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Press release

Local residents with a disability saddle up for better health

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Local residents living with a disability can start saddling up to improve their health and wellbeing with the help of a new coach and volunteer training programme in Mackay.

The Mackay Riding for Disabled Association (MRDA) is a non-profit registered charity run predominantly by volunteers to provide riding instruction and other horse-riding activities to people living with a disability.

With the support of more than \$4300 from Hail Creek Mine's Community Development Fund, the charity's new programme will provide more training and accreditation to the head coach, trainee coaches, and volunteers, which will boost the organisation's services and the quality of services it offers.

MRDA president Mary Steel said horse riding provides enormous benefits to the health and wellbeing of people living with a disability regardless of age.

"Our goal is not only to teach classical equestrian principals but also focus on promoting body awareness and improvements in strength, posture and control," Ms Steel said.

"Horse riding stimulates the senses and promotes confidence and self-esteem through activities with balls, hoops, barrels, balancing, grasping, throwing and counting. These also encourage decision-making, participation, and boosts concentration."

Alana Hunt, mother of 11 year old cerebral palsy sufferer Maddison Hunt, said there are limited opportunities provided for people with a disability to access recreational sports.

"As a parent, I am very grateful to the organisations that provide funds to keep MRDA running and also the volunteers that donate their time and services," Mrs Hunt said.

"Maddison has spent a large part of her life in a power wheelchair so horse riding gives her a welcome break from riding in the chair and provides her with a different form of movement.

"Not only does she get a chance to spend some time around horses, which she enjoys immensely, but she benefits greatly in developing her core body strength, trunk control, and balance.

"As her strength improves, she doesn't have to work as hard at her posture to be able to do things like feed herself, work a computer keyboard, write, draw, and manipulate objects."

Hail Creek Mine general manager operations Andrew Woodley said he is pleased to help provide health and wellbeing opportunities for people living with a disability.

"We recognise the huge benefits that many disabled people receive from horse riding, not only for the social aspect, but also the improvements it can make to their overall health," Mr Woodley said.

"The new training and accreditation opportunities will mean that the disabled community of Mackay and surrounding districts can enjoy a safe and more therapeutic work out with qualified volunteers.

"This will encourage stronger community participation and show people in our region that lifelong learning can be achieved by anyone no matter what adversity they have to overcome."

Ms Steel said the charity's current volunteer base is 20 people with trainee coaches.

"With further training, these volunteers can move to a level where they can help the coach attract and train more volunteers and trainee coaches," Ms Steel said.

"At the end of the day, this will increase our organisation's capacity and capability to work with disabled riders using the best methods and approaches available.

"We also hope to source more horses down the track so that we continue offering a fun, active, and safe service to more members of our community who live with a disability."

MRDA invites the general public to come along to its Open Volunteer and Rider Day on Saturday 4 September between 10am and 2pm at 11 Loughnane Court, North Mackay.

The open day is an opportunity for members of the public who are considering becoming a volunteer to view the centre, its riding displays, and meet the people responsible for the delivery of its service. A free sausage sizzle and entertainment will be provided. For more information, please contact MRDA president Mary Steel on (07) 4944 0066 / 0428 553 047.

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Attached photo – head coach Joan Lemmon trains one of the horses used at the centre, Joker.

