

2025



Stable Life

A hand to hold, a heart to heal, a horse to hug

Dryden Farm, Ashkirk, Selkirk TD7 4NT

Every moment, every bond –
helping children grow stronger,
braver, and ready for tomorrow.



Building Confidence
Through the Power
of Ponies

Confidence & Resilience

Our programmes help children and young people discover their inner strength, building self-belief and resilience through every interaction.

Life Skills Development

Through caring for and riding ponies, children and young people develop responsibility, empathy, communication, and teamwork – skills that last a lifetime.

Empowering Young Lives

We work with vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people, using equine facilitated learning to unlock potential and inspire brighter futures.

A message from our Chair

It is always a pleasure to look back on what we have achieved over the last twelve months and likewise look forward to the potential opportunities that awaits us as we develop Stable Life to improve its long-term sustainability.

World events over recent months have certainly been part responsible for our ever-increasing cost of living finances which in turn have dictated the decline in funding streams, which charitable organisations like Stable Life depend on annually. These pressures, combined with the long-lasting effects of Covid-19, are continuing to stretch our resources and our service delivery. However, as part of the proposed development of the organisation, we have been fortunate to obtain funding which will enable us to look seriously at setting up an education and wellbeing centre within our current constitution remit, enabling us to deliver SQA and award programmes. This is exciting news and as part of a wider organisational development planning process which will strengthen the position of the charity in the form of long-term sustainability and most importantly, improved outcomes for our young people. Watch this space!

You can read of our successes elsewhere in the annual report and the differences we are making to the lives of the young people who attend Stable Life. This is down to the professionalism and diligence of our team of staff and volunteers, all committed to the ethos and values that mean so much to this wonderful organisation, aptly led by our CEO Mags Powell. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mags and the team for all their efforts and am looking forward to collaborating with them as we take Stable Life forward. Sadly, we said goodbye to Kate Langer, our service manager earlier in the year who accepted a new role within another organisation, thank you for everything you did while here and good luck in the future.

I feel very fortunate that we have a great team of Trustees supporting us all here at Stable Life, their expertise and experience have helped us on various occasions, and I thank them for their continual assistance, particularly as we look forward to our development plans.

Finally, can I take this opportunity to once again thank all, staff, volunteers and fellow Trustees for all the challenging work over the past twelve months.

It has been another positive experience.

Graham Easton
Chair

Contents:

- Chair's Message
- About Us
- Chief Executive's Report
- Our Programmes
- Programme Reach & Impact
- Impact at a glance
- Yard Update
- Volunteer Update
- Financial Review
- Thank You



About Us

Our charity has supported vulnerable young people for over 40 years and has specialised in equine-facilitated programmes since 2008.

Our mission is to provide a safe, nurturing and learning experience using the horse and its environment, to help young people reach their full potential, and become healthier and happier with aspirations and dreams.

Our overall aim is that young people are inspired and empowered to achieve their aspirations, be happy, healthy and make positive contributions within their communities.

Working with Horses

Our programmes are based on a model of Equine Facilitated Wellness which we have developed into a person-centred package using the horse and its environment to engage with each young person who attends.

We run a team of dedicated staff who work to support young people and their families in either a group setting or on an individual basis. We also have a number of trained volunteers from adults to peer mentors who support our project workers.

We also support young people in their transition looking towards college placements and employment by offering practical work experience opportunities.

Equine Facilitated Wellness

Equine Facilitated Wellness refers to all experiential learning activities involving horses. This is not learning to ride, but a mix of games, pony care and reflective exercises to increase confidence, self-esteem, mental well-being and resilience.

Our horses provide a safe space for young people to unpack feelings, consider challenges in their lives and develop effective strategies for change. We offer small group and 1-1 sessions, ran primarily during term-time school hours.

Our Equine Facilitated Wellness service can help young people with vulnerabilities, aged 5-18, living in the Scottish Borders, who struggle with (but not limited to):

- low self-esteem
- emotional regulation
- poor mental well-being
- bereavement or loss
- low resilience
- experience of trauma
- communication
- social isolation
- low confidence
- family breakdown
- relationships
- anxiety



**Small steps
today, stronger
tomorrows.**

Ponies help young people discover what they can do. With patient partners by their side, they build self-belief, learn to manage emotions, and grow braver every day – feeling more confident and ready for tomorrow.

Chief Executive Report

This year has been one of steady growth, strengthened delivery, and deeper connection across all strands of our work. Following last year's organisational restructure, our team has continued to embed clearer roles, improved coordination, and more consistent support for the young people and families who rely on Stable Life.

Demand for our services remains high, and we have responded by increasing group capacity, refining session formats, and expanding family-focused support. As a result, 103 young people participated in our Main Service group sessions, 31 received 1:1 support, and 68 completed their intervention with strong, measurable outcomes across confidence, resilience, well-being, social skills, and life skills. These results reflect the dedication of our staff, volunteers, and partners, and the continued effectiveness of our Equine Facilitated Wellness model.

We also strengthened our progression pathways. Young people re-engaged with school, joined youth groups, took up independent riding lessons, secured college placements, volunteered, and even moved into employment. These steps forward show how therapeutic support at Stable Life translates into real-world change.

Family engagement grew significantly through Taking the Reins, with more parents participating than ever before. Our Saddle Up and Get Active programmes continued to build confidence, independence, and community connection, ensuring young people have positive routes beyond their intervention.

Financially, we remain mindful of the pressures facing small charities. We continue to diversify income streams and strengthen sustainability through our equine activities, partnerships, and fundraising efforts.

Stable Life remains a place of safety, growth, and possibility. I am deeply proud of our team, grateful to our volunteers, and appreciative of the continued support from our trustees, funders, partners, and community. Together, we are helping young people build confidence, resilience, and hope for the future.

Mags Powell
Chief Executive



We believe every child
deserves the chance
to thrive. Together, we
build confidence,
resilience and brighter
futures.

Our Programmes

Stable Life delivers a range of equine-assisted programmes designed to support young people aged 5–18 across the Scottish Borders. Our work includes Equine Facilitated Wellness, family support, accredited learning, and progression pathways, offering young people safe, nurturing experiences that build confidence, resilience, emotional regulation, and life skills.

This year marked a period of growth and transition across our programme portfolio, including the completion of our five-year Comic Relief-funded Healing Hooves project.

Main Service Programme

Our core therapeutic service continues to support young people experiencing social, emotional, or behavioural challenges. Delivered through group sessions and 1:1 support, the programme uses Equine Facilitated Wellness to help young people explore feelings, develop coping strategies, and build confidence in a safe, structured environment.

Healing Hooves (Comic Relief Pilot) – Project Ended June 2025

Healing Hooves came to a successful close in June 2025 after five years of delivery. Over its lifetime, the project supported young people facing trauma, anxiety, low confidence, and mental-health challenges through a blend of equine-assisted learning, counselling, and physical activity.

From your final report, two key legacy messages stand out:

- *“One of the most powerful aspects of the project has been watching the young people build trust and connection – first with the horses, and then with our staff and each other.”*
- *“Healing Hooves has not just been a project – it has been a catalyst for growth, learning and lasting change.”*

In its final year, the shift to 1:1 counselling proved highly effective, with young people benefiting from the time and space to build trust with the counsellor. This learning has directly shaped the development of new partnership work now emerging within Stable Life.

Taking the Reins – Family Programme

This partnership with Scottish Borders Council and the Whole Family Support Team continued to strengthen whole-family relationships. In 2025/26, we delivered: 2 family programmes and 1 parent programme. The programme helps parents and children build confidence together, improve communication, and strengthen bonds.

Big Sky Saddle Up Project

A progression pathway for young people ready to move from therapeutic support into independent riding. Participants learn grooming, tacking, and riding skills in a supported environment.

Get Active Club

Originally piloted through Healing Hooves, Get Active continued as an after-school progression programme.

Rural Pathways – SQA Accredited Learning

Delivered in partnership with Selkirk High School and Borders College, Rural Pathways offers young people the chance to gain an SQA NPA Level 4 in Horse Care, building confidence, skills, and future opportunities.

“You should try Stable Life out, it is really fun to ride and learn about them.”

Programme Reach & Impact

Main Service Programme

Our core therapeutic service saw significant growth:

- 103 young people participated in group sessions
- 31 young people received 1:1 support

This reflects increased capacity following last year's programme redesign, where group sizes were expanded and session formats adapted to reduce wait times of up to eight months .

Healing Hooves (Comic Relief Pilot)

20 young people participated This programme continues to support young people with mental health challenges through a blend of equine-assisted learning, counselling, and fitness – echoing last year's model combining equine learning, psychotherapy, and physical activity to “build resilience, core strength, social skills and confidence” .

Big Sky Saddle Up Project

14 young people participated This progression pathway supports young people transitioning from therapeutic intervention into independent riding, building confidence and independence.

Taking the Reins (Family Programme)

Family engagement expanded significantly this year:

- 2 parent-and-child programmes delivered
 - 11 parents
 - 12 children
- 1 parents-only programme delivered
 - 6 adults participated

This builds on last year's successful pilot, which supported “10 young people & 8 parents/ carers” and strengthens our whole-family approach.

Get Active Club

18 young people participated This programme continues to support young people who have completed Healing Hooves, helping them build confidence, teamwork skills, and community connection.

Total Reach

Across all programmes, 194 individuals were supported through direct interventions, family programmes, accredited learning, and progression pathways.

This represents a clear increase from last year's total of over 160 individuals supported – demonstrating both heightened need and strengthened delivery capacity.

“The way they feel at ease and how exciting they get to come, you guys do amazing work and I'm extremely grateful”

Impact at a Glance

Of the 68 young people who completed their intervention, the following outcomes were recorded:

- Confidence: 90% young people showed an increase
- Well-being: 88% young people showed improved well-being
- Resilience: 87% young people showed an increase
- Life Skills: 85% young people learned new life skills
- Social Skills: 78% young people showed improvement

Alongside therapeutic and family-focused support, many young people took meaningful steps toward independence, confidence, and community participation. Over the year, the following progression outcomes were recorded:

- 11 young people re-engaged with school
- 6 began riding lessons independently
- 4 took part in a local children's ride-out
- 2 secured college placements
- 2 became volunteers at Stable Life
- 1 gained employment
- 1 volunteered elsewhere
- 1 joined a youth group

This progression profile shows a strong spread across education, community engagement, volunteering, and personal development — reflecting the breadth of Stable Life's impact.



"The work and support you give to young people is amazing and makes a real difference in there life. Thank you"

Impact at a Glance

Case Study

Young person referred to Stable Life due to a combination of emotional, behavioural, and social challenges that had escalated during their first year of high school. Described as caring and sociable, they struggled to manage feelings of anger, frequently becoming overwhelmed and displaying emotionally reactive behaviours such as shouting, physical aggression, and defiance. Peer relationships were a major source of distress and they were experiencing difficulties in their home environment. Social work and police had been involved during particularly volatile periods, although no formal statutory measures were in place. They were also on a reduced school timetable.

The goal of referral was to support this young person in learning how to recognise and manage emotions—particularly anger—develop peer-appropriate social skills and rebuild their confidence and resilience.

The young person participated in structured weekly sessions that combined horse care, groundwork, mindfulness, and reflective discussion. Over time, they began to connect with the routines and responsibilities of working alongside a pony, and in turn, became more open to engaging with staff.

Key outcomes included:

- Emotional regulation and mindfulness
- Growth in communication
- Building resilience and confidence
- Empathy and reflection

By the end of their 1:1 intervention, the young person was notably calmer, more self-aware, and willing to communicate in ways that had not previously been observed by school or home. Following this success, they transitioned into a Supported Work Experience Pilot Programme, designed to build practical skills, confidence, and peer interaction. In the early sessions, they remained reserved and hesitant in-group discussions. However, by mid-programme, they were confidently asking questions, offering help, and socialising independently with others. In the final session, staff observed them chatting freely with another young person while caring for a horse—which illustrated just how far they had come.

Feedback

One young person shared:

“Months ago when I first started Stable Life, I was really nervous and didn’t want to go because I hated interacting with people and found it impossible to speak. Since meeting you I’ve been able to go out in public confidently and I’m getting better at communicating. I’m going to really miss our sessions as it was always one of the best parts of my week.”

A parent highlighted the role of staff in fostering trust:

“Megan was fantastic with them and did not push them too quickly. She has been the first adult in a long time that they have felt safe with and been able to trust without me being present. I see this as a big win and it has boosted their confidence.”

Yard Update

The yard has been full of energy, learning, and community spirit throughout the year, with riding lessons, holiday programmes, and special events all exceptionally well attended. Our team, volunteers, and horses have worked tirelessly to create a welcoming environment for riders of all ages and abilities.

Lessons continued to thrive, with strong attendance across all age groups and abilities. The Easter holiday programme was busy, offering a varied schedule of activities including: Own a Pony sessions, Handy Pony, Picnic rides, Show Jumping competition with jump heights tailored to all abilities, Graded hacks and Easter Egg Hunt. The summer programme expanded on the Easter activities, adding extra sessions and introducing a Gymkhana open to all, which was a great success and drew enthusiastic participation from riders and families. A shorter programme ran during the October holidays and was also well attended, demonstrating continued demand for accessible, fun equine activities throughout the year.

This year we were delighted to welcome several organisations who brought young people to take part in Own a Pony sessions, including: Waverley Housing (Making Memories Project), Rowlands Youth Group, Action for Children and Borders Additional Needs Group. These partnerships have helped more young people experience the joy of horses, build confidence, and enjoy meaningful time outdoors.

In February, we celebrated the retirement of Billy, one of Stable Life's much-loved stars. Billy supported countless riders over the years, helping them learn, grow, and build confidence. His gentle nature — paired with his famously stubborn, cheeky moments — made him a favourite among staff and young people alike. He is now enjoying a quieter life and being thoroughly spoilt.

This year also brought sadness as we said goodbye to Rose and Marcus, both of whom passed away after enjoying their well-deserved retirements. Marcus was truly one of a kind — kind, steady, and endlessly supportive. Rose was cherished in both the Riding School and Project Work. Her spirited heart and gentle nature touched many young people. They will always hold a special place in our hearts and memories. Their impact on riders and staff alike will be remembered for years to come.

We were thrilled to welcome Flora and Mouse to the Stable Life herd. Both have settled in beautifully and quickly become firm favourites with riders. Their calm temperaments and willingness to learn make them wonderful additions to our team.



Rose



Marcus



Mouse



Flora

"The best thing about stable life is meeting new people and getting the opportunity to ride and meet the horses and staff"

Volunteer Update

Volunteers continue to play a vital role in the smooth running of the yard and wider organisation. This year, 15 volunteers supported us on a regular weekly basis, with strong retention from previous years and a positive level of skills and training across the team. Although we experienced a natural drop-off in autumn as several long-standing volunteers moved on, we welcomed five new volunteers who have already become a valuable part of the yard.

Our volunteer group reflects a diverse mix of backgrounds and experiences, including high-school pupils, young people progressing from our programmes, individuals with additional support needs, and adults bringing extensive equine knowledge and transferable skills. Several volunteers have achieved significant milestones, with some now contributing over 100–400 hours of service.

We continue to face challenges in recruiting volunteer drivers, and this remains a priority area for development. Despite this, our current driver bank has provided essential support, ensuring young people can access sessions safely and consistently.

Corporate volunteering also made a welcome contribution this year, with teams from Utility Warehouse and Scottish Borders Council Local Area Co-Ordination Team completing grounds maintenance, painting and improvement work during dedicated volunteer days. We were pleased to host a festive gathering in December to thank our volunteers for their commitment and celebrate their contribution to Stable Life.

Overall, our volunteers remain an essential part of our community, bringing energy, reliability, and compassion to the yard. Their support enables us to deliver high-quality experiences for young people and maintain a safe, well-run environment for horses and riders alike.



SBC Local Area Co-Ordination Team

Financial Review

This report relates to the accounts of the organisation for the year ended 31st March 2026, prepared and examined by Deans Chartered Accountants and Business Advisors. The accounts have been compiled based on all income, expenditure and accounting transactions recorded during the accounting year.

At the end of the year, cash at bank and in hand amounted to £140,048 (2025 - £143,505). Overall, the income generated by the organisation increased from £343,893 in 2024/25 to £390,772

The other equine activities remain a key business plan objective for Stable Life and is fundamentally important as the organisation grows, demonstrated by the increased cost of providing our services within the new organisational structure. Staffing costs amount to £275,728 (2025 - £254,831) or 68% (2025 - 65%) of overall costs and the current operating model resulted in a total spend of £408,284 (2025 - £390,060). As the business goes forward in future years, it is vital that income streams continue to provide ongoing affordability to meet demand.

An operating deficit of £17,512 (2025 - £46,167 deficit) was therefore generated in 2025/26, which decreased the reserves bringing total funds to £209,356 (2025 - £226,868).

Summarised Statement of Activities

Incoming Resources £		Total Expenditure £	
Voluntary Income	213,459	Raising Funds	85,603
Activities for generating funds	82,872	Activities Costs	322,681
Investment Income	3,021		
Other Income	91,420		
Total Income	390,772	Total Expenditure	408,284
Net Expenditure	(17,512)		

A full set of accounts are available on request

“Stable Life has helped build my confidence and self esteem and resilience.”

Recognition & Awards

This year brought meaningful recognition for Stable Life's contribution to young people's wellbeing, mental health, and rights across the Scottish Borders. These achievements reflect the dedication of our staff, volunteers, trustees, and partners – and the courage and commitment of the young people we support.

🌟 Creating Hope Champions Award

Stable Life was honoured to receive the Creating Hope Champions Award, recognising our trauma-informed, relationship-based work supporting young people's mental health. This award highlights the impact of our equine-assisted programmes in helping young people build confidence, resilience, and emotional regulation in a safe, nurturing environment.

🌟 Inspiring Advocate for Mental Health Award

We were proud to be named Winner of the Inspiring Advocate for Mental Health at the Youth Borders LEAD Awards. This recognition celebrates our commitment to championing young people's wellbeing, amplifying their voices, and ensuring they have access to compassionate, meaningful support.

🎬 Featured in Youth Borders Documentary

Stable Life was featured in Youth Borders - Article 42: Our Borders - Scottish UNCRC Documentary - exploring how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is being embedded across the Scottish Borders. Our inclusion reflects the strength of our child-centred practice, our commitment to listening to young people, and the role our programmes play in upholding their rights to safety, participation, and wellbeing.

Creating Hope Champions Award



"Lachie really helped me because he was really gentle, he made me feel calm and loved"

Looking Forward

The end of our Comic Relief-funded Healing Hooves project in June 2025 marked an important milestone for Stable Life. Over five years, the project helped us deepen our trauma-informed practice, strengthen partnerships, and refine how we support young people facing complex emotional, social, and mental-health challenges.

Through Healing Hooves, we learned the value of combining Equine Facilitated Wellness with tailored therapeutic support, the importance of trust-building before counselling, and the need for age-appropriate physical activity. We also strengthened our staff team through trauma-skilled training and developed partnerships with counsellors and fitness professionals that will continue to shape our work.

These lessons have become the foundation for the next phase of Stable Life's development.

★ **Becoming a Wellbeing & Education Centre**

Looking ahead, Stable Life is evolving into a Wellbeing & Education Centre – a place where young people and families can access therapeutic support, accredited learning, progression pathways, and whole-family interventions in one integrated environment. Our aim is to create a centre where young people can grow, learn, heal, and progress – all within the safety and connection of the Stable Life environment.

★ **New Pilot Projects for 2026**

Two new pilot programmes we will be delivering over the next year are:

Galloping Forward

Galloping Forward is a group-based intervention for young people aged 8–18 who are awaiting assessment for neurodivergent conditions such as Autism or ADHD. It offers early, needs-based support in a safe, non-clinical environment using Equine Facilitated activities and reflective discussions.

Equine Connections

This programme is designed for young people aged 10-18 at risk of disengagement, offending, or poor mental health. It blends:

- Equine Facilitated Wellness
- Supported volunteering
- 1:1 counselling
- Youth achievement awards

★ **A Future Built on Learning**

As we move forward, Stable Life is entering a new chapter: one defined by stronger partnerships, clearer pathways, deeper therapeutic practice, and a commitment to becoming a Wellbeing & Education Centre for the Scottish Borders.

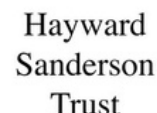
Through caring for and riding ponies, individuals develop responsibility, empathy, communication, and teamwork.

Thank You

All this would not have been possible without the investment of our funders for which we are eternally grateful.

We are also incredibly grateful and blown away for all the amazing support we receive in the local community. Our volunteers provide a brilliant service and without this vital support, we would not be able to provide our service. We would like to thank everyone who has helped us, whether that help came via a financial donation, materials or a generous gifting of time and skills.

A particular mention as always, must go to Mark and Jo Arres who are fantastic landlords and go that extra mile on a daily basis to assist us keeping the yard and fields in good order.



Thank You

Ashkirk Village Hall

Midlem Dancers

Hirsel Ladies Society

Mainhouse Charitable Trust

Tillicoultry Quarries

Re-Gen Ltd

Cooks Van Hire

Dalton Redpath Resurfacing Ltd

Crown Paints UK

Asda

Family & Friends of Richard
Aitchison

Natasha Stockmam and
Hawick Parks and
Environment Team

Milestone Garden Centre

Tarff Valley

Morrisons

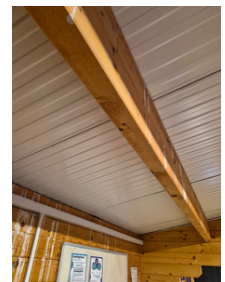


Earlston High School & YPI Pupils

Community Regeneration Partnership
Youth Facilities Fund



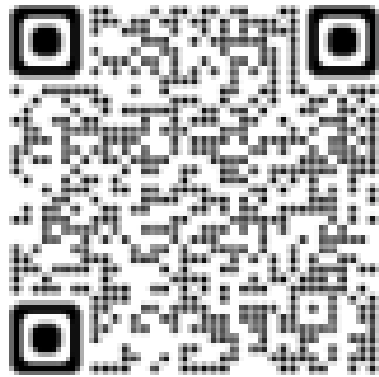
Funded by
UK Government



Benefact Group



Scottish Borders Local Action Group (LAG)
Community Led Local Development Fund 24/25



Find out more here



A hand to hold, A heart to heal, A horse to hug