

Creating a National Equine Assisted Therapy Centre

Where Their Ambition Needs Yours



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**It's not about learning
to ride, it's about
learning to live**



The Background

ChildVision is a unique service in Ireland for children and young people with sight loss and complex needs.

We are a National Therapeutic and Education Centre of Excellence for the young people who come to us, 90% of whom have additional, complex disabilities and require new, innovative programmes to meet their needs. The campus, located on Grace Park Road in Drumcondra, Dublin 9 has been dedicated to the care and education of the blind in Ireland for over 150 years. We are seeking €1.6M to build a National Centre of Equine Assisted Therapy so the buildings can match the work that is transforming the lives of children with disabilities every day.

Childvision's Equine Assisted Therapy Programmes are world-class, currently enabling over 150 interventions with children per week, using the horse as an unparalleled therapeutic medium.

This service follows the same pattern as all other clinical programmes and is structured around meeting therapeutic goals, educational goals, verbal interaction goals and neuro-sensory goals, rather than simply using horse riding as a leisure activity. It is widely recognised that the interaction between people and horses has powerful and varied benefits encompassing physical, mental, emotional and intellectual. The movement of a horse's walk stimulates and synthesizes the human walk, making it a transformational treatment base. Equine Assisted Therapy provides a multi-sensory experience, which builds gross motor skills, co-ordination and balance, along with independence, competence and social responsibility.

Our students are using the power of equine-assisted therapy to work not just on movement therapy, verbal communication and moving from dysregulation to regulation; but also on subjects like maths, literacy, biology and ecology – subjects that are rendered impossible in a traditional classroom for students with multiple and complex additional needs.

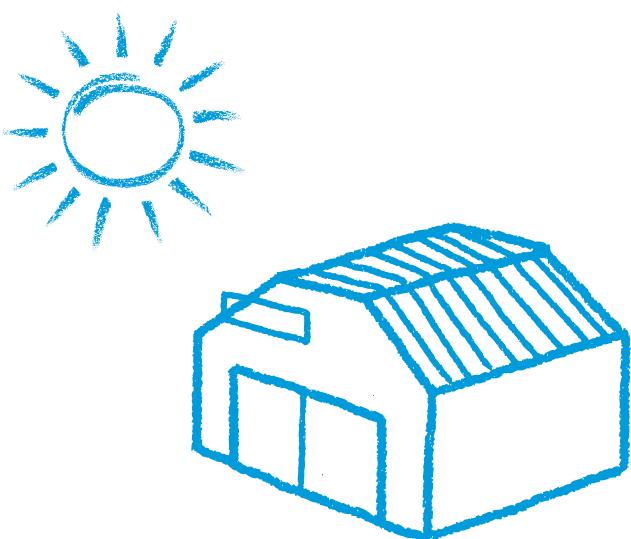
ChildVision's Equine Assisted Therapy service is being accessed by a range of beneficiaries: Visually Impaired children, Multi-Disabled Visually Impaired (MDVI) children, young people with a diagnosis on the Autism Spectrum, children with an intellectual disability, and children with Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome and multiple other life-limiting conditions.

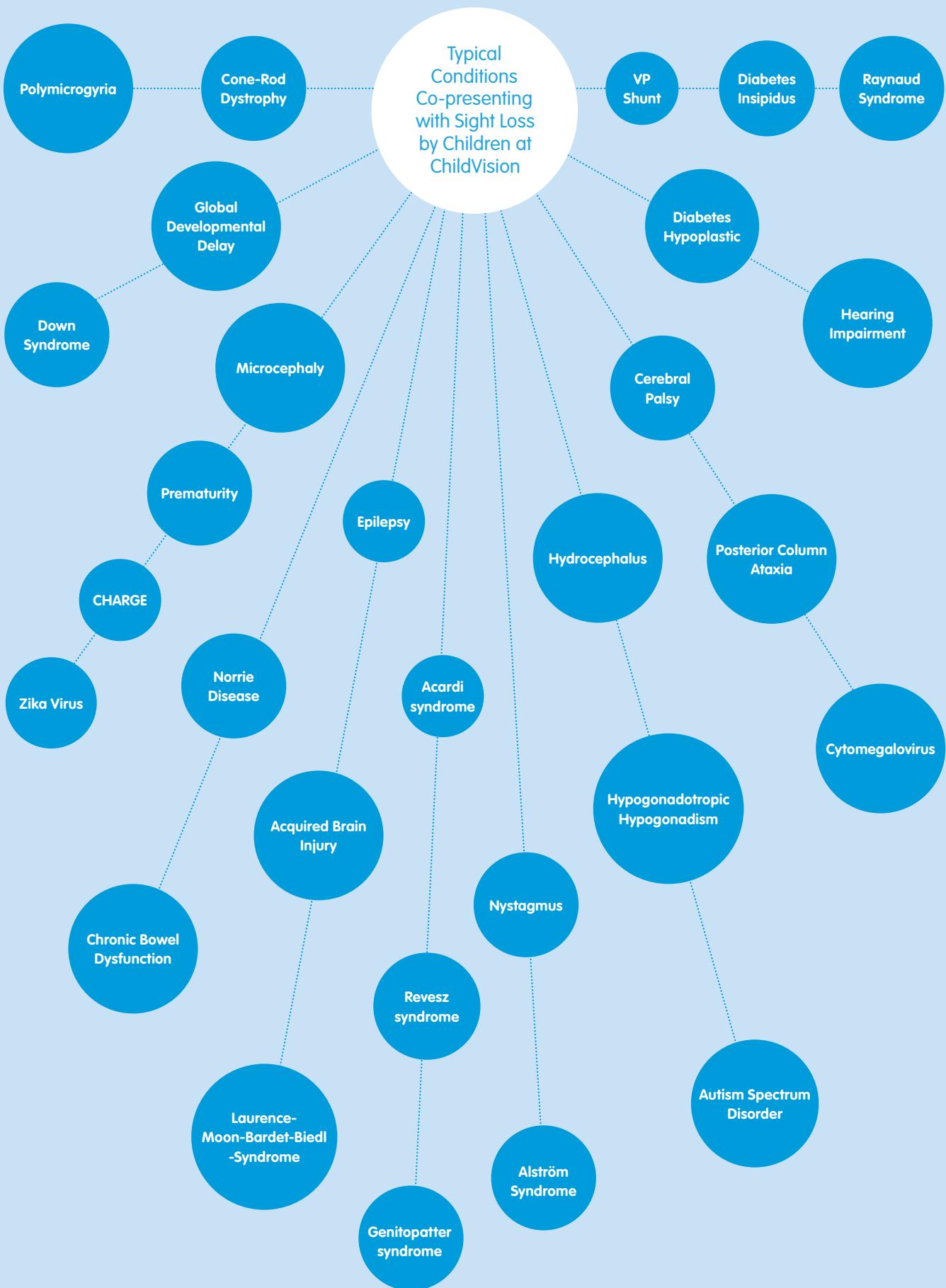
"What we are creating here is an environment where blind, multi-disabled and neurodiverse children can access the best in global equine therapeutics. This stretches far beyond the realm of horse riding, and into the clinical, medical and scientific benefits that equine-facilitated therapy can produce."

Brian Allen,
CEO ChildVision

Defining Disability Differently

At ChildVision we define disability differently. It is not about the condition itself but how it impacts each person's daily activities and their ability to participate in their best life, knocking down barriers, and going beyond diagnoses. The same condition on paper will impact each person and all aspects of their life in very different ways. These can include physical, sensory, cognitive and psycho-social implications – and Equine Assisted Therapy is impacting across 100% of our students, a mass positive correlation.





"We don't look at a student's disability, we look at their ability – and take it from there. We challenge people's perception of ability"

Terri Brosnan,
Equine Assisted Therapy Project Manager

What started in 2016 with 15 students with disabilities engaging in Equine Assisted Therapy per week, has reached a stretched maximum capacity of 150 students with disabilities per week. Our waiting list is consistently full, with a two-year lead time. The Equine Centre is concurrently a social enterprise for ChildVision, embarked upon in 2016 with an income of €40k. Since then, we have built a business strategy around the existing Equine Assisted Therapy programme, leveraging €139k. Our Equine Assisted Therapy programmes have now been recognised by Sport Ireland, Horse Sport Ireland, the HSE, and Tusla, with a Masterclass series, designed by ChildVision, to train trainers from all over Ireland to deliver high-level equine therapy across the country.

This growth has been achieved by a team with true grit, delivered with low to no budget and sub-standard facilities. The Equine Assisted Therapy programme is offered in a space that has been made to work, fuelled by determination and dedication to achieving the best. Our aim is to house the globally recognised Equine Assisted Therapy Programmes in a state-of-the art facility designed around challenging our students to become the best of themselves, in the most optimal environment.

What makes our Equine Assisted Therapy unique?

We have an especially rich understanding and experience of sensory disabilities, and sensory processing issues. Both of these issues are synonymous with visual impairment, and staff here are leading experts in their fields working with the clients in ChildVision. Our service grew out of the recognition by our experienced teams, that by providing a high-quality equine-assisted therapeutic experience for our service users, we would be enhancing their therapeutic inputs.

We have a highly skilled team, with equine specialists producing horses developed specifically for Equine Assisted Therapy, and a full-time Occupational Therapist working together to achieve the best possible outcomes for our students. We have sought to increase our knowledge of this field by working with international groups such as IAHAIO (International Association of Human and Animal Interaction Organisations), HETI (Horses in Education and Therapy International), EEFTN (European Equine Facilitated Therapists Network) and by setting up Equine Assisted Ireland. By adding to our own qualifications we are working to ensure that we are aware of the latest developments in our field, ensuring that we are highly skilled.

Within these groups we have served on the IAHAIO Equine Taskforce; we have been instrumental in setting up the HETI, Irish Register of Equine Assisted Activity Practitioners; and we have served on the EEFTN Educational Committee.

Our Occupational Therapist is currently training in Hippotherapy, and our equine specialists are recently fully qualified to Level 4 in the Horse Boy Method as well as their existing British Horse Society and Horse Sport Ireland qualifications.

We have engaged with researchers in both Irish and International universities to enhance the greater understanding of this field, presenting papers and participating on expert panels at HETI International, IAHAIO, ISAZ (International Society of Anthrozoology), SCAS (Society for Companion Animal Studies), AHA (American Hippotherapy Association) and EEFTN conferences and workshops.

By combining these areas of expertise, we have become the leaders in Ireland for Equine Assisted Therapy. We have been approached by Horse Sport Ireland and AIRE, to produce a practical working course for qualified instructors to give them a toolbox for working with people with disabilities. This course was funded by the dormant accounts fund, and we are in negotiations to provide a tailored course for the Instructors in the RDAI (Riding for the Disabled Ireland).



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Unyielding Support, Unbridled Potential



The Therapeutics

The collective of occupational therapy, physiotherapy and neuro-sensory practice with equines, forms Equine Assisted Therapy (EAT). Here we are working with horses to engage sensory, cognitive and neuromotor systems to achieve life-changing outcomes. Our therapists work to reinstate movement, regulate sensory disorders, and amplify ability across every student who presents to ChildVision.

A strong person-centred ethos permeates ChildVision's approach. This means more than just clinical diagnoses. Rather, it is about creating the conditions and environments in which people feel respected and empowered to be at the centre of deciding what is important to them in their lives. Every single day, we see Equine Therapy eliciting a multi-beneficial response across physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

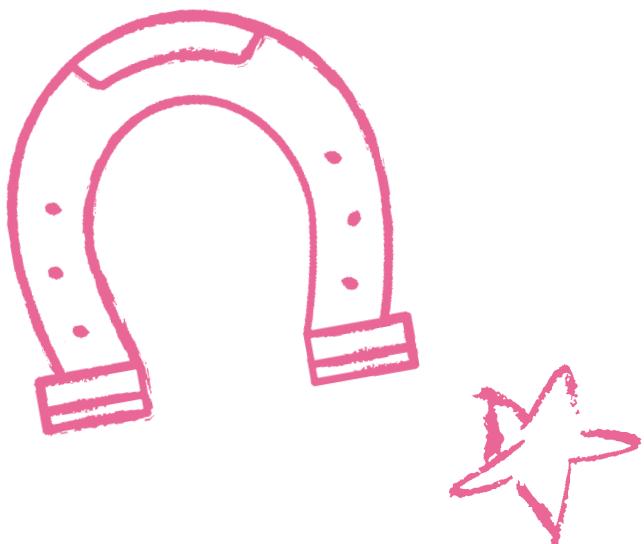
Equine Assisted Therapy and Development

Each child needs to develop skills sequentially. If they miss steps at the bottom, their foundation is weak and they will struggle with higher-level functions. Developmental milestones fall under specific "domains". These domains include physical development (gross and fine motor skills), social/emotional development, cognitive development and language development - receptive and expressive language. If we look at our journey from infant to adult, we understand that sight is the first processing tool that infants use to recognise the world around them; in fact, sight stands at 70% of orientation and exploration stages. The child will then lift their head, exercise head control, push up to crawl and then on to sitting and standing.

These stages apply to all children, but those with multiple disabilities will work through these stages at a much slower pace to better understand the world they are in. Equine Assisted Therapy addresses each developmental stage from sight and experience, right through to biomechanical, sensory and neurological input. We work strategically on the sensory and motor level to strengthen the foundations and then support and scaffold the children to develop higher-level functioning.

"Our team sees the person instead of the problem, and finds a way through Equine Assisted Therapy to help people feel more able for life around them. During Equine Assisted Therapy, we go beyond diagnosis to what we can achieve with each child. This can take many forms - from increasing mobility and moving from non-verbal to verbal communication, to improved respiratory function, and neuro-regulation. As a therapeutic tool, it is unparalleled in its impact."

Audrey Darby,
Occupational Therapy Manager



Equine Assisted Therapy and Movement

The biomechanical movement of the horse, the repetitive rhythmical gait, stimulates automatic responses from the child. This results in the mobilisation of joints and soft tissues, stimulation of joint receptors and the vestibular apparatus and challenges the balance of the student, whilst strengthening and re-educating weak or misused muscle groups.

- Supine and prone lying along the horse's back or across the barrel can be used in the early developmental stages, such as gaining head control and development of symmetrical posture. By using the shape of the horse, tonal patterns of movement can be influenced.
- Sitting astride the horse, the student experiences the full impact of the three-dimensional movement of the horse's pelvis that mimics that of the human pelvis during walking, moving forwards and backwards, side to side and rotationally.
- Sideways sitting can be used to encourage lateral tilting of the pelvis and offers an alternative position for working on upper limb activities, challenging balance, and weight transfer.
- Four-point kneeling on the horse's back mimics the movement pattern of crawling, and this can even progress to high kneeling or standing with small children, enabling them to experience the symmetrical walking pattern transferred from the horse.

(Kwon, J.Y. Effect of hippotherapy on gross motor function in children with cerebral palsy. A randomised control trial. The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, Vol 21(1), 15-21)

"Through Equine Assisted Therapy, we meet each child in their world, and then work towards ambitious but attainable goals. These goals can be simple, but life-changing. One of the students at ChildVision was not able to walk up or down stairs before he started in Equine Assisted Therapy. Through using the biomechanics and the movement of the horse we were able to build up his strength, balance, mobility and confidence so that now his mountain – the stairs – is climbable."

Audrey Darby,
Occupational Therapy Manager.

"ChildVision's commitment to learning about neuroscience is rare. A lot of the places that offer therapeutic activities with horses become so horse focused that they often lose sight of what they are actually working with, which is the child's nervous system and the brain. And what makes the team here really unusual is that they've already taken it on themselves to learn the applied neuroscience - this makes them cutting edge."

Rupert Isaacson,
Founder, Horse Boy Method

Equine Assisted Therapy & Neurodiversity

When children are efficient in their processing, appropriate responses to the environment around them occurs, and is demonstrated by appropriate skill mastery, behaviour, attention and self-regulation controlling their physical activity, emotional and cognitive responses. Without self-regulation, or with dysregulation, the body's movement in relation to surroundings and themselves is off-kilter. Our Occupational Therapy Equine Assisted Therapy team works with a range of neurodiverse children across the spectrum including children with Autism, ADHD, ADD, ODD, and PTSD.

We have 5 senses that we are all familiar with - touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight. There are three others that are less well known, but have an immense impact on our daily functioning. These are proprioception (our awareness of where our body is in space), vestibular (our awareness of movement), and interoception (the perception of sensations from inside the body). Equine treatment for sensory processing disorders includes identifying the systems that are out of balance, and then providing appropriate and graded sensory input to support the development and maturation of the system. Equine Assisted Therapy enables children with sensory disorders to regulate, and with this, to socially engage, to communicate and to learn.

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Defining Disability Differently



The Heroes



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When Aoibhinn is working with Fred, her horse and friend, she is in a space where she connects to her wholeness.

“Aoibhinn has never been given a diagnosis. She has cortical visual impairment (where her eyes do not connect with her brain), epilepsy, global development delay and at the early stages we were told she would be quadriplegic. A tough pathway. We gave Aoibhinn her own diagnosis – called AH – which stands for Absolute Hope. ChildVision met Aoibhinn in this world – a world of absolute hope and ambition, and they have become Aoibhinn’s front row. We have never met a more specialised team, enabling Aoibhinn not just to meet, but to exceed her potential. Wherever Aoibhinn is on her journey, the team at ChildVision meet her there. Through Equine Assisted Therapy, Aoibhinn has made some profound leaps. When Aoibhinn is working with Fred, her horse and friend, she is in a space where she connects to her wholeness. The connection is visceral, the stress is taken away and Aoibhinn lives and thrives in the moment – in that freedom her development is unlocked. She is now walking, more vocal, sleeping, and has started school – these are some of the things we were told Aoibhinn would never do – but thanks to Equine Assisted Therapy Aoibhinn’s diagnosis of Absolute Hope is proving itself to be the right one.”

Caitriona Breslin, Aoibhinn’s Mum.





Beating the odds again, the first conversation Lucy had of her own volition, was on horseback

"Lucy was diagnosed with a rare condition, with just 23 documented cases in the world. 'Micro-deletion of Chromosome 6' means developmental delays, compromised organs, heart problems and less ability to speak. Lucy also has severe hip dysplasia. We were told that Lucy would never walk or attend a normal school. Then we met ChildVision. They immediately recommended Equine Therapy. Using the mechanical movement of the horse Lucy's core strength built up to a point where her surgeon, despite only 2 out of 5 leading orthopaedic colleagues agreeing due to risk, was able to proceed with an operation which could enable her to walk. In December, Lucy walked around the corner of the hospital to surprise her surgeon after the operation – he had only ever seen Lucy in a wheelchair. He matched Lucy's tenacity and determination built up by Equine Therapy. Beating the odds again, the first full conversation Lucy instigated herself, was on horseback. She saw a horse-box and asked 'Is that where the horses go on holiday?'. Her therapist turned 360 degrees to capture this moment, which I was also able to witness. Lucy is now due to start at school in September, breaking down a third barrier. Lucy's drive, managed and amplified by the team and the horses at ChildVision, means she is on a completely different pathway thanks to the game-changing power of Equine Therapy."

Diane Hayles, Lucy's Mum.







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**Strong Foundations,
Unbridled Potential**

The Centre

A world-class National Equine Assisted Therapy Centre means more access, more of the time for our children and young people, enabling the highest level of intervention and impact. It means life-enhancing supports, independence and improved ability. It means connectivity for students and families through game-changing individual programmes for students who have not had an easy ride in life. Our existing model of delivery allows us to work with up to 150 people per week. With the new building, we can increase this number to 250 beneficiaries per week.

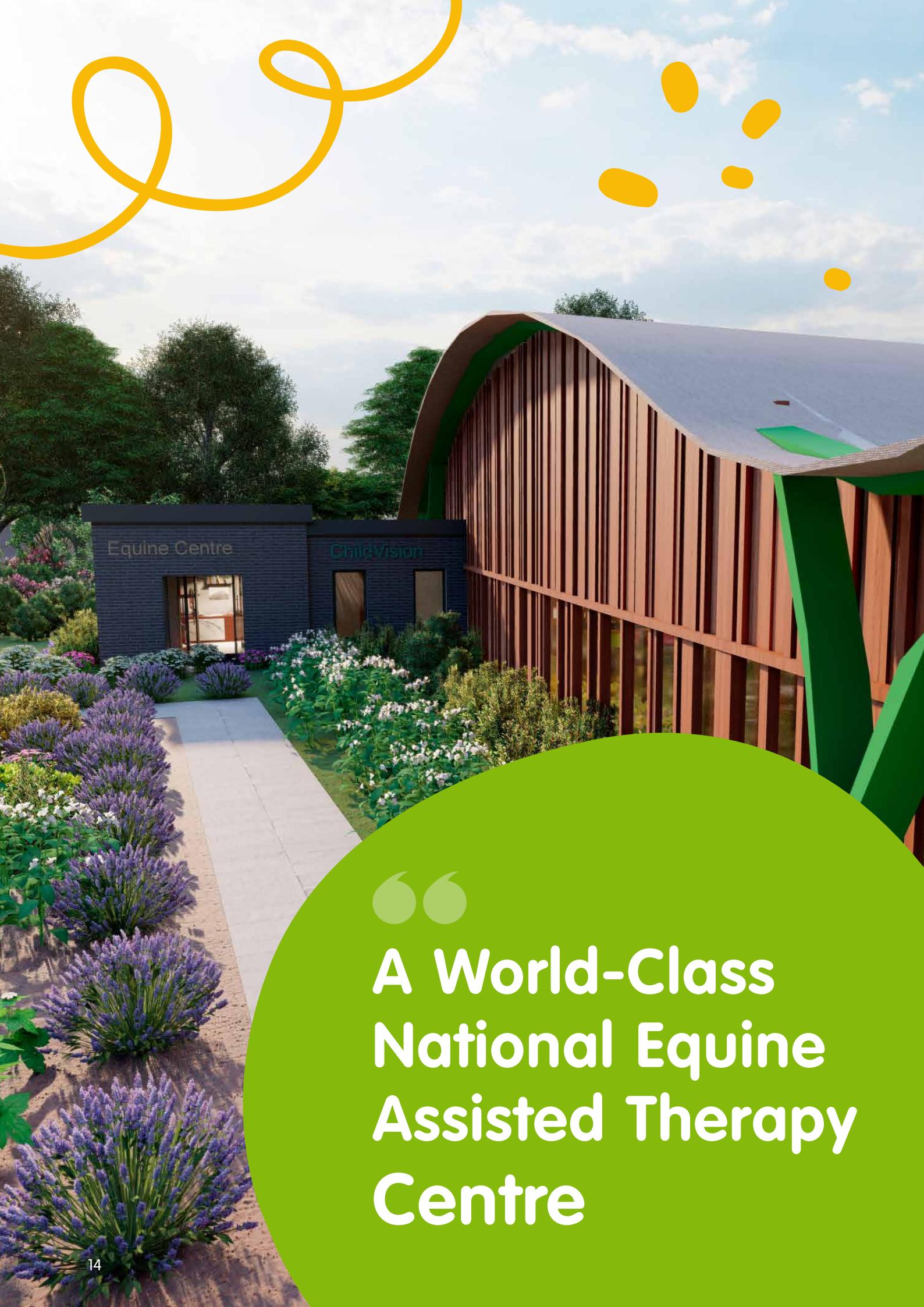
"I have been working with ChildVision since 2012 and over this decade, I have seen their utter unabridged commitment to providing excellence in terms of a mosaic of therapies that all come together to produce sensory integration and better cognition in people with impaired vision and associated conditions like autism. This work that I have seen here is really world-class. Of the 30 countries and in more than 100 locations that we work in, ChildVision is absolutely in the top 3 – it now needs the space to match up."

Rupert Isaacson,
Founder, Horse Boy Method

The Centre Means:

- A Private Assessment space – currently therapists are having to deliver thorough clinical assessments in public spaces, which is difficult for students, therapists, and families alike.
- A safe, enclosed environment in which to carry out uninhibited equine therapy work with all of our clients.
- A weatherproofed environment, enabling us to do more with more children and young people, and continue equine therapy year-round irrespective of weather.
- A structure within which a hoist can be erected. With a hoist, a large increase in the number of clients.
- A controlled environment for sensory-compromised and neurodivergent students.
- A distraction-free environment for the horses. Horses are prey animals constantly on the alert for possible dangers. Any outside noises or visual stimuli can cause them to startle, thus impacting the safety of the child who is on their back. With the compromised nature of the children we work with, it is vital that the horses remain calm and as stress-free as possible.





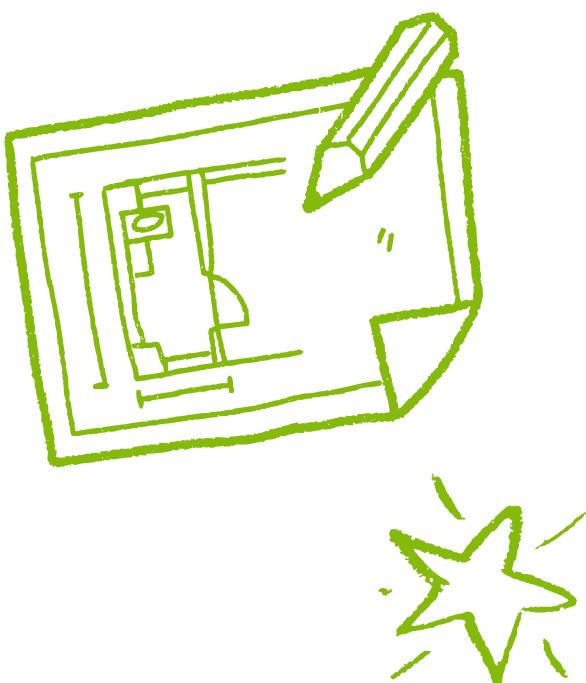
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**A World-Class
National Equine
Assisted Therapy
Centre**

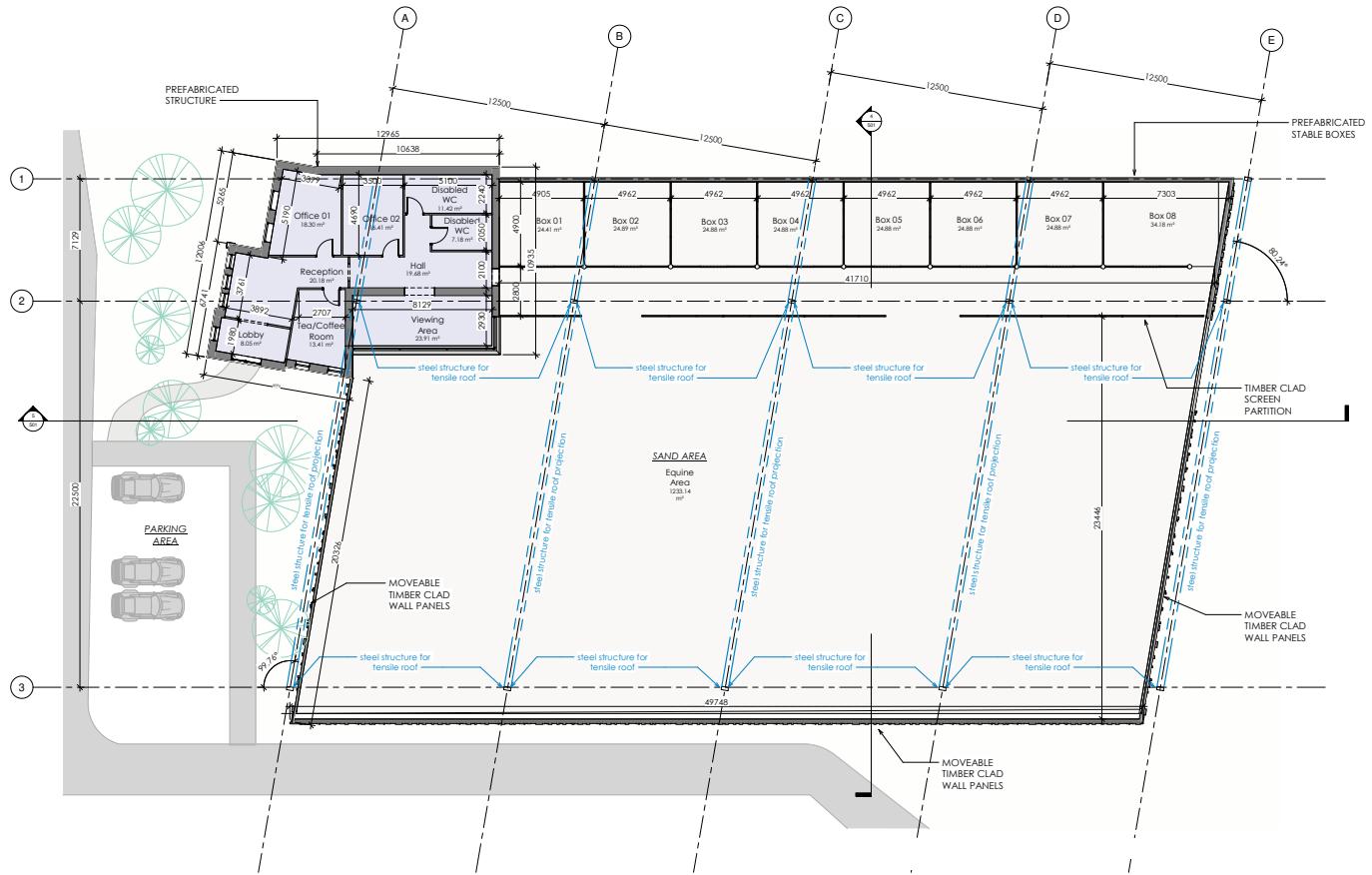
The Space

ChildVision's existing equine facility comprises an open sand arena, a small, poorly drained paddock, stables, storage rooms and offices in old unsuitable buildings. The remarkable work that our equine team delivers considering the constraints on resources is truly admirable. Our architects have been engaged to develop blueprints for a modern, purpose-fit facility. The brief is to provide for a larger sand arena, modern comfortable stabling for the horses, associated tack rooms and storage, an assessment area, an office, a learning space, a viewing area for parents, and adequate sanitary facilities. The overarching requirement is that the facility will allow for maximising the potential to deliver the best possible Equine Assisted Therapy to the children that use the space.

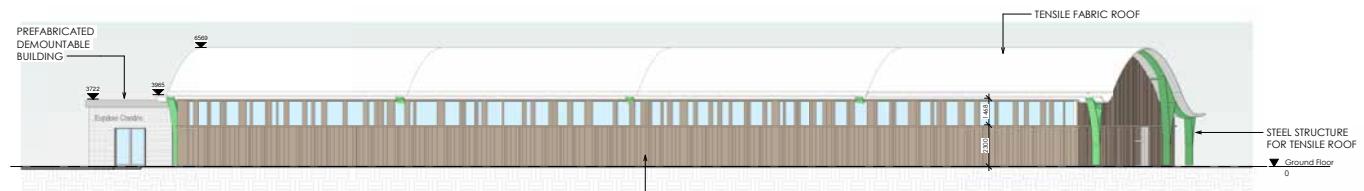
Considering the specific needs and vulnerabilities of ChildVision's children, it is imperative that the spaces are accessible to all, provide for clear wayfinding and sensory aspects, allow for protection from the elements and most importantly provide a facility that mirrors and amplifies the world-class therapeutics delivered here.

The Centre will be a modern, bright and designed specifically to enable the highest possible impact for children with multiple complex needs. An enclosure ensures that it can be used for longer periods of each day, and in all weather. The combination of the organic shaped, curved fabric roof, exposed timber walls and brick veneered prefabricated rooms will allow for an aesthetically pleasing, light-filled building. The textured wood and brick will have other tactile enhancements incorporated to aid the wayfinding for the visually impaired children, and the use of primary colours in the fixtures, fittings and decoration will follow the theme already applied throughout the campus.





Proposed Ground Floor Area: 1663.44 m² (17905.11 ft²)





A photograph of a young boy with dark hair and bangs, smiling broadly. He is wearing a blue zip-up hoodie over a teal t-shirt. A yellow saddle pad with a red and blue striped girth is visible across his chest. He is holding a large, circular horsehair brush with green and yellow bristles in his right hand, pointing it towards the camera. The background is a bright, outdoor setting with trees.

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The
Pure Love
of Horses

The Horses

Meet the team: Cody, Buddy, Brad, Fred, Echo, Bull and Jack

At the heart of Equine Assisted Therapy are our horses – beloved by beneficiaries, by therapists and by families across Ireland. ChildVision treat and condition our horses to the highest possible standard.



Buddy



Brad



Cody



Bull



Fred



Echo



Jack

They are well-muscled, suppled and happy in their lives, so they transmit well-being because they have well-being. ChildVision works to the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organisation (IAHAIO) guidelines, which provide best practice for meeting the care, training and welfare requirements for equines involved in delivering equine-assisted services. Examples include services that incorporate horses in therapy practice, in education and learning, and adaptive/therapeutic riding and horsemanship. All their day-to-day needs are met, from nutrition to free space and rest – but we can do better for them. With the new National Equine Therapy Centre we can take this care, training and conditioning to the next level with an environment where they too can thrive.

ChildVision is also a member of Horses in Education and Therapy International (HETI), with branches in 45 countries worldwide covering all aspects of therapeutic riding, hippotherapy, equine-assisted occupational therapy, equine psychotherapy and equine-assisted learning. ChildVision echoes HETI's mission to facilitate the worldwide collaboration between organisations and individuals whose objectives are philanthropic, scientific and educational in the field of equine-assisted activities and therapies.

“People think that we use riding school ponies and horses, the old boys. But in fact, ChildVision works incredibly hard to locate, train and condition our horses through specialist expertise, knowledge and the pure love of horses”

Terri Brosnan,
Equine Assisted Therapy Project Manager

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Where Their Ambition Needs Yours



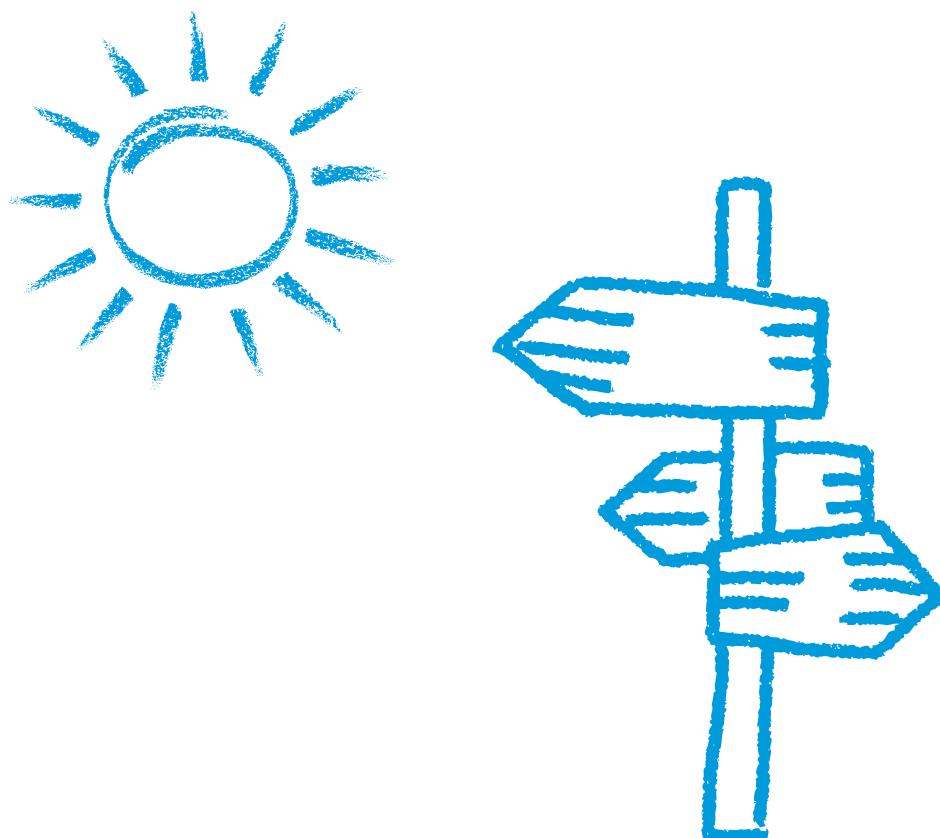
The Aim

What we are creating through our National Equine Assisted Therapy Centre is a haven, which stretches far beyond the bricks and mortar that this capital project breaks ground with. A holistic, person-centred equine environment for children with sight loss and complex needs to feel their best, achieve their best and live their brightest lives.

We may not be able to open their eyes to the world we see, or hear what they have to say, but we can open the doors to a place where they can take charge of their own lives, overcome obstacles, gain independence and look to their ability, rather than their disability – through horse power.

Whether you are an individual or a company, ChildVision needs your support to realise our ambition of providing a National Equine Assisted Therapy Centre for all of the children and young people with complex needs. We want to make life better for them – but we are not stopping at better. We want them to have access to the best.

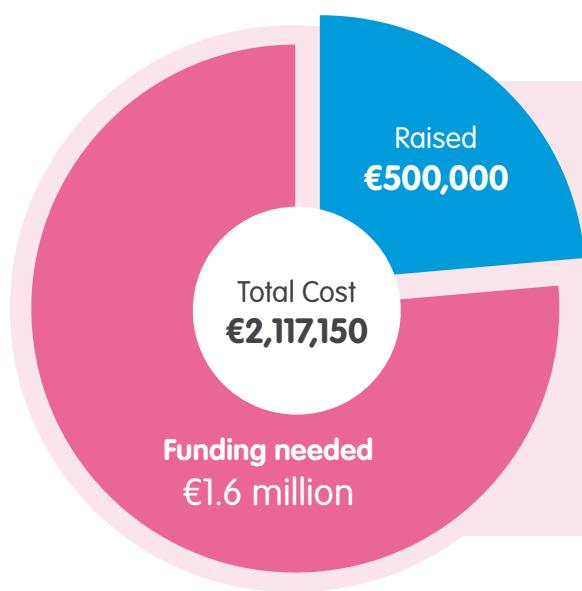
We would love to talk through how we can shape the National Equine Assisted Therapy Centre together. We have seen thousands of children with sight loss and other profound disabilities bravely overcome their obstacles and grow to reach their full potential through Equine Assisted Therapy - now ChildVision must bravely grow to meet their determination.



Our Funding Requirements to Achieve our Ambition

To create the **National Equine Assisted Therapy Centre**, ChildVision needs to secure €1.6 million in funding. ChildVision own the site, have been granted planning permission, and will have the facility fully operational within 18 months of breaking ground.

What lies behind the figures, graphics and plans is a transformation in the lives of people with disabilities, and the lives of their friends and families. They will receive the services they need, not just the ones that we have so far been able to afford to provide.



ChildVision has already committed almost **25% of the funds (€500,000)** to this development and our focus now is on raising the remaining funds from individuals, companies and philanthropic partners.

Overall Budget

Tensile fabric structure	€750 per sq m x 1500 sq m = €1.2 million
Prefabricated ancillary spaces structure (learning space, office, sanitary accommodation)	€1900 per sq m x 90 sq m = €171,000
Prefabricated stables	€80,000
Sand arena	€25 per sq m x 1500 sq m = €40,000
Side wall panels in timber	€150,000
Miscellaneous site works	€200,000
Contingency	15% = €276,150
Total projected costs	€2,117,150





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