

Sirona Spring/Summer Newsletter 2020



Welcome to our latest newsletter – we hope it finds you safe and well during these unprecedented times. Whilst most of the country has been under lockdown, the board of trustees took the decision for Sirona to remain open.

We have been providing an essential service, under a reduced COVID-19 timetable, to some of our most vulnerable young people. This includes those needing mental health support, those in foster in care and those with an education, health or care plan.

This has been a challenge both financially and operationally. We sought guidance from our local authorities and have been supplied with PPE from Devon County Council. We have adapted our timetable to have shorter sessions and a maximum of two young people at a time. This together with rigorous risk assessments, robust cleaning and social distancing has meant we have been able to work safely. We have also provided virtual equine-assisted therapy sessions.

There were worries about how we would manage to work safely, and the financial aspects of remaining open with the majority of our income streams drying up. But the Sirona team have pulled together under extraordinary circumstances - remaining positive despite having to be flexible in an ever changing environment. The team had to cope, often at short notice, with staff members being furloughed or self-isolating or the timetable changing. There were also worries about the effect changing practitioners or sessions would have on the young people attending.

Feedback from young people and their parents/carers has been overwhelmingly positive, with their session at Sirona being the only constant in their lives for many of our participants. This has been especially the case for those young people in foster care, some of whom have experienced the additional upheaval and anxiety of placement moves during lockdown.

We are very glad we made the decision to remain open for these young people. We are conscious that our provision is going to be in even more demand going forward with the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of many more young people.



Feedback

'If I didn't come to Sirona I'd stay in my room like a hermit all week'

'I feel calm when I'm at Sirona, it's calm there, everyone is nice and friendly which makes me relax. It's quiet too.'

'I love it here, I wish I could come every day'

'The horses make me feel like I'm one with them. It feels like the horses care for me like I'm their child'

'Talking about things instead of keeping it in has helped me be calmer, and now if I'm stressed I take a deep breath in and calm down'

EQUI-ART



We were lucky that just before lockdown happened we were able to complete our special Equi-Art project. This was a project to create some mosaic signs for our new buildings, and was supported by a grant from Devon County Council and local community artist Jan O’Highway.

On weekly artist in residence sessions, participants worked together with members of the Sirona staff and volunteer team to design the signs for our classroom, office, haybarn and new cloakroom and toilet. They then made figures out of clay which were linked to the buildings and set in amongst the mosaic and letters, such as haybales, stirrups and saddles, horse heads and many other creative creations! Two of the signs have now been fired and glazed, set in the steel frames and are up on the buildings with the final two near completion.

It is so lovely to have some colourful artwork on the yard. It was a fantastic additional activity to offer our participants, many of whom very much benefited from the opportunity. One young person discovered he had a natural talent for pottery and has been given the opportunity to take this further – something he may not have

discovered without this project. We therefore very much hope to gain funding to continue to provide dedicated art sessions in the future at Sirona.

NEWS FROM THE HERD



Whilst the country has been gripped by the pandemic and getting used to living in lockdown the Sirona horses have just carried on being horses, mainly grazing, drinking, dozing and play fighting – in the case of Toro and Rupert Jones, the mares preferring peace and quiet. In fact, we have all enjoyed the quieter and slower pace of life on the Dartington Hall estate, with hardly any cars on the lanes and much reduced traffic noise from the main road down the valley.

The horses can teach us much about how to return to calmness after times of stress, with their capacity to react in the moment to threat or confrontation, but then return to peace once the danger has passed.

With a reduced number of sessions, the horses have had more time off but have continued with their normal exercise programme to keep them fit and healthy. This has included some initial training in preparation to bringing Chasy along for driving, which she has taken in her stride. This has involved getting her used to things been dragged along behind her such as chains, then introducing a tyre and noisy metal drum. Next step will be putting her in harness and her getting used to dragging the tyre,

then in shafts and a cart – when we can find a professional to help with this side of her training.

If anyone knows of anyone locally who would be able to help with this please put them in touch for later in the year when we can work safely alongside someone.



FUNDING



With having to cancel all our public courses and events such as our open day, together with stopping all our group equine-assisted sessions, educational courses and nature-based activities, and many grant funders having suspended their funds, finances have been a huge concern for Sirona these last few months.

Once again many people have supported Sirona in different ways - from supporting us with Facebook birthday fundraisers, donations via paypal on our website, choosing Sirona when shopping at the Co-op and voting for us for a £1,000 Ecclesiastical award. In addition, Northampton School for Girls supported us through the 2.6 challenge to raise funds for Sirona, with Tara undertaking 26 ball squats a day for the campaign and raising £219. Thank you so much to everyone, it is so much appreciated and has been a great help during this time toward our horse care and other costs.



We have also been really grateful to the wonderful Wooden Spoon Trust for supporting Sirona once again, this year with a grant for us to purchase the 'Tiny Home' Shepherds hut that Dartington Hall had kindly loaned us. With this grant from the Wooden Spoon we have been able to purchase the Tiny Home and start to complete the repairs and improvements it needs. This will be a really valuable additional therapy and 1-1 space, together with a lovely warm home for Ginger, our very special yard and therapy cat!



We are still very much in need of funds to help us get through the next part of the year whilst we put in new funding applications and seek additional funding to cover our shortfall. One way people can support us is to sponsor one of our special horses at Sirona. For a small monthly donation the funds will support the feed and other costs such as farrier, worming, dentist etc for that horse or pony. Sponsors will receive a photograph and certificate and the opportunity to visit their sponsored pony (once we are fully open again).

Our patron Nicholas Evans says,

“Lockdown has been really hard for so many charities and Sirona is no exception. Our Sponsor a Pony scheme is a great way for anyone who loves these fabulous animals to help keep us going. Every sponsorship helps us help those who so urgently need us.”



TRUSTEE OPPORTUNITY

We are looking for a new trustee to join the Sirona board. Our current trustees have diverse backgrounds include social work, counselling, teaching, equestrian and more.

Someone with an understanding of young people/vulnerable groups and appreciation of animal assisted interventions would be ideal, and experience/background in any of the following even better:

HR/media/marketing/finance/IT/legal etc.

The board meet a minimum of quarterly. Please get in touch with us at info@sironaequine.org.uk for more information.



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