



Registered
Charity
1169709

Annual Review

2023



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“If ever you need to restore your faith in humanity, take a look at what Sirona is doing. It provides love and healing in a world that too often seems cruel and uncaring.” - George Monbiot, author, journalist & Sirona Patron



CEO Report



2023 was once again a very busy year at Sirona.

We continued to receive increased demand for our provision, with waiting applications up by a further 13% this year. This would appear to be a reflection of the national mental health crisis in young people, compounded by the lack of statutory support available. Recent figures show that the number of under 18yrs referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) has risen by 53% since 2019. In Devon there were nearly 1500 young people on the waiting list for CAMHS in 2022. Alongside this we are seeing more young people being referred to Sirona who are unable to attend school due to anxiety – again reflecting the national trend.

We have especially noticed a large increase in teenage girls attending Sirona this year who are unable to attend school due to their anxiety, and who are self-harming, isolated, and in some cases completely withdrawn from society apart from their attendance at Sirona. In addition, at the time of writing this report we have 4 young people attending who are exploring gender identity issues, one of whom is only 7 years old.

Our work continues to be centred on our participants being at the heart of our provision; we follow a strengths and child-centred approach, and our annual community open day is an important part of this. Young people and volunteers are involved in all aspects of the day, which takes many months of planning and lots of behind the scenes work to make it a successful event on the day.

Our open day on the 1st of July had over 170 people through the gates again and raised a fantastic £1,424.26 through donations and sales of cakes, plants, games, bric a brac stall and a raffle. Young people and volunteers from our community helped with all aspects of the day such as horseshoe painting and games, introducing the horses and other animals to the public, and helping on the stalls.

The highlight of the day is the horse agility demonstration that participants take part in with some of the ponies in

the arena. This showcases the horse handling skills and awareness young people have learnt from attending Sirona.



Time and time again we are truly astonished at how much young people have grown from when they started at Sirona, often withdrawn and with no confidence in themselves, to being able to skilfully lead a pony around an obstacle course, reading their body language and talking to complete strangers about their experience and knowledge.

“I never thought I would be able to help on the open day – I hate people watching you – and I hate shows - but here everyone is so nice and not judgy so i felt like I could do it”.

Despite the challenges of meeting the rising demand for our provision, alongside the more complex support needs of young people referred to Sirona, our staff and volunteer team remains passionately committed to our work, with the benefits we see daily confirming the vital importance of interactions with animals and nature for disadvantaged young people.

We could not continue our work without the support of our donors and funders, including the many individuals who support us through fundraising events and our ‘friends of Sirona’ scheme. Thank you.

Dr Hannah Burgon

Achievements & Performance

A summary 2023

Beneficiaries



115 direct beneficiaries
486 total beneficiaries



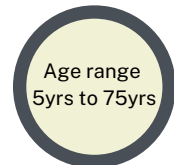
64% female, 32% male
4% LGBTQ+



8 Young Helpers



88.4% white British
11.6% other ethnic groups/mixed race



Age range
5yrs to 75yrs

Delivery



610 equine and
animal-assisted
sessions delivered



1,495
direct delivery
hours



86.9%
attendance
rate



302 Therapeutic
Horsemanship
Sessions



61 Level 1 Horse
Care Sessions



34 Supported Volunteer
Sessions



88 Changing
Lives Through
Horses Sessions



64 Equine-
Assisted Therapy
Sessions



8 Horse Works
Sessions



8 Holiday
Sessions



45 Taster Sessions

Reasons for Referral



65% referred with
mental health/anxiety -
compared to 43% in 2022



36% had an
Education & Health Care Plan
(EHCP)



40% were not in education/
in p/t education or NEET
compared to 19% in 2022



24% care experienced



35% with an Autistic Spectrum diagnosis -
compared to 23% in 2022



16% referred with
self-harming behaviours

Volunteers



48 volunteers



2051 hours volunteer hours donated



Costed @ £15 pr hr = £30,765

Our Equine and Animal-Assisted Sessions

We have continued to provide a range of different types of session to suit the diverse needs of our participants over the past year. From feedback and to help meet the increased demand for our provision from beneficiaries and local referring organisations, we introduced a new session called Horse Works in Autumn 2023 to suit the needs of young people 14 – 25 years who have completed a course of 1-1 therapeutic sessions at Sirona and gained the confidence to progress onto a small group activity. Three young people have attended these sessions to date, and we have started a waiting list with the aim to provide between 4-6 spaces for young people on Horse Works at a time depending on their levels of support needs, whilst recognising the need to keep the group a small, safe, therapeutic space.

“Without Sirona, there is very little on offer for young people who have fallen through the gaps”.

Our 1-1 Therapeutic Horsemanship and Equine-Assisted Therapy sessions have continued to be the most in demand of our provision; this is due to the increased need for 1-1 specialist support for young people with high levels of mental health and other related support needs. Providing this provision alongside horses and other animals set within the therapeutic aspect of the natural environment is therefore much in demand, and there are limited similar opportunities within our locality.

Supported Volunteering Group

This has continued to be a popular group and is provided to participants on a donation basis supported by the lottery community fund. There is a constant waiting list for those 18 years and over with a range of support needs to join the Supported Volunteer group. To manage this demand, we run the Supported Volunteering group on a 6-week rolling basis so new participants normally only have a 6 week wait and can then return to the waiting list for the next available block of sessions. Participants are referred from sources such as local GPs, social prescribing officers, NHS mental health teams, residential care providers and privately. They are referred with support needs such as mental health or physical health issues, isolation and exclusion in their communities, learning disabilities, and those who may have lost confidence following an illness which resulted in them losing employment for example.

“Being in a group is something I didn’t think I would be able to do”.



Summer Holiday Animal & Art Sessions

During the summer holidays we ran new Animal Active and Art sessions based on our previous Holiday Horsemanship holiday sessions but encompassing more variety with the other animals we now have at Sirona, together with art sessions with a local community artist. The sessions allowed new participants to attend Sirona who may not be able to attend during the school term, and for those who already attend Sirona but who need the consistency of provision to continue over the holidays. The small group sessions enable social opportunities for those young people who may be isolated over the long summer holiday, and those for whom mainstream holiday activities can be too overwhelming.



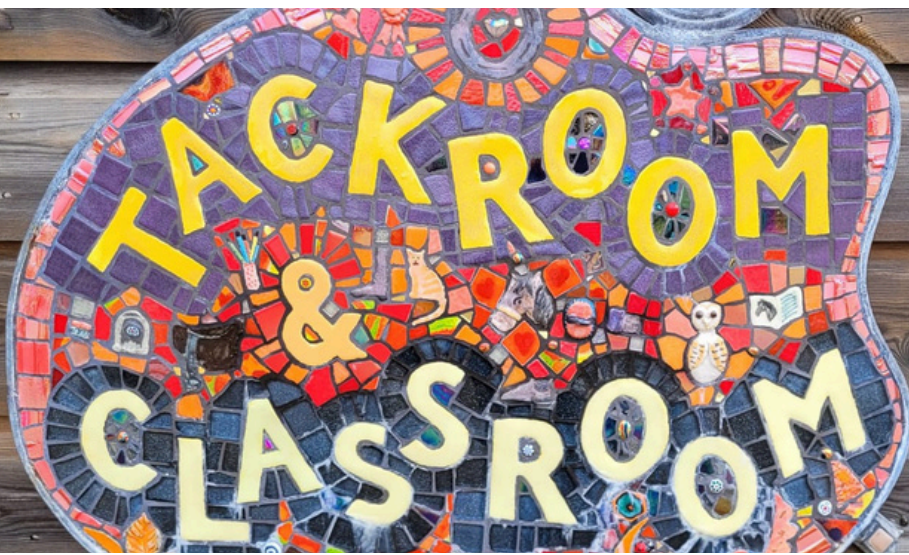
OCN London accredited course status

Following a huge amount of work on the part of our education co-ordinator Kirsty, a qualified teacher, we were able to finally gain independent centre approval status for delivering accredited courses at Sirona at the end of 2023. Previously we have partnered with Bicton College to deliver the Level 1 in Equine Care course, but sadly, due to education budget cuts they have withdrawn from outreach delivery partnerships, as have other local colleges. Because we strongly believe in the power of education to empower disadvantaged young people to have better life outcomes, we therefore explored alternative options, with the OCN London range of courses being a good fit for Sirona. We are excited for the further opportunities this can offer us in being able to deliver other related training, such as environmental and personal development courses in the future if there is demand for these.



Our Impact

Young people experiencing school challenges



We have experienced a sharp increase in the number of young people referred to Sirona over the past two years who are not attending school, attending on a part-time timetable, educated other than at school (EOTAS) or electively home educated (EHE).

In 2023 we closely followed the progress of 18 young people in the EOTAS / EHE category who attended Sirona for 12 or more sessions over the year.

2 young people were on the Autistic Spectrum and home educated. Both completed 12 sessions at Sirona to reduce isolation, build confidence and meet other young people - both engaged with regular weekly attendance and completed their set targets. 1 other young person remains at Sirona but has been able to return to education on a part-time basis, and another participant remains at Sirona as she only started in the Autumn term and requires further support to build her confidence.

Out of the 18 young people 13 were not attending school or any other provision when they were first referred to Sirona, and 5 were only attending on a limited, part-time timetable.

The final young person has just been able to return to Sirona following a break where she was unable to leave the house due to extreme anxiety and OCD. We adapted our provision to virtual online sessions in order to keep the contact and relationship with her practitioner and animals at Sirona. During a child in need meeting with other professionals involved in her care it was agreed that this child-centred approach was pivotal in enabling her to be able to leave her house and return to Sirona.

Following attendance at Sirona over 12 or more sessions, 9 either returned to school on a full-time basis, moved to an alternative education provider or progressed onto college. 2 moved into employment and 2 have progressed onto other move-on programmes at Sirona; the OCN London accredited Level 1 Animal Care course, and a new Horse Works group for young people to learn 'skills for employment'.

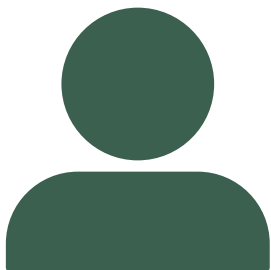
The young people's overall attendance rate at Sirona was 86.9%. This is in contrast to an absence rate of 81% of young people in Alternative Education Provision Pupil Referral Units.

Participant Feedback

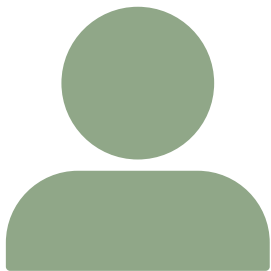
Collected from participants over 2023



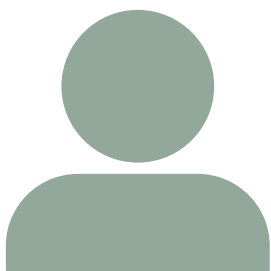
“Being at Sirona – has helped me with my emotions loads. I am calmer now and it has helped me learn new skills with animals and feel more confident. I am a lot happier as I have something to do – I know things can get better now as people want to help”.



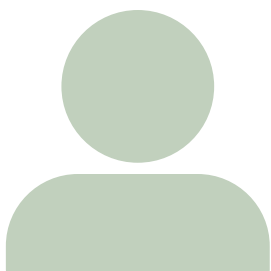
“Sirona has helped me eat better, because I’m doing something it makes me want to eat. Now I want to be a farrier or equine vet in the future”.



“It’s made me more happy and more confident in myself. They’ve made me more confident to show kindness towards other animals and help them - like the mouse. I’m more sensitive – when I walk with Rupert it makes me feel like I’m just like him”.



“Working with sensitive animals you need to have stability in yourself. Horses might react in a negative way if you shouted - they are prey animals. So you have to be really gentle. I’ve realised I have to be calmer. If I was angry it may change the horse’s behaviour so I have to be calm. It’s made me happier.”



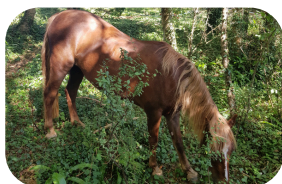
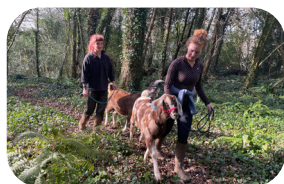
“I would like to say a massive thank you for helping me to fulfil my dream..... You have helped me with so much and taught me so much more. I also want to say thank you to all the horses and ponies. I will miss you all so much and a special thank you to Ginger (cat) for being my little helper”.



Environmental Activities

Our biodiversity and educational projects during 2023

Nature-Based Sessions



In line with our work being underpinned by encouraging an understanding and appreciation of the environment for our participants, our session activities continued to provide opportunities for learning about nature and increasing biodiversity on our land. Activities included taking the ponies and goats for a foraging walk, learning what plants the animals choose to eat and identifying their health properties. Some young people made pressings of the plants and created scrap books with information about the plants they researched.

Environmental Journalist



To support Sirona in promoting our work we were very privileged to have the well-known environmental journalist and activist George Monbiot join Sirona as a new patron in 2023. In October 2023 George took part in a popular community fundraiser 'Desert Island Tracks' in Totnes where he talked about his life and work and raising £1,854.35 for Sirona.

Nature & Sensory Garden



Our passionate horticulturist trustee Laurel Ellis (*top right*) continued to work tirelessly developing our nature sensory garden, planting a range of sensory grasses and creating a wildflower meadow around the apple trees, with support from volunteers and Shaun Dérioiz who spent a weekend working through torrential rain and mud to clear the area for seeding.

Biodiversity



Volunteers helped with planting a native hedgerow and assisting with the development of the pond area. An area of our horses' field was mulched with old hay and reseeded with a wildflower meadow seed attractive to bees and butterflies in order to increase the biodiversity of our rye grass rich monoculture pasture, which is not good for native ponies.

Local and National Connections

Community events, training and working with other organisations



Events

- 13 training courses and events provided to team and public
- 6 presentations given to external organisations including Cambridge University
- 23 community events/networking meetings attended/hosted

Worked with over 30 local and national organisations including;

- Cambridge University and Hartpury University
- Human Equine Interaction Register (HEIR)
- Schumacher College
- Guide Dogs UK (Young People)
- Keeping Young Totnes Safe
- The British Horse Society and many others

Events and Outreach

2023: A busy year for Sirona in terms of our wider outreach

Royal Invitation

A key highlight was being invited to meet HRH Princess Anne at the HEIR 1st anniversary event at Saddlers Hall in London in the Spring. The Sirona team were on the original working group helping to establish the register in order to improve standards and practice in the field. There are now 50 registered members and growing, with recognition in many media publications this year including the national equine magazine, Horse and Hound.



Cambridge University Presentation

We were also invited to present at a conference and networking event at Cambridge University in July, centred on bringing together selected people and organisations with a wide range of expertise in the field of equine and animal-assisted interactions. Dr Hannah Burgon (CEO) and Sarah Urwin (Chair of trustees) presented on 'The importance of Equine-Welfare in Equine-Assisted Interactions'. The presentation was well-received, and we were able to learn from other presentations ranging from programmes with therapy dogs and those with ex racehorses.



Lights, Camera, Action

British Equestrian Federation and Sport England Together Fund.

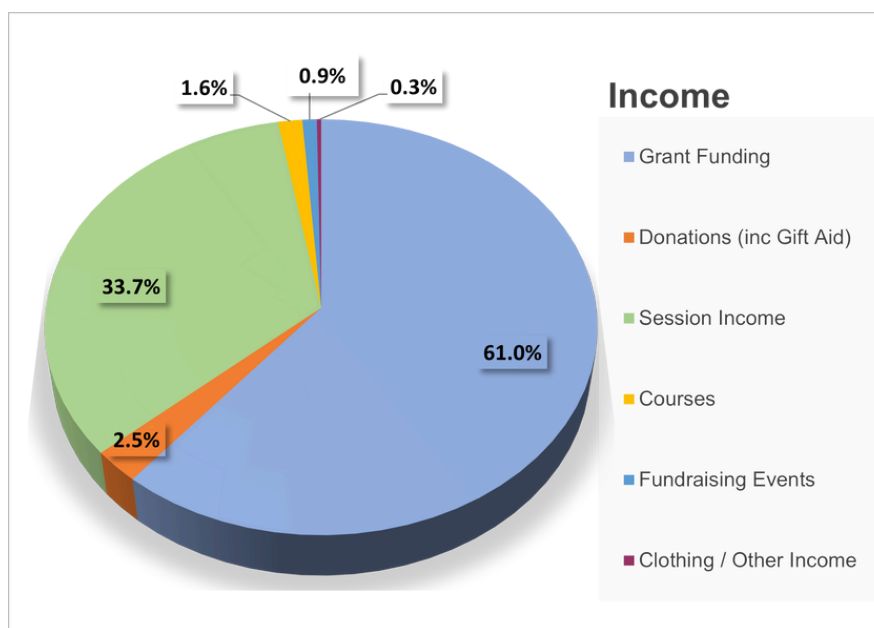
During a freezing, snowy autumn day a film crew from London visited Sirona as part of a film they made about three centres chosen who received funding from BEF/Sports England supporting vulnerable young people through horses. Despite the weather conditions and drones flying above them the horses all behaved impeccably whilst practitioners Josie and Kate talked about our work at Sirona. The film is available to watch on our website.



Financial Review

2023 Income and expenditure breakdown

Income

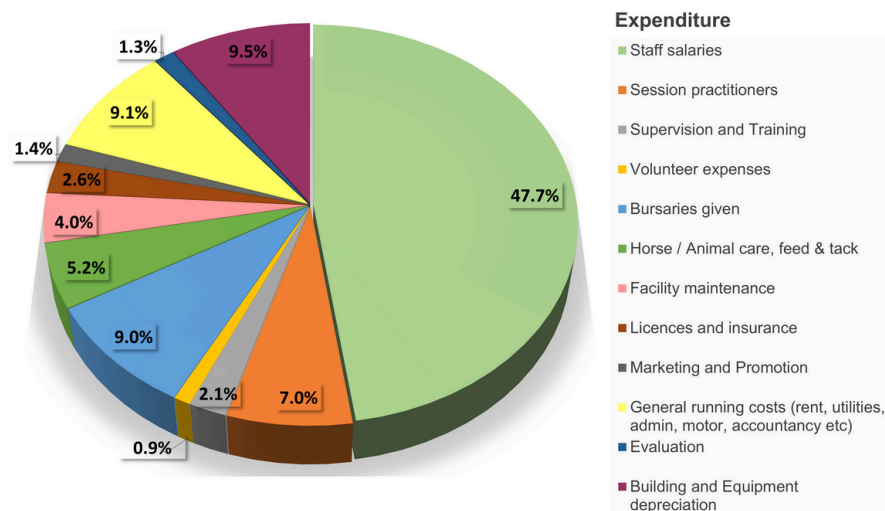


Sirona is funded primarily by grants and session income. The total income during the year was £255,223 (2022 - £192,358) of which

- £155,629 (2022 - £108,339) from grant funding.
- £6,504 (2022 - £7,190) from donations (including gift aid).
- £86,085 (2022 - £70,719) received from session income.
- £3,954 (2022 - £2,920) from courses
- £2,349 (2022 - £0) from fundraisers
- £702 (2022 - £668) from sales of clothing, merchandise and other items.

Session income rose by nearly 22% in 2023 as the session staff team was strengthened and stabilised. This was supported by an increase in grant income as the very welcome 3-year grant funding from the Reaching Communities Big Lottery Fund continued.

Expenditure



Total expenditure for the year on our charitable activities amounted to £222,324 (2022 - 183,993) as the charity sought to pursue its objectives.

- Direct staffing costs rose by a further £19,309 to £105,983.
- Horse and animal costs stayed stable during 2023 at £10,352 (2022 - £10,575).
- Rent and utilities remained similar £3,309 (2022 - £3,463)
- Provision of bursaries rose by £5,954 to £20,053 as the charity offered support in an increasingly difficult financial environment for so many.
- Other costs stayed relatively stable compared with the previous year.

THANK YOU

Our gratitude to our donors and supporters

We would like to thank all the grant funders who have supported us in the last year. We also wish to say thank you to the friends of Sirona who make regular donations to our work and sponsors of our horses through our Sponsor a Pony Scheme. We could not do what we do without you.



classic cottages



Wild about Devon



TIM HAILSTONE



HILDA ARMOUR



Contact us for further inquiries

www.sironaequine.org.uk

info@sironaequine.org.uk

01803 868779

Buckhams Stables, Old School
Farm, Dartington Estate,
Totnes, Devon, TQ9 6EB



Registered Charity No: 1169709

Registered office: The Merchant's House,
10 Town Quay, The Plains
Totnes, TQ9 5DW