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## New RDA facility opens in Redlands, Qld

by Janet Camilleri  
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Photos by Katy Driver

Twenty-four year old Claire Byrne loves horse riding. Even her wedding ring is in the shape of a horse shoe!

In fact, Claire's mission in life is to share that joy with as many others as she can – especially people who may not normally have that opportunity, due to a disability or other hardship.



Above: Left to right: Lorette Wigan, Owner, Pine Lodge Equestrian Park, Janet Butler, Secretary, CPEC, Claire Byrne, President, CPEC, the Hon. Tracy Davis, Minister for Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, and Claire's Seeing Eye Dog, Nancy

Claire knows firsthand what horse riding can mean to a youngster. Diagnosed with Osteopetrosis (marble bones disease) as a baby, and legally blind, Claire went for her very first ride as an 8 year old. She quickly realised that it brought her a new freedom: "The horse was my eyes!"

Growing up in Sydney, Claire was soon going on trail rides every weekend.

After moving to Queensland, Claire began taking riding lessons in the hope that one day she would have a horse of her own.

CC (or Calisto Cosmo to give him his full name) was thin and scrawny looking, and suffered from Queensland Itch, when Claire first met him. The family agreed to take him for a two week trial; that was nearly twelve years ago.

CC is a chestnut Arabian with "three white stockings and feet, and a blaze on his head," explains Claire. "He's almost too pretty and prancy to be a boy!" she says affectionately. The pair has developed a strong bond, and although CC can be a little nervous and flighty, he behaves well for his owner and in fact, out of the over 50 bone fractures Claire has had in her life, only three are horse related – and none from CC.

Main photo above: Claire Byrne, with her two horses, Jagger and Pocco and Minister Davis.

Claire and CC became involved in a local pony club and Riding for the Disabled, before going on to compete in dressage events. They did extremely well in competitions, including the Queensland Junior State Championships, and the Nationals.

After speaking at an awards night for Riding for the Disabled, Claire was asked if she would be interested in working for the organisation. It seemed a great idea as Claire has a passion for helping others, volunteering for both Vision Australia and the Tandem Bike Club. The only problem: the nearest branch is at Moggill in Brisbane's west – over 2 hours each way, travelling by public transport!

### Riding in the Redlands

What was needed was a riding school for the disabled, right here in the Redlands, Qld – a goal that Claire, with the support of her husband, family, and other committee members, has been working towards ever since.

Calisto Park Equestrian Centre (named after CC himself!) was registered as a not-for-profit organisation in early 2012. CPEC is independent of the national group Riding for the Disabled, as their aim is much broader than assisting people with disabilities; CPEC wants to provide opportunities to disadvantaged people from all walks of life.

The owners of Pine Lodge Equestrian Centre at Thornlands have come on board and are donating the use of their facilities, free of charge. Claire and her team have been busy applying

for grants; a promotional DVD is being produced; a coach is lined up; and volunteers are being recruited and trained. It is hoped that the first lessons will be held in the next couple of months.

### The Benefits of Horse Riding

Several local schools are very interested, as well as Bay Care Respite and the Cerebral Palsy League – and with good reason. Horse riding doesn't just provide fun and socialisation for people with a disability. The benefits of pet therapy are well known, while the riding itself strengthens muscles and improves balance, and develops confidence, coordination and patience in riders of all ages.

Although Claire and the team have achieved so much, there is still a long way to go. The group is kept busy with fundraising, writing policies and procedures, and spreading the word. The venue also needs a lot of work to adapt it for CPEC – wheelchair friendly paths, gardens and more.

If you are interested in finding out more about Calisto Park Equestrian Centre, or supporting this extremely worthwhile cause, please contact Claire on 0437 047 465.

Make sure you pop over and like Calisto Park Equestrian Centre on Facebook, it's a great way to show your support and be kept informed of all the latest developments!

CPEC also wishes to thank: Lorette Wigan, Pine Lodge Equestrian Park, Robert Evans, Boyce Jewellers, Camping Solutions, Ormiston  
The CPEC Committee, Staff and Volunteers  
Redland City Council is proud to provide \$3,000 for the Official Launch of CPEC as part of the Community Grants Program in Assisting the Redlands Community.



Above: the CPEC committee; back row: Janet Butler, Claire Byrne, Peter Byrne, Candice Brown. Front row: Tania Ameer-beg, Nancy, Melissa Finn, Eliza Marshall

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