

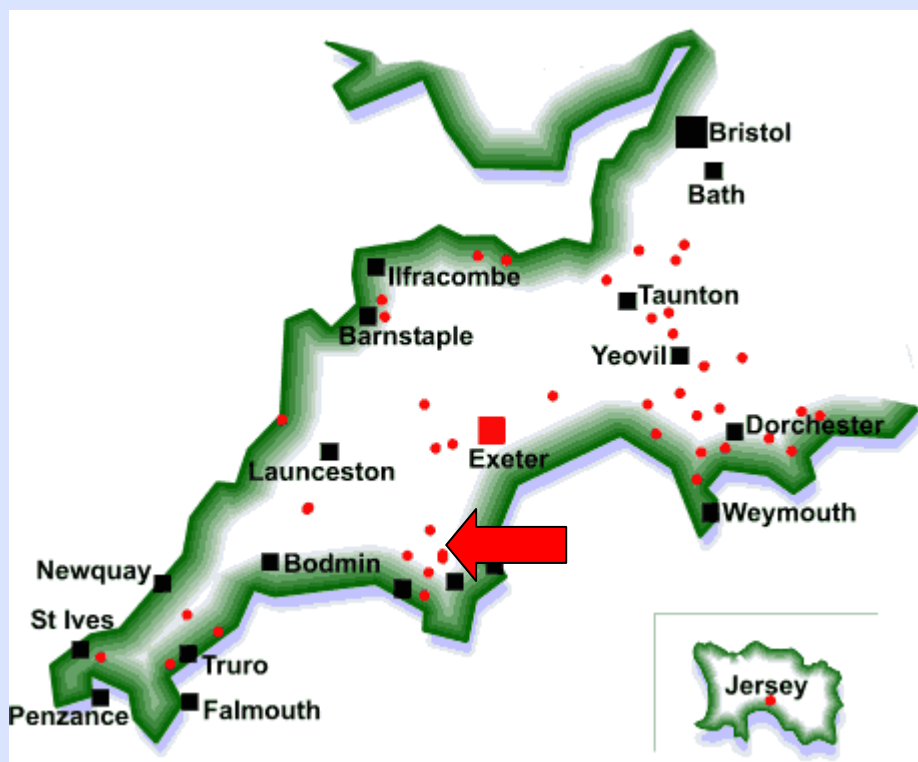
## Step into Sport Case Study Erme Valley Riding for the Disabled Centre

The Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) is a federation of 506 Member Groups, dedicated to improving the lives of people with disabilities through the provision of opportunities for riding, carriage driving and equestrian vaulting.

Groups enable people to improve their health and wellbeing, delivering a real and lasting therapy that not only benefits mobility and co-ordination but encourages confidence and self-worth whilst having fun.

Each year, more than 18,000 volunteers across the UK give a total of more than 3.5 million hours of their time to support RDA activities.

Erme Valley Riding for the Disabled Centre, a registered Charity, is located in the rural South Hams, near Ivybridge in Devon.



Established for over 20 years, the Centre is run by its founder Peggy Douglas, who is supported by a team of willing and dedicated volunteers. The centre offers a welcoming and safe environment for both volunteers and riders, encouraging riders to feel comfortable and at ease and giving them the confidence to develop new skills and enjoy horse riding activities.

Peggy firmly believes that young volunteers are a valuable asset to any organisation and is also a keen supporter of Step into Sport; a few years ago her own daughter was one of the first to gain accreditation for volunteering through the scheme and was selected to attend the prestigious 4 day camp at Loughborough.

### Meet the Volunteers

**Poppy** and **Charlie** are both Year 12 students at Ivybridge College in Devon.

Although they didn't really know each other before starting to volunteer together they have since become the best of friends!



**Charlie** had previously volunteered with Erme Valley for about a year in 2005 and has returned to support the Centre since Christmas 2006.

**Poppy** had no previous experience of Riding for the Disabled and has now been volunteering with Erme Valley since October 2006.

Charlie lives very close to the Centre while Poppy lives about 15 minutes away.

### How did they get involved?

Ivybridge College has a well-established **Step into Sport** Programme. As both Charlie and Poppy had taken horse riding as part of their GCSE, the school suggested that they might be interested in becoming involved in **Step into Sport**. Ivybridge College is a very large school and there are only a limited number of **Step into Sport** places available, so it is a great achievement for the girls to be offered the opportunity to participate in **Step into Sport**.

### What are their volunteering roles?

Both of the girls have very responsible roles. As **Charlie** had previous experience with RDA, she has quickly progressed to leading the horses for the riders.



**Poppy** (in the blue jacket) is currently volunteering as a side walker, essential to maintaining a safe environment and ensuring the riders are participating fully. She plans to progress to leading the horses.



### What do Poppy and Charlie enjoy most about volunteering?

While the girls like the fact their volunteering complements their love of horses, they also agree that by supporting disabled individuals to take part in a fulfilling activity, they have become more aware of the difficulties people with disabilities face in the wider world. Both are considering medicine as a future career and feel that they have gained valuable insights into how the whole family can be affected by the disability of a child or sibling and also the therapeutic benefits of riding.



### What do the girls think of Step into Sport?

Charlie and Poppy both agree that **Step into Sport** is a great way of encouraging more young people to become involved in volunteering activities. They are both confident that they will achieve at least 100 hours of volunteering and feel that gaining the accreditation and certificate of achievement will look good on their CVs. They are keen to emphasise, however, that their main motivation for volunteering with Erme Valley Riding for the Disabled Centre is because they really enjoy volunteering as a social activity and gain a great deal of personal satisfaction from the opportunity to support and make a difference to individuals in their local community.

### What makes the RDA a special place to volunteer?

Poppy explained that even in the relatively short time she has been volunteering, she has personally witnessed the growth and development of riders – both in terms of physical and riding ability and also confidence.

She admits that she had found the prospect of volunteering with RDA quite daunting at first, because she feels there is a general lack of understanding, particularly among younger people, of how to act around people with a disability.

Poppy is now convinced that many more people of all ages would choose to volunteer with RDA if they knew how to get started and that many potential Step into Sport volunteers would get a lot out of the experience.

Charlie points out that there are immense benefits to both individuals and families, including the provision of greater choice for disabled people, giving them something to look forward to, participation in a social activity and respite for the family.

### Are they likely to carry on volunteering in the future?

Yes!!

### Conclusion

Poppy and Charlie are two young volunteers who are clearly getting a great deal from their volunteering activities with Erme Valley Riding for the Disabled Centre and the Centre is, in turn, benefiting greatly from their enthusiasm and support. Peggy Douglas has developed a good relationship with Ivybridge College and provides a welcoming and supportive environment for young volunteers. She, Poppy and Charlie are all convinced that, given the opportunity, many more young people could reap the joint benefits of participating in **Step into Sport** and volunteering with the RDA – which is good news all round!

**Report prepared by Jill Loader, Consultant National Volunteer Co-ordinator  
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