

# You helped these kids to have a *better life*



When Boots pledged its support for BBC Children in Need, we knew every penny would make a difference. Here, we meet just one group of kids that have benefited

*words by rosaling ryan photography by sam jones*

**n**ext time you're at the check-out in Boots, you could find yourself gazing at the items near the counter, like magazines, lip balms, or Pudsey Bear products being sold to help raise funds for BBC Children in Need (CIN). You may even buy a Pudsey pin badge for £1 and think no more about it. But this one simple act of shopping will go towards helping the lives of thousands of disabled and disadvantaged children that are supported by the charity. Donating just £3, for instance, could enable a child in respite care to spend a day in a sensory garden, while £10 could pay for a young athlete

who has had an organ transplant to enter the British Transplant Games\*.

With your support, Boots is helping CIN to fund over 3,000 projects like these in the UK. We spent the day at Taking the Reins ([www.circlesnetwork.org.uk/taking\\_the\\_reins.htm](http://www.circlesnetwork.org.uk/taking_the_reins.htm)) in Rugby, Warwickshire to find out exactly where your donations go and the difference they can make to a child's future.

## **BONDING WITH HORSES HELPS BOOST CONFIDENCE**

Taking the Reins, an equine-facilitated learning (or 'horse whispering') project has been supported by CIN since 2006. It aims to help children with life-threatening diseases,

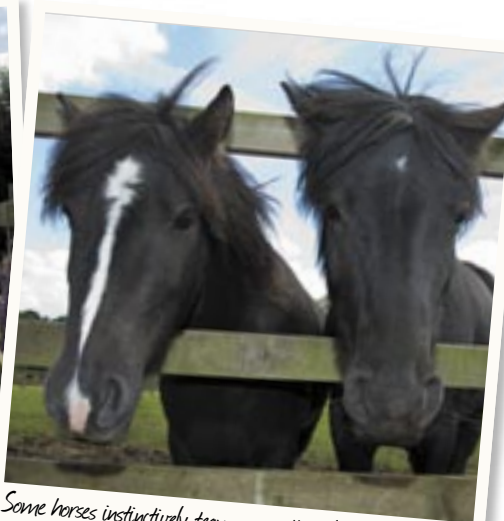
disabilities such as cerebral palsy, those with autism and emotional and behavioural difficulties, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds to build confidence, self-esteem and better relationships, both with themselves and others.

On the day we visited, the children taking part, who were dealing with issues and conditions such as bereavement, depression and autism, were paired up with one of the eight horses or ponies at the stables.

Founder Mandy Neville explains that horses are herd animals and communicate with subtle body language. Remember the film *The Horse Whisperer*? Similar methods are applied at Taking the Reins, using the



12-year-old Mattie doesn't communicate verbally so it's good for him to be with horses that also communicate through behaviour



Some horses instinctively team up with children with eating disorders, while one in particular will choose a child who has been bullied



Children of all ages have the chance to get stuck in, mucking out, grooming or working with the horses in muddy fields



Stacey, 11, has emotional and behavioural difficulties, but spending time with horses has helped her to build up her self-esteem

## DARE TO DREAM

BBC Children in Need donates funds to projects across the UK – here we highlight just a few...

### *Mousetrap Foundation, London.*

Its project, *Envision*, allows visually impaired children to engage with London theatre through specially designed workshops. Rosie, 18, visited the *Billy Elliot* set. Since the show, she's become more confident and inspired to start dance classes.



### *Anderstown Traditional and Contemporary Music School, Belfast.*

The music school is in an area of economic deprivation, but CIN allows it to offer a range of free classes to 5–18-year-olds. James, 15, has been taking drumming lessons and is now setting long-term goals for his future.



### *Ladybird Pre 5 Centre, Greenock.*

This under-fives centre offers opportunities for socially disadvantaged children to take part in a range of activities, such as games, drama and cookery classes. Staff encourage children to motivate and inspire themselves, and parents say there are no other facilities of the same nature in the area.



horses' natural body language to build a bond between horse and child. Children soon learn the importance that their postures, gestures, voice or noise commands like clicking, can have on the horse's behaviour and response. 'For children who don't often excel, this can be extremely

**'THIS IS THE FIRST REAL OPPORTUNITY THAT MATTIE HAS HAD TO BE HIMSELF'**

significant, helping them develop trust, control and confidence,' says Mandy.

Children from all over the UK come to Taking the Reins for 12 weekly sessions. One child currently on the project is Matthias, 12, known as Mattie. 'Mattie has autism spectrum disorder and often this manifests as a lack of imagination, communication difficulties and problems with social interaction,' explains his mum, Georgina. 'He can get frustrated if he doesn't understand a question, and he'll shout it back to me over and over again. This is the first real opportunity he's had to be himself.'

While she's talking, Mattie is calmly grooming one of the eight horses at the ▶

## Inspiring lives

stables and following instructions from project leader Vicky Whittle. 'It's hard when you have a learning disability which means you don't understand the world and the world doesn't understand you,' says Georgina. 'The horses don't make any demands on him and I know he enjoys it. He's not able to say the words, but I can tell from his body language that he is much happier and relaxed as he's able to calmly follow instructions.'

### INSPIRING KIDS TO HAVE A BETTER FUTURE

Another child being helped by the project is Stacey, 11, who struggles with emotional and behavioural difficulties and was recently expelled from school. When she first started attending Taking the Reins, she had no self-belief and no energy to get involved with the horses or interact with other children. Her problems are different from Mattie's but she is learning to build better relationships with others and, in turn, her own self-esteem.

'I can't really say why I like it here, I just know that I do,' says Stacey, who has nine brothers and sisters at home. 'When the horses listen to me and follow me, I like the fact I'm the only one there. At first, I didn't think I'd be able to get the horses to do what I ask, but now I know I can do it. I feel much happier.'

In just six weeks, Stacey's enthusiasm for life has grown considerably. Stacey's mum is discussing plans for her to get back into school, and Stacey is now keen to make the most of her future. 'I'd like to do something like this when I finish school,' she says. 'I'd love to work with horses again – it's great here.'

Taking the Reins was awarded a grant of just over £122,500 by CIN in 2006 to pay for staff salaries, volunteer expenses and other costs such as insurance. 'We couldn't run this place without CIN,' says Mandy. 'Since we set up the project two years ago, I've seen more parents cry here than in my entire career. It really does have such a success with children who may not get help anywhere else.' ■



Having gained in confidence, Stacey (right) is now making plans for her future



While Mattie (right) learns about horses, other kids learn about autism. 'He's accepted by everyone here,' says Mattie's mum



Founder Mandy Neville says that horses communicate with subtle body language, which the children can identify with

## Pudsey's people

**Boots has been working with CIN for five years and, so far, has helped to raise £2m for the cause. This year, with your help, Boots hopes to raise a further £500,000. Whatever you can afford will make a real difference. To find out more about projects supported by BBC Children in Need, to make a donation, or for ideas on how to fundraise for this year's Appeal, visit [www.bbc.co.uk/pudsey](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pudsey).**

BBC Children in Need is a registered charity: England and Wales no 802052 and Scotland no SC039557

