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VISION IMPAIRMENT

RDA SA DISABILITY FACT SHEET

• What is Vision Impairment?

- Vision Impairment involves partial or total lack of sight
- Vision Impairment can be caused by congenital abnormalities, ageing, diseases and disorders, injury, trauma, infection, diabetes and nerve deterioration
- People with vision impairment may have
 - Difficulties with spatial awareness
 - Impaired balance
 - Impaired sense of direction
 - Loss of mobility
 - Change in their lifestyle
 - Reduced independence
 - Loss of confidence
 - Social isolation

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SYMPTOM	RDA BENEFIT
Difficulties with spatial awareness	Improved visual spatial perception including directionality (knowing left from right), space perception (knowing when items are similar in shape but different), perception of depth (picking out an object from a background). Riding stimulates tactile sense both through touch and environmental stimuli. The many sounds of outdoor farm situation help involve the auditory system.
Poor balance	The three-dimensional rhythmic movement of the horse is similar to the motion of walking, teaching rhythmical patterns to the muscles of the legs and trunk. Placing the client in different positions on the horseworks different sets of muscles. The movement of the horse assists the vision impaired rider to activate their core muscle groups and to find their centre of balance.
Lack of self-confidence	Confidence is gained in mastering new skills normally performed by able-bodied people. The ability to control an animal much larger and stronger than oneself is a great confidence builder.
Social isolation	Group lessons provide riders with the opportunity to join in with their peers and develop friendships
Concentration	Programs include educational concepts, learning numbers, colours, shapes, patterns and sequencing. Memory and concentration can be improved through playing games.
Psychological benefits	Adaptive equipment helps riders participate in a sport to the best of their ability. This includes competition opportunities. Learning to control the horse and other skills provides riders with a sense of achievement.

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Jenny's Story

Article by Jenny McDonald from RDA SA Newsletter Autumn 2009

Could I, with only 1% vision in the bottom of one eye, really be able to learn to ride a horse? When I was younger I had dreamed of riding a horse, but never thought I'd ever get to do it. I vividly remember my first lesson at Jennibrook. I remember touching Luke the horse for the first time, feeling his soft fur and stringy mane. My legs were trembling as I mounted him from the ramp. When he started to walk slowly forwards, I felt so unbalanced and thought I would fall off him sideways! With their [volunteers] help I slowly gained in confidence and each week felt less nervous. I also remember being taken off the lead rope for the first time. When they asked me if I would like to try, I thought, "Am I sure I can do this?" I was scared at first, but the coach knew I had gained enough skill to be able to control the horse by myself. I felt so excited to be able to ride independently! Over the past two years my riding has improved immensely. I was able to compete in my first State Dressage Championships in 2006 in an unled walk/trot dressage test. This year, I will ride two tests used for the Para-Equestrian grade two team.

Horse riding has been so valuable to me. It has helped me gain confidence, keeps me fit and healthy and, quite honestly, gives me something to live for. I so much look forward to my lessons every week and get quite depressed when the weather is bad or we can't ride for some other reason.

