



Alternative Education Provision

Changing Lives Through Horses | Catering & Hospitality | Animal Care



**Changing Lives
Through Horses**



**Catering &
Hospitality**



Animal Care





A welcome from **CAROLINE TOMLINSON** CEO and Founder of My Life

At My Life, we understand that traditional school environments simply don't work for every young person.

If you want something different, you have to do something different. Here, students enjoy learning, following instructions, building confidence, asking questions and developing positive relationships.

They build on their strengths, and improve day by day.

Read on to discover how we're helping young people grow in confidence and succeed in their own way.

WELCOME TO MY LIFE'S

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROVISION

Real environments. Real learning. Real outcomes.

When we started My Life in 2012, we were a group of families who simply wanted something better for the people we loved – meaningful opportunities, a sense of purpose, and the chance to feel included rather than exclude. That belief still drives everything we do today.

Over the years, My Life has supported thousands of children and young adults across the North West through person-centred opportunities that build **confidence, networks, independence and life skills.**

From working with horses at our equestrian centre, to caring for animals and preparing and serving food in our community café, everything we offer is designed to be **purposeful, practical and engaging.**

Our approach has always been about recognising individual strengths, building on them, and creating pathways that lead somewhere meaningful.

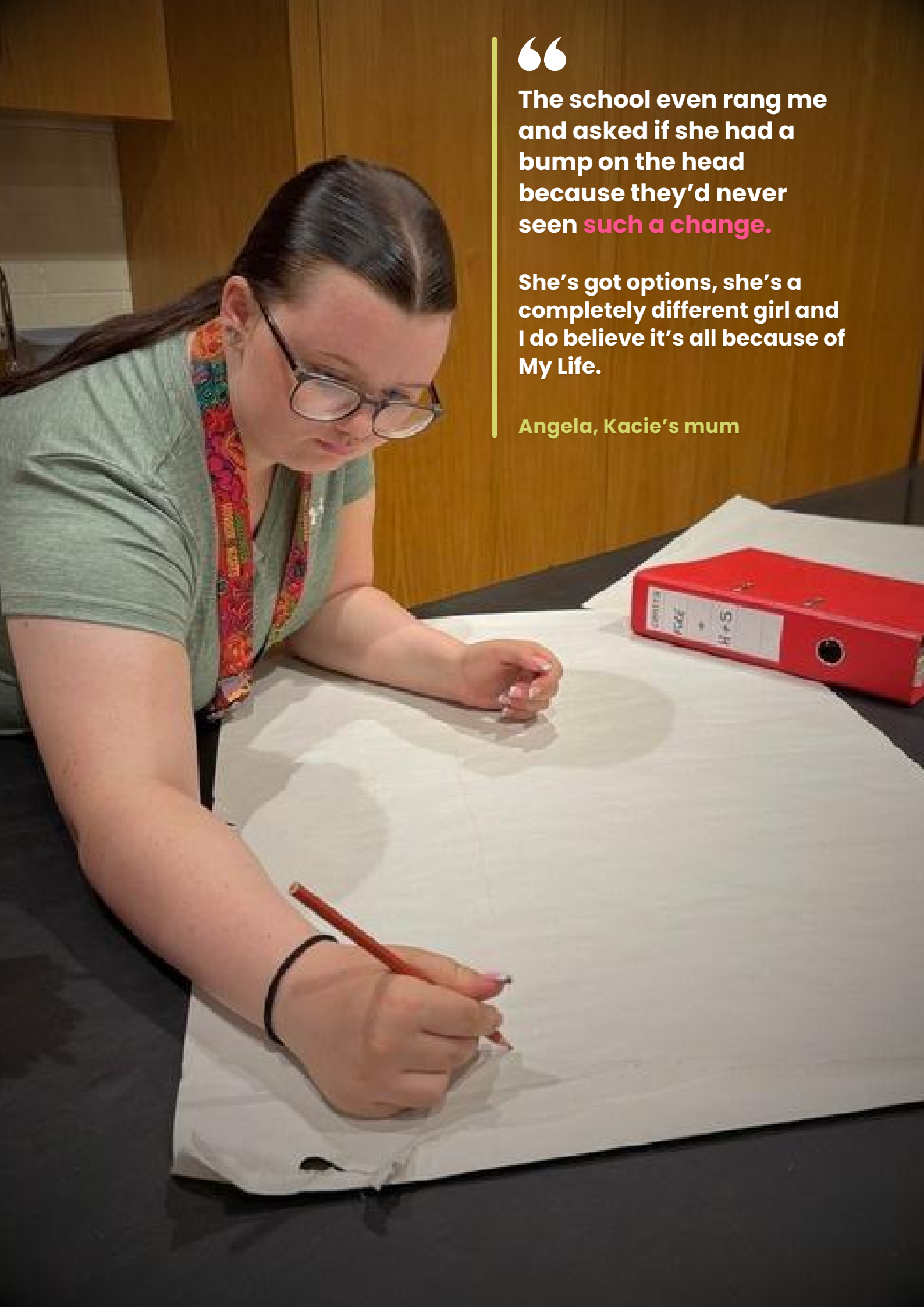
Through our **Alternative Education Provision**, we bring this same philosophy to young people who need **something different from traditional education.** Many arrive with anxiety, or feel there have been barriers to learning and building networks. Many are disengaged.

What everyone finds here is a **calm, supportive environment** where people can reconnect, rebuild confidence and rediscover a love of learning.

So whether it's developing trust and responsibility through working with horses, gaining confidence and routine through animal care or building independence and communication skills through catering and hospitality, our programmes led by our experienced and skilled practitioners are **rooted in real experiences that create real outcomes.**

Learning at My Life doesn't stop at participation. Every pathway is designed and often supported by local education authorities or schools to help young people move forward – perhaps into a more fruitful and stable relationship with education, but also into **further education, training, qualifications, volunteering or eventually employment.**

But most of all, My Life's Alternative Education provision gives children and young people the skills, confidence and resilience they so desperately crave. In fact, we're more than just a provision. We're changing lives.



“

The school even rang me and asked if she had a bump on the head because they'd never seen **such a change**.

She's got options, she's a completely different girl and I do believe it's all because of My Life.

Angela, Kacie's mum

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROVISION:

THE NATIONAL PICTURE

The demand for alternative education provision has never been greater.

In March 2026, the Department of Education reported that the number of children **missing more than half of their time in school hit a record high** in England – and it was telling that this increase was mainly due to a rise in pupils with SEND missing school.

This is not to stigmatise anyone – the DfE admitted there is far more to do for children and young people with SEND or on an ECHP. But what the report did reveal is that there is nowhere **near enough support for the 175,000 children and young people across the country** who go through long-term school absence through no fault of their own.

And sometimes, schools and local authorities cannot meet the needs of people within mainstream settings. This is a systemic challenge which can be met by specialist places like **My Life which can offer timely, suitable support to young people** who otherwise would feel disengaged, disconnected, and at risk of long-term disadvantage.

Every day a young person spends without meaningful education is a day that widens the gap – not only in attainment, but in confidence, wellbeing, and future opportunity. The schools we work with, in the main, recognise that – and rather than just seek placements, **they work with us to find solutions.**

A place at My Life, then, is not always meant to be instead of school, it's about complementing the work they do.

Through personalised pathways, therapeutic support, and a focus on rebuilding trust in education, we create environments where learners can **rediscover their sense of purpose** and ultimately reduce time out of school while preparing young people for their next steps.

The national picture, then, might seem bleak, but actually we see it as an opportunity and a call to action. By being flexible, innovative and committed to young people, My Life can find a sweet spot for those outside mainstream education to find a pathway forward.



Young learners (5-11)



Learners (11-16)



Post-16 learners with EHCPs (up to 25)

WHO WE SUPPORT

We can take people from **five to 25 with EHCPs**, although we recognise that not all children have an Educational Care Plan. You can use these programmes while an EHCP is being developed.

We can also cater for students in the **Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) system** - the education or special educational provision of children or young people outside of a formal educational setting.

As you may know, EOTAS can be agreed with the Local Authority via an EHC needs assessment, a reassessment of needs or at an EHCP annual review. We can help you navigate this system should you need us to.

Elective home education children and young people are welcome too, as long as the costs are covered.

We also work in partnership with local schools and other groups to offer enrichment programmes for people throughout the year.

WHO WE SUPPORT

My Life



**We typically
cater for young
people who:**

Struggle in
mainstream settings

Experience anxiety
or school avoidance

Are at risk of
exclusion

Are not currently in
education



Observing Chloe's development and learning journey alongside the horses has been remarkable.

Through her interactions with her horse, Chloe has cultivated traits such as patience, empathy, and confidence.

Not only that, but she has also developed her Maths, English and communication skills while getting involved in all aspects of horse care.

Katie Wild
Chloe's Teacher

OUR PATHWAYS

Our learners access three core programmes, and can explore one, two or try a combination of all three, with a timetable designed to accommodate their needs and interests.

Each learner follows an individual timetable linked to **IEP/EHCP outcomes**, with **functional skills** being an essential part of the learning process.



Changing Lives Through Horses

Using horses as the inspiration for change, our programme provides an **alternative and complementary learning environment** to mainstream education, offer horse care and ridden modules.



Changing Lives Through Catering & Hospitality

With My Life's community cafe Stable Door providing a base, each person is constantly in a learning catering and hospitality environment, whether that be cooking, serving, following instructions, **building confidence, asking questions and developing positive relationships**.



Changing Lives Through Animal Care

My Life in Standish also has a **working farm**, and we take some of the principles of the Changing Lives Through Horses programme into work with different animals.



BHS CHANGING LIVES THROUGH HORSES

Horses have a remarkable role to play in developing character and key life skills in young people, regardless of whether more traditional methods have been successful.

The British Horse Society's Changing Lives through Horses programme is delivered on a national scale through selected BHS Approved Centres – of which Thompson House Equestrian Centre is one. We are committed through this programme to helping and **supporting young people to develop life skills and engage with society positively.**

Changing Lives through Horses aims to improve the lives of young people who, for various reasons, may need **additional support, are disengaged, or disadvantaged, or at risk of becoming excluded from education.**

Using horses as the inspiration for change, the programme provides **an alternative and complementary learning environment to mainstream education.** The skills developed through the programme meet the requirements of ongoing education and training, employers and participants.

There are two frameworks – the **Achieve awards aimed at 5–11 year olds** and the **Explorers awards aimed at 11–25 year olds.** Participants can follow the framework most appropriate to them regardless of age. Both offer horse care and ridden modules.



CHANGING LIVES THROUGH CATERING & HOSPITALITY

Our Catering and Hospitality Programme is a unique, person-centred pathway guided by professionals, delivered over a number of days each week. Depending on the ages and needs of each participant, it covers everything from culinary techniques and food safety to housekeeping, service skills, procurement and sourcing, industrial laundry, and field-to-fork food production.

Learners gain hands-on experience in our dedicated classrooms and pop-up kitchen, culminating in opportunities to serve customers in our community Stable Door Café.

We focus on two key areas: practical catering and hospitality skills, and essential functional skills developed through practical, hands-on learning rather than a traditional classroom setting. This approach helps maximise learning, particularly for those who find conventional environments overwhelming.

Set within 84 acres of beautiful countryside, My Life offers a rich and varied environment—from our **café, working animal farm** and **equestrian centre** to **holiday chalets** - enhanced by a vibrant programme of events including **horse and dog shows, seasonal celebrations, and live music** and **charity occasions**.

All of which need organising, managing and hosting, which is why Stable Door Café lead on the Catering and Hospitality Programme to give people the experience of being at the heart of these remarkable events.



CHANGING LIVES THROUGH ANIMALS

Our “Changing Lives Through Animal Care” provision provides learners with a supportive, hands-on experience centred around animal care, wellbeing and personal development.

Delivered across the week to meet individual needs, the programme is led by experienced staff and builds confidence, independence and practical skills through real-world learning experiences. Learners are supported within an enriching environment featuring **working farm animals, open land** and **purpose-built learning spaces**, where they engage in hands-on animal care, including feeding, husbandry, health checks and safe handling, while developing positive connections with animals and nature.

Alongside vocational learning, the pathway develops **Maths and English skills** through practical, animal-based activities, helping learners apply skills in real-life contexts and reducing barriers to learning for those who find traditional classroom environments challenging.

Learners can work towards Animal Care qualifications from Entry Level 1 to Level 1, developing confidence, independence and practical skills through hands-on activities in animal handling, health, welfare and safe working practices. Our personalised approach supports learners at their individual starting points, enabling progression into **further education, training or employment** through a rewarding learning experience at the heart of our working farm.



FUNCTIONAL SKILLS IN CONTEXT

We embed maths, English, and related science and communication skills into real life environments.



MATHS

Learners develop numeracy skills through practical activities across horse care, catering and hospitality, and animal care.

They regularly practise counting, weighing and measuring ingredients and feed, managing money, estimating quantities, and creating simple budgets and charts.

These real-world tasks help build confidence and understanding in a meaningful, applied context.

ENGLISH

We encourage learners to read books, articles and stories related to horses, animals and food, building comprehension, vocabulary and communication.

We use themed materials for reading activities that develop understanding and critical thinking.

Writing tasks include journals, short stories, menus and recipes, while following recipes and feed instructions supports sequencing and literacy.



OUR APPROACH & OUR PEOPLE

OUR MODEL IS:

- Person-centred
- Therapeutic
- Skills-based

OUR FOCUS IS:

- Engagement before attainment
- Confidence before qualification

This is learning that works because it is relevant, practical and meaningful.

Every learner follows a personalised journey of:

- Progression
- Accreditation
- Skill development
- Confidence building
- Engagement

Stable Door Cafe, Thompson House Equestrian Centre and My Life's farm are the perfect environments for children and young people to learn, operated and run as it is by **qualified chefs** meeting the highest hygiene standards, and trained and accredited **equine and animal experts, teachers and tutors.**

We have significant skills working with individuals of all ages and abilities and currently work with **over eight Local Authorities, ICB health organisations and commissioners.** We have a strong reputation for person-centred practice and have CQC registration.

We also have an Occupational Therapist who specialises in Mental Health supporting our young people to manage their anxiety and transfer these skills to other aspects of ordinary life. The OT has specialist knowledge of using horses and animals to facilitate engaging sessions that can make a real difference.

SAFEGUARDING

At My Life, safeguarding is at the heart of everything we do.

We are fully committed to creating a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment where every person feels valued, respected, and protected. We recognise that many of the people we support may have experienced barriers to learning, and we place their wellbeing at the centre of our approach.

Fundamentally, My Life is a values-based organisation which wants to try and help people live their best lives. That means establishing a deep and meaningful relationship with the people who access our services, their families and carers.

Our Approach

We have shifted the focus from what the 'broad brush stroke' of safeguarding means, to one focused more on understanding people, adapting our support and helping people be the best they can be, while ensuring significant issues are reported and dealt with.

We adhere to all statutory safeguarding requirements and work in line with current government guidance to ensure the highest standards of care. Our safeguarding policies are regularly reviewed and rigorously implemented by trained staff who understand their responsibility to identify and respond to concerns promptly and effectively.

All members of staff receive comprehensive safeguarding training, including child protection and online safety. Our designated safeguarding leads are highly experienced and provide ongoing support, ensuring that concerns are managed sensitively and appropriately.

Inclusive Support

We foster strong relationships with external agencies, including social services, health professionals, and local authorities, to ensure coordinated and holistic support. We aim to ensure safeguarding is led by the individual, and not the process.

We actively encourage people to share their views, raise concerns and seek help when needed. We empower everyone to build resilience, develop confidence, and make positive choices based upon a culture of respect, tolerance, and inclusion.

This means that bullying, discrimination or any forms of abuse are not tolerated.

By prioritising safeguarding in all aspects of our work, we aim to provide a secure foundation where people can re-engage with education, achieve their potential, and prepare for a positive future.



OUTCOMES THAT MATTER

We're really delighted that people who start pathways with us have the opportunity to gain a wide-range of **qualifications and certifications**.

They might be working towards Open Awards in Catering & Hospitality in Animals. They might attain BHS Challenge, Pony Club or riding and stable management awards. They might return to education reinvigorated and ready to take on GCSEs or A Levels.

We also continually monitor and tailor programmes to ensure the individual outcomes set by an EHCP are met and built upon. We work closely with our occupational therapist, for example, to look at how an individual might need support regulate themselves.

But just as important are outcomes that aren't listed on a piece of paper. Mixing into the community, feeling more confident, independent living skills – these are the kind of achievements we also love seeing in people.

“

You can't give a certificate out to a feeling of being part of something after previously struggling with isolation. But it's possibly the greatest achievement of all.

It's also about friendships that are made, relationships formed and a general sense of people living their best life.

So yes, success with us can be an improvement in functional skills, Open Awards, vocational qualifications, Duke of Edinburgh Awards, maybe for the older ones work experience and qualifications.

But if we've increased confidence, re-engaged people with learning, improved well-being and developed their independence, that's just as important.

HARRY

FINDING HIS CONFIDENCE

Everyone who attends My Life has a unique story, but many share a common challenge—finding it difficult to thrive in mainstream education.

For Harry, living with anxiety and autism meant traditional school environments felt overwhelming and isolating.

At My Life, that changed.

Harry joined the equine pathway last September through the **British Horse Society's Changing Lives Through Horses programme**, attending two days a week. Tailored to his needs, it has given him the opportunity to learn and engage in a way that works for him—and he hasn't missed a single session.

Through the programme, Harry is building confidence, communication and independence. Each day offers the chance to develop at his own pace, and at home he now talks enthusiastically about what he's learned.

The impact goes beyond skills. Harry is more confident, more willing to engage with others, and better able to cope in new situations. He is also beginning to look ahead, taking part in dressage competitions and exploring a future with horses.



For Harry and his family, My Life has created a space where he feels understood, supported and able to thrive.



FUNDING & ACCESS

**Placements
can be funded
through:**

EHCP / Local
Authority

EOTAS

School
placements

Elective Home
Education

**Funding is more
accessible than ever –
and we can help guide
families and schools
through the process.**

NEXT STEPS



We are here to help you explore what's possible, either with your current education provider or separate from them.

Please come and arrange a time for a tour of our facilities and find out more about our programmes. There is also the opportunity to try a taster session in all of our departments.

“If you want something different, you have to do something different.”

But most of all, just get in touch for a chat. We know that navigating alternative education provision is incredibly tricky and we have the skills, insight and knowledge to make it work for you and your loved one.



 **VISIT US**

My Life Standish

Thompson House Equestrian Centre
Pepper Lane, Standish
Wigan, WN6 0PP

my-life.org.uk

CALL US

01257 472900

EMAIL US

info@my-life.org.uk



Registered charity number 1167858

Registered office: Thompson House Equestrian Centre, Off Pepper Lane, Standish,
Wigan, Lancashire, WN6 0PP

Version: June 2026