use during the year hosting events such as first aid training, slide shows, lectures as well as day to day classroom, reception use. Walls display art work by Saddle Club members, certificates and posters.



Minibus Gift

Many thanks to the Campus Reprovision team at Kent County Council for the gift of a bright red wheelchair-accessible minibus. The minibus provided transport for a weekend's training for carriage drivers with disabilities, has transported volunteers to and from the project, and helped out collecting donations for the AVCP charity shop.



Our charity shop after late-night shopping



“Since Lucy as started riding she has been a lot happier and confident and outgoing. She loves going to the stables and helping out when she can, and I know she would come more often if she could. The staff members are always very helpful and patient with her.

The stables play an important part in Lucy's life in many ways, it means she can meet people in a friendly atmosphere who all share a love of horses and country life, something that more disabled people should be able to share in.”

Feedback from parents

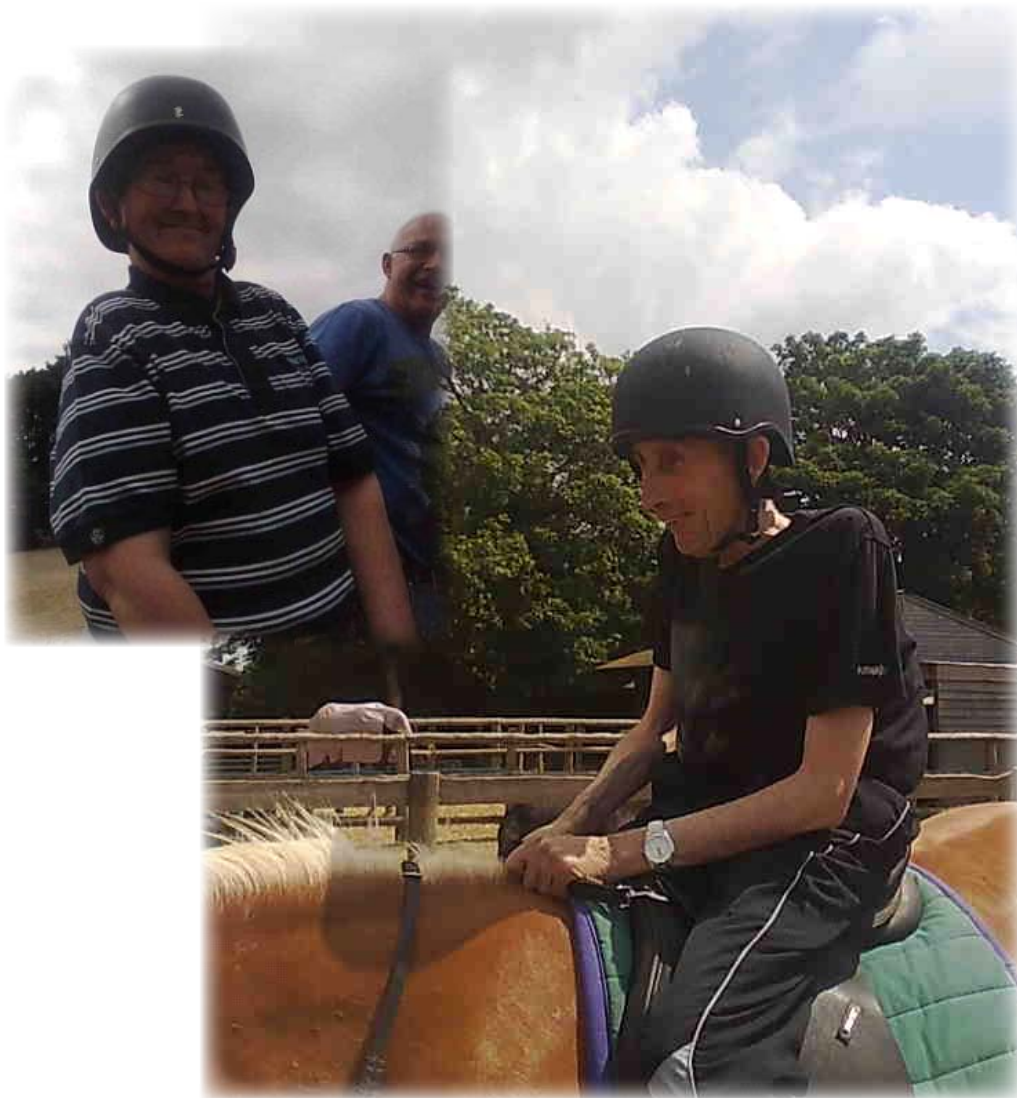
“My son has been kindly offered a part time work experience at the AVCP since September 09.

He has been learning a wide range of skills and working as part of a team. He thoroughly enjoys it and I've seen his confidence and self esteem grow.

The journey to and from the stables is a difficult one, so I was delighted to hear that there may be a possibility of transport being provided which will mean he will be able to in the future attend more days.”

Therapeutic horse riding and carriage driving

Over 200 adults and children benefited from horse riding and carriage driving during the year thanks to the funding support from **Colyer Fergusson Charitable Trust** and **Kent County Council Kick Start project**. Through their support we provided activities for 18 organisations and many individuals. We hope you enjoy reading some comments we have received about our project.



Feedback from a carriage driver

“As a registered blind person, who also suffers from other disabilities from a car accident many years ago.

Carriage driving has given me a freedom that I cannot describe; there are no words of thanks big enough which can be given to the AVCP who in the last year have taught me to drive a pony and carriage.

As 70% of blind people who live alone never go out of their houses, I was becoming one such person, how easy it was, just to stay in, instead of trying to go out. Cars parked on the pavement, overgrown hedges, busy roads, obstacles around every corner. Not to mention the fact how vulnerable a blind person is alone out there.

When I first went to the stables and yard a year ago, I thought I would never learn how to put on all the harness, or take it off, never mind driving a pony.

Now a year on not only am I putting harness on and taking it off but I can now drive a pony myself, and I have found a freedom I thought I would never find.

I have drove along Byways with the instructor, on a sunny day feeling the wind and scents that fill the air all around, of which I can never describe the beauty of it all.

I can now drive a 20metre circle, a serpentine and a figure of eight. All taught to me by the instructors and staff of this wonderful charity. Many disabled people from young children to adults. Many in wheelchairs, many not walking some totally disabled. Many under privileged youngsters, who have found like me, a freedom and utter exhilaration which they have never known, all of which will lead on to other things boosting their confidence and move onto perhaps greater things in this sport.

As I said words of thanks are not enough for all the hours that are put in, giving a chance to many a young person, whom was it not for the hard work and dedication of all the staff and volunteers, would never have been given the chance anywhere else. And like me would never know the pure joy of riding a horse or driving a carriage, or simply grooming a horse would bring.”

“The range of needs that our pupils have is huge; some have physical disabilities, some have multi sensory impairments and some have severe autistic spectrum disorders and some have a combination of disabilities; all of them have complex conditions. You and your staff have embraced our pupils in a very positive way, this not only helps to make them feel good about themselves but it also has a really positive impact on our staff.

Our children learn and develop through the riding and driving experiences you provide. They improve their knowledge and understanding of others and other living beings, they develop a better sense of balance, they are inclined to communicate better because the motivation of riding is so great and they leave the stables relaxed and happy. At school we look to improve pupils’ learning through the five common senses of taste, touch, smell, sight and hearing, and we also aim to improve skills by developing the vestibular and proprioceptive senses; riding and driving help to develop these.”

Teacher’s feedback

“My name is Annette, I am a below knee amputee. I have always loved horses and own 4 of my own.

I had my accident 7 years ago and about 1 year ago was ready to give up horses as I didn’t feel safe riding.

One day I was talking about my problems when Amanda suggested carriage driving. So I started to have lessons and loved it. Then after awhile Amanda asked if I would like to be a buddy for other disabled drivers and I said yes.

I am loving it there and I am just doing a course in Community Coaching Leader and First Aid. Then I hope to go and help others to carriage drive.

I am enjoying being part of the team and hope that I will always be a useful member”

Volunteer’s feedback



“Jo Murrell and her team clearly demonstrate a consistent and conscientious non-discriminatory and creative approach which ensures people of all abilities get the most out of their experiences at the Project, whether it is riding for pleasure, learning about horticulture or developing skills for the workplace.”

Organisation’s feedback

Helping others and feeling great about it

During 2010 we have been overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and hard work invested in the project by a group of students, volunteers and work experience candidates. The AVCP wouldn't have been the same without the input from these wonderful participants who worked on both the stable yard and the garden. Our thanks go to **Action for Rural Communities in Kent** who administered funding support from the **European Social Fund** for this project.

Case study

Mr A is quite unsteady on his feet and inclined to forget things, finding it difficult to focus on tasks. He has obviously relied on people doing tasks for him, he appeared over anxious about remembering what he had learnt and did struggle learning the names of equipment he needed to use. He had difficulty at first concentrating on what had to be done, tending to stand back and wait for others to complete his tasks. Mr A showed obvious enjoyment in his work however, and once he had completed a task a number of times and he understood what the task required he became keen to begin as soon as he arrived. His physical stamina improved and he found he could complete the tasks more easily; this in turn improved his confidence. Mr A was delighted to learn about horses and took great pride completing his work sheets, he has lately begun to help others, assisting with the ramps during carriage driving sessions for wheelchair users and preparing the area ready for riding sessions. Mr A takes pride in being a useful team member, he enjoys the social life being at the project affords him and has benefited greatly in confidence and self esteem since joining the AVCP.



Driving ambition

Annette Johnson worked towards taking her Community Sports Leader Award during 2010, volunteering her time and energies helping other drivers and training new volunteers. Annette received funding from Active Dover for further training and attended events at the Unicorn Equestrian Centre and Ashfields Carriage and Polo Ground. The training was organised by **Carriage Driving Sports Group for drivers with disabilities** (CDSGdd). Also pictured is Stephen Holland, Stephen has been carriage driving for over twenty years, this year driving for the first time in public without any assistance and with a great deal of skill.

Wheelchair accessible carriage driving

During 2010 the AVCP expanded to include carriage driving for wheelchair users. We would like to thank **The Lord Taverner's** for the funding support needed to purchase our carriage. This activity has met with great demand both for regular weekly sessions and for one off special events. One young man came along and had a go at driving as part of 'Aiming High' funded by Children in Need. He became a pin up boy for the AVCP **Peoples Millions** funding bid. Well done Clara and Ryan for all your help with photos and the filming. We hope you enjoyed being on the ITV news! We are very pleased to say that our funding bid was successful; we are now able to purchase a second wheelchair accessible carriage and two ponies plus harness. The grant also supports some session cost and we are thrilled to be able to expand this valuable activity.



Saddle Club

Saddle Club ran for a second year providing young people a two hour activity on a Saturday learning to ride and look after a horse. Saddle Club is a subsidised activity with members making a £6.50 donation. We were supported this year by **Kent County Council Youth Service** and **Kent Sport**. In addition to the weekly club activities, members have benefited from a series of special events including a coach trip to visit The Magic of the Horse performance at the Towerlands Equestrian Centre, a marvelous musical equestrian extravaganza well worth the trip. We invited Elizabeth Roberts along to give a display and talk about riding a horse side saddle, many members were able to 'have a go' themselves. They were also able to find out how to long rein when Kate Spillet bought her 'Pocket Rocket Team' of Shetland ponies and explained how she taught her ponies to perform various 'tricks', standing on a box and lunging in different directions two at a time. A carriage driving day with Sonny Hillier introduced members to the sport of driving and further driving days are planned next year.

Awards For All keep us in training

A successful grant bid to Awards for All, enables Trustees and staff to receive the training that is required to run a project such as the AVCP. We look forward to experiencing progress during the next few years as the project goes from strength to strength.



Thank you **Kent County Council** for funding hand washing units for the yard and garden, these will be in action early in 2011.

The AVCP is pleased to report that during the autumn we successfully applied for ABRS membership (**Association of British Riding Schools**) this membership brings the advantage of accredited equitation and stable management tests, we look forward to launching these in 2011. Extra news from 2010 includes Saturday Saddle Club Horse Sams trip to the Royal International Horse Show. Young volunteers inventive win of the Family Pony Class at the National Connemara Breed Show. Congratulations also to Minnismoor Silver Charm who won Connemara Society Champion Foal, thank you to all young volunteers who helped at these events.



“Everything in the garden is blooming lovely”

The AVCP garden has grown to include new projects during the year. The woodland walk, sister project to the garden, and inspired by gardening participants has proved very popular during the summer. The AVCP Small Animal Unit has also got off to a good start with goats, a couple of chickens and a number of small quail, rabbits too. The latest garden ‘off shoot’, is the construction of a large soft fruit cage. The materials for construction and plants sponsored by **Proactive Development** as a project for their residents. Photos show gardeners returning from a trip to purchase plants and enjoying a celebratory well earned cup of tea. The garden was set up originally with funding from **Coyler Fergusson Charitable Trust**. **Coyler Fergusson** has continued to support activities during 2010 by funding activity running costs.



Donations

The AVCP received local backing with donations from **Sir Charles Jessel Charitable Trust** and continued funding support from the members of the **Snargate Lodge**. The project also received donations from individuals; your support is greatly appreciated. The website will soon feature a Wish List Page, featuring items we regularly need to replace and details of an annual sponsorship scheme. For those wondering how to donate there's a paypal link on the website

www.avcp.co.uk