

Minister for Sport visits Riding Centre in Derbyshire

The newly-appointed East Midlands Champion for Community Sport, Manjula Sood, yesterday joined Sports Minister Gerry Sutcliffe at a riding centre in Derbyshire to see how they are getting hundreds of disabled young people into equestrian sports.

They visited Scropton Riding and Driving Centre and saw a paraplegic carriage driving display by Terry Kirby, recipient of the senior Disabled Sports Award for South Derbyshire. Kirby also invited the minister to join in him in the carriage to demonstrate first hand the skills required.



The Minister for Sport, Gerry Sutcliffe receives a first-hand demonstration from Para Equestrian carriage driver Terry

This was followed by an impressive display of para-equestrian dressage by 15 year old Matthew Dalley, a member of the East Midlands Regional Foundation Squad. The Sport England-funded squads, which are coordinated by the British Equestrian Federation, have been set up across five regions with the aim of producing regional talent pools of riders to support their ambition to progress to World Class level.

Minister for Sport, Gerry Sutcliffe said: "It's always a pleasure to meet the committed people who work in community sport. I was very impressed with the staff and the excellent facilities at Scropton Equestrian Centre. We have an unrivalled opportunity to become a more active nation in the run up to 2012 and beyond so it was great to meet the people in Derbyshire who are working hard to make sure this happens. Andrew Finding, Chief Executive of the British Equestrian Federation (BEF) said: "Sport England funding has had a clear and definable impact on equestrian sport in this country. This has been a fantastic showcase of just some of the work we have been able to achieve with this support. We strive to ensure as many people as possible can discover the benefits of getting involved with horses and we have been able to extend our work in many areas. The work seen here today is being replicated, not only by the Riding for the Disabled Association, but also by our other 15 member bodies, across the UK allowing more people to have the opportunity to get involved, stay involved and excel in their chosen discipline."

Ed Bracher, Chief Executive of Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) added: "Scropton RDA group is based here at the centre and the two demonstrations we have seen today are great examples of what we are trying to achieve. The RDA has been a direct recipient of Sport England funding, which has helped us reorganise and improve our system for creating new groups. This has had a direct impact on participation, allowing more people to enjoy the type of experience seen here. We have also been able to increase the number of qualified coaches across the UK and are now looking at a system to encourage and sustain volunteers – with more than 18,000 dedicated volunteers who give more than 3.5 million hours of their time each year at the RDA - this is crucial to us."

Manjula Sood will be a key part of Sport England's drive to get a million people playing more sport – and will act as an important advocate for grassroots sport across the region. She will help to develop and take forward local partnerships that improve sport provision and take-up and secure continued investment in grassroots initiatives. Welcoming her appointment, Richard Lewis, Chair of Sport England, said: "Manjula's expertise and passion will help us make the case for sport, and its power to build happier, healthier, communities in the East Midlands. She will play a key role in cementing the local relationships that are critical to our drive to get more people playing sport and inspire individuals at every level to fulfill their potential."



Group from left – right: Andrew Finding, Ed Bracher, Terry Kirby; Gerry Sutcliffe; Matthew Dalley; Ann Ripon; Manjula Sood; Chris Marbrow, Trustee of Scropton Equestrian Centre.