OUR SPECIAL FRIENDS

England & Wales · Charity number 1156778

Details

Other names	OSF
Status	Registered
Legal form	Charitable company
Company number	08769892
Registered	2014-04-23
Register	View on the Charity Commission register

Contact

Address	Unit 4 The Vision Centre 5 Eastern Way Bury St Edmunds Suffolk IP32 7AB
Phone	01284 247077
Email	office@ourspecialfriends.org
Website	www.ourspecialfriends.org

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Activities

Objects: TO RELIEVE THE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL SICKNESS OF THE ELDERLY AND OTHER VULNERABLE PEOPLE OF ALL AGES BY HELPING THEM TO MAINTAIN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH AND HAVE ACCESS TO COMPANION ANIMALS BY PROVIDING THEM WITH SERVICES OR FACILITIES CALCULATED TO RELIEVE THE NEEDS OF SUCH PEOPLE.TO RELIEVE ELDERLY AND OTHER VULNERABLE PEOPLE OF ALL AGES WHO ARE IN NEED OF HELP AND SUPPORT WITH THEIR ANIMALS BY PROVIDING THEM WITH SERVICES OR FACILITIES CALCULATED TO RELIEVE THE NEEDS OF SUCH PEOPLE AND TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH AND WELFARE OF THE ELDERLY AND OTHER VULNERABLE PEOPLE BY PROVIDING THEM WITH ACCESS TO ANIMAL COMPANIONSHIP.TO PROMOTE HUMANE BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS ANIMALS BY PROVIDING HELP TREATMENT AND GUIDANCE IN THE CARE AND WELFARE OF ANIMALS BELONGING TO THE ELDERLY AND OTHER VULNERABLE PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND TO ASSIST WITH THE RESETTLEMENT OF ANIMALS THAT CAN NO LONGER BE ADEQUATELY CARED FOR BY AN ELDERLY OR VULNERABLE PERSON. TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC IN THE BENEFIT TO THE ELDERLY AND OTHER VULNERABLE PEOPLE OF ANIMAL COMPANIONSHIP AND IN MATTERS PERTAINING TO THE PROPER CARE AND WELFARE OF ANIMALS BY THE ELDERLY AND OTHER VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND THE EFFECT THAT THE DEATH OF AN ANIMAL CAN HAVE ON AN ELDERLY OR OTHER VULNERABLE PERSON.

Activities: 1.Help people at a vulnerable time in their lives to benefit from the companionship of animals through the provision of practical and emotional support.2.Increase the awareness and understanding of the benefits of the human-companion animal relationship and the impact of bereavement. 3.Facilitate the effective collaboration between human and companion animal organisations and support networks.

Classification

- **How:** Provides Other Finance, Provides Human Resources, Provides Services, Provides Advocacy/advice/information, Other Charitable Activities
- **What:** Education/training, The Advancement Of Health Or Saving Of Lives, Animals, Other Charitable Purposes
- **Who:** Children/young People, Elderly/old People, People With Disabilities, Other Charities Or Voluntary Bodies, Other Defined Groups, The General Public/mankind

Geography

- Suffolk

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Finances

Period end	Income	Expenditure	Assets	Employees
2025-04-30	£264,364	£264,259	-	-
2024-04-30	£227,277	£276,261	-	-
2023-04-30	£222,569	£239,446	-	-
2022-04-30	£237,478	£204,922	-	-
2021-04-30	£240,487	£140,160	-	-

Trustees

Name	Role	Appointed
Carolyn Ruth Bradburne		2020-09-16
Dr ELIZABETH JEAN ORMEROD BVMS MRCVS		2018-07-25
Lily Tinsley		2025-10-15
Rebecca Kathleen Stephens		2024-02-07
Rebekah Sullivan		2024-08-16
Robert Fraser Ferguson		2018-07-25

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OUR SPECIAL FRIENDS

England & Wales - Charity number 1156778

Accounts

COMPANY REGISTRATION NUMBER: 08769892
CHARITY REGISTRATION NUMBER: 1156778

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Unaudited financial statements

30 April 2025

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Financial statements

Year ended 30 April 2025

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Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' annual report (incorporating the directors' report)

Year ended 30 April 2025

The trustees, who are also the directors for the purposes of company law, present their report and the unaudited financial statements of the charity for the year ended 30 April 2025.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in notes to the accounts and comply with the charity's governing document, the Charities Act 2011 and Companies Act 2006 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland published in October 2019.

Reference and administrative details

Registered charity name	Our Special Friends
Charity registration number	1156778
Company registration number	08769892
Principal office and registered office	Unit 4 The Vision Centre 5 Eastern Way Bury St Edmunds Suffolk IP32 7AB

The trustees

The trustees who served during the year and at the date of approval were as follows:

Dr M Johnston MA VetMB PhD MRCVS (Resigned 17 July 2025)
R Ferguson (Treasurer)
C Bradburne
Dr E Ormerod BVMS CF
R Stephens
R Sullivan
Dr J Gurney MB ChB, MA (Resigned 24 July 2024)
L Tinsley (appointed 15 October 2025)

Patron	Lord Fairhaven DL KStJ M Abraham OBE BVM&S MRCVS
Team	B Johnston, *CEO and Animal Companionship Practitioner* G Reid, *Animal Companionship Practitioner* S McAulay, *Animal Companionship Practitioner* F Day, *Volunteer Support Manager* A Simmonds, *Fundraising Lead* M Taylorson, *Office Coordinator*
Assisted by:	S Bradwell, *Finance* A Hunt, *Fundraising*
Supported 'in the office' by volunteers:	K Mallet, *Service Delivery* C Singleton, *Service Delivery* J Webb, *Admin Support* S Day, *Admin Support* C Gordon, *Admin Support* R Clarke, *Marketing and PR* B Cave, *Social Media*
Voluntary Advisers	Dr D Carson BVSc(Syd) MRCVS Dr D Rook LL.B(Hons) LLM, DLaw FHEA Dr H Crawford BVSc PGCertSAECC MRCVS L Dickson CGMA MBA, Caseron J Grossart MA MRICS Dr J Littlewood MA PhD BVSc(Hons) DVR DVD MRCVS Veterinary Dermatology Referrals Dr C Mayer MBBCh FRCPsych, Consultant Psychiatrist A Reynolds
Bankers	Barclays Bank plc 20/21 Cornhill Bury St Edmunds Suffolk IP33 1DY
Independent examiner	A Robinson Lovewell Blake LLP Chartered accountants First Floor Suite 2 Hillside Business Park Bury St Edmunds IP32 7EA

Objectives and activities

Our vision is a world in which the power of animal companionship is recognised and integrated into effective care and support plans to enhance the lives of people and their animals.

Animal companionship has been shown to have significant benefits in terms of health and wellbeing for both humans and animals. Sadly, the world we live in is not designed to protect these relationships. Our aim is to be there when things go wrong and help keep people and their animal companions together.

We do this by working in and with our communities to deliver both activity and support services. Examples of our activity services include helping with dog walking, pet welfare and volunteers visiting with their own animals. The services are provided for as long as someone needs them. We frequently develop long-term relationships with our clients.

Our support services are often the most challenging to deliver. Examples of our support include dealing with situations involving domestic abuse, emergency hospitalisation, or homelessness. We are often called on to find emergency foster care for pets at a time when people are under real stress. The complexity of these cases together with the need for urgent action led us to develop the role of Animal Companionship Practitioner. The role requires both veterinary and social care knowledge combined with empathy, patience and resilience.

In addition to the animal companionship support services we deliver, we maintain an animal welfare support fund which can provide financial help for vet fees and other essential pet care.

We are a small charity and can currently only deliver services in West Suffolk. Our ambition is to help more people both in East Anglia and beyond, but we recognise we can't do this on our own. Our strategy is therefore to continue to develop and deliver services in West Suffolk while also seeking to encourage others to protect the bond between people and their pets.

Public benefit

In shaping our objectives for the year and planning our activities, the Trustees have considered the Charity Commissions guidance on public benefit when setting the objectives for the year.

The Trustees confirm that they have complied with the duty in section 4 of the Charities Act 2011.

Achievements and performance

During the year, we supported 1,175 people: 708 direct beneficiaries and 467 people who indirectly benefited, such as family of clients. We also supported 395 dogs, 223 cats, and 19 other animals.

We measure how effective we have been in improving people's health and wellbeing by asking them for feedback. During 2024/25 that feedback can be summarised as follows:

- 100% of clients agreed they had benefited from our services and would recommend us to someone else in their situation
- 84% agreed their mental health and/or emotional wellbeing had improved
- 70% agreed they felt less lonely and/or isolated
- 72% agreed they felt better connected to their community
- 80% agreed they felt less anxious about their situation
- 92% agreed their pet(s) health and/or welfare had improved

Furthermore, 49% of clients said they "always/often" felt lonely before receiving help from us, which reduced to 18% after receiving our help.

Third parties involved in cases, including friends and family of clients, referrers, and our volunteers, are requested to complete separate feedback forms to ascertain their opinions on Our Special Friends' (OSF') impact for both themselves and the client, with 94% of third parties agreeing they had benefitted from OSF being involved with the client.

97% of respondents agreed that the client's health and wellbeing had improved due to the involvement of OSF and 77% agreed OSF's involvement meant the client received support from other agencies earlier than would have been possible otherwise.

During the year we also actively encouraged others to recognise the issues we are dealing with and change their approach. Examples included engaging with social workers to highlight the importance of pets to struggling families and lobbying housing providers to adopt pet-inclusive policies.

A highlight of the year was taking our team to Westminster to meet MPs and make the case for change. A total of 39 MPs came to our drop-in session and heard first-hand about the work we are doing.

CEO Report

OSF is creating a local community of compassionate accessible support for people and animals that need it most. We have shown in West Suffolk that if you have veterinary knowledge and volunteer support where people and pets are living, a plethora of issues can be addressed.

Cases are becoming more complex, people and pets are really struggling, hidden in plain sight. Our interventions are encouraging worried owners to access care, enabling people to stay in hospital and not resist admission or self-discharge and to get to rehab while we care for their animal friends in the meantime.

We are the eyes and ears for the hidden need, and it is shocking. We provide hope when there is none but we are a small team and cannot help everyone. The gap is widening, and community support is needed now, more than ever. However, it is very difficult to objectively measure our impact. We improve wellbeing and reduce the burden on others but quantifying that is a challenge.

I am hugely grateful to all our volunteers and our small team of colleagues for their consistent hard work and commitment. The Westminster event in particular took a lot of resources, and I am hugely grateful to Marc Abraham, our Patron, for the opportunity. We had a large turnout of MPs to the event in Portcullis House, campaigning for pet-inclusive policies.

A new Animal Companionship Practitioner (ACP) colleague, Sam, joined during the year. She is a Registered Veterinary Nurse (RVN) who immediately took to our innovative role, bridging the divide between human and animal health and social care. We also found a Fundraising Lead after nine months of recruitment, Andrew joins us part-time, but the fundraising climate is very tough.

Our team comprises a diverse local volunteer community, supported by a lean employed team at the centre. We need core multi-year unrestricted funding to enable the central team to manage and coordinate our community support. Our work is often unseen but for all of us in the OSF community, it is glaringly obvious that our presence is needed. We constantly get affirmation of the impact we are having; the challenge is demonstrating it.

Financial review

Total income for the year ended 30 April 2025 was £264,364 which was 16% up on the previous year (2024: £227,277). We continue to rely primarily on grants, and the average amount of each grant is still relatively low. We therefore rely on a constant flow of successful applications to fund our services and maintain reserves.

While a broad spread of funders reduces the risk inherent with just one or two major providers, the time and effort required to apply, secure and report on these grants is significant for a small charity. Our future growth will therefore depend on securing income from a wider range of sources. During the year we recruited a part-time Fundraising Lead with the aim of diversifying our sources of income.

In addition to fundraising to support our charitable activities, we believe there is an increasingly strong case for local authorities and welfare agencies to contract with us to provide our services.

Expenditure for the year decreased to £264,259 (2024: £276,261). The decrease was primarily in order to reduce the deficits of the last two years. As a result, we achieved a very modest surplus for the year which increased our reserves from £136,885 to £136,990.

Reserves Policy

Unrestricted reserves, which the trustees consider to be free reserves, at 30 April 2025 were £62,418 (2024: £75,863).

If the level of unrestricted reserves falls below 6 months of unrestricted expenditure the Trustees will determine what action is required to be taken in order to increase reserves in line with our policy. As at the year end unrestricted reserves amounted to 7 (2024: 5) months of unrestricted costs.

The Charity's reserves policy is to also maintain total reserves at a level adequate to protect its ongoing work from significant fluctuations in funding. As at the year-end total reserves were £136,990 (2024: £136,885). The trustees are satisfied with the level of reserves.

Plans for future periods

As with any small charity in the current environment our plans are heavily dependent on the availability of funding. Nevertheless, we have identified future projects to enhance our data collection and impact reporting, streamline our case management and improve our communications and messaging.

Structure, governance and management

The charity is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The charitable company was incorporated on 11 November 2013 (number 08769892) and became a registered charity (number 1156778) on 23 April 2014. The company was established under a Memorandum of Association, which sets out its objects and powers and is governed under its Articles of Association. In the event of the company being wound up members are required to contribute an amount not exceeding £10.

The current board of trustees and the changes which have occurred since the previous annual report are as stated in the reference and administrative details of these accounts.

None of the Trustees have any beneficial interest in the charitable company.

Appointment, induction and training of trustees

New trustees are recruited through a combination of advertising, recommendation, and personal contact. Appointments are reviewed and approved by the Board and all new trustees are provided with a detailed induction.

Risk management

Management has reviewed the major risks to which the Charity is exposed. Where appropriate systems or procedures have been established to mitigate the risks the Charity faces. As is the case for many charities, external funding represents a risk to the stability of the Charity. Our Special Friends enjoys the support from a number of loyal donors, costs are closely monitored to ensure the Charity operates within its means and the Charity maintains some reserves, all of which minimise exposure to this risk.

Trustee responsibilities

The trustees, who are also directors for the purposes of company law, are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company law requires the charity trustees to prepare financial statements for each year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, for that period.

In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the applicable Charities SORP;
- make judgments and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charity's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Going concern

Through consideration of reports on income, expenditure and of forecasts for the next twelve months, Trustees have analysed any risks to the Charity, and have identified no material uncertainties that cast doubt about the ability of the company to continue as a going concern.

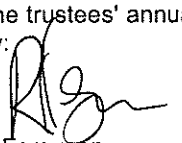
Independent examiner reappointment

A resolution to reappoint A Robinson of Lovewell Blake LLP as independent examiner will be proposed at the next trustee board meeting.

Small company provisions

This report has been prepared taking advantage of the small companies' exemption of section 415A of the Companies Act 2006.

The trustees' annual report was approved on 14 January 2025 and signed on behalf of the board of trustees by:



R Ferguson
Trustee and treasurer

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Independent examiner's report to the trustees of Our Special Friends

Year ended 30 April 2025

I report to the charity trustees on my examination of the financial statements of the company for the year ended 30 April 2025 which comprise the statement of financial activities (including income and expenditure account), balance sheet and the related notes.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity trustees of the company (and also its directors for the purposes of company law) you are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 ('the 2006 Act').

Having satisfied myself that the financial statements of the company are not required to be audited under Part 16 of the 2006 Act and are eligible for independent examination, I report in respect of my examination of your company's financial statements as carried out under section 145 of the Charities Act 2011 ('the 2011 Act'). In carrying out my examination I have followed the Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the company as required by section 386 of the 2006 Act; or

2. the financial statements do not accord with those records; or

3. the financial statements do not comply with the accounting requirements of section 396 of the 2006 Act other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair' view which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination; or

4. the financial statements have not been prepared in accordance with the methods and principles of the Statement of Recommended Practice for accounting and reporting by charities applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102).

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

A Robinson

A Robinson
Independent Examiner

Lovewell Blake LLP
Chartered accountants
First Floor Suite
2 Hillside Business Park
Bury St Edmunds
IP32 7EA

20 January 2026

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Statement of financial activities (including income and expenditure account)

Year ended 30 April 2025

	Note	Unrestricted	2025 Restricted	Total funds	2024 Total funds
		£	£	£	£
Income and endowments					
Donations and legacies	5	31,292	19,000	50,292	52,352
Charitable activities	6	53,500	156,736	210,236	173,233
Other trading activities	7	1,500	–	1,500	–
Investment income	8	2,336	–	2,336	1,692
Total income		88,628	175,736	264,364	227,277
Expenditure					
Raising funds					
Expenditure on raising funds	9	41,304	–	41,304	30,934
Charitable activities	10	60,769	162,186	222,955	245,327
Total expenditure		102,073	162,186	264,259	276,261
Net expenditure and net movement in funds		(13,445)	13,550	105	(48,984)
Reconciliation of funds					
Total funds brought forward		75,863	61,022	136,885	185,869
Total funds carried forward		62,418	74,572	136,990	136,885

The notes on pages 10 to 20 form part of these financial statements.

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Balance sheet

30 April 2025

	Note	2025 £	2025 £	2024 £	2024 £
Current assets					
Debtors	**15**	78,198		59,564	
Cash at bank and in hand		144,605		139,010	
		222,803		198,574	
Creditors: Amounts falling due	**16**	(85,813)		(61,689)	
Net current assets			136,990		136,885
Total assets less current liabilities			136,990		136,885
Net assets			136,990		136,885
Funds of the charity					
Restricted funds			74,572		61,022
Unrestricted funds			62,418		75,863
Total charity funds	**19**		136,990		136,885

For the year ending 30 April 2025 the charity was entitled to exemption from audit under section 477 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

Directors' responsibilities:

- The members have not required the company to obtain an audit of its financial statements for the year in question in accordance with section 476;
- The directors acknowledge their responsibilities for complying with the requirements of the Act with respect to accounting records and the preparation of financial statements.

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' regime.

These financial statements were approved by the board of trustees and authorised for issue on 14 January 2026 and are signed on behalf of the board by:

R Ferguson
Trustee and treasurer

Company registration number: 08769892

The notes on pages 10 to 20 form part of these financial statements.

1. General information

The charity is a public benefit entity and a private company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales and a registered charity in England and Wales. The address of the registered office and operating address is Unit 4, The Vision Centre, 5 Eastern Way, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP32 7AB.

2. Statement of compliance

The charity constitutes a public benefit entity as defined by FRS 102. The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland issued in October 2019, the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102), the Charities Act 2011, the Companies Act 2006 and UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice.

3. Accounting policies

Basis of preparation

The financial statements have been prepared on the historical cost basis.

The financial statements are prepared in sterling, which is the functional currency of the entity.

Going concern

The accounts have been prepared on the going concern basis and the trustees believe that no material uncertainties exist. The trustees have considered the level of funds held and the expected income and expenditure for the next 12 months from authorising these financial statements. The budgeted income and expenditure is sufficient with the level of reserves for the charity to be able to continue as a going concern.

Fund accounting

Unrestricted funds are available for use at the discretion of the trustees to further any of the charity's purposes.

Restricted funds are subjected to restrictions on their expenditure declared by the donor or through the terms of an appeal, and fall into one of two sub-classes: restricted income funds or endowment funds.

Income

All income is included in the statement of financial activities when entitlement has passed to the charity, it is probable that the economic benefits associated with the transaction will flow to the charity and the amount can be reliably measured. The following specific policies are applied to particular categories of income:

3. **Accounting policies** *(continued)*

Income *(continued)*

- income from donations or grants is recognised when there is evidence of entitlement to the gift, receipt is probable and its amount can be measured reliably.

- legacy income is recognised when receipt is probable and entitlement is established.

- income from contracts for the supply of services is recognised with the delivery of the contracted service. This is classified as unrestricted funds unless there is a contractual requirement for it to be spent on a particular purpose and returned if unspent, in which case it may be regarded as restricted.

Expenditure

Expenditure is recognised on an accruals basis as a liability is incurred. Expenditure includes any VAT which cannot be fully recovered, and is classified under headings of the statement of financial activities to which it relates:

- expenditure on raising funds includes the costs of all fundraising activities, events, non-charitable trading activities, and the sale of donated goods.

- expenditure on charitable activities includes all costs incurred by a charity in undertaking activities that further its charitable aims for the benefit of its beneficiaries, including those support costs and costs relating to the governance of the charity apportioned to charitable activities.

- other expenditure includes all expenditure that is neither related to raising funds for the charity nor part of its expenditure on charitable activities.

All costs are allocated to expenditure categories reflecting the use of the resource. Direct costs attributable to a single activity are allocated directly to that activity. Shared costs are apportioned between the activities they contribute to on a reasonable, justifiable and consistent basis.

Tangible assets

Tangible assets are initially recorded at cost, and subsequently stated at cost less any accumulated depreciation and impairment losses. Any tangible assets carried at revalued amounts are recorded at the fair value at the date of revaluation less any subsequent accumulated depreciation and subsequent accumulated impairment losses.

These are capitalised if they can be used for more than one year, and cost at least £1,000.

Depreciation

Depreciation is calculated so as to write off the cost or valuation of an asset, less its residual value, over the useful economic life of that asset as follows:

Computer Equipment	-	33% straight line

3. Accounting policies *(continued)*

Financial instruments

A financial asset or a financial liability is recognised only when the entity becomes a party to the contractual provisions of the instrument.

Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at the amount receivable or payable including any related transaction costs, unless the arrangement constitutes a financing transaction, where it is recognised at the present value of the future payments discounted at a market rate of interest for a similar debt instrument.

Current assets and current liabilities are subsequently measured at the cash or other consideration expected to be paid or received and not discounted. Debt instruments are subsequently measured at amortised cost.

4. Limited by guarantee

The company has no share capital but is limited by guarantee. Every member of the company is the guarantor and undertake to contribute to the assets of the company in the event of it being wound up, such amounts as may be required. Each guarantor's liability is limited to £10.

5. Donations and legacies

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	**Total Funds 2025**
	£	£	**£**
Donations and gifts	28,565	19,000	47,565
Legacies	1,000	–	1,000
Gift aid	1,727	–	1,727
	31,292	19,000	50,292

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds 2024
	£	£	£
Donations and gifts	30,005	20,500	50,505
Gift aid	1,847	–	1,847
	31,852	20,500	52,352

6. Charitable activities

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	**Total Funds 2025**
	£	£	**£**
Grants	53,500	156,736	210,236

6. Charitable activities (continued)

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds 2024
	£	£	£
Grants	58,950	114,283	173,233

7. Other trading activities

	Unrestricted Funds	**Total Funds 2025**	Unrestricted Funds	Total Funds 2024
	£	**£**	£	£
Fundraising events	1,500	1,500	–	–

8. Investment income

	Unrestricted Funds	**Total Funds 2025**	Unrestricted Funds	Total Funds 2024
	£	**£**	£	£
Interest receivable	2,336	2,336	1,692	1,692

9. Expenditure on raising funds

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	**Total Funds 2025**
	£	£	**£**
Outsourced services	24,772	–	24,772
Advertising and marketing	1,303	–	1,303
Staff costs	15,229	–	15,229
	41,304	–	41,304

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds 2024
	£	£	£
Outsourced services	6,819	20,000	26,819
Advertising and marketing	4,115	–	4,115
Staff costs	–	–	–
	10,934	20,000	30,934

10. Expenditure on charitable activities

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	**Total Funds 2025**
	£	£	£
Volunteer costs	2.871	–	2.871
Animal care costs	393	22.544	22.937
Office expenses	24.701	23.913	48.614
Outsourced services	19.283	–	19.283
Staff costs	13.521	115.729	129.250
	60.769	162.186	222.955

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds 2024
	£	£	£
Volunteer costs	4.116	–	4.116
Animal care costs	2.199	13.498	15.697
Office expenses	33.970	5.882	39.852
Outsourced services	15.615	–	15.615
Staff costs	92.056	77.991	170.047
	147.956	97.371	245.327

11. Independent examination fees

Fees payable to the independent examiner for examination of the financial statements were £1,800 (2024: £1,637)

12. Staff costs

The total staff costs and employee benefits for the reporting period are analysed as follows:

	2025	2024
	£	£
Wages and salaries	135.683	155.954
Social security costs	6.347	10.480
Pension costs	2.449	3.614
Staff training and expenses	193	2.685
	144.672	172.733

The average head count of employees during the year was 5 (2024: 5). No employee received employee benefits of more than £60,000 during the year (2024: None). The key management personnel of the charity comprise the CEO for the charity. The total amount of employee benefits (including employer pension contributions) received in respect of key management personnel amounted £30,845 (2024: £34,827).

13. Trustee remuneration and expenses

Trustees were reimbursed expenses amounting to £Nil (2024: £Nil) during the year.

14. Tangible fixed assets

	Equipment
	£
Cost	
At 1 May 2024 and 30 April 2025	3,852
Depreciation	
At 1 May 2024 and 30 April 2025	3,852
Carrying amount	
At 30 April 2025	–
At 30 April 2024	–

15. Debtors

	2025	2024
	£	£
Prepayments and accrued income	76,743	59,077
Other debtors	1,455	487
	78,198	59,564

16. Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year

	2025	2024
	£	£
Trade creditors	5,509	3,402
Accruals and deferred income	78,450	58,287
Social security and other taxes	1,854	–
	85,813	61,287

17. Deferred income

	2025	2024
	£	£
Deferred income at 1 May 2024	56,650	-
Recognised in the year	(41,100)	-
Grants deferred	60,000	56,650
Deferred income at 30 April 2025	75,550	56,650

Deferred income relates to conditional grant income entitled to within the year on behalf of projects being completed in following years.

18. Defined contribution plans

The company provides pension benefits under the NEST scheme.

The amount recognised in income or expenditure as an expense in relation to the defined contribution plans was £2,449 (2024: £3,614).

19. Analysis of charitable funds

Year ended 30 April 2025 Restricted grants	At 1 May 2,024	Income	Expenditure	Transfers	At 30 Apr 2,025
	£	£	£	£	£
Pets Foundation	15,000	–	(15,000)	–	–
Babergh District Council	20,000	–	(17,862)	–	2,138
West Suffolk Council - Community Chest	9,000	–	(9,000)	–	–
Global's Make Some Noise	12,022	31,100	(30,780)	–	12,342
Anthony V Martin Charitable Foundation	5,000	–	(2,170)	–	2,830
Anonymous Charitable Fund	–	30,000	(30,000)	–	–
Helen Roll Charity	–	10,000	(10,000)	–	–
Suffolk Community Foundation – David & Jill Simpson Fund	–	5,000	(5,000)	–	–
Simon Gibson Charitable Trust	–	10,000	(10,000)	–	–
Suffolk Community Foundation – J A Award	–	2,000	(2,000)	–	–
Petplan Charitable Trust	–	5,000	(5,000)	–	–
Mid Suffolk District Council Community Grant	–	30,000	(20,000)	–	10,000
Suffolk Community Foundation - Tattersalls	–	1,136	–	–	1,136
Helen Roll Charity	–	10,000	–	–	10,000
Anonymous Donor (1)	–	14,000	–	–	14,000
Babergh District Council	–	10,000	–	–	10,000
Anonymous Donor (2)	–	5,000	(374)	–	4,626
Suffolk Community Foundation – Household Support Fund	–	5,000	(5,000)	–	–
West Suffolk Council - Thriving Communities	–	7,500	–	–	7,500
	61,022	175,736	(162,186)	–	74,572
Unrestricted funds					
General funds	75,863	88,628	(102,073)	–	62,418

Year ended 30 April 2024	At 1 May				At 30 Apr
Restricted Funds	2023	Income	Expenditure	Transfers	2024
	£	£	£	£	£
Kennel Club Charitable Trust – Chelsea & Mr French Fund	838	–	(838)	–	–
Anonymous Charitable Trust	15,774	–	(15,774)	–	–
West Suffolk Council - Community Chest	5,000	–	(5,000)	–	–
Mid Suffolk District Council	20,000	–	(20,000)	–	–
ADCH Mars Food Fund Programme	1,998	–	(1,998)	–	–
Helen Roll Charity	–	10,000	(10,000)	–	–
National Lottery Community Fund – Awards for All	–	9,560	(9,560)	–	–
Suffolk Community Council – Locality Funding	–	907	(907)	–	–
Suffolk Community Foundation - Shadwell	–	1,250	(1,250)	–	–
Animal Friends Insurance	–	5,000	(5,000)	–	–
West Suffolk Council - Newmarket Public Mental Health Programme	–	5,000	(5,000)	–	–
Co-Op Local Community Fund	–	2,016	(2,016)	–	–
The Hobson Charity	–	5,000	(5,000)	–	–
Suffolk Community Foundation - Pargiter	–	5,000	(5,000)	–	–
Florence Cohen Charitable Trust	–	2,000	(2,000)	–	–
Suffolk Community Foundation - Miller	–	2,000	(2,000)	–	–
Suffolk County Council - Locality Funding	–	1,000	(1,000)	–	–
Pets Foundation	–	15,000	–	–	15,000
Babergh District Council	–	20,000	–	–	20,000
Suffolk Community Foundation - Birketts	–	1,000	(1,000)	–	–
Global's Make Some Noise	–	15,550	(3,528)	–	12,022
West Suffolk Council - Community Chest	–	9,000	–	–	9,000
Anthony V Martin Charitable Foundation	–	5,000	–	–	5,000
Anonymous Individual Fund	–	20,000	(20,000)	–	–
500 Suffolk Reasons	–	500	(500)	–	–
	43,610	134,783	(117,371)	–	61,022
Unrestricted funds					
General Funds	142,259	92,494	(158,890)	–	75,863

Restricted fund purposes:

- Anonymous Donor (2): The income received within this fund is restricted to the animal welfare support fund for animals experiencing pain.
- Mid Suffolk District Council: The income received within these funds is restricted to support animal companionship support services for 24/25 (£20,000) and 25/26 (£10,000).
- Helen Roll Charity: The income received within this fund is restricted to support the cost of encouraging the wider adoption of animal companionship support services
- Suffolk Community Foundation - Tattersalls Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship support services in the Newmarket area.
- Anonymous Donor (1): The income received within this fund is restricted to support office rental costs.
- West Suffolk Council – Thriving Communities: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship practitioners.
- Babergh District Council: The income received within these funds is restricted to support animal companionship coordinator costs for 24/25 (£20,000) and animal companionship support services for 25/26 (£10,000)
- Global's Make Some Noise: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship practitioner costs.
- Anthony V Martin Charitable Foundation: The income received within this fund is restricted to the animal welfare support fund

The following restricted projects have been completed:

- Pets Foundation: The income received within this fund is restricted to support the animal welfare support fund
- West Suffolk Council – Community Chest: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship coordinator costs.
- Anonymous Charitable Trust: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship practitioner costs in 24/25 and the Charity Manager salary in 23/24
- Helen Roll Charity: The income received within this fund is restricted to support volunteer recruitment and management costs.
- Suffolk Community Foundation – David and Jill Simpson Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship support services.
- Simon Gibson Charitable Trust: The income received within this fund is restricted to support volunteer recruitment and support costs
- Suffolk Community Foundation – Birketts: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship support services.
- Petplan Charitable Trust : The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship practitioner costs
- Suffolk Community Foundation –Household Support Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to purchase supermarket vouchers to distribute to clients in need.

20. Analysis of net assets between funds

30 April 2025	General Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds
	£	£	£
Current assets	148,231	74,572	222,803
Creditors less than 1 year	(85,813)	–	(85,813)
Net Assets	62,418	74,572	136,990

30 April 2024	General Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds
	£	£	£
Current assets	137,552	61,022	198,574
Creditors less than 1 year	(61,689)	–	(61,689)
Net Assets	75,863	61,022	136,885

21. Related parties

B Johnston, CEO of the charity, is a family member to the Trustee M Johnston. During the year the charity paid B Johnston amounts totalling £30,845 (2024: £38,264).

J Bradburne, is a family member to the Trustee C Bradburne. During the year the charity paid J Bradburne amounts for outsourced services totalling £5,700 (2024: £4,500).

There were no other related party transactions in this or the prior year.

OUR SPECIAL FRIENDS

England & Wales - Charity number 1156778

Accounts

Our Special Friends

Promoting, preserving and providing the power of animal companionship

Annual Report 2023 - 2024

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR DONORS AND VOLUNTEERS

We would not exist without your generous support

Front Cover: 'Sally' out walking with Bobby our visiting dog

Above: Renee and Pebbles

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Thank you very much to all our volunteers, supporters, donors and fundraisers, without your kind help we would not be able to provide our support. These are just a few examples of fundraisers this year:

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD 2024

This has been a VERY special year for Our Special Friends as it is the 10th anniversary from when the charity was first registered.

It was also special as Our Special Friends was chosen by the Chairman of West Suffolk Council to be his charity of the year. He featured Our Special Friends repeatedly throughout the year at his civic events, both highlighting the charity and raising its profile significantly across the county, as well as helping to raise funds. The charity's contribution to society was also highlighted by Global's Make Some Noise campaign which raised significant funds and widened awareness of the charity beyond the county's borders.

As you'll see in the data around our growth over the past ten years, when we added a second Animal Companionship Practitioner to our staff team, it enabled service delivery to increase by 33%. The majority of cases still come from self-referral but it is heartening to see 43% increase in referrals from Social Prescribing Linkworkers who play such a pivotal role in the provision of care for some of the most disadvantaged in society.

The range of circumstances of clients is still wide but the most frequent are physical and mental ill health as well as mobility and financial distress.

The importance of the human-animal bond in society has been well documented with studies showing significant cost savings to society and improved quality of life for many who have animals in their lives. Our Special Friends is determined to show the benefits of Suffolk being recognised as a pet-inclusive county.

Our Special Friends is asked to provide a wide variety of support activities (as you will see in the pie chart on page 11 and in the other infographics) and helped 615 cases in the year. This is an average of more than two cases per working day and equates to more than 1,100 people being supported. The cases are often complex in their circumstances and require significant expertise in the support that the team of staff and volunteers provide, alongside many of the statutory services such as mental health trusts, the probation service, and domestic abuse organisations; and often at very short notice. I invite you to read some of the cases and testimonials that are showcased in this annual review. There can be no doubt that many people have had their lives improved by the important, but often "below the radar" work that Our Special Friends carries out.

Looking ahead, Our Special Friends is building a strategy to influence politicians and others to appreciate the role that charities such as Our Special Friends can make to wider society if its principles and service delivery could be made more widely available.

Mark Johnston - Chair of the Trustees

OUR VISION

A world in which the power of animal companionship is recognised and integrated into effective care and support plans for people and animals.

OUR MISSION

To identify, develop, promote and deliver animal companionship support services which secure the benefits of animal companionship for people experiencing times of vulnerability, improving welfare for both.

OUR GOALS

1. To develop and demonstrate the role of an Animal Companionship Practitioner (ACP) and the effective application of Animal Companionship Support Services (ACSS) to vulnerable people in society as a functioning unit in its current location.

2. To deliver and evidence outstanding ACSS in our current location

3. To expand the adoption and provision of ACSS locally, through outreach, education, training and partnerships with like-minded organisations and agencies and secure budgetary support from them.

4. To ensure financial stability.

    a. To ensure our sustainability as a provider of ACSS in the current locality.
    b. To influence the provision of ACSS in other locations.

Trustees have had regard to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit.

Bury St Edmunds Market with our donated Scrumbles Advent Calendars

CEO'S REPORT

This year we celebrated our 10th anniversary as a registered charity and it was the year that we recruited our first Animal Companionship Coordinator (ACC), thanks to funding from Mid Suffolk District Council and the National Lottery Community Fund's Awards for All programme.

Our full-time ACC liaises between the OSF office in Newmarket and our referred cases, visiting people in their homes, recruiting local volunteers and matching them to the identified need. This role formalises and professionalises some of the work undertaken by our Lead Volunteers and the very first 'animal companionship support worker' at the start of our charity. We are indebted to all our volunteers, and especially our local Lead Volunteers and Assessors, whose work has been crucial for OSF to operate. However, with volunteering decreasing nationally, bringing in a paid-for role increases consistency and sustainability. We have continued to support owners going through critical times and people with a love of animals who appreciate the joy that their presence can bring. With over 600 cases in the year, and over 100 volunteers helping in varied roles, we have found a real need for this holistic support in the community where people and animals are suffering, and where access to pre-existing services is challenging. However, with other sectors in crisis, referrals to OSF are becoming increasingly complex. We are focusing on the quality of our intervention and creating transformational change.

This year has been a balance between us receiving more cases than our resources. It is important for people to find us easy to contact and to get a timely reply from our team. Many situations are urgent or they have reached out to others without any responses and are desperate.

We are helping to fill a void into which people and animals are falling, where they are suffering and not accessing the support that they need. We want more people and initiatives to help fill this gap and enable our communities to be pet-inclusive.

We were thrilled to be chosen as one of the small charities supported by Global's Make Some Noise. We met their colleagues and benefited from their support which raised awareness of our community work, and vital funds for our Animal Companionship Practitioner role. We were also the Charity of the Year for the Chair of West Suffolk Council and my thanks go to Roger Dicker and Ruth Pusterla for all that it involved.

None of this would be possible without the support of so many, and I thank everyone who is helping or has helped to develop this community outreach approach.

Dr Bin Johnston
CEO, Founder & Lead Animal Companionship Practitioner

Our Special Friends

The difference we made

2023/2024

472 new cases

145 other cases in the period

615 cases in the year

Beneficiaries

Direct: 721

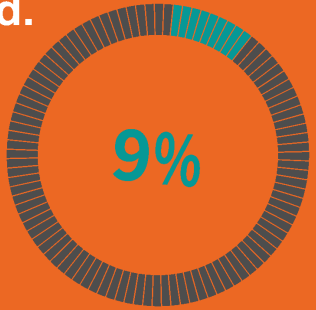
Indirect: 385

1106
people supported

365
dogs supported

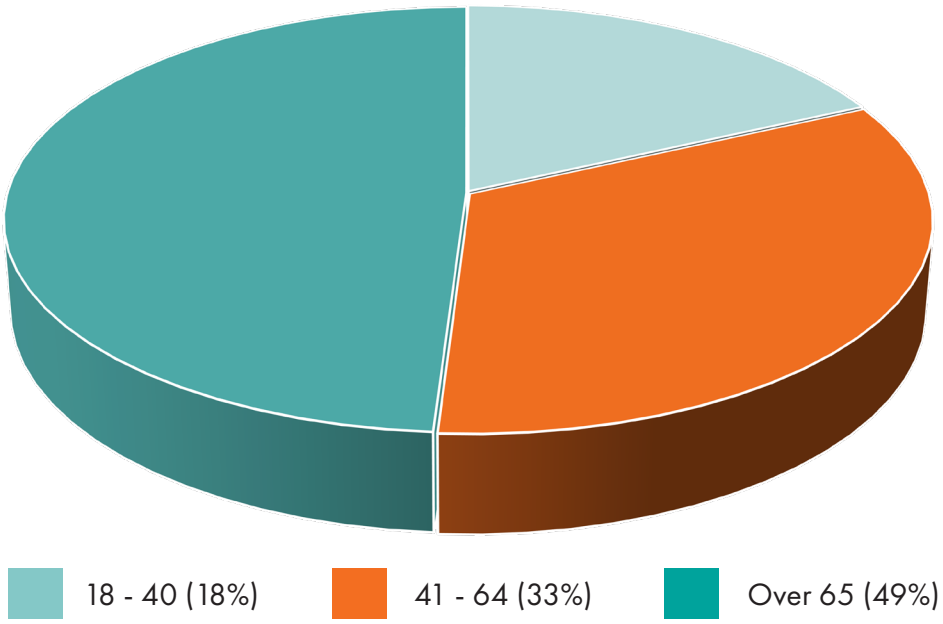
152
cats and small animals supported

9% of our clients have requested support more than once in this reporting period.



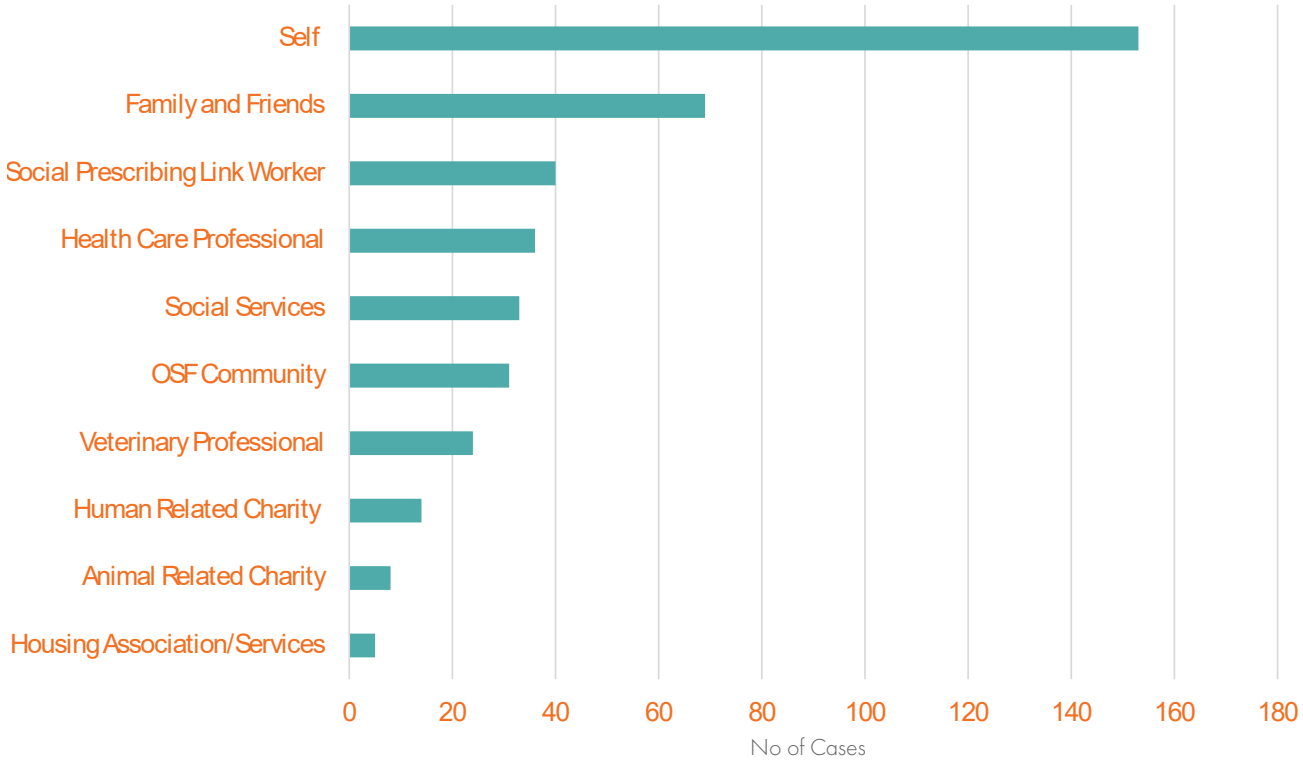
CASE DATA

Client Age Range



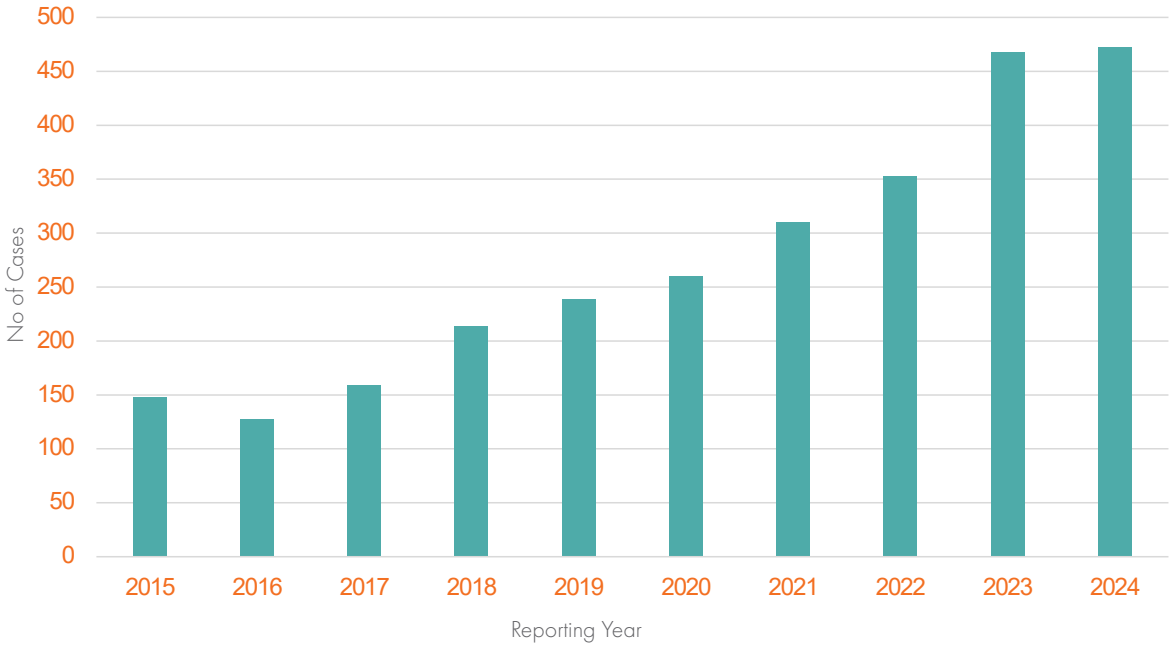
We support people of all ages, and for clients for whom we have age data, the largest proportion is over 65.

Source of Referrals



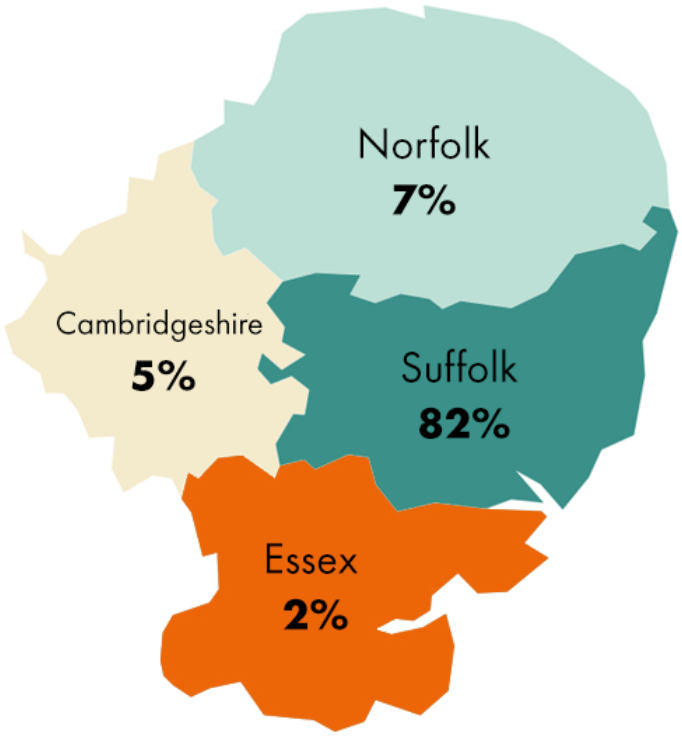
The leading source of cases continues to be self-referral with a broad range of others.
Social Prescribing Linkworker referrals have increased by 43%.

10 Years of Growth in Number of New Cases



Over the years we have seen a steady growth in new cases which is especially apparent in the year 2023 which shows the impact of having a second Animal Companionship Practitioner in post. This enabled us to increase our service delivery capacity by 33% on the previous year .

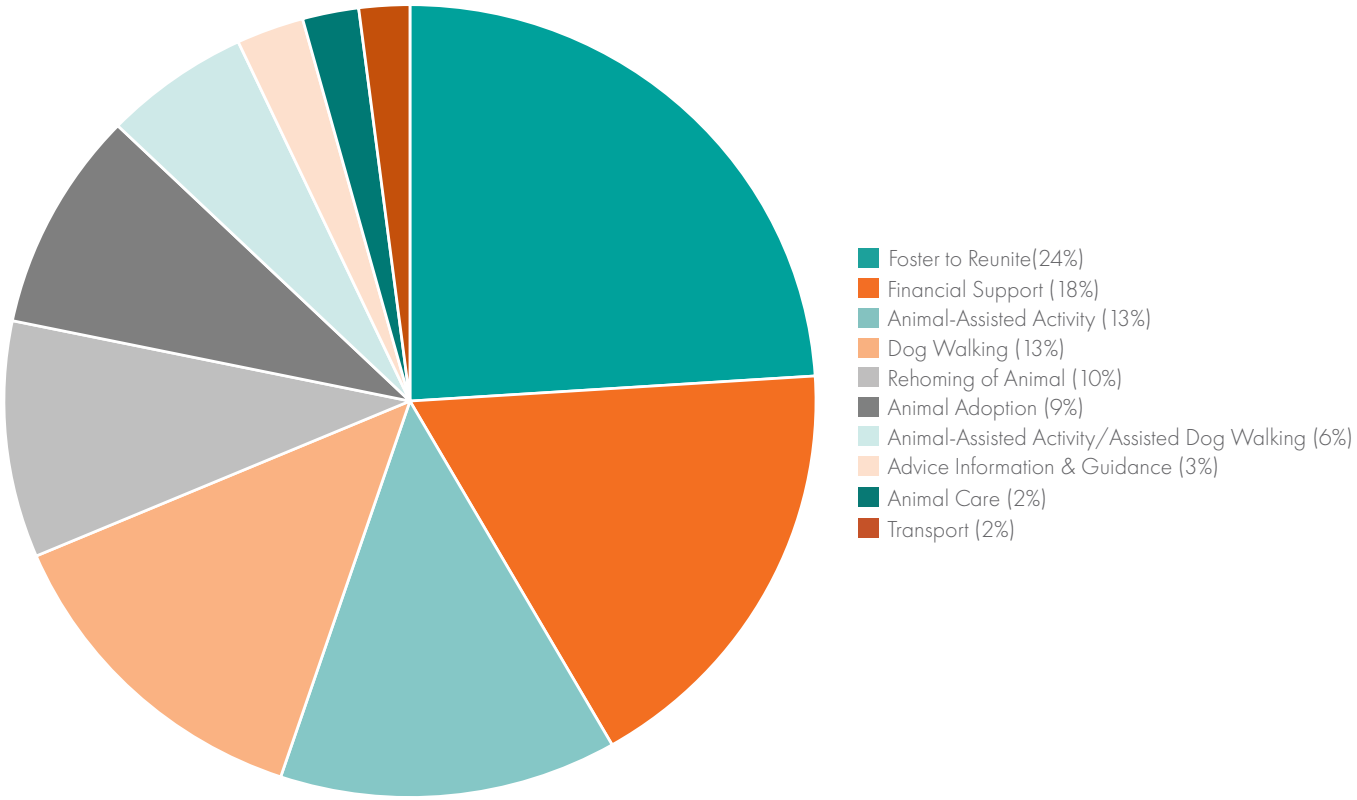
Location of New Cases in East Anglia



This illustrates that our primary focus is Suffolk while we aim for a pet-inclusive county and to develop and demonstrate the impact of our approach.

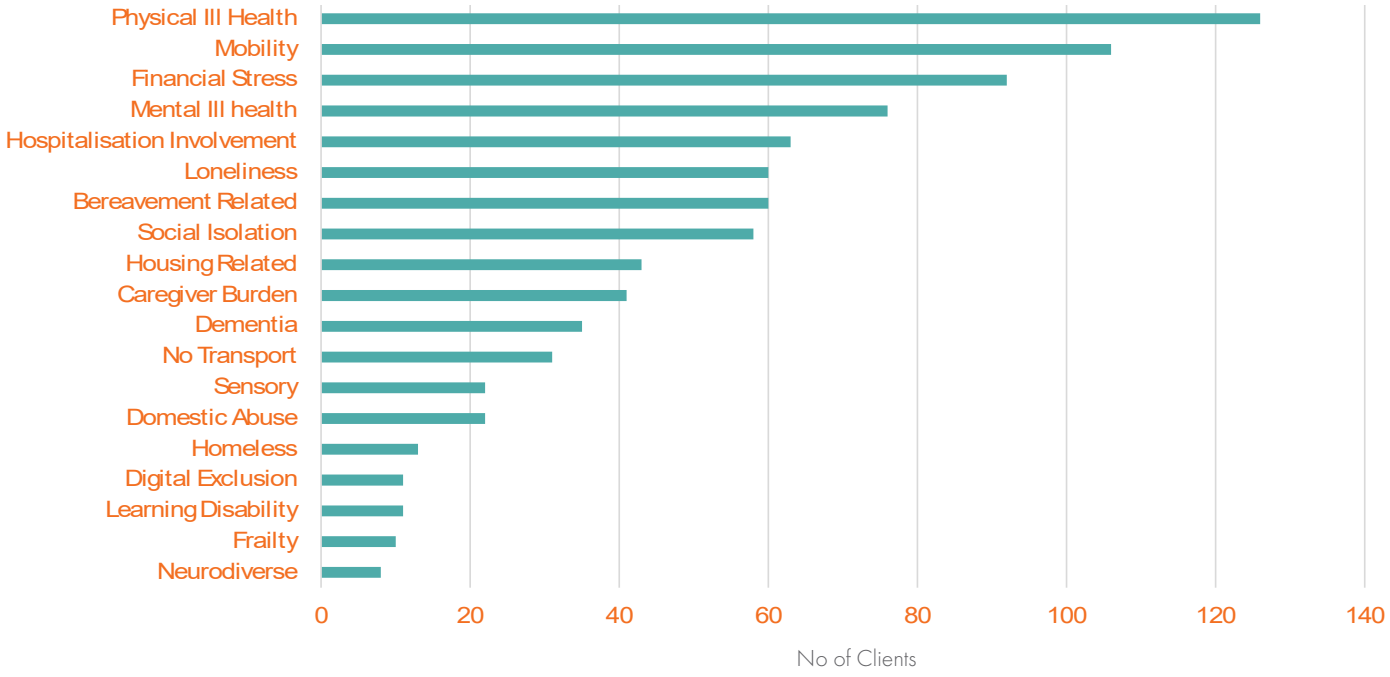
Where the postcode is available, 4% of new cases are outside East Anglia

Help Requested 2023-2024



The top request is Fostering to Reunite, which is nearly 24% of all the services requested. This is largely due to lack of pet-inclusive accommodation. Financial Support is the second highest which is not surprising in the current climate. More than one service can be needed and we are recording the primary one.

Why Our Services Are Needed



CASE STUDY 'Martha' and her cats

NB – names have been changed to protect our client's identity

In October 2023, Our Special Friends (OSF) received a call from 'Martha' who had been admitted to a mental health unit and was worried that there was no-one to care for her two cats. She had had the cats, a two-year-old brother and sister pair, since they were six months old. Having already had her two young children taken away from her, the cats were very important to Martha and she was concerned as they had already been without care for 24 hours.

Martha had only moved to the area two months previously and had no local family or friends who could help. She did not know how long she would be staying in hospital, and as the cats had not been vaccinated, they could not go into a cattery. Martha had been in hospital previously when she had been able to leave the ward to care for the cats herself. However, due to her deteriorating mental health, the hospital staff could no longer allow this.

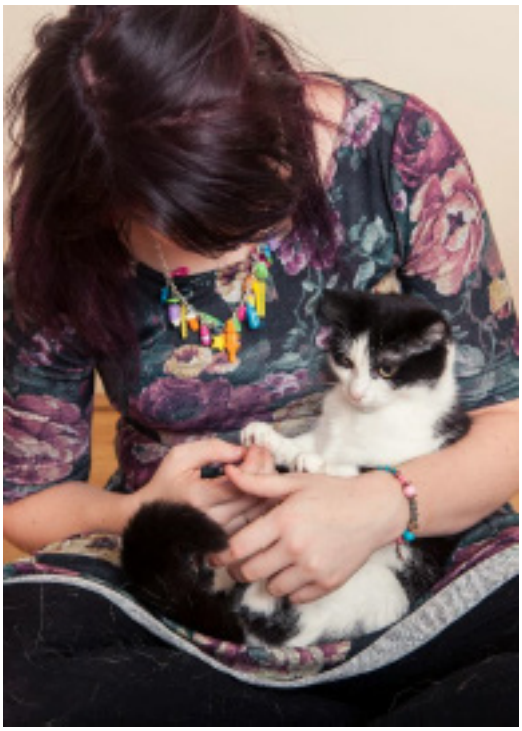
Our Special Friends quickly stepped in and sent a call out to our volunteers for help. We arranged a rota of two volunteers to visit, with occasional visits from OSF staff to fill any gaps. Martha had provided the keysafe code to us, illustrating a high level of trust and allowing us to easily provide in-situ pet care. We set up a WhatsApp group so Martha could be kept updated with news and photographs of the cats, which she found very reassuring. She was also able to order food and cat litter online when OSF notified her that supplies were getting low, giving her an important connection to her pets' care.

A month later, Martha was well enough to be escorted home to care for the cats herself. Unfortunately, a few weeks later there was a crisis and Martha had to be readmitted to hospital, so OSF stepped in again to provide in-situ care for the cats. During this time, Martha sent a WhatsApp message saying she had made the difficult decision to rehome the cats as she wasn't going to be returning home. Given Martha's evident love for her cats, this caused immediate concern to OSF. We contacted the hospital, who said she was in the process of being discharged and was expected back later to collect her belongings. Further contact with Martha indicated she was at risk of suicide but her whereabouts were unknown. We continued to liaise with Martha and the hospital and thankfully she was located and returned to hospital. Her fear of discharge and being without her children had precipitated Martha's suicide plan, but after four days more in hospital she had improved sufficiently to be discharged home. While we hope Martha will continue to recover, she knows Our Special Friends will always support her and her cats if she needs it.

Martha told us *"[Our Special Friends] stepped up to help immediately as soon as the help was required, even last minute/on the day, they communicated extremely well with me via calls and messages, but also respected my privacy and the sensitive nature of my illness ... The volunteers have been extremely kind and compassionate with regards to my situation and health and have even raised the alarm on occasion when I needed more professional support.*

[Our Special Friends] were so very proactive with their support. Because my health was changeable and unpredictable, I was concerned that I may have had to find a new home for my two cats. However, due to the support from OSF, I felt reassured that the cats were being very well cared for over the periods that I was away.

My relationship with my cats is stronger than ever now and I am so very grateful that OSF were there to help look after them when I was unable to ... I have remained out of hospital for a month and a half now, so I am excited at the prospect of being able to return to work very soon; fingers crossed ... [the cats] are both very well and happy and still loving me being home and I'm loving spending time with them too."



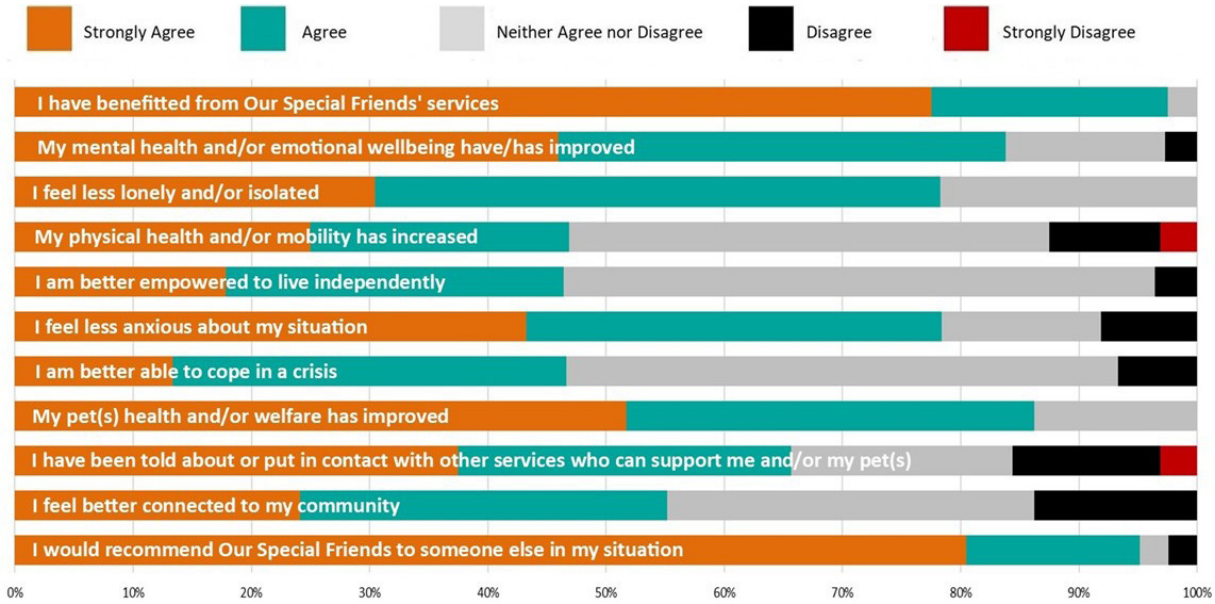
Stock image for illustrative purposes

OUR SPECIAL FRIENDS IMPACT

Feedback Form Statistics and Comments 2023/24

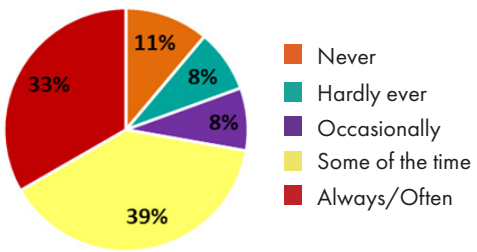
Our Special Friends measures our impact on clients' health and wellbeing through our Client Feedback Form, which is sent to all clients. This includes a list of statements about the difference OSF has made, with clients requested to select how much they agree or disagree with statements on a five-point scale between 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly Disagree'. The following chart shows the breakdown of responses received in 2023/24:

Our Special Friends Client Reported Impact 2023/24

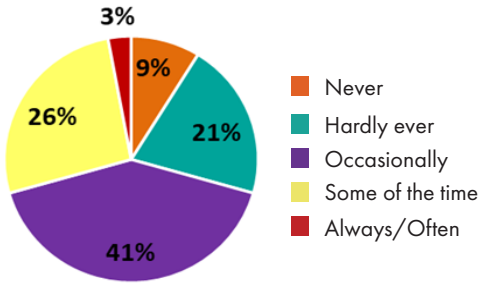


Reducing loneliness and isolation is a key outcome for Our Special Friends. The following pie charts show the responses to questions asking clients to self-assess their feelings of loneliness both before and after receiving help from Our Special Friends. This demonstrates a significant reduction in clients who 'Always/Often' or 'Some of the time' felt lonely, and an increase in those who 'Hardly ever' or only 'Occasionally' felt lonely after receiving help from Our Special Friends.

How lonely did you feel BEFORE receiving help from Our Special Friends



How lonely did you feel AFTER receiving help from Our Special Friends



Responses received throughout 2023/24 to open questions in our Client Feedback Form include:

Without Our Special Friends I would have had to give up our beloved family cat in order to flee from domestic violence and live in refuge for 11 months. Instead, we were able to be reunited with her when we found a new place to live. My mental health improved knowing that she was being well cared for by her lovely foster carer and that I would eventually see her again. To have her back with us now is wonderful. We feel like a family again.

The emotional support was excellent. I felt that I wasn't alone with the problems I had. The follow up care was fantastic to ensure everything was still ok. I am very grateful to this organisation.

My world seems brighter. Less isolated. Gave me something to look forward to.

They found a new cat for me to adopt after my 2 girls passed away. I'm not as lonely now.

Jane and Margot were lovely visitors. I really enjoyed chatting to Jane and stroking Margot. The visits helped with my sadness and loneliness after my husband's death.

This is a wonderful service. Since heart and mobility problems, I have worried about losing my best friend, Archie. I can't thank you all enough. I need to say a special thank you to my volunteer dog walking 'family'. They are very special people. Archie and I look forward to seeing them.

Saved me from being incredibly depressed and stressed which also helped my whole family and changed a dog's life which will forever fill me with happiness and relief.

They were very understanding and supportive with my hard decision. Made me feel confident my decision was the right one.

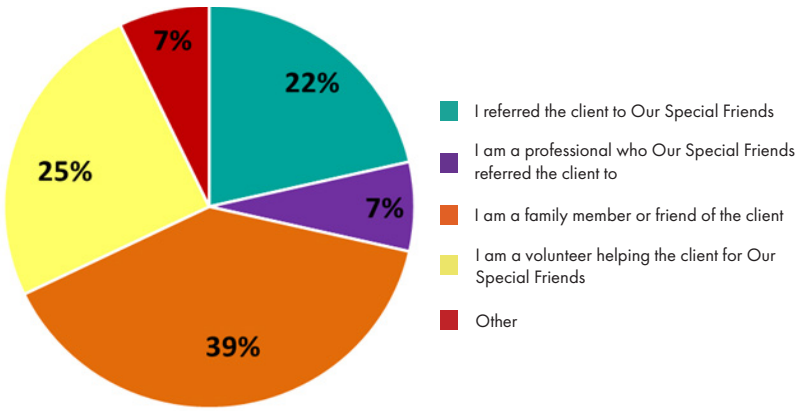
My life changed for the better ... [my] health is so much better and I made new friends.

They went above and beyond, checked in on me to show me they were still there to support me while I was at my lowest. Until they contacted me, I felt there was no one who could or would help ... Our Special Friends went out of their way to support me in every way they could ... They gave me light at the end of my tunnel, enabled me to recover and get into housing, I'm now stable, full time working and saving for a place of my own.

Third Party Feedback

We also measure impact through a Third Party Feedback form, which asks people involved with the client for their opinion on how both they and the client have benefited from OSF's services. The pie chart on the right breaks down the type of relationship respondents to the Third Party Feedback Form had with the client for forms received in 2023/24:

Third Party's Relationship with Client %



The Third Party Feedback Form also gave a list of statements, asking the respondent to rate how much they agreed with each one on a five point scale between 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly Disagree'. Responses are summarised in the following graphic:

Our Special Friends Third Party Reported Impact 2023/2024

Narrative feedback from third parties included the following:

OSF gave the client the emotional support she needed, and found safe fostering for her cat, who was hugely important to her. They also helped in navigating the NHS mental health services on her behalf and hopefully speeding up her recovery plan.

My parents have been able to keep their dog with the support of Our Special Friends. Without them Sandy may have had to be rehomed.

The dog walking facility Our Special Friends offered has been invaluable ... [it] has been so useful for those of us looking after him as 'another pair of eyes' and lovely for the client especially when housebound.

Having Emma & Bentley visit weekly gave [Mum] something to look forward to ... it is a lifeline for isolated and lonely people like my Mum ... and has enabled Mum to continue living at home which has always been her wish.

CASE STUDY

'Enid', 'Honey' and 'Rebecca'

In August 2023, OSF received an urgent referral from Adult Social Services for a lady, 'Enid', aged 73, who was in hospital and needed to stay in overnight but was close to self-discharging as she had no one to feed and look after her beloved 12-year-old dog, 'Honey'. Social Services were requesting help for someone to go and check on the dog and feed her.

Unfortunately, when Our Special Friends called back, the Social Worker who had referred Enid wasn't working and the person on duty wasn't aware of the situation. Luckily, Enid's son had managed to arrange for the neighbour to check on the dog that night.

Enid doesn't have a strong support network around her that can help as her son lives 50 miles away and there have been a lot of fallings out within the family so no other help was available. Due to this, the son was feeling exhausted and experiencing care giver burden, meaning foster care for Honey was urgently needed.

Honey experiences separation anxiety if left alone as she is used to the company of Enid 24/7. However, within three days of OSF receiving the referral, OSF had found a perfect match of fosterer as the volunteer, 'Rebecca', works from home. A WhatsApp group was created with Enid's son and granddaughter as well as Rebecca. This allowed regular updates to be sent and the granddaughter shared the photos with Enid when she visited her in hospital. This provided great comfort to Enid knowing Honey was being well cared for. Rebecca looked after Honey for three days before she was returned home.

In less than a week, Enid was back in hospital and Honey needed fostering again. Thankfully, Rebecca was available to look after the dog again. This time it was nine days before Enid and Honey could be reunited. During this time, Honey ventured into town and experienced her first 'puppuccino'. She also provided much comfort to Rebecca's teenage daughter.

Rebecca said:
"Honey is a really chilled vibe and her being here is helping my daughter massively as well. She has had a tough time at school over the past year and the girl friendship dynamic drama gets a bit much for her at times, so Honey seems to have done her the world of good as well... She's been the best house guest. Such a lovely, lovely girl...We love her so much!!"

Enid's granddaughter said:
"Thank you so much for how much love and reassurance you are giving Honey to make her feel settled. I've been showing my Nan the pictures daily and letting her know what Honey has been up to which makes her smile."

Enid's son said:
"You are all heroes, mother will forever [be] in your debt, it is the knowing for her, she is so attached to Honey. Everything you are doing is much appreciated - thank you - and it is taking so much worry and pressure off...We've been loving the photos and updates."

Images above: Enid reunited with her beloved dog Honey
Honey enjoying a 'puppuccino' while in foster care

ANIMAL COMPANIONSHIP COORDINATOR'S STORY

Trina's Story: From a classroom full of children to an office full of dogs

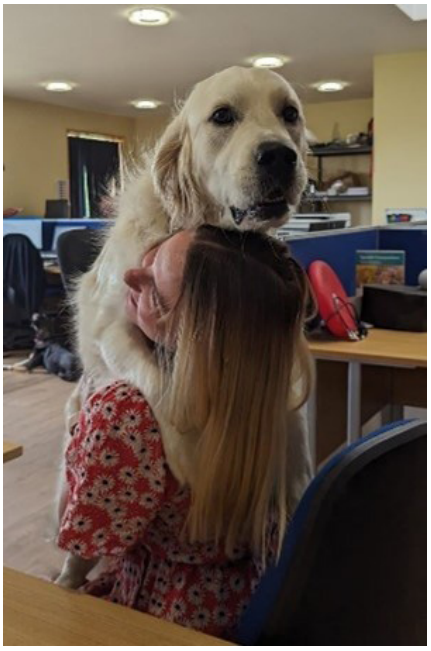
After 12 years of teaching in primary schools, I was ready for a change in career. As much as I loved teaching and inspiring the next generation, I was fed up and exhausted with the ever-increasing paperwork and politics involved in education. I knew I needed to make a change to improve my own wellbeing and when I saw the job as an Animal Companionship Coordinator at Our Special Friends (OSF) it felt like the job description was written for me; it was literally my dream job! Helping people and helping animals.

So, I took the leap of faith and decided to apply. I was very excited when I was offered an interview but also super nervous. I hadn't had an interview outside of teaching for over 12 years. However, once I arrived at the office in Newmarket, and was greeted by the waggy tails and wet noses of the office dogs, I felt more at ease. The human and animal health and welfare sector were completely new to me, but I did have many transferable skills and knowledge from my time teaching. I was offered the job and felt very excited to start this new chapter of my career but also felt sad to be leaving teaching behind.

After my first week at OSF, I knew I had made the right decision. I was welcomed into the team, and I certainly enjoyed the novelties of not being a teacher.

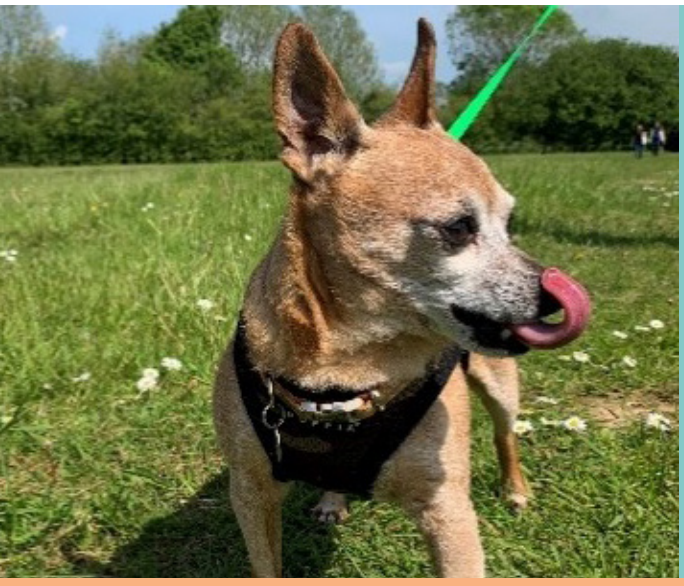
My job as an Animal Companionship Coordinator is a very varied role, where no two days are the same. It involves meeting and assessing clients in the community for our Animal-Assisted Activity programme or for dog walking support. I still sometimes pinch myself that I get paid for having a chat with a client or for taking their dog for a walk to assess its suitability. Don't get me wrong, at times it can be difficult and upsetting to meet vulnerable people who are lacking the care and support they need but I also get chance to meet people who have amazing stories to share about their lives from fighting in WW2, to travelling the world and even meeting the Pope! I assist with fostering to reunite and provide adoption support, as well as networking, attending events and working closely with the Volunteer Support Manager to recruit more volunteers.

I thoroughly enjoy my job and it is rewarding knowing that we are helping support people and animals in need. If there is ever a chance for you to join the Our Special Friends team, then I would highly recommend it!



Trina being welcomed to the office by Willow

ANIMAL COMPANIONSHIP COORDINATOR CASES

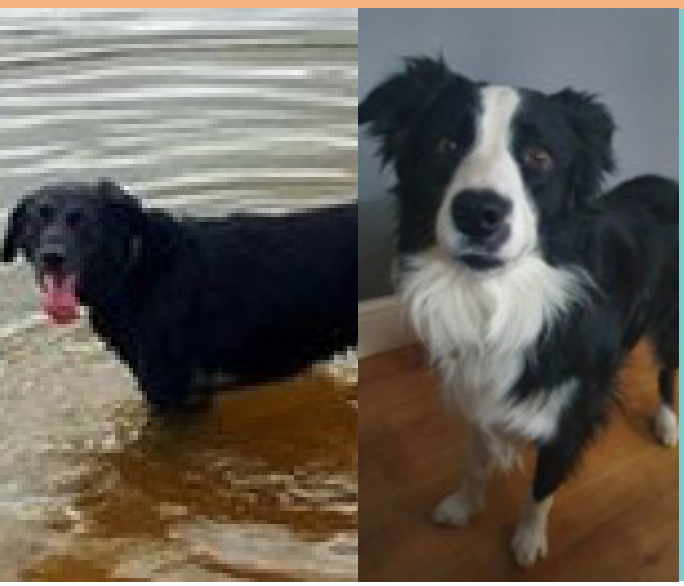


Dog Walking

A 76-year-old was referred to us by Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System because she needed help walking her dog due to having heart failure. OSF provides weekly dog walking, which also gives peace of mind for the client in case she is admitted to hospital. The client used to stay awake at night worrying about what would happen to their dog.

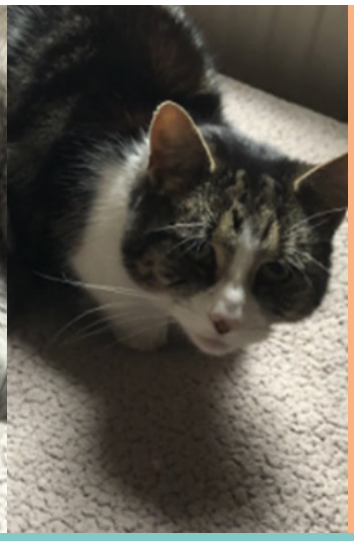
Animal-Assisted Activity (AAA)

A 79-year-old was referred to us for AAA by a social prescribing link work. The client is receiving palliative care for Parkinson's and his wife is the main carer. As a couple they were struggling with feeling isolated and the client was feeling depressed. He had emigrated here from New Zealand and has no family locally. The AAA visits allow the wife respite in addition to providing animal companionship which they both enjoy. The volunteer even took the client to meet their pony.



Foster to Reunite

A 38-year-old single mum with a toddler contacted us requesting fostering for her two dogs as she moved into emergency accommodation with a no pet policy following a no-fault eviction. The client's sister was only able to provide a month of respite care for the dogs. OSF put a plea on Facebook and their old school friend saw and fostered dogs two days before deadline.



Foster to Reunite

Fostering needed for two cats as a family had moved into emergency accommodation with a no pet policy. They were evicted after eight years as landlord sold the house. OSF organised a cattery, a vet appointment for vaccinations and advocated for the family to stay with their pets.

Foster to Reunite

Fostering for a dog due to the owner requiring hospital admission. The client was referred to us by their vets as they were refusing the operation if there was no-one to look after their dog. OSF was contacted with just three days notice, but stepped in and found two volunteers who fostered the dog, allowing the client extra time to recover post-operation.

Rehoming Support

OSF were contacted by an Independence and Wellbeing Practitioner for help to support a 75-year-old client who bought a German Shepherd puppy. The client had health issues and needed an oxygen machine. Initially, OSF provided advice and financial support, as the client had a support network to help with the puppy. Unfortunately, the support network didn't help, and the client made the difficult decision to rehome the dog. OSF provided emotional support during this.

VOLUNTEER MANAGER'S REPORT

Frances Day, Volunteer Manager

Recruitment and activity/successes

This year our recruitment rate has increased, and we have successfully recruited 43 new volunteers. We are proud to report that our retention rate continues to be high, with 25% of our active volunteers having been with us for over 5 years. This demonstrates the incredible commitment that our volunteers show us, as well as the community that we have built over the years.

Our Special Friends has supported five Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) students to complete their awards which encourages young people to enhance their skills, grow in confidence and help their community. OSF works hard to match DofE students to cases that will raise awareness of the unmet need in their community as well as help develop skills to use throughout their lives.

"I think this whole experience is giving Freya good life skills and a sense of duty and has been rewarding." – AJP, mother of DofE student

OSF provided ten in-house training opportunities for our volunteers. These included repeats of our core training such as Case Discussions, Bereavement and Grief and Animal First Aid, as well as new sessions from external providers e.g. Sight Training (delivered by Suffolk Sight) and Having Difficult Conversations (delivered by St Nicholas Hospice Neighbours). On the 26th June, we also hosted another successful Volunteer Celebration Event to thank our volunteers for their continued support.

This year, we have developed a working partnership with our new Animal Companionship Coordinator (ACC). This role has helped identify opportunities to recruit new volunteers, as well as match them to cases with ongoing support. Before the appointment of the ACC role, the tasks were predominantly carried out by volunteers. With the limited availability and capacity of volunteers, it is evident that this needs to be a paid-for role.

Survey

We received 48 responses to the annual Volunteer Survey, similar to previous years. In summary, volunteers feel very well supported. With regards to how rewarding volunteering with OSF is, no volunteers scored 3 or less and 90% said they would strongly recommend their friends and family to volunteer with us. Whilst we provided training sadly over 40% said they were 'offered but didn't attend'. While 42% of respondents say they do more than one role for the charity, 17% said they would like to do more, so we will look to addressing this response.

Challenges

This year, our referrals have become incredibly complex. Our team of assessors, along with the service delivery team, have needed to determine whether some cases are appropriate to be matched to a volunteer.

Call for help and the year ahead

In the year ahead we will look to enhance our volunteer community. We have identified a need for a volunteer fundraising group. We hope that this team will be able to coordinate fundraising opportunities and events. We are also planning to improve our fosterer recruitment experience by developing a bespoke induction for them. The need for fosterers is increasing and our capacity is limited.

To volunteer with us, complete our online form at www.ourspecialfriends.org/download-volunteer/

Our Special Volunteers

2,496
AAA Visits

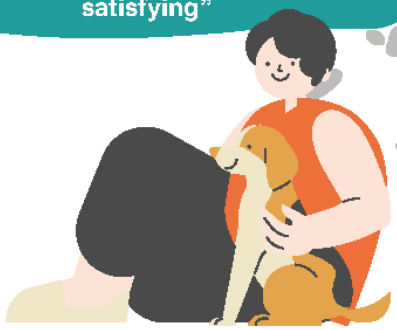
43,392
foster hours

39
new volunteers

"Good communication. Outstanding support for clients and volunteers"

4,420
Dog Walks

"Every time I visit a client it means the world for them and for me and my dog. You can clearly see how their mood changes and it's really satisfying"



10
in house training opportunities

"Makes volunteers feel valuable"

99% reported they have been offered relevant and useful training

98% would recommend volunteering with Our Special Friends to friends and family

Promoting, preserving and providing the power of animal companionship

VOLUNTEER STORY Juliet and Mabel

"I'm glad the rescue centres turned me down"

Juliet Thomason explains how rejection turned to joy.

I've been a volunteer with other charities in the past, in particular with the Meals on Wheels service, but working for Our Special Friends is quite different. That's because the aim of our CEO and founder of the charity, Belinda Johnston, was to create a community of animal lovers who help each other as well as the clients. And from personal experience, I know how this does work both ways.

Firstly, I would not have my lovely Border Terrier, Mabel, if it were not for help from OSF, and second, because one of our volunteers and now a good friend, Carole Langton, kindly looked after her for six weeks after I had a shoulder replacement operation. My right shoulder had smashed when I fell while walking Mabel and since I'm right-handed, and live alone, life would otherwise have been difficult. I really appreciated the help.

I used to live on a farm just outside Newmarket and when I lost my Border Collie I thought I would 'downsize' for my next dog as I intended to move to Bury St Edmunds within the next few years. I contacted several rescue centres and was turned down as being over 70 and too old, even though I was fit. I didn't want a puppy, neither did I want an old dog as I'd been through the distress of losing one to cancer. A lifelong dog owner, I was desperate for canine company again.

Thankfully, friends introduced me to Belinda, who found Mabel for me. Then three years old, Mabel had been returned to her breeder due to a marriage break-up, and the breeder interviewed me to ensure the dog was this time going to a good forever home. The right age, and easier for me to manage than a large Collie, she's proved perfect. And it seems that she's thanked OSF in her own way, by becoming a visiting AAA dog, while I've been rewarded by making several new friends.

Mabel and I have now been visiting a bed-bound elderly lady in Bury St Edmunds for two years. She so enjoys our visits as otherwise all she can do is watch TV all day. She has dementia, but so did my late husband, so together with my years of delivering meals to lonely elderly people, I understand and empathise with her.

In the five years I've been a volunteer with OSF, I have regularly visited other people with Mabel, walked the dogs of clients who are not mobile, and have occasionally helped with pet care and providing transport. Relationships do not necessarily end when the initial need has been met. I used to visit a lovely, very bright lady and take her old Spaniel for a walk, but now that the dog is reluctant to walk I still call in to see the owner. I enjoy whatever I do for OSF, everyone is so friendly.

As for the rescue centres that turned me down in 2019, I wish they could see me now on my hour-long walks with Mabel.

Image : Mabel and Juliette

"And it seems that she's thanked OSF in her own way, by becoming a visiting AAA dog, while I've been rewarded by making several new friends."

CASE STUDY Ted, Aida and Blue

In May 2022, Ted was referred to Our Special Friends (OSF) by the NHS Integrated Neighbourhood Team. Recently widowed, Ted, 87, struggled with low mood and isolation. Having been diagnosed with arthritis and COPD, Ted was housebound, and although his family were supportive, they did not all live locally, leaving Ted feeling very alone.

When an OSF Volunteer Assessor met Ted, he shared fond memories of his late Jack Russell Terrier and other dogs he had owned previously. Missing the canine companionship, Ted was eager for OSF to arrange weekly visits from a volunteer and their dog. Although Ted smoked, he agreed to refrain from smoking two hours before visits and to air out his flat to ensure a comfortable environment for the dog and the volunteer.

We identified a potential volunteer, Aida, who had previously visited another client whose health had deteriorated and meant visits were no longer possible. Aida has a lovely 7½ year old friendly Staffordshire Bull Terrier, Blue, who she had brought over from Spain, and they started visiting Ted in July 2022. Ted delighted in Aida's visits and interacting with Blue, getting her to sit, and practising Blue's skills such as balancing treats on her nose before flicking her head up to catch them! He even bought Blue a special water bowl for the warm weather. Blue, loving the attention and treats, quickly adapted to her role in providing companionship.

Aida's weekly visits continued until Ted sadly passed away at the end of February 2024. Ted's granddaughter notified Aida, who was deeply saddened as she was just about to arrange their next visit. Aida attended Ted's funeral, where a photo of Ted and Blue was lovingly included in the order of service."

Aida told us how right from the start, the match: *"was a complete success as Blue and Ted felt an instant connection on the very first visit (I guess the treats and cuddles helped!).*

For a little bit more than a year, Blue and I visited Ted once a week, and during this time became genuine good friends. We would have our 'moan-ments', but mostly there was a lot of laughter. I really miss the stories he used to tell me about the air force, and all the travelling he did around the world. You could perfectly imagine the places by the descriptions he gave. Also, he would tell me about his family, how happy he was with them, and how he met his lovely wife.

I think Animal Companionship is just amazing. How much positive impact a single hour can have in a person's life, and to see the improvement in their mental health and wellbeing. For example, we would start the visits with "my back aches today" or "I have been a little bit down this week" and finish with laughter, teaching new tricks to Blue, and spoiling her with treats and cuddles.

Not only would the visits positively affect Ted's day, but also mine, and that feeling lasted long after the visit had ended. I got to know Ted really well and we become good friends. It made me feel great, that I was being helpful when I took Blue to visit him, socialising and bringing a smile to his face. Visiting Ted made me really happy, and it felt very gratifying to see that he enjoyed the time with us too"

Ted's son said to Aida: *"I just wanted to let you know that he loved your visit every time you went with Blue. He told me all about them every night when I called him, he loved talking to you about places in Spain ... Thank you for doing what you do visiting people that need some company and entertainment from your sweet dog."*

Image above: Ted enjoying Blue's visit

OUR SPECIAL

THE YEAR AHEAD

Looking to the future, we need to continue to strive for multi-year core funding, demonstrate our impact and share our knowledge to encourage others to be pet-inclusive. Our cases are often very complex and involve many variables, which makes quantifying impact challenging. We intend to review our data capture and analysis to improve evidence of outputs, outcomes and impact.

Financially, we know we are too reliant on grants and trusts and need to diversify our income. Therefore, we are aiming to recruit a new fundraising colleague to nurture the local community support and increase individual and corporate giving.

Our growing compassionate community really appreciates how important it is to keep people and beloved pets together, and to help them live well together. However, there are many barriers and challenges. The biggest is housing, specifically temporary and emergency housing which do not allow pets, resulting in additional significant distress, and sometimes homelessness or forced relinquishment.

We are undertaking a strategic review to make the most of our resources and to ensure that our evidence is fully evaluated and our knowledge is used to influence change.

We want to continue to answer telephone calls and reply to enquiries as soon as possible. We must maintain this quality of support if we are to influence others.

We are having to be reactive because others are saying "no". Animal companionship is not all positive and we are evidencing a lot of challenges especially when there is significant mental health or critical changes in circumstances. We want to encourage more care planning where there are pets, so when owners need support it is clear and easy for others to step in. Research is needed for the most effective solutions to safeguard the health and welfare of people and animals; and we will explore working with academics to be part of this. We have useful data that needs to be analysed.

Lack of pet-inclusive housing and the crises in so many sectors means that community outreach is vital in this everchanging and challenging world. The dearth of community care is making it increasingly difficult for everyone experiencing vulnerability. We need joined up integrated services and proactive care planning to help prevent crises.

Our society needs widespread pet-inclusive accommodation, including sheltered housing, care facilities, mental wards and homeless hostels, and strong networks of multi-disciplinary support for these important life-enhancing and life-saving human-animal bonds.

Our collaborative approach is only possible with sustainable funding, vital volunteers and policy changes. We are proud of our role in identifying and supporting unmet need and look forward to doing more. There is a busy time ahead.

Image opposite: Irene and Blue

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Financial statements

Year ended 30 April 2024

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Independent examiner's report to the trustees	33
Statement of financial activities (including income and expenditure account)	34
Balance sheet	35
Notes to the financial statements	36

Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' annual report (incorporating the directors' report)

Year ended 30 April 2024

The trustees, who are also the directors for the purposes of company law, present their report and the unaudited financial statements of the charity for the year ended 30 April 2024.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in notes to the accounts and comply with the charity's governing document, the Charities Act 2011 and Companies Act 2006 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland published in October 2019.

Chair's report

If you wish read the Chair's Report for Our Special Friends please see the annual report preceding these accounts.

Reference and administrative details

Registered charity name	Our Special Friends
Charity registration number	1156778
Company registration number	08769892
Principal office and registered office	West End House Upper Green Higham Bury St Edmunds Suffolk IP28 6PA

The trustees

The trustees who served during the year and at the date of approval were as follows:

Dr M Johnston MA VetMB PhD MRCVS (Chair)
R Ferguson (Treasurer)
C Bradburne
Dr E Ormerod BVMS CF
R Stephens (Appointed 07/02/2024)
R Sullivan (Appointed 16/08/2024)
Dr J Gurney MB ChB, MA (Resigned 24/07/2024)

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

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Patron	Lord Fairhaven DL KStJ
Team	Dr B Johnston MRCVS, CEO, *Founder and Lead Practitioner* G Reid, *Animal Companionship Practitioner* F Day, *Volunteer Support Manager* T McManus, *Office Coordinator* J Connolly, *Charity Manager*
Supported 'In the office' by volunteers:	R Clarke, *Marketing and PR* K Mallet, *Service Delivery* C Singleton, *Service Delivery* J Webb, *Admin Support* C Guy, *Admin Support* S Day, *Admin Support* C Gordon, *Admin Support*
Assisted by:	S Bradwell, *Finance* M Toller, *Finance* A Hunt, *Fundraising*
Paid Advisers	J Bradburne LLB (London) LLM Cantab
Voluntary Advisers	Dr D Carson BVSc(Syd) MRCVS Dr D Rook LL.B(Hons) LLM, DLaw FHEA Dr H Crawford BVSc PGCertSAECC MRCVS L Dickson CGMA MBA, Caseron J Grossart MA MRICS Dr J Littlewood MA PhD BVSc(Hons) DVR DVD MRCVS Veterinary Dermatology Referrals Dr C Mayer MBBCh FRCPsych, Consultant Psychiatrist P Morphew FCIPD A Reynolds
Bankers	Barclays Bank plc 20/21 Cornhill Bury St Edmunds Suffolk IP33 1DY
Independent examiner	L Thurston FCCA Lovewell Blake LLP Chartered accountants First Floor Suite 2 Hillside Business Park Bury St Edmunds IP32 7EA

Objectives and activities

If you wish to read about the objectives and activities of Our Special Friends please see the annual report preceding these accounts.

Public benefit

In shaping our objectives for the year and planning our activities, the trustees have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on Public Benefit including, The Public Benefit Requirement (PB1), Running a Charity (PB2) and Reporting (PB3).

Achievements and performance

If you wish to read about the achievements and performance of Our Special Friends please see the annual report preceding these accounts.

Financial review

Total income for the year ended 30 April 2024 was £227,277 which was slightly up on the previous year (2023: £222,569). We continue to rely primarily on grants, and the average amount of each each grant is still relatively low. We therefore rely on a constant flow of successful applications to fund our services and maintain reserves.

While a broad spread of funders reduces the risk inherent with just one or two major providers, the time and effort required to apply, secure and report on these grants is significant for a small charity. Our future growth will therefore depend on securing income from a wider range of sources. In particular, we are seeking a community fundraiser and ideally we would also like to find an organisation or individual prepared to support our core operations with multi year funding.

In addition to fundraising to support our charitable activities, we believe there is an increasingly strong case for local authorities and welfare agencies to contract with us to provide our services.

Expenditure for the year increased to £276,261 (2023: £239,446). The increase is primarily due to higher staff costs. The main impact was a full year's cost of our animal companionship coordinator, who joined part way through the prior year.

Reserves Policy

Unrestricted reserves at 30 April 2024 were £75,863 (2023: £142,259).

If the level of unrestricted reserves falls below 6 months of unrestricted expenditure the Trustees will determine what action is required to be taken in order to increase reserves in line with our policy. As at the year end unrestricted reserves amounted to 5 (2023: 7) months of unrestricted costs.

The Charity's reserves policy is to also maintain total reserves at a level adequate to protect its ongoing work from significant fluctuations in funding. As at the year end total reserves were £136,885 (2023: £185,869). The trustees are satisfied with the level of reserves.

Plans for future periods

If you wish to read about the plans for future of Our Special Friends please see the annual report preceding these accounts.

Structure, governance and management

The charity is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The charitable company was incorporated on 11 November 2013 (number 08769892) and became a registered charity (number 1156778) on 23 April 2014. The company was established under a Memorandum of Association, which sets out its objects and powers and is governed under its Articles of Association. In the event of the company being wound up members are required to contribute an amount not exceeding £10.

The current board of trustees and the changes which have occurred since the previous annual report are as stated in the reference and administrative details of these accounts.

None of the Trustees have any beneficial interest in the charitable company.

Appointment, induction and training of trustees

New trustees are recruited through a combination of advertising, recommendation, and personal contact. Appointments are reviewed and approved by the Board and all new trustees are provided with a detailed induction.

Risk management

Management has reviewed the major risks to which the Charity is exposed. Where appropriate systems or procedures have been established to mitigate the risks the Charity faces. As is the case for many Charities, external funding represents a risk to the stability of the Charity. Our Special Friends enjoys the support from a number of loyal donors, costs are closely monitored to ensure the Charity operates within its means and the Charity maintains some reserves, all of which minimise exposure to this risk.

Trustee responsibilities

The trustees, who are also directors for the purposes of company law, are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company law requires the charity trustees to prepare financial statements for each year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, for that period.

In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the applicable Charities SORP;
- make judgments and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charity's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Going concern

Through consideration of reports on income, expenditure and of forecasts for the next twelve months, Trustees have analysed any risks to the charity, and have identified no material uncertainties that cast doubt about the ability of the company to continue as a going concern.

Independent examiner reappointment

A resolution to appoint L Thurston FCCA of Lovewell Blake LLP as independent examiner will be proposed at the next Annual General Meeting.

Small company provisions

This report has been prepared taking advantage of the small companies' exemption of section 415A of the Companies Act 2006.

The trustees' annual report was approved on 9 October ..... and signed on behalf of the board of trustees by:

R Ferguson
Trustee and treasurer

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Independent examiner's report to the trustees of Our Special Friends

Year ended 30 April 2024

I report to the charity trustees on my examination of the financial statements of the company for the year ended 30 April 2024 which comprise the statement of financial activities (including income and expenditure account), balance sheet and the related notes.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity trustees of the company (and also its directors for the purposes of company law) you are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 ('the 2006 Act').

Having satisfied myself that the financial statements of the company are not required to be audited under Part 16 of the 2006 Act and are eligible for independent examination, I report in respect of my examination of your company's financial statements as carried out under section 145 of the Charities Act 2011 ('the 2011 Act'). In carrying out my examination I have followed the Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the company as required by section 386 of the 2006 Act; or

2. the financial statements do not accord with those records; or

3. the financial statements do not comply with the accounting requirements of section 396 of the 2006 Act other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair' view which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination; or

4. the financial statements have not been prepared in accordance with the methods and principles of the Statement of Recommended Practice for accounting and reporting by charities applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102).

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

L Thurston FCCA
Independent Examiner

Lovewell Blake LLP
Chartered accountants
First Floor Suite
2 Hillside Business Park
Bury St Edmunds
IP32 7EA

11 October 2024

Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Statement of financial activities (including income and expenditure account)

Year ended 30 April 2024

	Note	2024 Unrestricted funds £	2024 Restricted funds £	2024 Total funds £	2023 Total funds £
Income and endowments					
Donations and legacies	5	31,852	20,500	52,352	33,547
Charitable activities	6	58,950	114,283	173,233	188,397
Other trading activities	7	–	–	–	309
Investment income	8	1,692	–	1,692	316
Total income		92,494	134,783	227,277	222,569
Expenditure					
Raising funds					
Expenditure on raising funds	9	10,934	20,000	30,934	38,911
Charitable activities	10	147,956	97,371	245,327	200,535
Total expenditure		158,890	117,371	276,261	239,446
Net expenditure and net movement in funds		(66,396)	17,412	(48,984)	(16,877)
Reconciliation of funds					
Total funds brought forward		142,259	43,610	185,869	202,746
Total funds carried forward		75,863	61,022	136,885	185,869

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year.
All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Balance sheet

30 April 2024

	Note	2024 £	£	2023 £	£
Current assets					
Debtors	15	59,564		3,648	
Cash at bank and in hand		139,010		196,135	
		198,574		199,783	
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	16	(61,689)		(13,914)	
Net current assets			136,885		185,869
Total assets less current liabilities			136,885		185,869
Net assets			136,885		185,869
Funds of the charity					
Restricted funds			61,022		43,610
Unrestricted funds			75,863		142,259
Total charity funds	19		136,885		185,869

For the year ending 30 April 2024 the charity was entitled to exemption from audit under section 477 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

Directors' responsibilities:

- The members have not required the company to obtain an audit of its financial statements for the year in question in accordance with section 476;
- The directors acknowledge their responsibilities for complying with the requirements of the Act with respect to accounting records and the preparation of financial statements.

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' regime.

These financial statements were approved by the board of trustees and authorised for issue on 9 October....., and are signed on behalf of the board by:

R Ferguson
Trustee and treasurer

Company registration number: 08769892

Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

1. General information

The charity is a public benefit entity and a private company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales and a registered charity in England and Wales. The address of the registered office and operating address is West End House, Upper Green, Higham, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP28 6PA.

2. Statement of compliance

The charity constitutes a public benefit entity as defined by FRS 102. The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland issued in October 2019, the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102), the Charities Act 2011, the Companies Act 2006 and UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice.

3. Accounting policies

Basis of preparation

The financial statements have been prepared on the historical cost basis, as modified by the revaluation of certain financial assets and liabilities and investment properties measured at fair value through income or expenditure.

The financial statements are prepared in sterling, which is the functional currency of the entity.

Going concern

The accounts have been prepared on the going concern basis and the trustees believe that no material uncertainties exist. The trustees have considered the level of funds held and the expected income and expenditure for the next 12 months from authorising these financial statements. The budgeted income and expenditure is sufficient with the level of reserves for the charity to be able to continue as a going concern.

Fund accounting

Unrestricted funds are available for use at the discretion of the trustees to further any of the charity's purposes.

Designated funds are unrestricted funds earmarked by the trustees for particular future project or commitment.

Restricted funds are subjected to restrictions on their expenditure declared by the donor or through the terms of an appeal, and fall into one of two sub-classes: restricted income funds or endowment funds.

Income

All income is included in the statement of financial activities when entitlement has passed to the charity, it is probable that the economic benefits associated with the transaction will flow to the charity and the amount can be reliably measured. The following specific policies are applied to particular categories of income:

3. Accounting policies *(continued)*

Income *(continued)*

- income from donations or grants is recognised when there is evidence of entitlement to the gift, receipt is probable and its amount can be measured reliably.

- legacy income is recognised when receipt is probable and entitlement is established.

- income from donated goods is measured at the fair value of the goods unless this is impractical to measure reliably, in which case the value is derived from the cost to the donor or the estimated resale value. Donated facilities and services are recognised in the accounts when received if the value can be reliably measured. No amounts are included for the contribution of general volunteers.

- income from contracts for the supply of services is recognised with the delivery of the contracted service. This is classified as unrestricted funds unless there is a contractual requirement for it to be spent on a particular purpose and returned if unspent, in which case it may be regarded as restricted.

Expenditure

Expenditure is recognised on an accruals basis as a liability is incurred. Expenditure includes any VAT which cannot be fully recovered, and is classified under headings of the statement of financial activities to which it relates:

- expenditure on raising funds includes the costs of all fundraising activities, events, non-charitable trading activities, and the sale of donated goods.

- expenditure on charitable activities includes all costs incurred by a charity in undertaking activities that further its charitable aims for the benefit of its beneficiaries, including those support costs and costs relating to the governance of the charity apportioned to charitable activities.

- other expenditure includes all expenditure that is neither related to raising funds for the charity nor part of its expenditure on charitable activities.

All costs are allocated to expenditure categories reflecting the use of the resource. Direct costs attributable to a single activity are allocated directly to that activity. Shared costs are apportioned between the activities they contribute to on a reasonable, justifiable and consistent basis.

Tangible assets

Tangible assets are initially recorded at cost, and subsequently stated at cost less any accumulated depreciation and impairment losses. Any tangible assets carried at revalued amounts are recorded at the fair value at the date of revaluation less any subsequent accumulated depreciation and subsequent accumulated impairment losses.

These are capitalised if they can be used for more than one year, and cost at least £1,000.

Depreciation

Depreciation is calculated so as to write off the cost or valuation of an asset, less its residual value, over the useful economic life of that asset as follows:

Computer Equipment	-	33% straight line

3. Accounting policies *(continued)*

Financial instruments

A financial asset or a financial liability is recognised only when the entity becomes a party to the contractual provisions of the instrument.

Basic financial instruments are initially recognised at the amount receivable or payable including any related transaction costs, unless the arrangement constitutes a financing transaction, where it is recognised at the present value of the future payments discounted at a market rate of interest for a similar debt instrument.

Current assets and current liabilities are subsequently measured at the cash or other consideration expected to be paid or received and not discounted.

Debt instruments are subsequently measured at amortised cost.

4. Limited by guarantee

The company has no share capital but is limited by guarantee. Every member of the company is the guarantor and undertake to contribute to the assets of the company in the event of it being wound up, such amounts as may be required. Each guarantor's liability is limited to £10.

5. Donations and legacies

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	**Total Funds 2024 £**
Donations			
Donations and gifts	30,005	20,500	50,505
Gift aid	1,847	–	1,847
	31,852	20,500	52,352

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds 2023 £
Donations			
Donations and gifts	31,448	–	31,448
Gift aid	2,099	–	2,099
	33,547	–	33,547

6. Charitable activities

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	**Total Funds 2024 £**
Grants	58,950	114,283	173,233

6. Charitable activities *(continued)*

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds 2023 £
Grants	79,812	108,585	188,397

7. Other trading activities

	Unrestricted Funds £	**Total Funds 2024 £**	Unrestricted Funds £	Total Funds 2023 £
Fundraising events	–	–	309	309

8. Investment Income

	Unrestricted Funds £	**Total Funds 2024 £**	Unrestricted Funds £	Total Funds 2023 £
Interest receivable	1,692	1,692	316	316

9. Expenditure on raising funds

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	**Total Funds 2024 £**
Outsourced services	6,819	20,000	26,819
Advertising and marketing	4,115	–	4,115
Staff costs	–	–	–
	10,934	20,000	30,934

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds 2023 £
Outsourced services	14,947	7,397	22,344
Advertising and marketing	2,024	–	2,024
Staff costs	14,543	–	14,543
	31,514	7,397	38,911

10. Expenditure on charitable activities

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	**Total Funds 2024 £**
Volunteer costs	4,116	–	4,116
Animal care costs	2,199	13,498	15,697
Office expenses	33,970	5,882	39,852
Outsourced services	15,615	–	15,615
Staff costs	92,056	77,991	170,047
	147,956	97,371	245,327

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds 2023 £
Volunteer costs	3,897	–	3,897
Animal care costs	4,052	13,389	17,441
Office expenses	19,473	13,750	33,223
Outsourced services	24,869	–	24,869
Staff costs	50,092	71,013	121,105
	102,383	98,152	200,535

11. Independent examination fees

	2024 £	2023 £
Fees payable to the independent examiner for:		
Independent examination of the financial statements	1,637	1,800

12. Staff costs

The total staff costs and employee benefits for the reporting period are analysed as follows:

	2024 £	2023 £
Wages and salaries	155,954	124,013
Social security costs	10,480	5,289
Pension costs	3,614	2,318
Staff training and expenses	2,685	4,028
	172,733	135,648

The average head count of employees during the year was 5 (2023: 5).

No employee received employee benefits of more than £60,000 during the year (2023: None).

Key management personnel

The key management personnel of the charity comprise the CEO for the charity. The total amount of employee benefits (including employer pension contributions) received in respect of key management personnel amounted £34,827 (2023: £26,674).

13. Trustee remuneration and expenses

Trustees were reimbursed expenses amounting to £Nil (2023: £252) during the year.

14. Tangible fixed assets

	Equipment £
Cost	
At 1 May 2023 and 30 April 2024	3,852
Depreciation	
At 1 May 2023 and 30 April 2024	3,852
Carrying amount	
At 30 April 2024	–
At 30 April 2023	–

15. Debtors

	2024 £	2023 £
Prepayments and accrued income	59,077	3,648
Other debtors	487	–
	59,564	3,648

16. Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year

	2024 £	2023 £
Trade creditors	3,402	–
Accruals and deferred income	58,287	11,652
Social security and other taxes	–	2,262
	61,689	13,914

17. Deferred income

	2024 £	2023 £
Amount deferred in year	56,650	–

Deferred income relates to conditional grant income entitled to within the year on behalf of projects being completed in following years.

18. Defined contribution plans

The company provides pension benefits under the NEST scheme.

The amount recognised in income or expenditure as an expense in relation to the defined contribution plans was £3,614 (2023: £2,318).

19. Analysis of charitable funds

Year ended 30 April 2024

Restricted funds

	At 1 May 2023 £	Income £	Expenditure £	Transfers £	At 30 Apr 2024 £
Kennel Club Fund	838	–	(838)	–	–
Hollyhock Trust Fund	15,774	–	(15,774)	–	–
West Suffolk Council - Crisis Support Fund	5,000	–	(5,000)	–	–
Mid Suffolk District Council Fund	20,000	–	(20,000)	–	–
Mars Pet Food Fund	1,998	–	(1,998)	–	–
Helen Roll Charity	–	10,000	(10,000)	–	–
National Lottery Community Fund	–	9,560	(9,560)	–	–
Suffolk Community Council Grant	–	907	(907)	–	–
Suffolk Community Foundation - Shadwell Fund	–	1,250	(1,250)	–	–
Animal Friends Insurance	–	5,000	(5,000)	–	–
West Suffolk Council - Public Mental Health Fund	–	5,000	(5,000)	–	–
Co-Op Local Community Fund	–	2,016	(2,016)	–	–
The Hobson Charity	–	5,000	(5,000)	–	–
Suffolk Community Foundation - Pargiter Trust Fund	–	5,000	(5,000)	–	–
Florence Cohen Charitable Trust	–	2,000	(2,000)	–	–
Suffolk Community Foundation - Miller Trust Fund	–	2,000	(2,000)	–	–
Suffolk County Council - Locality Support Fund	–	1,000	(1,000)	–	–
Pets at Home - Community Partnerships	–	15,000	–	–	15,000
Babergh District Council	–	20,000	–	–	20,000
Suffolk Community Foundation - Birketts Fund	–	1,000	(1,000)	–	–
Global's Make Some Noise	–	15,550	(3,528)	–	12,022
West Suffolk Council - Community Chest	–	9,000	–	–	9,000
Anthony Martin Charitable Fund	–	5,000	–	–	5,000
Anonymous Individual Fund	–	20,000	(20,000)	–	–
500 Suffolk Reasons	–	500	(500)	–	–
	43,610	134,783	(117,371)	–	61,022

Unrestricted funds

General funds	142,259	92,494	(158,890)	–	75,863

Year ended 30 April 2023

Restricted funds

	At 1 May 2022 £	Income £	Expenditure £	Transfers £	At 30 Apr 2023 £
West Suffolk Council - Volunteer Support Manager Fund	10,000	–	(10,000)	–	–
West Suffolk Council - Animal Companionship Practitioner Fund	7,290	–	(7,290)	–	–
West Suffolk Council - Crisis Support Fund	–	5,000	–	–	5,000
West Suffolk Council UK Shared Prosperity Fund	–	2,250	(2,250)	–	–
Mid Suffolk District Council Fund	–	20,000	–	–	20,000
Kennel Club Fund	–	10,000	(9,162)	–	838
Hollyhock Trust Fund	–	39,190	(23,416)	–	15,774
Coco Joelle Foundation Fund	–	5,000	(5,000)	–	–
Suffolk Community Foundation - Harris Family Fund	–	2,000	(2,000)	–	–
Suffolk Community Foundation - David & Jill Simpson Fund	1,000	–	(1,000)	–	–
Suffolk Community Foundation - Pargiter Trust Fund	2,500	–	(2,500)	–	–
Suffolk Community Foundation - Miller Trust Fund	500	–	(500)	–	–
Suffolk Community Foundation - Pargiter Trust Fund	–	5,000	(5,000)	–	–
Suffolk Community Foundation - Shadwell Fund	500	–	(500)	–	–
Helen Roll Charity	5,000	–	(5,000)	–	–
Co-Op Local Community Fund	–	2,145	(2,145)	–	–
Green Hall Foundation Fund	–	5,000	(5,000)	–	–
Anonymous Individual Fund	7,397	–	(7,397)	–	–
Charles Hayward Foundation Fund	4,000	–	(4,000)	–	–
Mars Pet Food Fund	–	3,000	(1,002)	–	1,998
Pets at Home Foundation Fund	–	10,000	(10,000)	–	–
Kennel Club Charitable Trust Fund	2,387	–	(2,387)	–	–
	40,574	108,585	(105,549)	–	43,610

Unrestricted funds

General Funds	162,172	113,984	(133,897)	–	142,259

Restricted fund purposes:

- Pets at Home - Community Partnerships: The income received within this fund is restricted to support the animal welfare support fund.
- Babergh District Council: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship coordinator costs.
- Global's Make Some Noise: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship practitioner costs.
- West Suffolk Council - Community Chest: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship coordinator costs.
- Anthony Martin Charitable Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to support the animal welfare support fund.

The following restricted projects have been completed:

- Kennel Club Fund: Represents income from the Kennel Club Charitable Trust & Mr French restricted to support animal companionship practitioner costs.
- Hollyhock Trust Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to support charity manager salary costs.
- West Suffolk Council - Crisis Support Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to crisis support and prevention.
- Mid Suffolk District Council Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship coordinator costs.
- Mars Pet Food Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to support the animal welfare support fund.
- Helen Roll Charity: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship practitioner costs.
- National Lottery Community Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship coordinator costs in Mid Suffolk.
- Suffolk Community Council Grant: The income received within this fund is restricted to support virtual meeting costs and equipment.
- Suffolk Community Foundation - Shadwell Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship support services costs.
- Animal Friends Insurance: The income received within this fund is restricted to support Vet costs within the animal welfare support fund.
- West Suffolk Council - Public Mental Health Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship practitioner costs in the Newmarket area.
- Co-op Local Community Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to support volunteer manager costs.

- The Hobson Charity: The income received within this fund is restricted to support vet costs within the animal welfare support fund.
- Suffolk Community Foundation - Pargiter Trust Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship support services costs for the elderly.
- Florence Cohen Charitable Trust: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship support services costs for the elderly.
- Suffolk Community Foundation - Miller Trust Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship support services costs.
- Suffolk County Council - Locality Support Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to support boarding costs.
- Suffolk Community Foundation - Birketts Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to support animal companionship support services costs.
- Anonymous Individual Fund: The income received within this fund is restricted to support fundraising activities.
- 500 Suffolk Reasons: The income received within this fund is restricted to support fundraising activities.

20. Analysis of net assets between funds

30 April 2024

	General Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds £
Current assets	137,552	61,022	198,574
Creditors less than 1 year	(61,689)	–	(61,689)
Net Assets	75,863	61,022	136,885

30 April 2023

	General Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds £
Current assets	156,173	43,610	199,783
Creditors less than 1 year	(13,914)	–	(13,914)
Net Assets	142,259	43,610	185,869

21. Related parties

B Johnston, CEO of the charity, is a family member to the Trustee M Johnston. During the year the charity paid B Johnston amounts totalling £38,264 (2023: £27,810).

L Ferguson, is a family member to the Trustee R Ferguson. During the year the charity paid L Ferguson amounts for outsourced services totalling £Nil (2023: £5,768).

J Bradburne, is a family member to the Trustee C Bradburne. During the year the charity paid J Bradburne amounts for outsourced services totalling £4,500 (2023: £1,000).

There were no other related party transactions in this or the prior year.

Image opposite: Janet and Higgins

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR DONORS

We would not exist without your generous support.

We are very grateful to our corporate sponsors who have donated their time or products which, amongst others include:

Adoption Mission (Mars Petcare)
Bury St Edmunds Cathedral
Caseron Cloud Accounting
Danetre Health Products
Denzel's
Everyman Cinema
Glasswells
Greene King
LickiMat
L'Occitane
Pet-ID Microchips Ltd
Pet Remedy Ltd
Scrumbles
Vetstream Ltd

And to Trusts and Foundations which, amongst others include:

Annie Tranmer Charitable Trust
Anthony V Martin Charitable Foundation
Babergh District Council
Belstead Ganzoni Charitable Settlement
Co-op Local Community Fund
D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust
Florence Cohen Charitable Trust
G C Gibson Charitable Trust
Global's Make Some Noise
Helen Roll Charity
Hobson Charity
Leslie Mary Carter Charitable Trust
Morley Family Charitable Trust
Mrs FB Laurence's Charitable Trust
Mrs L D Rope Third Charitable Settlement
National Lottery Community Fund - Awards for All
Newmarket Public Mental Health Programme
Pets (at Home) Foundation
Postcode Places Trust
R&J Gardner Trust
Scott (Eredine) Charitable Trust
Simon Gibson Charitable Trust
Sir Frederick Hiam Charitable Trust
Sir Jules Thorn Charitable Trust - Ann Rylands Small Grants
Suffolk Community Foundation - Birketts Fund
Suffolk Community Foundation - Miller Trust Fund
Suffolk Community Foundation - Pargiter Trust Fund
Suffolk Community Foundation - Shadwell Fund
West Suffolk Council Community Chest

Our Special Friends,
c/o British Racing School, Snailwell Road, Newmarket, CB8 7NU
01284 247077 www.ourspecialfriends.org office@ourspecialfriends.org

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THANK YOU TO ALL OUR VOLUNTEERS

Our thanks go to all our volunteers for their continued support and commitment over the years. It goes without saying that Our Special Friends would not exist without them

OUR SPECIAL FRIENDS

England & Wales - Charity number 1156778

Accounts

Our Special Friends

Promoting, preserving and providing the power of animal companionship

Annual Report 2022 - 2023

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR DONORS AND VOLUNTEERS

We would not exist without your generous support

Front Cover: Shelia enjoying a special moment with Izzy
Above: Beryl appreciating Molly's visit

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Thank you very much to all our volunteers, supporters and fundraisers, without your kind help we would not be able to provide our support. These are just a few examples of fundraisers this year:

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD 2023

I'm really pleased to be able to let you know that Our Special Friends has had another very good year providing the support that an increasing number of people within the region are needing.

The charity is not only providing direct support for clients who are experiencing particularly tough times in this cost-of-living crisis time, but also advocating for them with the statutory services and other agencies to unlock problems and challenges in helping those clients secure a better quality of life.

The charity has received funding to recruit a dedicated member of the team to focus on cases and volunteers in Mid Suffolk thanks to much appreciated funding from Mid Suffolk District Council. This means that there will be a full-time colleague, largely based in the community, enabling volunteers to help those that need help and matching them to clients.

The office location at the British Racing School continues to be an excellent base for the organisation.

The charity continues to leverage the importance of the Human-Animal Bond and the benefits to Society, whether that be savings to the National Health Service, support to those fleeing domestic abuse or experiencing mental ill-health, as well as those experiencing significant loneliness, with many of these people being invisible through no fault of their own to usual statutory services (Councils, GP surgeries, etc). The cost-of-living crisis has really identified that there is a lot of invisible vulnerability in the community, and the magic of animals enables clients or all their friends and family on their behalf (if they have any) to reach out and benefit from the support that Our Special Friends provides, which unfortunately otherwise do not get provided because the resources of the statutory services are so stretched and underfunded. Our Special Friends really does mean that more people get the help that they need sooner than would otherwise be the case; are monitored more regularly so that the cost of supporting them is significantly reduced and yet lives are improved.

We continue to be very grateful for the support that we receive from many trusts and organisations listed at the end of this report, to enable us to carry on providing these important services. The expansion of our region into Mid Suffolk supported by Mid Suffolk District Council is a strong testament for the way local organisations really value what is being achieved by Our Special Friends.

I really hope that you will continue to be interested in what is being done by Our Special Friends whose holistic approach to supporting its clients is truly innovative, not just in the UK, but also internationally!

We look forward to bringing you details about our 10th birthday celebrations.

If you would like to become more involved in what Our Special Friends is doing as a volunteer in the locality; as a financial supporter, or even as a Trustee, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Mark Johnston - Chair of the Trustees

OUR VISION

A world in which the power of animal companionship is recognised and integrated into effective care and support plans for people and animals.

OUR MISSION

To identify, develop, promote and deliver animal companionship support services which secure the benefits of animal companionship for people experiencing times of vulnerability, improving welfare for both.

OUR GOALS

1. To develop and demonstrate the role of an Animal Companionship Practitioner (ACP) and the effective application of Animal Companionship Support Services (ACSS) to vulnerable people in society as a functioning unit in its current location.

2. To deliver and evidence outstanding ACSS in our current location

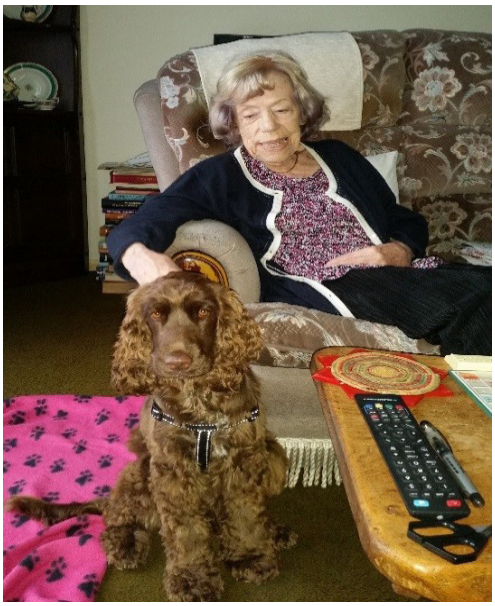
3. To expand the adoption and provision of ACSS locally, through outreach, education, training and partnerships with like-minded organisations and agencies and secure budgetary support from them.

4. To ensure financial stability.

    a. To ensure our sustainability as a provider of ACSS in the current locality.
    b. To enable the expansion of properly resourced animal companionship support services in other locations.

Trustees have had regard to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit.

Case Study Gwyneth, Jenny and Bonnie



Gwyneth and Bonnie enjoying each other's company

Gwyneth was 90 years old and living alone in her own home when first referred to Our Special Friends in late 2015. Having recently spent time in hospital, her family said Gwyneth was feeling down, and although mentally alert, was physically frail and unable to get out and about much. Gwyneth loved dogs, but her mobility issues meant it was not possible for her to have one of her own. OSF's Animal-Assisted Activity (AAA) programme, providing weekly visits from a volunteer with their friendly pet, was the perfect solution. Following two years of successful visiting, unfortunately other commitments meant the volunteer we had initially matched to Gwyneth had to step back from making regular visits – but Gwyneth was keen to keep receiving weekly AAA.

OSF therefore looked for a new volunteer, and in April 2018 we matched Gwyneth with a new volunteer, Jenny, and her young cocker spaniel, Bonnie. The visits were a wonderful success, with Gwyneth benefiting from the unconditional love that Bonnie offered as well as social interaction with Jenny. They usually spent the afternoon chatting and playing Scrabble, which Jenny reports Gwyneth was very good at, and provided her with additional mental stimulation.

Jenny said "I am loving my volunteering experience. Bonnie has gained confidence in new situations and with new people. I am so proud of how well she has adapted to her befriending role and it gives me enormous pleasure to see the bond developing between her and the lady we visit. She knows the route we take to get to the house and drags me up the drive to the front door! My reason for joining Our Special Friends was to support vulnerable people, which I am very pleased to be doing, but I have also made a new friend in the process."

Meanwhile, Gwyneth's family explained the importance of AAA visits: "This is to say a big thank you to your organisation for the marvellous care and support you provide to my step mother. Gwyneth looks forward to the weekly visits she has from your volunteer Jenny and her dog, and her mood has improved very much since she has had the visits from your ladies. When she first had visits from your volunteer she had been in hospital and was feeling very down. Your constant support and dedicated service in keeping those visits going, with only one change of volunteer, has been an important part of Gwyneth getting her confidence and spirit back and we are very grateful to Our Special Friends for this.

As a family we very much appreciate the level of professionalism your organisation displays towards Gwyneth and also towards us. We know that you will let us know if there are any areas of concern about Gwyneth and we find that your extra pair of very thoughtful eyes keeping a look out for her, when we are not living nearby, is very reassuring. We do rely on Our Special Friends to be part of a schedule of activities for Gwyneth in her home, which keep her busy and in touch with the outside world.

Gwyneth herself loves the chats that she has with Jenny and she loves seeing the dog and being able to stroke it. She tells us about the way the dog behaves and how it looks out of the window and she looks forward to seeing her every week. Being able to speak to someone regularly with whom she has a shared interest in dogs is very good for my step-mum's mental and physical health and we hope that you can continue to provide this important service for the foreseeable future."

After more than four years of visits from Jenny and Bonnie, sadly Gwyneth died in the summer of 2022. Having played such an important role in Gwyneth's life, Jenny and Bonnie both attended her funeral.

Some of the team at Suffolk Dog Day

CEO'S REPORT

During 2022/23, OSF worked with a total of 619 cases, including opening 469 new cases, representing an increase of over 30% on the previous year. Many cases are highly complex, involving issues such as mental health, disability, homelessness, and domestic abuse, requiring intensive work from our staff and team of 113 volunteers. Most of the beneficiaries of OSF's direct interventions live in the western side of Suffolk, a predominantly rural area, interspersed with small market towns, villages and hamlets. While often perceived as affluent, Suffolk experiences significant rural deprivation and healthcare needs which has only been exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis and the post-Covid 19 landscape. Our Animal Companionship Practitioners also provide advice, information and guidance free of geographical boundaries.

In our ninth year as a registered charity we enjoy our dog friendly office at the British Racing School. It is a beautiful site with lots of green space and equine therapy on our doorstep. Undeniably a good base for the office team to develop and coordinate our community outreach support.

We are indebted to our volunteers and supporters who make animal companionship support services possible. The team is dedicated to supporting people experiencing a range of difficult circumstances, helping them to find appropriate solutions. Our compassionate community of people who have a love of animals continues to grow, enabling local support often at very short notice.

Helping people to live well, to feel less lonely, to flee domestic abuse, receive inpatient hospital care and cope in housing crises are the main aims of our organisation, which we continue to strive to achieve to our best ability.

The cost of living crisis has resulted in increased requests for financial assistance. This has led to the necessity for us to modify our criteria for eligibility and referrals via the veterinary practices, working closely to ensure our limited funds reach the most critical need. We have distributed supermarket vouchers to clients following our relationship with the Rural Coffee Caravan; and pet food and other supplies via our Animal Welfare Support Fund.

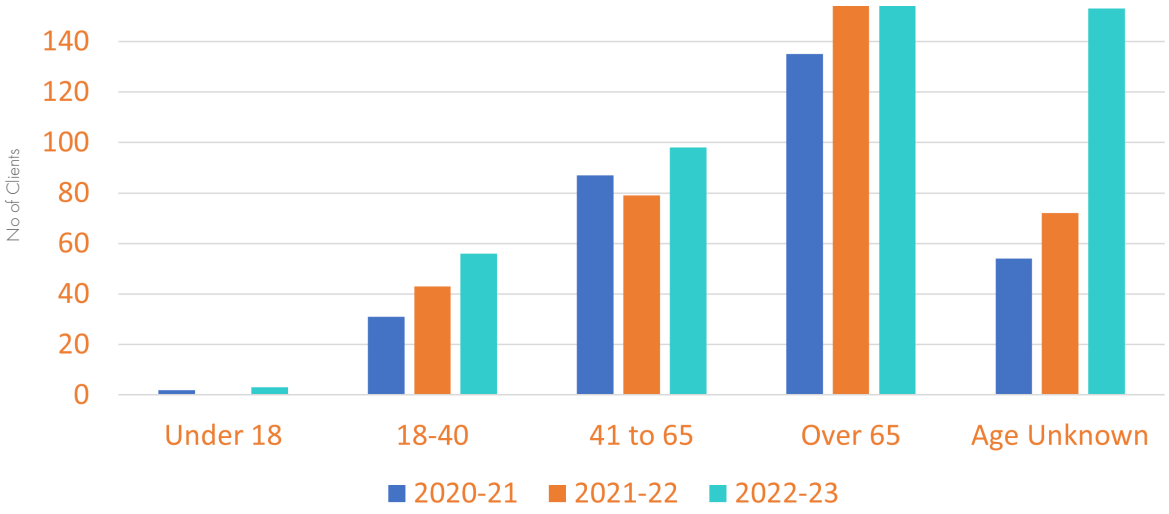
Seamus joined us in a new role of Charity Manager to review organisational procedures and compliance and implement new systems to improve administration and efficiency. This has enabled me to continue to lead and focus on the Animal Companionship Practitioner (ACP) role. Alongside the service delivery and volunteer management, Seamus and our Office Coordinator colleague are helping to streamline the processes so we can work even more efficiently and effectively.

Cases are increasingly complex due to limited community care, especially mental health support and lack of accommodation allowing pets. We provide a reassuring point of contact as our team answer the telephone and our volunteers regularly visit people, establishing ongoing supportive relationships.

We have noticed that the critical points are people moving in or out of hospital, in or out of care and into temporary/emergency housing. There needs to be more care planning and recognition that sentient animal friends are vital family members and often 'carers' providing emotional support. They have needs which can only be met if they are documented . We are encouraging everyone to have CVs for their pets as well as care plans.

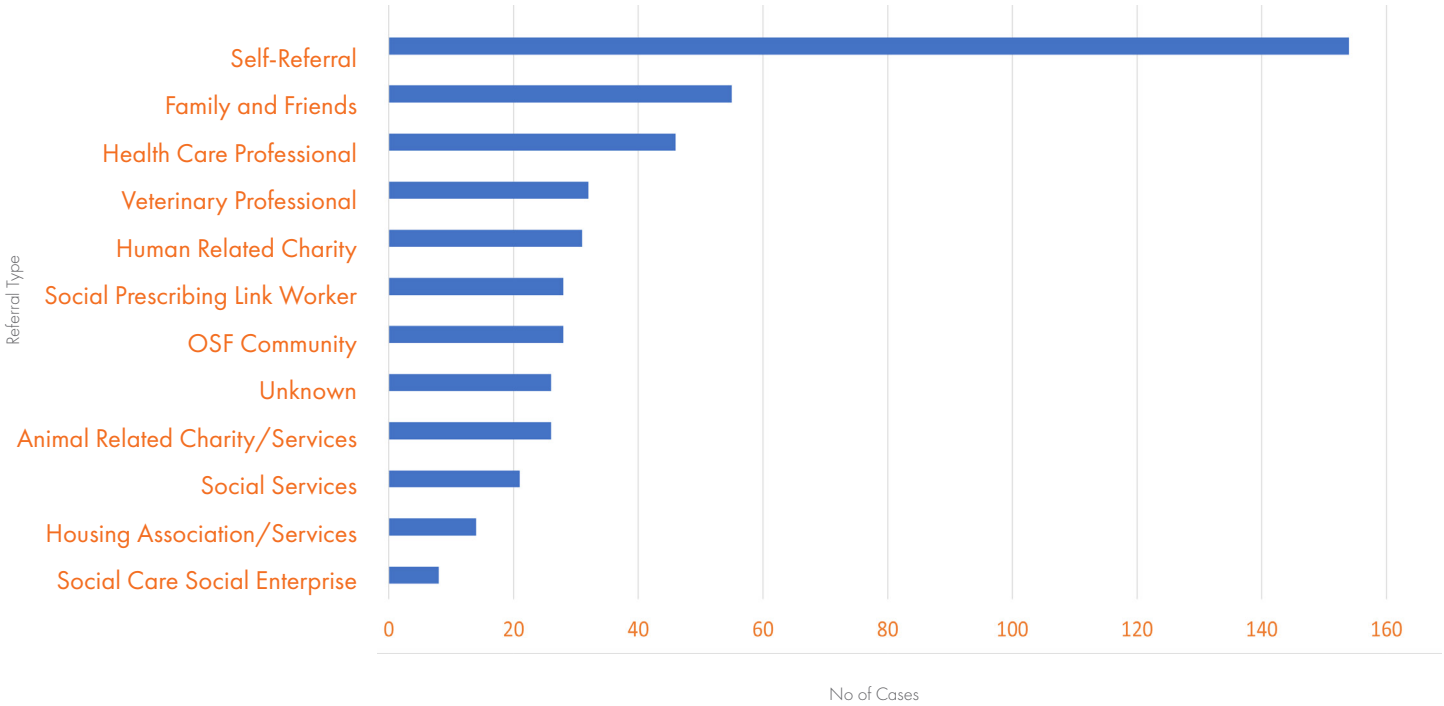
With crisis in all sectors, it is important to help people to keep pets with them wherever possible especially as rehoming centres are overrun, with no capacity in the system. It has never been more important to help to keep people and their beloved pets together and it is why we 'do what we do', and want to do more.

Age Range of Referred Clients for New Cases



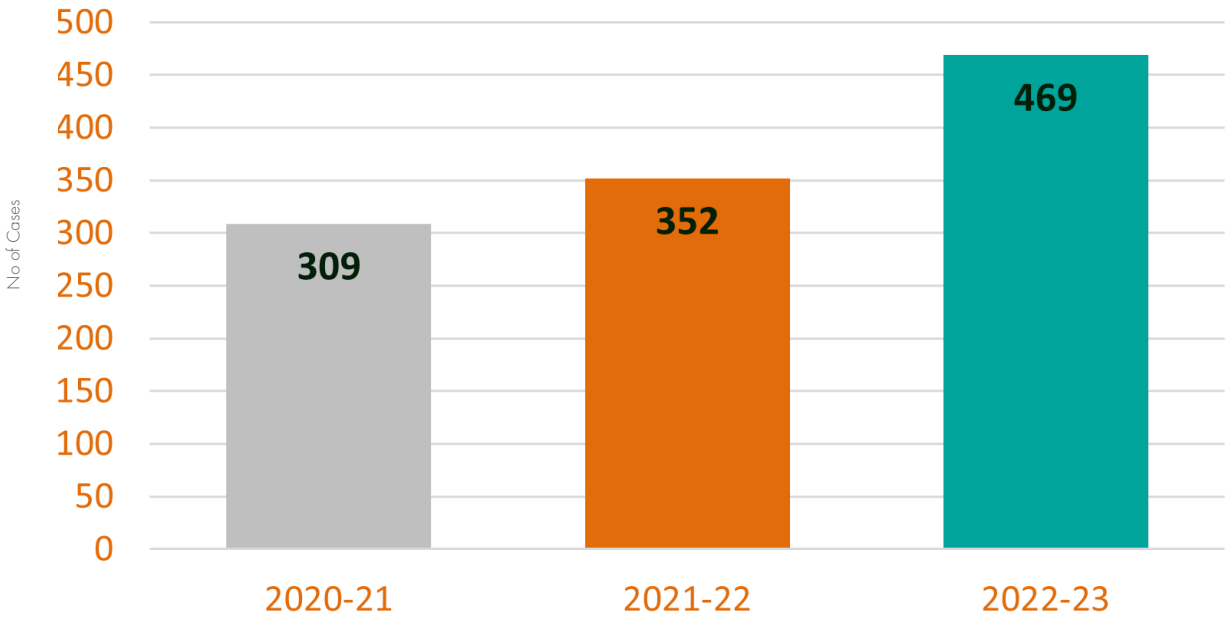
We support people of any age and a large proportion are over 65; with an increase in all demographics each year. It is not possible to collate age-related data on all clients due to the variety of circumstances and urgency of many cases.

Sources of Referrals



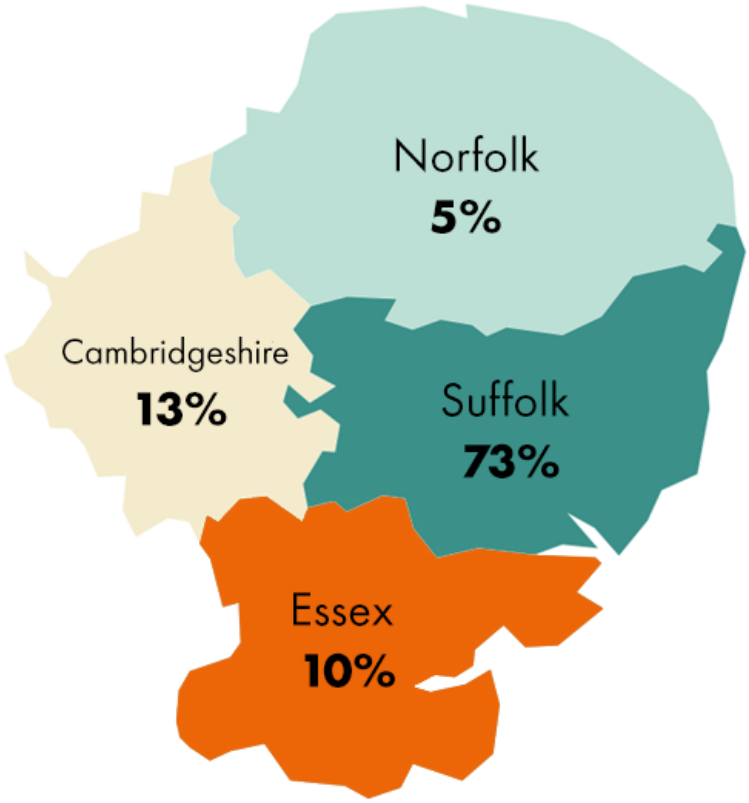
The single leading source of cases continues to be self-referral with a broad range of others. We continue to see a rise in secondary referrals, with a fourfold increase by Social Prescribing Link Workers compared to last year.

Growth in Number of New Cases



Out of a total of 619 cases in the year, 469 were new cases, an increase of 33% compared to last year

Location of New Cases in East Anglia



Alongside an increased total of new cases in 2022/2023, more cases were supported in the adjacent counties of Cambridgeshire and Essex.

Image opposite: Anne enjoying being out in the fresh air in the Abbey Gardens, Bury St Edmunds accompanied by our volunteers Jonathan and Celia, with their lovely visiting dog Bilbo.

Case Study Joyce's Journey with Our Special Friends

In 2018, OSF attended an event at a GP surgery, where Joyce approached us. It had been a terrible time for Joyce, aged 89, who had lost her husband and then three months later, her son, who was her only child. Having kept dogs for much of her life, Joyce was very keen to have a small dog to keep her company.

OSF soon became aware of a little elderly dog, Taz, who needed to be rehomed from another OSF client. Recognising Joyce's urgent need for companionship, the adoption process was fast-tracked and Taz arrived at Joyce's within three days of the assessment, just a month after the initial meeting at the GP surgery. OSF also paid for some essential dental work for Taz through our Animal Welfare Support Fund. Taz was well behaved, and Joyce was delighted with what turned out to be an excellent match. As Joyce needed a mobility scooter to get out, her neighbour's son helped by walking Taz. Joyce absolutely adored Taz: she had a friend always by her side, who also guarded her and the house.

Joyce told us at the time "Our Special Friends have been most helpful in finding my little dog and were very careful to ensure he was going to a good home. He is an absolute treasure and has given me a new lease of life after losing both my husband and only son in the last six months. I think this is a splendid charity and are providing an excellent service to elderly and such people."

OSF kept in regular touch with Joyce and contributed financially when Taz needed further dental treatment eighteen months later. After three and a half happy years together, sadly Taz fell ill and was euthanised to prevent ongoing suffering.

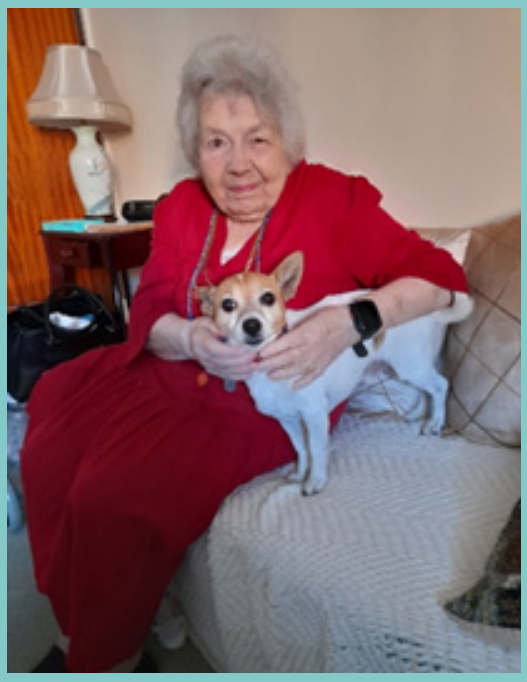
While Joyce decided whether she wanted another permanent canine companion, OSF arranged for her to receive weekly visits from a volunteer and their dog through our Animal-Assisted Activity (AAA) programme. Christina had previously adopted Griffle, a gorgeous, friendly dog through OSF and was matched with Joyce. The visits were very successful, with Christina's daughter also coming along which was an added bonus for Joyce. However, after eight months Christina and her family moved away so could no longer visit.

At this point, Joyce told us she wanted to adopt another dog of her own, but none of the dogs we knew of were suitable. In the interim, Joyce was keen to keep having AAA visits, so we matched her with a couple, Celia and Jonathan, and their characterful dog Bilbo. Jonathan and Celia took turns to visit Joyce every week, initially with just Bilbo, then alternating with their younger dog Digby once he had passed his AAA assessment. They also supported Joyce with her adoption search whilst continuing regular visits.

Six months later, by which time Joyce was 94 years old, an eleven year old Jack Russell cross, Archie, became available for adoption. Archie was not coping with the other dogs and cats in the home, so OSF spoke to Joyce who was keen to take him on. Archie's previous owner was delighted to find him a quiet calm home where he would be able to enjoy one-to-one company: "I can't thank you enough for everything you have done to help me with Archie. It's been such a hard decision, and I literally couldn't be happier with the thought of him going to live with Joyce." Archie settled in very well with Joyce, who was delighted to have a small, friendly, well behaved dog with her day and night. His playful character kept her amused much of the time!

Joyce enjoys great support from her neighbours who like to take Archie for a walk, sometimes with Joyce in her wheelchair. Archie is very popular when he accompanies Joyce to her weekly lunch club, and when Joyce visits to a friend who lives at a care home, Archie loves to go along and meet the other residents.

Our Volunteer Celia commented: "A more perfect outcome for this incredibly resilient lady could not have been achieved."



Joyce with Archie

Top left: Joyce with Griffle Top right: Joyce with Taz Bottom: Joyce with Bilbo

VOLUNTEER MANAGER REPORT

Frances Day, Volunteer Manager

Recruitment and Challenges

Volunteer participation rates are at an all-time low across the nation (Gov, Community Life Survey) and Our Special Friends have certainly felt the strain over the last year. In 2022/23 Our Special Friends have recruited 21 new volunteers (a 46% decrease on last year). However, our retention rates are at an all-time high with only 10 leaving. Our current volunteer community is now 113.

With recruitment rates suffering, it is vital that we invest time, and support, in retaining our current volunteers. Here at Our Special Friends we do this by keeping regular contact and offering opportunities to touch base/review how our volunteers feel. We continue to send The Monthly Paws volunteer bulletin and have held 11 in-house volunteer training opportunities. We identified the need for case discussions as an opportunity for volunteers to give feedback and openly discuss any concerns they might have regarding their clients and activities. The first session was well attended and confirmed the need for these to take place. In March, we also hosted a lead volunteer and assessor meet-up to bring together the thoughts of these volunteers, who play a pivotal role in the charity. We also offer numerous training opportunities, held by external organisations, to support volunteer learning and increase confidence in carrying out their volunteer role.

Survey

The above can be seen in our 2022/23 volunteer survey results, of which we had a similar number of responses to last year.

Across the volunteer sector we have seen a change in volunteering from regular to a more ad-hoc/as required basis and volunteer responses have backed this trend, however there was an increase in volunteers saying they are happy to do more. With new cases increasing 33% this year we have tried hard to maximise our volunteers offers.

90% of volunteers said they feel well supported in their role – including Sarah, who commented, "You are readily available to answer questions and offer support. You listen to volunteers concerns and you act appropriately", and Tony, who said, "Every member of the staff supports us and care that we are happy with what we are doing."

When asked what we could do to improve, we received very few answers! Two responses requested that training session are made more accessible by hosting online or being held in a central location. This is a consideration for the year ahead.

The year ahead

In 2023/24 we plan to tighten our volunteer review process. These will by whatever method is preferable to the volunteer giving a chance to check in, refresh their safeguarding knowledge, keep their DBS current and identify any need for further training. We are also designing our bespoke OSF safeguarding training to be delivered from January 2024. We have seen a considerable increase in referrals, particularly for Animal-Assisted Activity in the Bury St Edmunds area. We must now focus on targeted recruitment in this area to try and meet this need.

To volunteer with us, complete our online form at **www. ourspecialfriends.org/download-volunteer/**

Our Volunteers

This year Our Special Friends has helped more people and their pets than ever before.

12,480
hours volunteered

1,872
AAA Visits

21
new volunteers

"Our clients feel someone cares about them"

"Always supportive with good communication"

2, 288
Dog Walks

11
in house training opportunities

"We love being part of OSF"

98% of volunteers find volunteering with Our Special Friends rewarding

96% of volunteers feel well supported in their volunteer role

Promoting, preserving and providing the power of animal companionship

VOLUNTEER STORY – Tracey and Adi Nunn

"This has proved to be an extremely rewarding time. We have cared for many cats, and we have seen most of them returned successfully to their owners when they have settled whatever crisis is happening."

Tracey tells us about her experience volunteering for OSF.

My husband Adrian and I began volunteering for Our Special Friends in January 2020.

I had been volunteering with the RSPCA for many years before then. I enjoyed helping people find new pets and bringing them together, but the other side was I sometimes had to take people's pets away when they were at their lowest, and that I never got used to.

I ceased volunteering for the RSPCA and was looking for something to do to help local animals and people.

I cannot really remember how we heard of OSF, but we signed up to be dog walkers and helped a few people during this time. I have lovely memories of some of the dogs and people we have met.

Evolution happens, and we became one of the volunteers who fosters animals. We have a summer house and we have used this in the past to take in cats where the owners are having difficulties and need some space to sort out things but not lose their animals because of this.

This has proved to be an extremely rewarding time. We have cared for many cats, and we have seen most of them returned successfully to their owners when they have settled whatever crisis is happening.

Adi is a diamond as he pitches in and is really hands on with the cats too. Our Special Friends purchased a Catio, and with a little renovation from my son and his partner, it is now attached to our summer house and provides more space and access to open air for any of our feline residents.

We have met some lovely people during this time and have seen some very tough situations turn around and resolve which is heartwarming and rewarding.

We love being part of Our Special Friends because of the ethos of the charity, keeping animals and their owners together is such a vital thing if it is possible. When you have trauma, and all you have left is your pet they become the focus of your support. Then to lose that is the most harrowing thing ever. You are in a situation beyond your control and that pet may be the only stability you have.

Having had lots of people (men, women, and children) in my kitchen in the past, sobbing as they have to say goodbye to their pet is awful and I can tell you that from experience.

But, knowing that now we can say that when your life is settled you can be reunited with your beloved pet back is the best part.

All the team at the charity are so supportive to us. We can call them anytime and they will help and support. Even on Easter Sunday!!!

Our Special Friends are unique in the charity sector locally and we personally are very proud to say we support them and hope to do so for a long time yet.

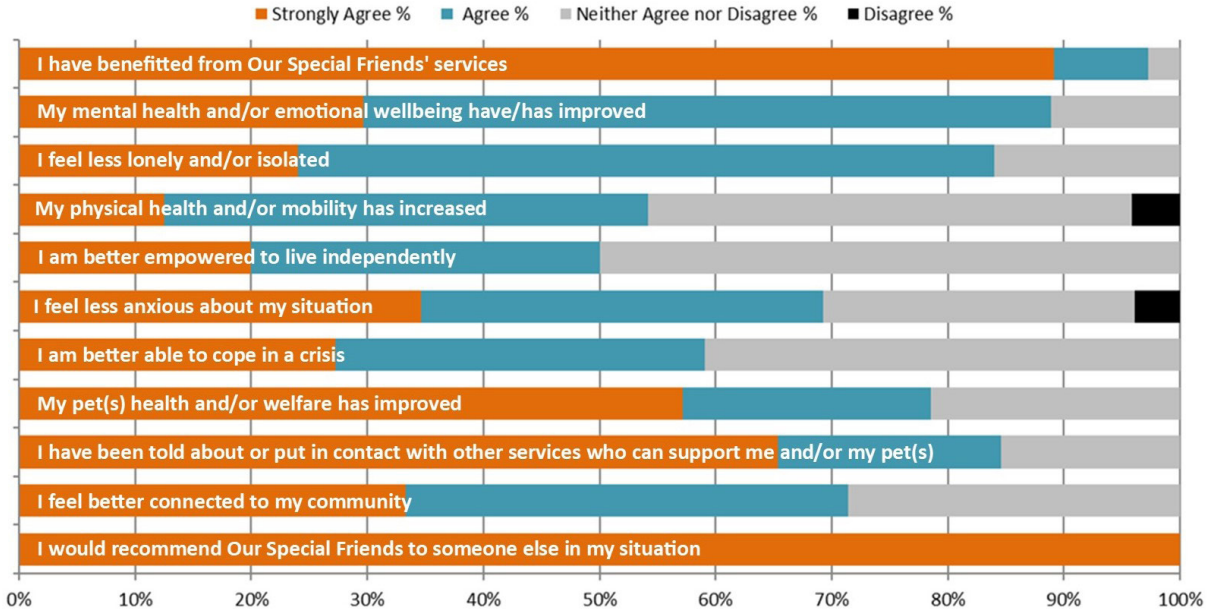
Image opposite: Tracey and Adi

"We love being part of Our Special Friends because of the ethos of the charity, keeping animals and their owners together is such a vital thing if it is possible."

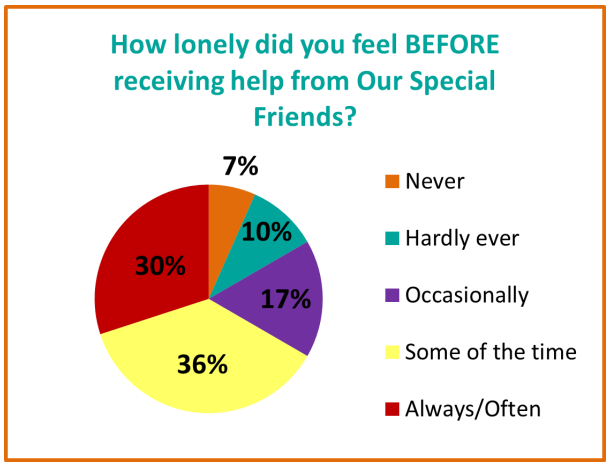
OUR SPECIAL FRIENDS IMPACT

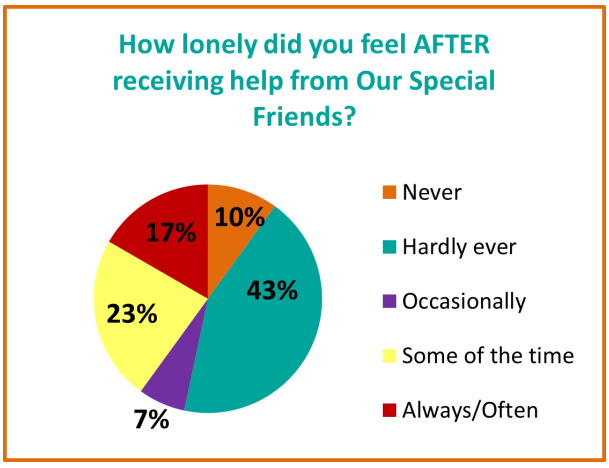
Client Feedback

Our Special Friends measures our impact on clients' health and wellbeing through our Client Feedback Form, which is sent to all clients. This includes a list of statements about the difference OSF has made, with clients requested to select how much they agree or disagree with statements on a five-point scale between 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly Disagree'. The following chart shows the breakdown of responses received in 2022/23:



Reducing loneliness and isolation is a key outcome for Our Special Friends. The following pie charts show the responses to questions asking clients to self-assess their feelings of loneliness both before and after receiving help from Our Special Friends. This demonstrates a significant reduction in clients who 'Always/Often' or 'Some of the time' felt lonely, and an increase in those who 'Never' or 'Hardly ever' felt lonely after receiving help from Our Special Friends.





Responses received throughout 2022/23 to open questions in our Client Feedback Form include:

I was given permission to keep my cat with us which in turn helped my mental health and got my autistic son talking again.

I felt awful having to ask but felt I was dealt with in a very caring and non-judgemental way. You were very supportive and informative.

Empathic response to request for Dog Walker who would understand the needs of my dogs and consequently mine.

I honestly don't know what we would have done without OSF!

Gave me the help, support and strength I needed, plus helped my dog Bud, gain confidence and training to start his new happier life.

OSF gave me a reason to get up in the morning and look forward to their visits.

Since my husband died, I found myself without friends and family, they have filled a huge hole. The dogs are delightful, and for a little while, make me smile.

Great kind, non-judgemental support, which was discrete and I appreciated enormously. I have been able to keep my beloved boys when at one time was heartbroken to think that I would need to rehome them.

OSF are experts in companion animals and their relationships with us. Your counsellor ... was very helpful and sympathetic. He understood my grief at the loss of my beloved dog. The psychologist I had been sent to by my solicitors was influenced by his professional opinion so thank you.

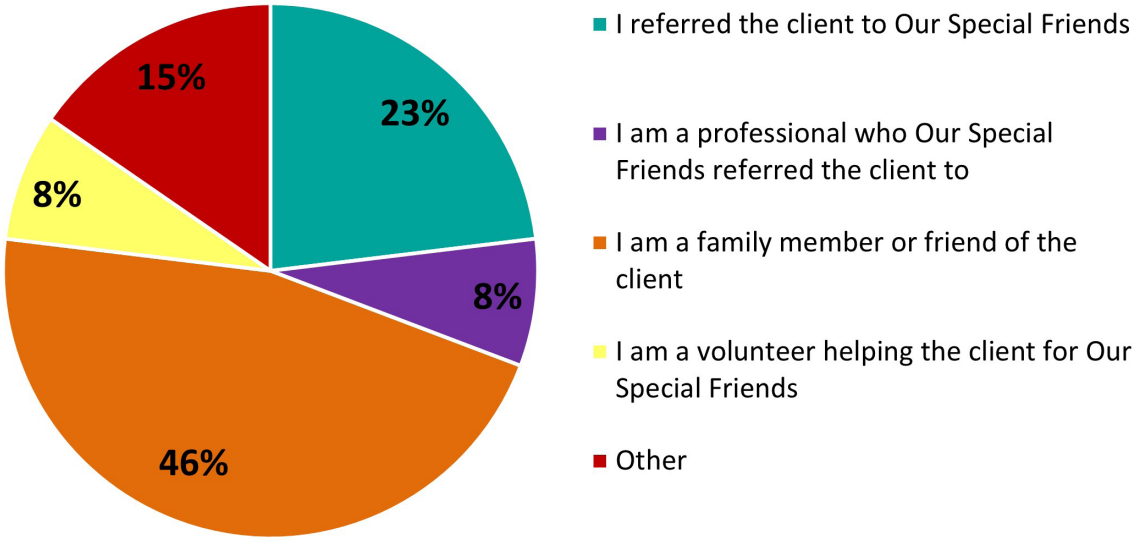
Clear communication of the different possibilities, fast response time, friendly understanding and supportive staff.

Reasons why our animal companionship support services are needed

Third Party Feedback

We also measure impact through a Third Party Feedback form, which asks people involved with the client for their opinion on how both they and the client have benefited from OSF's services. The following pie chart breaks down the type of relationship respondents to the Third Party Feedback Form had with the client.

Third Party's Relationship with Client %



The Third Party Feedback Form also gave a list of statements, asking how much the respondent to rate how much they agreed with each one on a five point scale between 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly Disagree'. Responses are summarised in the following graphic.

10 reasons why people needed help from OSF, paired with examples of OSF intervention that were received through feedback from client/third party user questionnaires.

1. **Hospitalisation** *"Was hugely assisted at a very difficult time when my father was admitted to hospital in an emergency situation, enabling me to care for him, and to have the worry about his dogs welfare taken from my shoulders ."*
2. **Housing** *"Gave advice to me and spoke to my Housing association on my behalf regarding the no pet rule... I was given permission to keep my cat with us which in turn helped my mental health and got my autistic son talking again!"*
3. **Poor Physical Health** *"Our mum was able to keep her beloved dog and best friend with her in her darkest moments before she sadly passed away. Having the volunteer walker was such a god send to our mum."*
4. **Poor Mental Health** *" You have helped with my mental health in coping with the situation for a second time."*
5. **Loneliness** *"Not feeling totally alone with an insurmountable problem." "A world of difference I feel I have a family again"*
6. **Change in Circumstances** *"I have been able to keep my beloved boys when at one time was heartbroken to think that I would need to rehome them."*
7. **Bereavement** *"Helped me to understand the practicalities of losing our family dog and how to support our children and look after myself around the loss."*
8. **Mobility** *Client unable to walk her dog: "Empathic response to request for dog walker who would understand the needs of my dogs and consequently mine."*
9. **Financial** *"Helping to fund the surgery made a massive difference to our cat who had been left in a lot of pain."*
10. **Animal Health/Welfare** *"Immediately found a foster home for my cat." "Helped my dog get the help he needed which I couldn't afford"*

Case Study Tony and Digger

Our Special Friends was contacted on a Friday in August 2022 by a friend and neighbour of a gentleman, Tony, who had been hospitalised because help was needed to look after Tony's elderly spaniel, Digger. After an initial foster home had fallen through, the neighbour had been popping in to check on Digger, and a professional paid dog walker was taking Digger out daily - but Tony's stay in hospital was now going to be longer than first expected so more support was needed. Tony's next of kin, his nephew, did not live locally so couldn't help with looking after Digger in situ, and worked full time so was not in a position to have him at their house.

Tony and Digger were delighted to be reunited

The very same day, OSF identified a potential foster home with a couple who loved spaniels and regularly took on older dogs with health problems through Spaniel Aid. Tony's nephew was visiting at the weekend, so was able to transport Digger to the foster home, where he settled in quickly. During his stay, Digger began scratching compulsively around his head and neck, and his fosterers took him to his vets where they found evidence of fleas. Digger was also licking at his paws, so OSF requested his previous vet history which showed that he was thought to have arthritis, but that his medication had lapsed. As per our Fostering Agreement, OSF agreed to cover the vet bills for Digger through our Animal Welfare Support Fund, including the arthritis medication, flea and worm tablets, a follow-up consultation, and a flea spray for the foster home.

After briefly being discharged in August and then re-admitted to hospital after a fall, Tony was able to come home in the middle of September, with carers visiting four times a day to support his recovery. Meanwhile, due to personal issues the foster family had said they would need Digger to go home in early October. Fortunately Tony was well enough for his nephew to collect Digger from the fosterers and return him home on 1st October, with his neighbours and the paid dog walker providing continued support. Towards the end of October, Tony called to say how pleased he was with the service he had received, and he made a very generous donation of £200.

Sadly, in mid-December Tony became unwell again, but unfortunately the family who had fostered Digger previously had just taken on another dog through Spaniel Aid so couldn't have Digger as well. OSF worked quickly to identify another volunteer who was happy to take Digger on - however, before that could happen, one of Tony's neighbours stepped forward to foster Digger. A key goal for OSF is to increase support within a client's existing network or community, so this was an ideal solution.

BREMAIN
DOLPHIN

THE YEAR AHEAD

Funding is crucial to enable us to continue to provide our Animal Companionship Support Services (ACSS) and to develop and grow to help more people and animals in need of care and support. We want to create a sustainable organisation to share our knowledge and encourage others to 'do what we do'. We believe passionately that our support is making a big difference by, aiding people's recovery and at the same time we are helping to reduce the pressure off a wide range of people, family, friends, statutory services and other professionals.

We have a lean team in our office made up of: a Charity Manager to cover the operational aspects of the charity, an Office Coordinator who supports the team and is the gateway to our office, a Volunteer Support Manager and two Animal Companionship Practitioners (ACPs) for our cases; and our financial colleagues. We are totally reliant on the passion, dedication and skills of our volunteer community. Many are going above and beyond, but having a paid, full time role, based largely in the community and liaising with the office, would be ideal to help with in-home assessments and matching cases to local support. This is where our new Animal Companion Coordinator (ACC) role will make such a difference.

Evaluating our complex interventions is a priority to show our impact but is challenging due to our collaborative approach and the variability of client difficulties.

Keeping pets and people together is needed for both their wellbeing and welfare and because relinquishing them is increasingly not an option. The rehoming sector is in crisis and is having to adapt in order to provide more community support. None of us want owners to be separated from their pets unless it is absolutely necessary. Any age of person can have a pet as long as there is a good local network of support and an effective care plan, but we need a 'joined up' approach and effective communication.

Dogs Trust and Cats Protection are now in our area providing 'foster to reunite' for domestic abuse cases which was a result of us asking them to come here to help. We would like more organisations to provide Animal-Assisted Activity in the home, more people to provide accompanied dog walking if owners have sufficient mobility and care plans to enable care in crises.

We want to establish a community and corporate fundraising team, preferably led by a new colleague so our funding can be diversified. Whilst we currently rely heavily on grants and trusts, it is evident that it is important to become less reliant on this stream of financial resource, especially when applications are oversubscribed.

It is important that we clarify our message and impact in order that more people are aware of the breadth and depth of our support. 'Our Special Friends' as a charity name works for people who are fearful that they are going to lose their beloved pet, but does not explain the range of our support; which aims to help in difficult times and enable happy, healthy people and pets to live, and age, well together.

Finally, we will be celebrating our 10th birthday in 2024 and all that we have achieved to date; looking to the future and striving for sustainability.

Image opposite: Willow and Otto enjoying our time at Suffolk Dog Day

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Structure, governance and management

The charity is a company limited by guarantee incorporated on 11 November 2013 and governed by its Articles of Association. It was registered as a charity under the Charities Act 2011 on 23 April 2014.

None of the Trustees have any beneficial interest in the charitable company. All of the Trustees are volunteers. Trustees are assisted to fulfil their duties by the chief executives and by other advisors, who offer information and assistance in undertaking all their governance tasks. It is the responsibility of the Trustees to meet to make balanced, proportionate and clear decisions about the future of the charitable company, and make all disclosures about the organisation.

New trustees are recruited through a combination of advertising, recommendation, and personal contact. Appointments are reviewed and approved by the Board. All new trustees are provided with a detailed induction.

Through consideration of reports on income, expenditure and of forecasts for the next twelve months, Trustees have analysed any risks to the charity, and have identified no material uncertainties that cast doubt about the ability of the company to continue as a going concern.

Financial review

Total income for the year ended 30 April 2023 was £222,569 which was slightly down on the previous year (2022: £237,478). We continue to rely primarily on grants, and the average amount of each each grant is still relatively low. We therefore rely on a constant flow of successful applications to fund our services and maintain reserves.

While a broad spread of funders reduces the risk inherent with just one or two major providers, the time and effort required to apply, secure and report on these grants is significant for a small charity. Our future growth will therefore depend on securing income from a wider range of sources. In particular, we are seeking a community fundraiser and ideally we would also like to find an organisation or individual prepared to support our core operations with multi year funding.

In addition to fundraising to support our charitable activities, we believe there is an increasingly strong case for local authorities and welfare agencies to contract with us to provide our services.

Expenditure for the year increased by 17% to £239,446 (2022: £204,922). This was in line with our budget and primarily reflected the recruitment of a charity manager during the year.

Unrestricted reserves at 30 April 2023 were £142,259 (2022: £162,172). The Trustees are satisfied with the level of reserves, which is in line with our reserves policy of 4-6 months operating expenditure.

If the level of reserves (excluding restricted reserves) falls below 6 months of operating expenditure the Trustees will determine what action is required to be taken in order to increase reserves in line with our policy.

Statement of Trustees responsibilities

The Trustees, who are also directors of the charity are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Report and financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company law requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year, which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the charitable company for the year.

In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- Select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- Observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP 2019 (FRS 102);
- Make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- State whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements.
- Prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in operation.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the company and to enable them to ensure that the fi-nancial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice: Accounting and Reporting by Charities 2019 (FRS 102) and in accordance with the special provisions of Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

Approved by the Trustees/Directors on and signed its behalf by:

Robert Ferguson

Robert Ferguson (Jan 29, 2024 09:46 GMT+1)

Robert Ferguson
Director

Our Special Friends

Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2023

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Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

Our Special Friends
Independent Examiners Report for the year ended 30 April 2023

We report to the trustees on our examination of the accounts of the company for the year ended 30 April 2023 which are set out on pages 28 to 35.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity trustees of the company (and also its directors for the purposes of company law) you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 ("the 2006 Act").

Having satisfied ourselves that the accounts of the company are not required to be audited under Part 16 of the 2006 Act and are eligible for independent examination, we report in respect of our examination of your company's accounts as carried out under section 145 of the Charities Act 2011 ("the 2011 Act"). In carrying out our examination, we have followed the Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act.

Independent Examiner's Statement

We have completed our examination. We can confirm that no matters have come to our attention in connection with the examination giving us cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the company as required by section 386 of the 2006 Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records; or
3. the accounts do not comply with the accounting requirements of section 396 of the 2006 Act other than any requirement that the accounts give a "true and fair view" which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination; or
4. the accounts have not been prepared in accordance with the methods and principles of the Statement of Recommended Practice for accounting and reporting by Charities (applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102).

We have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Stephanie J Beeston-Clarke FCCA
Beeston-Clarke Accountants Ltd
Chartered Certified Accountants
242 Leicester Road
Markfield
Leicester
LE67 9RG

Dated: 29 January 2024

Statement of financial activities (including summary income and expenditure account)

	Notes	Unrestricted funds	Restricted income funds	Total funds	*Prior year funds*
		£	£	£	£
Income	**3**				
Donations and legacies		33,547	-	33,547	*74,011*
Charitable activities		79,812	108,585	188,397	*163,429*
Fundraising events		309	-	309	*24*
Interest		316	-	316	*14*
Total income		113,984	108,585	222,569	*237,478*
Expenditure	**4**				
Raising funds		31,514	7,397	38,911	*37,162*
Charitable activities		102,383	98,152	200,535	*167,760*
Total expenditure		133,897	105,549	239,446	*204,922*
Net income/(expenditure)		(19,913)	3,036	(16,877)	*32,556*
Transfers between funds		-	-	-	-
Net movement in funds		(19,913)	3,036	(16,877)	*32,556*
Reconciliation of funds:					
Total funds brought forward		162,172	40,574	202,746	*170,190*
Total funds carried forward		**142,259**	**43,610**	**185,869**	***202,746***

Balance sheet

	Notes	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted income funds £	Total this year £	*Total prior year £*
Fixed assets	**7**	-	-	-	-
Current assets					
Debtors	**8**	3,648	-	3,648	*540*
Cash at bank and in hand		152,525	43,610	196,135	*210,579*
Total current assets		156,173	43,610	199,783	*211,119*
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	**9**	13,914	-	13,914	*8,373*
Net current assets		142,259	43,610	185,869	*202,746*
Total assets less current liabilities		142,259	43,610	185,869	202,746
Total net assets		**142,259**	**43,610**	**185,869**	***202,746***
Funds of the Charity					
Restricted income funds	**10**	-	43,610	43,610	*40,574*
Unrestricted funds		142,259	-	142,259	*162,172*
Total funds		**142,259**	**43,610**	**185,869**	***202,746***

For the year ended 30 April 2023, the company was entitled to exemption from audit under section 477 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

The members have not required the company to obtain an audit of its accounts for the year in question in accordance with section 476 of the Companies Act 2006.

The directors acknowledge their responsibilities for complying with the requirements of the Companies Act with respect to accounting records and the preparation of accounts.

These accounts have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to small companies subject to the small companies' regime and in accordance with FRS102 SORP.

Approved by the Board and signed on its behalf by

Date

Robert Ferguson

Robert Ferguson (Jan 29, 2024 09:49 GMT+1)

Robert Ferguson
Director

Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

Our Special Friends

Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2023

Our Special Friends is a charitable company limited by guarantee, incorporated in England and Wales.
The registered office is West End House, Upper Green, Higham, Bury St Edmunds, IP28 6PA

Notes to the accounts

1 Basis of preparation

These accounts have been prepared under the historical cost convention with items recognised at cost or transaction value.

The accounts have been prepared in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice: Accounting and Reporting by Charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) issued on 16 July 2014, and with the Charities Act 2011

2 Accounting policies

Recognition of income	Income is included in the Statement of Financial Activities when: · the charity becomes entitled to the resources; · it is more likely than not that the trustees will receive the resources; and · the monetary value can be measured with sufficient reliability.
Grants and donations	Grants and donations are only included in the Statement of Financial Activities when the general income recognition criteria are met.
Legacies	Legacies are included in the Statement of Financial Activities when receipt is probable, that is, when there has been grant of probate, the executors have established that there are sufficient assets in the estate and any conditions attached to the legacy are either within the control of the charity or have been met.
Volunteer help	The value of any voluntary help received is not included in the accounts but is described in the trustees' annual report.
Liability recognition	Liabilities are recognised where it is more likely than not that there is a legal or constructive obligation committing the charity to pay out resources and the amount of the obligation can be measured with reasonable certainty.
Governance and support costs	Support costs have been allocated between governance costs and other support. Governance costs comprise all costs involving public accountability of the charity and its compliance with regulation and good practice.
Tangible fixed assets for use by charity	These are capitalised if they can be used for more than one year, and cost at least £250 They are valued at cost and depreciated over 3 years.

Notes to the accounts

3 Analysis of income

		Unrestricted funds £	Restricted income funds £	Total funds £	*Prior year £*
Donations and legacies:	Donations and gifts	31,448	-	31,448	*68,966*
	Gift Aid	2,099	-	2,099	*5,045*
	Total donations and legacies	33,547	-	33,547	*74,011*
Charitable activities:	General grants provided by govt/other charities	79,812	108,585	188,397	*163,429*
Other Income:	Interest	316	-	316	*14*
	Fundraising events	309	-	309	*24*
Total Income		**113,984**	**108,585**	**222,569**	***237,478***

Included in general grants of £188,397 are £27,250 of government grants (2022: £nil).

All income in the prior year was unrestricted except for £51,029 of general grants.
Further details are shown in note 9.

4 Analysis of expenditure

		Unrestricted funds £	Restricted income funds £	Total funds £	*Prior year £*
Expenditure on raising funds	Outsourced services	14,947	7,397	22,344	*21,773*
	Advertising, marketing, direct mail and publicity	2,024	-	2,024	*2,887*
	Staff costs	14,543	-	14,543	*12,502*
	Total expenditure on raising funds	31,514	7,397	38,911	*37,162*
Expenditure on charitable activities	Volunteer costs	3,897	-	3,897	*2,856*
	Animal care costs	4,052	13,389	17,441	*19,725*
	Office expenses	19,473	13,750	33,223	*27,862*
	Outsourced services	24,869	-	24,869	*29,946*
	Staff costs	50,092	71,013	121,105	*87,371*
	Total expenditure on charitable activities	102,383	98,152	200,535	*167,760*
Total expenditure		**133,897**	**105,549**	**239,446**	***204,922***

A fee of £1,800 has been provided in respect of the Independent Examination of the financial statements for this year (2022 - Nil).

Notes to the accounts

5 Staff costs

	This year	*Prior year*
	£	£
Salaries and wages	124,013	*91,840*
Social security costs	5,289	*3,801*
Pension costs (defined contribution scheme)	2,318	*1,726*
Staff training and expenses	4,028	*2,506*
	135,648	***99,873***

No employees received employee benefits (excluding employer pension costs) for the reporting period of more than £60,000.

The company provides pension benefits under the NEST scheme

The full time equivalent number of staff working for the charity during the year was 5 (2021: 4)

6 Transactions with trustees and related parties

Travel expenses amounting to £252 were re-imbursed to one Trustee (2022 - Nil).

During the year, close family members of Mark Johnston, Robert Ferguson and Carolyn Bradburne provided services to the company. Bin Johnston (CEO) received £27,810 in salary and expenses. Laura Ferguson received £5,798 for administrative support services and Jeremy Bradburne received £1,000 for business planning consultancy. The amounts in respect of Laura Ferguson and Jeremy Bradburne include £1,560 and £500 respectively in accruals at 30 April 2023.

During the prior year Bin Johnston received £26,674 in salary and expenses.

7 Fixed assets

At the year end and prior year end the company held fully depreciated computer equipment with a total cost of £3,852.
There were no additions or disposals during the year or prior year.

8 Debtors and prepayments

	This year	*Prior year*
	£	£
Prepayments and accrued income	3,648	*540*
	3,648	***540***

9 Creditors and accruals

	Amounts falling due within one year	
	This year	*Prior year*
	£	£
Accruals and deferred income	11,652	*6,062*
Taxation and social security	2,262	*2,311*
	13,914	***8,373***

Notes to the accounts

9 Restricted funds

Current Year	Purpose and Restrictions	Fund balances brought forward	Income	Expenditure	Fund balances carried forward
Government Grants		£	£	£	£
West Suffolk Council Community Chest	Volunteer Support Manager salary	10,000	-	(10,000)	-
West Suffolk Council Community Chest	Animal Companionship Practitioner salary	7,290	-	(7,290)	-
West Suffolk Council Community Chest	Crisis Support and Prevention	-	5,000	-	5,000
West Suffolk Council UK Shared Prosperity Fund	IT Upgrade	-	2,250	(2,250)	-
Mid Suffolk District Council	Animal Companionship Coordinator salary	-	20,000	-	20,000
Other Grants					
Kennel Club Charitable Trust - Chelsea & Mr French Fund	Animal Companionship Practitioner salary	-	10,000	(9,162)	838
Anonymous Trust	Charity Manager salary	-	39,190	(23,416)	15,774
Coco Joelle Foundation	Animal-Assisted activity	-	5,000	(5,000)	-
Suffolk Community Foundation					
Harris Family Fund	Core costs	-	2,000	(2,000)	-
David & Jill Simpson Fund	Core costs	1,000	-	(1,000)	-
Pargiter Trust Fund	Core costs	2,500	-	(2,500)	-
Miller Trust Fund	Core costs	500	-	(500)	-
Pargiter Trust Fund	Core costs	-	5,000	(5,000)	-
Shadwell Trust Fund	Core costs	500	-	(500)	-
Helen Roll Charity	Animal Companionship Practitioner salary	5,000	-	(5,000)	-
Co-op Local Community Fund	Animal-Assisted Activity	-	2,145	(2,145)	-
Green Hall Foundation	Animal-Assisted Activity	-	5,000	(5,000)	-
Anonymous individual	Fundraising costs	7,397	-	(7,397)	-
Charles Hayward Foundation	Animal-Assisted Activity	4,000	-	(4,000)	-
Association of Dogs and Cats Homes - Mars Food Fund	Pet Food	-	3,000	(1,002)	1,998
Pets at Home Foundation	Animal Welfare Support Fund	-	10,000	(10,000)	-
Kennel Club Charitable Trust	Animal Welfare Support Fund (Dogs only)	2,387	-	(2,387)	-
	Total Restricted Funds	**40,574**	**108,585**	**(105,549)**	**43,610**

Notes to the accounts

9 Restricted funds (continued)

Previous year	*Purpose and Restrictions*	*Fund balances brought forward*	*Income*	*Expenditure*	*Fund balances carried forward*
Government Grants		£	£	£	£
West Suffolk Council	*Animal Companionship Practitioner*	*25,000*	*-*	*(17,710)*	*7,290*
Other Grants					
Individual Grant	*Fundraiser salary*	*-*	*10,000*	*(2,603)*	*7,397*
Individual Grant	*Fundraiser salary*	*6,070*	*-*	*(6,070)*	*-*
Charles Hayward Foundation	*Animal - Assisted Activity*	*-*	*4,000*	*-*	*4,000*
Mrs Smith & Mount Trust	*Animal - Assisted Activity*	*1,800*	*-*	*(1,800)*	*-*
Godolphin	*Office rent*	*4,547*	*-*	*(4,547)*	*-*
Individual Grant	*Office rent*	*4,548*	*-*	*(4,548)*	*-*
St Edmunds Trust	*IT work stations*	*-*	*2,529*	*(2,529)*	*-*
Suffolk Community Foundation					
Fonnereau Road Health Foundation	*Animal - Assisted Activity*	*1,573*	*-*	*(1,573)*	*-*
David & Jill Simpson	*Core costs*	*-*	*4,000*	*(3,000)*	*1,000*
Pargiter Trust Fund	*Core costs*	*-*	*10,000*	*(7,500)*	*2,500*
Miller Trust Fund	*Core costs*	*-*	*2,000*	*(1,500)*	*500*
Sir George Earle Benevolent Fund	*Core costs*	*-*	*3,000*	*(3,000)*	*-*
Shadwell Trustt Fund	*Core costs*	*-*	*500*	*-*	*500*
Individual Grant	*Fundraiser salary*	*-*	*10,000*	*-*	*10,000*
Helen Roll Charity	*Animal Companionship Practitioner*	*-*	*5,000*	*-*	*5,000*
Helen Roll Charity	*Volunteer support*	*2,685*	*-*	*(2,685)*	*-*
Animal Welfare Support Fund					
Petplan Charitable Trust 2020	*Animal Welfare Support*	*385*	*-*	*(385)*	*-*
The Hobson Charitable Trust	*Animal Welfare Support*	*5,000*	*-*	*(5,000)*	*-*
Petplan Charitable Trust 2021	*Animal Welfare Support*	*10,000*	*-*	*(10,000)*	*-*
Kennel Club Charitable Trust	*Dog Welfare*	*5,000*	*-*	*(2,613)*	*2,387*
	Total Restricted Funds	***66,608***	***51,029***	***(77,063)***	***40,574***

GOVERNANCE AND SPECIAL ADVISORS

Patron

Lord Fairhaven DL KStJ

Board of Trustees

Robert Ferguson, Treasurer

Dr Mark Johnston MA VetMB PhD MRCVS, Chair

Dr Elizabeth Ormerod BVMS CF

Carolyn Bradburne

Dr Jill Gurney MB ChB, MA, appointed June 2022

Team

Dr Bin (Belinda) Johnston MRCVS, *CEO, Founder and Lead Practitioner*

Sally Bycroft, *Marketing and PR*

Gemma Reid, *Animal Companionship Practitioner*

Frances Day, *Volunteer Support Manager*

Bil Thorn, *Office Administrator*

Trudi McManus, *Office Coordinator*

Seamus Connolly, *Charity Manager*

Laura Ferguson, *Office Administrator*

Supported 'in the office' by volunteers:

Rebecca Clarke, *Marketing and PR*

Karen Mallett, Christine Singleton, *Service Delivery*

Jan Webb, Catherine Guy, Sophy Day, Celia Gordon, *Admin Support*

Assisted by:

Susan Bradwell, *Finance*

Mark Toller, *Finance*

Anna Hunt, *Fundraising*

Voluntary Advisers

Jeremy Bradburne LLB (London) LLM Cantab

Dr Deidre Carson BVSc(Syd) MRCVS

Dr Debbie Rook LL.B(Hons) LLM, DLaw FHEA

Dr Helen Crawford BVSc PGCertSAECC MRCVS

Lisa Dickson CGMA MBA, *Caseron*

John Grossart MA MRICS

Dr Janet Littlewood MA PhD BVSc(Hons) DVR DVD MRCVS Veterinary Dermatology Referrals

Dr Christopher Mayer MBBCh FRCPsych, Consultant Psychiatrist

Philippa Morphew FCIPD

Alan Reynolds

Independent Examiners
Beeston-Clarke Accountants Ltd
242 Leicester Road
Markfield
Leicester
LE67 9RG

Bankers
Barclays Bank plc
20/21 Cornhill
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP33 1DY

Registered Office
West End House
Upper Green
Higham
Bury St Edmunds
IP28 6PA

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR DONORS

We would not exist without your generous support.

We are very grateful to our corporate sponsors who have donated their time or products which, amongst others include:

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Pet Remedy Ltd
Pitpat Ltd
Royal Canin Ltd
Vetstream Ltd

And to Trusts and Foundations which, amongst others include:

Coco Joelle Foundation
Florence Cohen Charitable Trust
Godolphin
Hedley Foundation
Postcode Places Trust
Roger Jefcoate
Suffolk Community Foundation

Our Special Friends,
c/o British Racing School, Snailwell Road, Newmarket, CB8 7NU
01284 247077 www.ourspecialfriends.org office@ourspecialfriends.org

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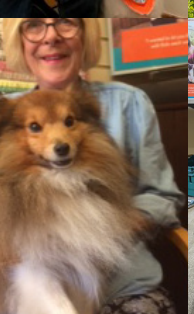

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR VOLUNTEERS

Our thanks go to all our volunteers for their continued support and commitment over the years. It goes without saying that Our Special Friends would not exist without them

OUR SPECIAL FRIENDS

England & Wales - Charity number 1156778

Accounts

Our Special Friends

Promoting, preserving and providing the power of animal companionship

Annual Report

2021 - 2022

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR DONORS

We would not exist without your generous support

Front cover: Maureen having a special moment with Wiggo
Above: Ruby Lee enjoying a visit from Bentley!

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Belinda and Rolo

TRIBUTE TO ROLO
AND ALL THE ANIMAL COMPANIONS THAT WE LOST THIS YEAR

We would like to pay tribute to Rolo (2008- 2022), who was the inspiration behind our visiting dog programme which we call Animal-Assisted Activity (AAA). He was such a character who loved people and encouraged interaction. It was a delight to see how he brightened the lives of the people that we visited; and met at events or in the office. We wish that we could have an endless supply of available dogs like him. He certainly created lots of smiles and happiness.

RIP Rolo

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD 2022

Our Special Friends has had a really strong year helping a significant number of new clients and their companion animals. This was in no small part due to the addition of two new members of the team, Gemma Reid (Animal Companionship Practitioner) and Frances Roach (Volunteer Support Manager), whose roles have enabled our CEO Bin Johnston to continue to lead on service delivery and drive the charity's strategy.

The two new team members have taken on more of the day to day interactions with clients and volunteers which has expanded Our Special Friends' capacity and reach, allowing the charity to help many more beneficiaries. The increase in the volume and speed at which cases can be managed this year has also resulted in a wider appreciation of the work of Our Special Friends in the local area from its excellent location at the British Racing School in Newmarket.

Financially, the charity has also had a robust year thanks to the increasing financial support from private individuals, Trusts, corporate supporters, legacies and local authority. The Trustees believe that the charity is now in a position to further develop the committed team and to recruit and appoint a charity manager in the next financial year to take on the overall operational management of the charity and ensure its future sustainability while also enabling its scaling into a wider geographic area.

With the uncertain economic times ahead, the cost of living increases and a possible recession we are acutely aware that those that are most in need will also be those most affected. The follow-on from this will undoubtedly be an increasing need for the services provided by Our Special Friends.

Having supported people and their companion animals throughout the pandemic, Our Special Friends has proven that supporting people at times of vulnerability through promoting, preserving and providing animal companionship is hugely beneficial to both the person and the animal involved.

Whether we help people look after their pets when they are unable to, make regular calls with a visiting dog or arrange for temporary fostering, our interventions are relatively low cost and immensely powerful. Our services are free at the point of delivery and our ethos is non-judgemental, caring and driven by empathy. It's what we believe makes us special.

Finally, a big "Thank you" from myself and all the Trustees to all our supporters, volunteers, team members - both two legged and four!

Mark Johnston - Chair of the Trustees

OUR VISION

A world in which the power of animal companionship is recognised and integrated into effective care and support plans for people and animals.

OUR MISSION

To identify, develop, promote and deliver animal companionship support services which secure the benefits of animal companionship for people experiencing times of vulnerability, improving welfare for both.

OUR GOALS

1. To **develop** and **demonstrate** the **role** of an **Animal Companionship Practitioner** (ACP) and the effective application of **Animal Companionship Support Services** (ACSS) to vulnerable people in society as a functioning unit in its current location.

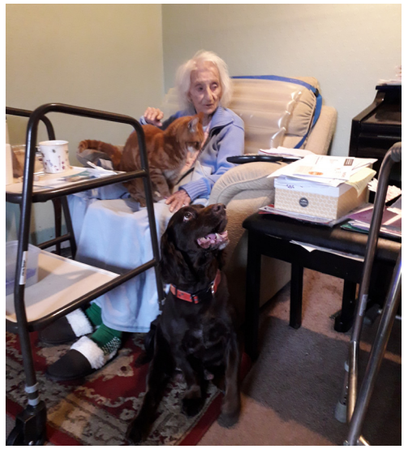
2. To **deliver** and **evidence** outstanding ACSS in our current location

3. To **expand** the adoption and provision of ACSS locally, through outreach, education, training and partnerships with like-minded organisations and agencies and secure budgetary support from them.

4. To **ensure** financial stability.

   a. To ensure our sustainability as a provider of ACSS in the current locality.
   b. To enable the expansion of properly resourced animal companionship support services in other locations.

Case Study **Maureen and Tate**



Our Special Friends (OSF) received a referral in February 2021 from a Red Cross support worker concerning Maureen, an elderly lady who lived alone with her dog, Tate, and two cats. Maureen was extremely frail, in poor health and was being supported by a care company who visited her four times a day. The support worker had grave concerns over the welfare of Maureen's animals which were reported to be defecating and urinating in the home. Also, Tate, an elderly cocker spaniel, was not getting any exercise.

OSF contacted Maureen's nephew, who was sympathetic to his aunt's situation and he understood the strong bond Maureen had with her pets, especially Tate whom she had cared for since he was a puppy. Maureen's nephew lived in London and was not able to visit regularly but he did telephone his aunt daily. Other family members who had previously helped Maureen were tired and wanted Maureen to rehome Tate, but her nephew felt rehoming Tate would 'kill' his aunt.

OSF visited and confirmed that Maureen was living in unsanitary conditions and was unable to care for her pets. Tate was found to be in poor health and the cats were not able to freely enter/exit the house, which led to them urinating and defaecating in the house.

OSF arranged veterinary treatment for Tate and set up a volunteer dog walking rota in collaboration with a professional dog walker to ensure Tate got the exercise he needed. Unfortunately, the OSF volunteers found themselves helping with Maureen's personal care which was not appropriate. They also reported that Tate's water bowl was found to be empty on multiple occasions; the cats were not being fed and there was evidence of animal faeces and urine on the floors - despite the care agency's agreement to undertake these tasks. OSF provided cat food and contacted the care agency and community matron to report their findings. In August, Maureen was admitted to hospital and, at short notice and out of hours, OSF arranged emergency foster care for Tate, and provided food to the neighbours so they could continue feeding Maureen's cats. Although Maureen was happy to be reunited with her animals upon discharge from hospital, it was clear to OSF that she was still not able to provide the care they needed. Indeed, it was not long before she was re-admitted to hospital.

OSF arranged further foster care, during which time Maureen deteriorated and it became apparent she would not return home. Fortunately, a family member was able to permanently adopt Tate, and the cats were rehomed locally. Maureen was subsequently discharged from hospital into a care home where she receives the support she needs – and best of all, visits from her family and Tate.

This is a summary of an exceedingly complex case that required input from multiple agencies and services, of which OSF was a key component. OSF liaised regularly with the community health care professionals, hospital, veterinary practice, the professional dog walker and Maureen's family to optimise outcomes for Maureen and her pets.

From left: Councillor Margaret Marks and Belinda Johnston

CEO'S REPORT

Having moved into our new office at the British Racing School, Newmarket, in April 2021, our primary aim was to re-establish our core office team and further support our volunteers and clients across the local region. This new stable base for Our Special Friends is very important as having the team all under one roof makes working on our cases much more effective. As many of our cases are complex with interrelated issues, including mental and physical health, domestic violence, homelessness, addiction and isolation, it is great to have an office base where our team can work together to provide our signature holistic response to the people and animals we support.

I am immensely grateful to everyone who has helped us to develop and deliver our animal companionship support services (ACSS), allowing us to adapt to the needs of our beneficiaries and to grow throughout the year. We reviewed our strategy in March 2022 and continue to focus on delivering our vision, mission and key goals. One of the key goals was around capacity internally and we were joined in August by two new fulltime colleagues, who by working closely together have enabled Our Special Friends to respond to the increased number of requests for help.

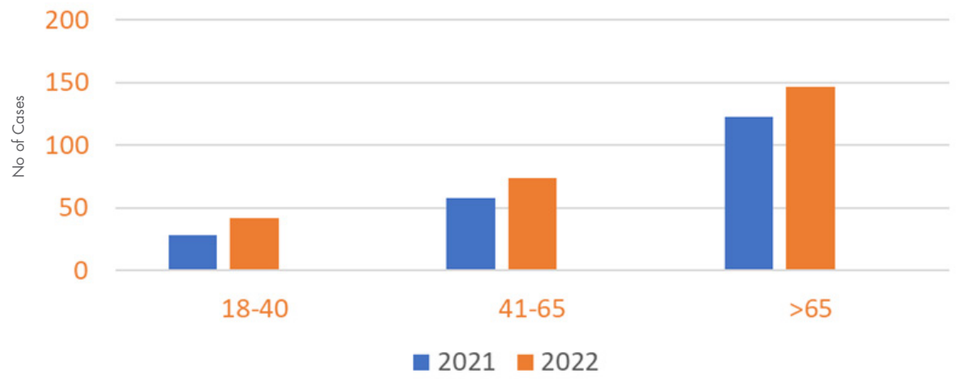
Not surprisingly, direct requests for financial help also increased throughout the year and these were overwhelming our capacity so we encouraged the support agencies we work with to contact us on their client's behalf, rather than signposting them directly to us. This effectively added a layer of triage which has facilitated and increased our collaboration and made our case management process easier to navigate.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without very significant gifts of people's time, compassion, skills and funding. I am hugely grateful to our wonderful volunteers both office-based and out in our communities, without whom this charity, like so many others, just would not exist.

As always, we now look forward to the year ahead supporting more people and their animal companions, and others who have a love of animals, but sadly cannot have their own pet and appreciate our friendly visits. Undoubtedly the need for our range of animal companionship support services, led by our Animal Companionship Practitioners, will continue to grow and Our Special Friends will remain committed to helping all those that seek our help.

We are indebted to Councillor Margaret Marks who nominated Our Special Friends (along with SARS) as her chosen charity for which to raise funds during the year.

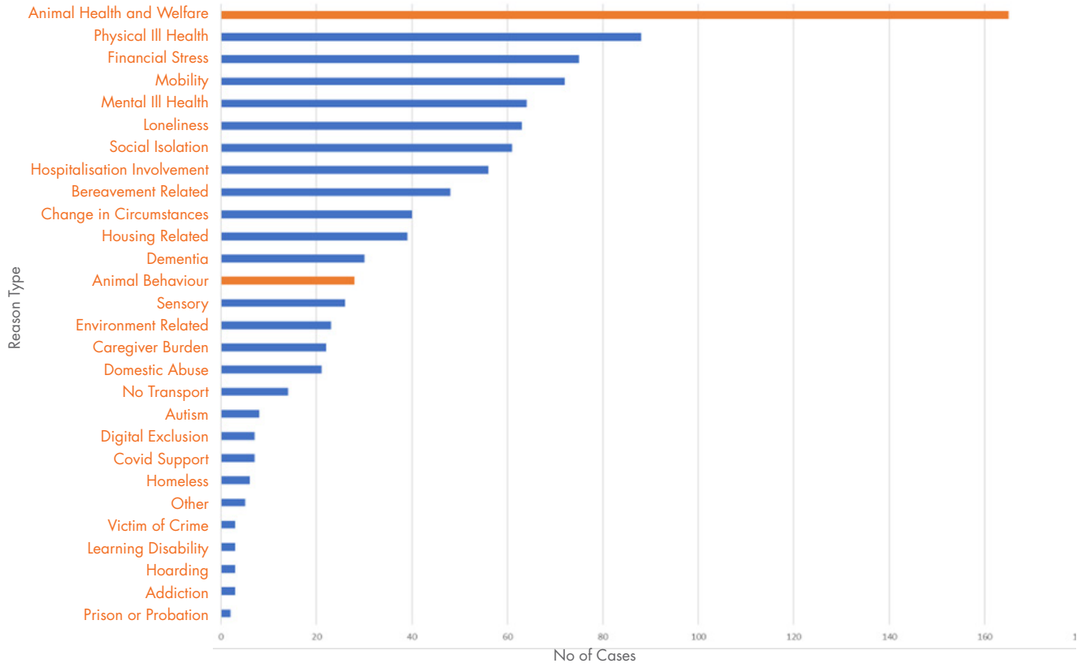
Age Range of People Needing Our Support*



Over 50% of the people we support are over 65, but we support people across all age ranges and have seen growth in all demographics this year, highlighting the increasing need across the region.

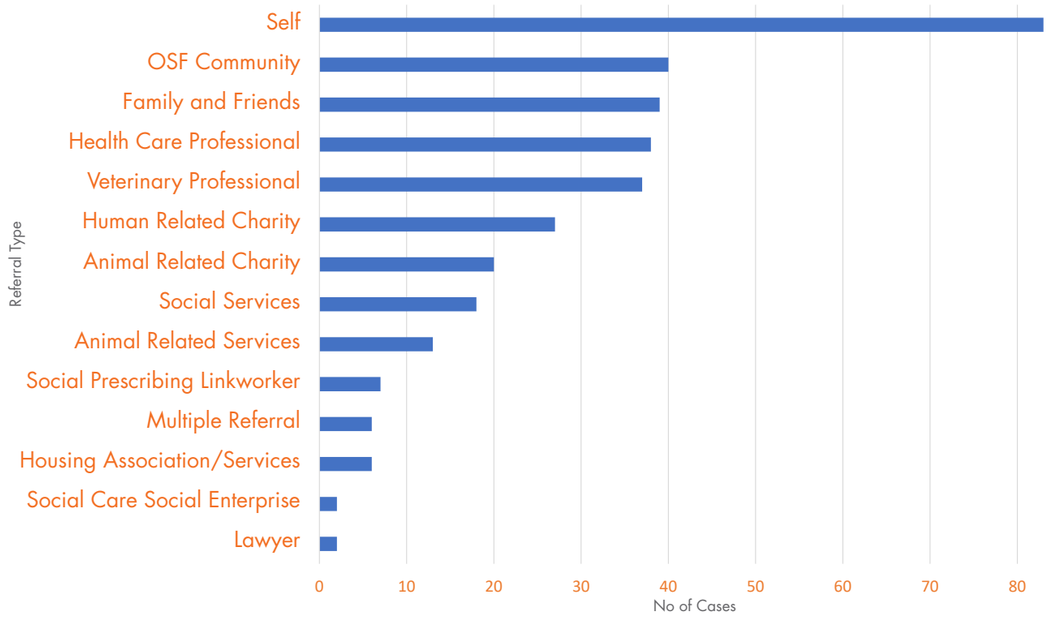
** Only includes clients for whom we have age data*

Reasons People Need Our Support



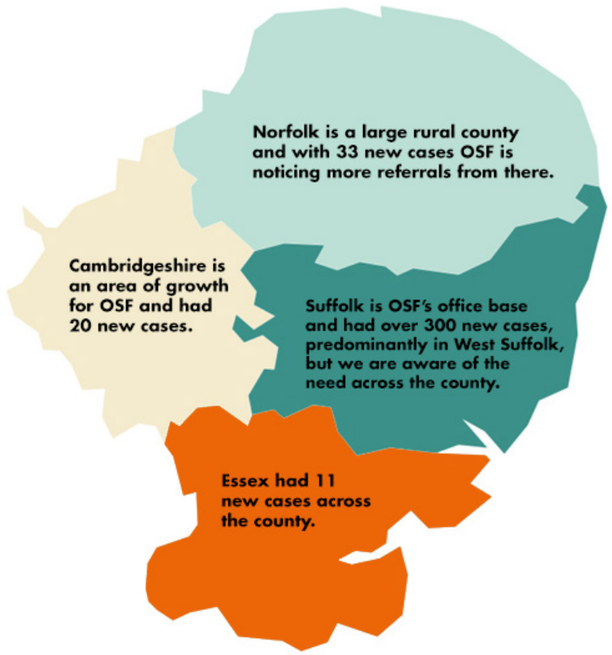
The main reasons that people needed the help of OSF last year related to the health and welfare of their animal companion, their own physical ill health and financial worries. Many of the cases we supported involved multiple characteristics from the chart above.

Sources of Referrals

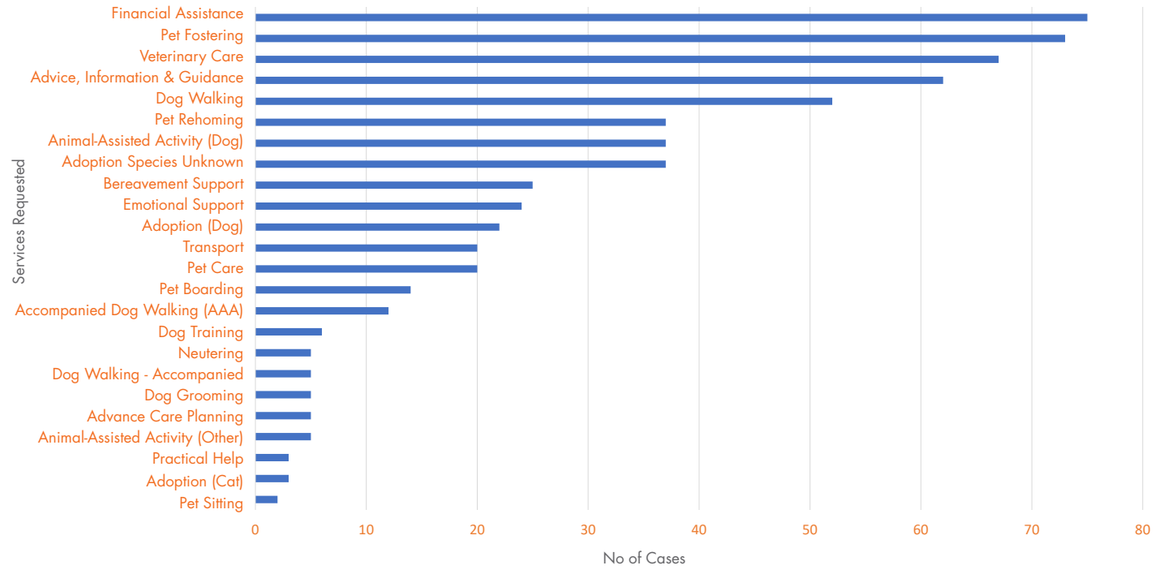


Self-referrals are the principal source of our cases but we have also seen a significant rise in all the secondary referral routes this year. Notably, we have seen an increase of over 140% in our referrals from human related and animal related charities which we believe is due to our engagement and networking within the sector.

Where We Work - East Anglia

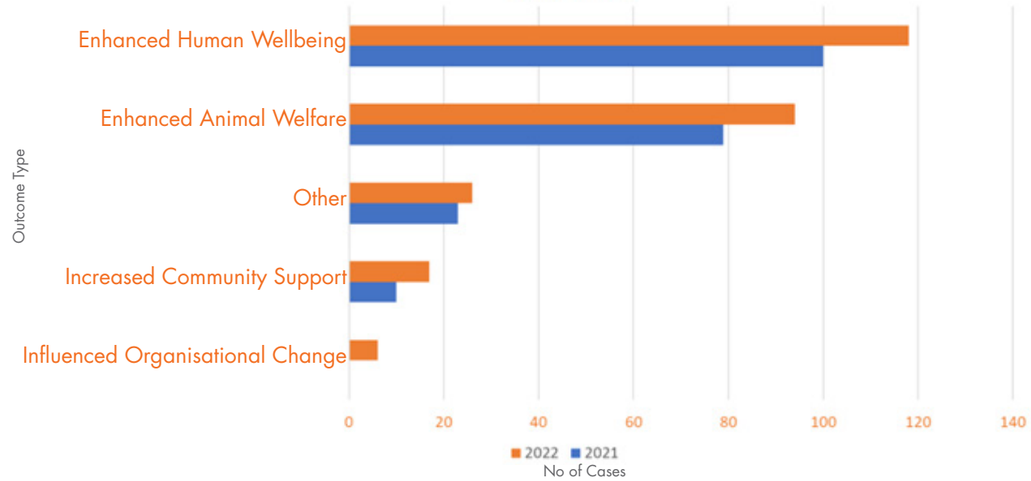


Services Requested



We had a broad range of our services requested again this year with financial assistance, pet fostering, veterinary care, advice and support making up the majority of the requests. We are also very proud of our work around rehoming, AAA, fostering and adoption where the aim is to respect the human animal bond in the first instance

Outcomes



As always it is encouraging to see that we increased our outcomes across the board this year, with enhanced human and animal welfare/wellbeing at the forefront of our work promoting, preserving and providing the benefits of animal companionship.

Case Study **Andrea and Her Cats***

Our Special Friends (OSF) was contacted by a lady on behalf of her friend Andrea, who had fled an abusive relationship, along with her 8-year-old son, who is neurodiverse. Andrea owned four cats, two of which she took to her mother's house, however, this caused problems due to her mother's allergies. Andrea's other two cats still lived in and around Andrea's ex-partner's flat, and although Andrea and her friend had visited several times when they knew her ex-partner was not there, they had not been able to capture the cats. Alongside her own situation, Andrea was very distressed about the welfare of her cats, two of which she had raised from birth, as her ex-partner had threatened their lives. She was desperate to find a temporary home for them until her housing application had been processed and she had somewhere safe for herself, her son and the cats to live.

OSF immediately worked to find a solution for Andrea and her beloved cats. Sadly, there were no fostering options available over the Christmas period. Finding a cattery that would take them was also a challenge because the cats were not up to date with their vaccinations. Fortunately, OSF identified a cattery who could keep and isolate all four cats until they were vaccinated. As Andrea was struggling with finances, OSF agreed to contribute to the boarding costs from our Animal Welfare Support Fund. OSF also advised Andrea to contact Cats Protection to borrow a trap, and eventually she successfully captured both cats from where her ex-partner lived and took them to the cattery.

Although boarding resolved the initial crisis, it was not an ideal situation for the cats' welfare, and not knowing how long it would be until Andrea was safely housed raised funding concerns. Therefore, after the Christmas holidays OSF initiated a new search for a foster home. This time a possible volunteer was identified - a vet who was known to OSF from a previous case and who had recently had to have her own cat 'put to sleep'. After appropriate checks, the match was made and the volunteer collected Andrea's cats from the cattery. It was a hugely successful foster placement and so reassuring to know the cats were in the hands of a capable volunteer and vet! Throughout the subsequent two months, the volunteer sent regular messages and pictures of the cats to Andrea, which she found very reassuring.

After being separated for a total of nearly four months, Andrea found pet friendly accommodation and she and her son were able to be reunited with their cats. Throughout this difficult time, Andrea was extremely comforted, knowing that her cats were being safely looked after. Temporary fostering saved her from having to make painful rehoming decisions during an already distressing time. None of this support would have been possible without the help of OSF's volunteers and our Animal Welfare Support Fund. The cats are such an important part of Andrea's life, and to see how happy her son was to be reunited with them was incredibly moving.

**Andrea's name has been changed to protect her identity*

Sadly, OSF is seeing an alarming rise in the number of referrals involving domestic abuse. Parting with an animal that may be the victim's sole source of comfort during dark times can be heartbreaking and can cause a delay in them seeking help or attempting to flee. Providing foster care with the aim of reuniting pets with their owners in cases like Andrea's can sometimes make the crucial difference to enable someone to permanently escape domestic abuse.

Andrea's cats settled in quickly at their foster home

Throughout this difficult time, Andrea was extremely comforted, knowing that the cats were being safely looked after.

Case Study **The Atkins Family and Cody**

Mr Atkins called OSF in distress because his family's beloved cat, Cody, had been hit by a car and had suffered an eye injury. Having taken Cody to the vet, the Atkins family were told that Cody's eye needed to be removed at a cost of around £500. As it was, the family were struggling to make ends meet. Mrs Atkins had only just returned to work in her NHS role after suffering from Long Covid, and Mr Atkins' salary put them just above the threshold for claiming benefits. There was no way they could afford this essential treatment, even with a payment plan. Furthermore, the RSPCA and Cats Protection had not responded to the family's request for help. They were facing the very real possibility of having their otherwise healthy cat put to sleep.

Luckily, Cody's vet knew about Our Special Friends, and gave the Atkins family our contact details. OSF agreed to finance the operation, and later on the very same day Mr Atkins called to tell us that Cody underwent a successful operation. When we were in touch a few days later, Cody was recovering well at home and seemed much happier. In the meantime, the RSPCA West Suffolk had pledged £100 towards the operation, reducing the amount OSF had to pay – however, the RSPCA's support alone would have been both too little and likely too late to have saved Cody's life.

It took a while for Cody to get used to having one eye, but as the photos below show, he is back to his happy self. The Atkins family say that he now enjoys a bit more fuss than previously… and amazingly can still hunt, bringing mice back as 'gifts'!

"Cody is back to his happy self … he's such a wonderful character and it seems to have added to his personality! We cannot thank you enough for helping us in our hour of need, it's greatly appreciated. Thank you."

VOLUNTEER SUPPORT MANAGER'S REPORT

Frances Roach

An overview

Our annual volunteer survey received a record 57 responses. The anonymous survey encouraged volunteers to share their activities, thoughts, and feelings about volunteering with Our Special Friends. Responses were very positive and we are pleased to introduce our case review process as a direct response to volunteer feedback. It is wonderful that many of our volunteers are re-engaging with OSF and that our supportive community continues to grow.

Supporting our volunteers

This year we have been delighted to re-introduce face-to-face meetings, offering direct support for volunteers. We encourage volunteers to drop into our offices whenever they want/need to and have the opportunity to discuss any case-related or personal issues. This has also helped build relationships between volunteers and myself as Volunteer Support Manager and Gemma, our Animal Companionship Practitioner, who are both new in role this year. From the beginning of 2022, we ran a monthly volunteer training with topics including Animal-Assisted Intervention, Animal First Aid and Safeguarding. These sessions have been delivered by our in-house team as well as third-party agencies. We have also supported new recruits with three 'Welcome to OSF' induction sessions, although there seems to be an increased preference for this being accessible online. In June we held our first volunteer celebration event since Covid, to thank our volunteers. We continue to keep in touch with our volunteers via our volunteer bulletin, The Monthly Paws. Here we share information, welcome new volunteers, and offer opportunities for volunteer development and support.

Recruitment and resignations

In 2021/22 we fully recruited 39 volunteers. With the absence of many local animal-centric events which would usually attract new volunteers, we had to think creatively about how to attract new members to our volunteer team. Appeals on social media have been successful with 38% of our new recruits hearing about us on Facebook. Our volunteer application form is now accessible online, meaning we are also receiving more completed application forms via the website. The past year we have also focused on 'cleaning' our data so that it is a true reflection of our volunteers' activity and capacity. As a result of this we have been able to re-engage volunteers who were on hold during Covid, but also have confirmed the resignations of 16 volunteers.

Challenges and plans for the year ahead

Despite recruiting a good number of new volunteers, the need for our volunteer support grows evermore. Our team has worked closely together to identify our need and recruit volunteers accordingly. We anticipate that living in uncertain times, individuals may not have the capacity to volunteer. In the next year we hope to develop our induction training to ensure that all new recruits are able to access information easily and readily. This will be codesigned, involving volunteers and staff, both of whom can enact change.

Our Special Friends Volunteer Survey

Volunteers feel well supported with an average score of 4.5 out of 5

Volunteers found their volunteer tasks rewarding with an average score of 4.8 out of 5

90% Of volunteers scored us 5 out of 5 in recommending Our Special Friends to friends and family

The top **5** benefits of volunteering for Our Special Friends were;

- Sense of fulfilment or achievement
- Being involved in the local community
- Knowing you have helped Our Special Friends' cause and charity
- Enjoyment of animal companionship
- Feeling helpful to others

QUOTES FROM OUR VOLUNTEERS

I benefit from the social interaction with people I meet.

I believe that my input has made a huge difference in the lives of owner and dog.

OSF is very accepting and really makes the volunteers feel valued.

Volunteering has given me a sense of achievement.

I feel valued by the owners and their family members.

Feeling part of a team.

Its been hugely rewarding!

OSF makes sure that we are comfortable, happy and looked after at all times.

Volunteers are well supported and offered regular training sessions.

VOLUNTEER STORY – Ann and Kasha

"It is so rewarding to see her face light up when we arrive..."

Ann and Kasha taking a rest during a walk

Ann first learnt about Our Special Friends through a local charity event, and thought that our Animal-Assisted Activity (AAA) service would be perfect for her rescue Chocolate Labrador, Kasha, who was a happy dog but often bored. Ann said "The job specifications for Kasha – to laze around being admired, brushed and fed tit-bits by lonely elderly people – ideally suited her laid-back temperament."

After an induction, Ann and Kasha began their weekly Animal-Assisted Activity (AAA) home visits to a client who was unable have a pet of their own, providing some much needed animal companionship and also some regular human interaction. Soon Ann took on other tasks for OSF, including walking clients' dogs when the owner had mobility issues, providing foster care for pets in her own home when their owner was facing crisis, taking another AAA client for walks with Kasha, and taking a pet to a vet appointment during lockdown. She became a regular at our monthly Volunteer Meet-ups in Sudbury, and even introduced us to a friend who has now become a volunteer herself.

For their AAA visits, Ann and Kasha were matched with a lady who can only move about her home slowly using a walking frame, who needs help with showering and requires meals to be delivered. They visited every Monday morning, and Ann said: "It is so rewarding to see her face light up when we arrive. We stay an hour, and as she has slight hearing loss I pull up a stool and sit directly in front of her to aid communication, with Kasha between us to stop her searching the house for biscuit crumbs. I enjoy learning about [the client's] past, especially her experience of living in Iran, or Persia as she still calls the country. We swap books and sometimes sit in her pretty garden. Our client has both happy and sad recollections, some involving the dogs she has owned, and hopefully telling me about them helps to maintain those memories."

But all of a sudden, things changed very quickly for both Ann and Kasha. After a serious car crash, instead of visiting her client, it was Ann who was, in her words, "shuffling around with a walking frame due to fractures, and needing my husband Brian's help with showering and dressing. Meals from the same caterers my client uses were ordered as we could not cope with buying and cooking food." Ann and Brian were struggling with their situation: overwhelmed by the trauma, regular liaison with officials and the insurance company, having to cancel a holiday and other engagements, and even by the constant flow of kind phone calls, cards and flower deliveries. Brian had been fatigued since catching Covid three months previously, and with Ann needing so much support, walking Kasha had now become an additional chore rather than a pleasure. Due to the stressful situation, Ann and Brian sometimes snapped at Kasha, who couldn't understand why they weren't paying her the usual amount of attention.

In distress, Ann contacted OSF for help. We were able to find a short-term foster home for Kasha the very same day, giving Ann and Brian the space they needed to concentrate on the essentials and come to terms with what had happened. Four days later, a happy Kasha was returned to Ann and Brian, who were now in a position to enjoy her companionship. During her recuperation, attending the Volunteer Meet-ups was one of the few social things Ann felt able to do, and she has also found great support from the local network of OSF volunteers. Ann and Kasha resumed their AAA visits a month later, "with an increased appreciation of client needs and of OSF's work."

"I enjoy learning about [the client's] past, especially her experience of living in Iran, or Persia as she still calls the country. We swap books and sometimes sit in her pretty garden. Our client has both happy and sad recollections, some involving the dogs she has owned, and hopefully telling me about them helps to maintain those memories."

VOLUNTEER STORY – Sophie and Fenton

"Many people shared stories about the different ways in which their beloved cat, dog, guinea pig or even budgie had improved their lives..."

During the height of the pandemic, I spent some time working at my local vaccination centres around Suffolk, administering Covid vaccines to members of the public. It was during these busy weekend shifts that I started to gain more insight into some of the physical and mental health challenges that many people face in their day to day lives, and to understand the value that animals bring to those who are more vulnerable in society.

In my 'normal' career I am a qualified veterinary surgeon, and when patients asked me what I did as a 'day job' the conversation often naturally moved on to talk about their own pets and their importance to them. Many people shared stories about the different ways in which their beloved cat, dog, guinea pig or even budgie had improved their lives. For some of the more vulnerable, isolated patients their animal companion had often been their only company throughout the period of lockdown, and it was clear that many would not have got through this time without them.

Not long after I had started at the centre I became aware of the work of Our Special Friends, through their excellent Facebook page. I had been fortunate to be the owner (or 'dog Mum' as I believe it's known these days!) of Fenton, a five year old Irish terrier. I felt that perhaps there were some other people out there who would appreciate meeting him, particularly if they were not in a position to be able to have a dog themselves.

It is difficult to describe in words how much Fenton means to me. He is a true friend; kind and warm-hearted, affectionate, and a furry body to cuddle up on the sofa with at the end of a long day at work. Equally, he makes me laugh most days with his silly antics, swirling round in high speed circles in anticipation of a walk, or barking in apparent jealousy when my husband kisses me on the cheek! He has taught me that even with several years of clinical training under my belt, animals will teach you something new every day, and contrary to what we might think, they can indeed speak – you just have to listen to them in the right way.

Having passed the canine and human assessments, Fenton and I were 'matched' by OSF to a lady called Jenny, who lives in Bury St Edmunds. I was somewhat nervous ahead of our first visit, unsure what to expect and whether she would even like us. I need not have worried; after we arrived and sat down all together with a cup of tea, Fenton took a few minutes to sniff around and make himself at home. Seemingly understanding his new role, he quickly settled down at Jenny's feet, appreciative of some tummy rubs and a small handful of treats. I relaxed, and knew things would be fine at that point.

Over the course of our visits, Jenny has become a friend too, telling me stories about her life and about the pets she was fortunate to have herself growing up and as an adult. I have come to realise the times when she feels like chatting, and those when she would rather just sit more quietly; gently stroking Fenton and telling him 'you are a special boy, aren't you'. The condition of Dementia can make it harder for her to remember some things, but she almost always is able to recall his name which I hope is a small indicator of what he brings to her life.

We have really enjoyed the experience of supporting OSF and I would recommend it to anyone who is interested in AAA. There is always support available at the end of the phone and there is a very friendly network of people to support you too. I have learned so much working with the charity and Fenton and I look forward to continuing in our partnership with OSF together.

Sophie Ignarski & Fenton

HOW WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Agency

From an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor at a local Domestic Abuse Service

Foster care and boarding to enable owner to escape while her emergency housing did not allow pets.

"I just wanted to let you know the difference that this made to my client's life.

She had been in an abusive relationship for several years and each time we tried to get her out she would not leave without the cats. She had become extremely unwell, and I was concerned for her mental and physical health. Our Special Friends' help and support has enabled us to get her out of the property safely, and with the support of her family she is gradually getting stronger each day away from a high-risk perpetrator."

"Our Special Friends were so helpful and I feel they went above and beyond to help my client"

From a Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker

Helping a homeless person and animal companion through referral and access to veterinary care

"(Our Special Friends) assisted my client to get her dog veterinary treatment.

She has peace of mind that her dog is well and now vaccinated and she been offered further treatment from the vets. It is hard to find negatives (with Our Special Friends).. excellent"

From an Addiction Support Worker

AAA leading to adoption

"Our Special Friends was been an integral part of my client's recovery journey. … a volunteer visited her each week with their own dog: a befriender to talk to and the company of an animal was a perfect combination for her. I was delighted to hear later that she then adopted her very own dog. My client's low mood/outlook on life drastically improved."

From a Community Psychiatric Nurse

Foster care and boarding to reunite, urgent mental health admission

"Our Special Friends helped to house 3 dogs which needed to be taken from their home whilst their owner was admitted to hospital for treatment. It allowed the person to be reassured that her dogs would be looked after and possibly saved the dogs from a person who was likely to abuse /neglect them.

'As a community psychiatric nurse, the work you do makes my job a lot easier"

Client

From clients who had never had a dog before where Our Special Friends provided adoption support

Millie needed to be rehomed due to her owner's critical frailty even after several months of OSF support to keep them together. Initial referral from their social worker.

Compassionate support for an owner needing to relinquish their beloved dog; accessing veterinary care and matching dog to new owners. Advice, guidance and support throughout the journey.

Four years later: "OSF introduced us to Millie, our wonderful dog, and to the brilliant concept of Our Special Friends. Millie is a lovely companion to us both, giving us the great opportunity to meet other dog walkers, make good friends and of course, daily exercise in these difficult times. OSF cannot improve, it is perfect for us. We would rate the service 6 (out of 5) if we could. Millie is such a sociable girl and very loving and she has added another dimension to our lives and those of our extended family."

From a client whose dog passed away and OSF visited regularly with a volunteer dog

Care planning, bereavement support, alerting her GP and Animal-Assisted Activity

89-year-old lady living in warden assisted living was signposted by her vets wanting advice on what would happen to her dog, Daisy, if something happened to her. OSF kept in touch after creating an advance care plan to document her wishes and provided support when Daisy had to be 'put to sleep' over a year later. Once when she was feeling unwell, our volunteer encouraged her to seek medical advice, her GP was contacted and she was taken to hospital for tests before returning home. She subsequently received regular AAA visits over the next two years until her death in October 2022.

"Thank you so much to Our Special Friends for the flowers and for your kindness over the years to myself and Daisy"

From a man with mental health issues facing urgent hospital admission who was concerned about his beloved cat

Transport, access to veterinary care, financial support, enhanced mental health, prevention of hospital admission

"Thank you very much. Jemima is much better and much happier. She's been playing like she's a kitten which I haven't seen her do for a while now. I'm ever so grateful for all your help and I'll be singing your praises every opportunity I get! Thanks for the everything, the flea spray, the trip to the vets, the ear drops, the cat food and your efforts in finding her somewhere to stay if she needed it. You have made a big difference to my baby. Thank you so very much."

Volunteer

From a volunteer on the benefits of visiting in the community, dog walking, emotional support

"For me and my dog – developing a special bond through contact with clients. He enjoys the attention from them all and is always excited when we go to their homes.

I have been deeply touched by the life stories which emerge when we visit. My clients are keen to talk on a wide range of topics. This client's isolation is very worrying and our weekly visits relieve it somewhat. With her daughter's consent (and via the office) I have referred the client to Adult Social Services to see if they can offer her any assistance in any way. Her daughter is feeling under pressure to care for her which puts a strain on their relationship. If her daughter is there when we attend she likes to off-load to me I'm happy to listen."

From a Volunteer and their dog Bailey

Visiting in the community

"I have been a volunteer at Our Special Friends for some 6 years, shortly after I retired. Bailey has always had a keen interest in people and other animals and is a particularly bright, special dog with a determined personality. His drive and sociability is the backbone to our working relationship. I have enjoyed taking him to meet a variety of people in a range of situations knowing that seeing us regularly has made a difference to both the people we visit and our day. I get great pleasure learning about other people's lives and Bailey always helps people feel more at ease. Bailey enjoys being the centre of attention whether he visits an individual client or retirement home and the staff also enjoy his company. Overall the experience benefits everyone: I get out more enjoying meeting new people, Bailey enjoys extra company (and biscuits) and we hope that we make a bit of a difference to our clients' lives."

Maureen enjoying volunteer Bee and Wiggos's visit

THE YEAR AHEAD

Our Special Friends started 12 years ago, from one case and a belief that people with a love of animals were hidden away in our communities, invisibly vulnerable and struggling with several issues including financial stress, mental and physical health, loneliness and isolation. It became clear that these people were not able to be supported by veterinary clinics or rehoming centres. Over 1900 cases later, we know that the role of an Animal Companionship Practitioner and Our Special Friends' range of animal companionship support services make a difference, often a transformative one. Therefore, we have continued to develop and define our collaborative and holistic approach.

Looking forward to the year ahead we expect further increases in demand for Our Special Friends' services. We are monitoring the global increase of inflation due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the negative economic effects of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. Coupled together these issues have led to the UN's Global Food Price Index rising to its highest ever level since its inception in 1990. These substantial costs of living increases will undoubtedly mean hardship for our current and future beneficiaries as the most basic of household costs increase.

With the economic outlook being so bleak, the charity has never been more focused on growing our capacity, strengthening our team, building a sustainable infrastructure and helping as many people and animal companions as we can.

We will recruit our first Charity Manager next year to deliver operational resilience and ensure the future financial sustainability of the charity. We will build on our Animal Companionship Practitioner role and further support our invaluable volunteers through the new Volunteer Support Manager role. As our requests for support expands geographically we will also look at how we best scale OSF to manage these new cases.

As a charity that relies on voluntary funding we know that being able to demonstrate the impact of our support continues to be a high priority and we will develop feedback forms to enable anonymous responses from clients and third parties involved in our cases. We are also acutely aware that we need to be able to accurately record, store and analyse the data related to our work, so we will focus on our information systems in the coming year so that we have robust systems in place. This will allow us to evidence our impact and successfully apply for further funding to support our beneficiaries. We are thankful that we also have a wealth of powerful case studies which we will endeavour to share widely to help explain what we do. We have identified that we need to invest in marketing and communications so this will be an objective for 2022-23.

We believe that this year ahead will be challenging and for those that enjoy animal companionship, the presence of animals will be all the more important in helping people to cope. Unfortunately, these supportive relationships will be at greater risk as the cost of living crisis escalates and wellbeing and mental health deteriorates. We are aware that the complexity of our cases is ever increasing and that there is a lack of mental health and social care support in the community. The people that we are accessing have significant health issues and/or disadvantages. Their network of support is often either non-existent, at a critical point or lacking in effective resource.

We all need to take a radical cross-society holistic approach to promoting wellbeing, reducing the impact of mental health conditions, intervening earlier, improving treatment and supporting people to live well while pushing a vision for change that can be 'made real' in each local area, transforming lives and livelihoods and levelling up the country.

There is much to do and Our Special Friends will continue promoting, preserving and providing the power of animal companionship to all who need it.

Picture (right): Volunteer dog Blue wearing her OSF bandana with pride at our Volunteer Celebration Event

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Total income for the year ended 30 April 2022 was £237,478 which was slightly down on the previous year (2021: £240,487). We continue to rely primarily on grants, and the average amount of each grant is still relatively low. We therefore rely on a constant flow of successful applications to fund our services and maintain reserves.

While a broad spread of funders reduces the risk inherent with just one or two major providers, the time and effort required to apply, secure and report on these grants is significant for a small charity. Our future growth will therefore depend on securing income from a wider range of sources.

The value of the services we provide is increasingly being recognised by statutory bodies responsible for the welfare of the vulnerable people we work with. While this is encouraging, we receive very little statutory funding for our services. In the future, we believe this should change but we are realistic about the challenges involved.

Expenditure for the year increased by 46% to £204,922 (2021: £140,160). This was in line with our budget and primarily reflects the recruitment of a full-time Volunteer Support Manager and a second Animal Companionship Practitioner.

Reserves at 30 April 2022 were £202,746 (2021: £170,190). Our budgeted expenditure for 2022-23 is just over £250,000 but we are more cautious about increases in income during the current year and so expect reserves to reduce to a level closer to six months forecast spend. This is the line with our reserves policy.

Our Special Friends

Financial Statements for the year ended

30 April 2022

Our Special Friends
Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2022

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Report to the trustees of Our Special Friends

I report to the charity trustees on my examination of the accounts of the Company for the year ended 30 April 2022 set out on pages 4 to 10.

As the charity's trustees of the Company (who are also the directors of the company for the purposes of company law), you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 ("the 2006 Act").

Having satisfied myself that the accounts of the Company are not required to be audited for this year under Part 16 of the 2006 Act and are eligible for independent examination, I report in respect of my examination of your charity's accounts as carried out under section 145 of the Charities Act 2011 ("the 2011 Act"). In carrying out my examination, I have followed the Directions given by the Charity Commission (under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act.

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention which gives me cause to believe that:

- accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 386 of the Companies Act 2006; or
- the accounts do not accord with such records; or
- the accounts do not comply with relevant accounting requirements under section 396 of the Companies Act 2006 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair' view which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination; or
- the accounts have not been prepared in accordance with the Charities SORP (FRS102).

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Marguerite EM Nice

Marguerite EM Nice ACA ATA
Chartered Accountant, Chartered Tax Advisor

The Green Farmhouse
The Green
Barrow
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP29 5AA

18 July 2022

Statement of financial activities (including summary income and expenditure account)

	Notes	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted income funds £	Total funds £	*Prior year funds £*
Income	**3**				
Donations and legacies		184,685	52,755	237,440	*239,399*
Charitable activities		24	-	24	*1,057*
Interest		14	-	14	*31*
Total income		184,723	52,755	237,478	*240,487*
Expenditure	**4**				
Raising funds		28,489	8,673	37,162	*28,649*
Charitable activities		97,644	70,116	167,760	*111,511*
Total expenditure		126,133	78,789	204,922	*140,160*
Net income/(expenditure)		58,590	(26,034)	32,556	*100,327*
Transfers between funds		-	-	-	-
Net movement in funds		58,590	(26,034)	32,556	*100,327*
Reconciliation of funds:					
Total funds brought forward		103,582	66,608	170,190	*69,863*
Total funds carried forward		**162,172**	**40,574**	**202,746**	***170,190***

Balance sheet

	Notes	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted income funds £	Total this year £	*Total prior year £*
Current assets					
Debtors	**6**	540	-	540	*3,303*
Cash at bank and in hand		169,969	40,610	210,579	*175,397*
Total current assets		170,509	40,610	211,119	*178,700*
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	**7**	8,337	36	8,373	*8,510*
Net current assets		162,172	40,574	202,746	*170,190*
Total assets less current liabilities		162,172	40,574	202,746	170,190
Total net assets		**162,172**	**40,574**	**202,746**	***170,190***
Funds of the Charity					
Restricted income funds	**8**	-	40,574	40,574	*66,608*
Unrestricted funds		162,172	-	162,172	*103,582*
Total funds		**162,172**	**40,574**	**202,746**	***170,190***

For the year ended 30 April 2022, the company was entitled to exemption from audit under section 477 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

The members have not required the company to obtain an audit of its accounts for the year in question in accordance with section 476 of the Companies Act 2006

The directors acknowledge their responsibilities for complying with the requirements of the Companies Act with respect to accounting records and the preparation of accounts
These accounts have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to small companies subject to the small companies' regime and in accordance with FRS102 SORP

Approved by the Board and signed on its behalf by

Date 30 June 2022

Robert Ferguson
Director

Notes to the accounts

1 Basis of preparation

These accounts have been prepared under the historical cost convention with items recognised at cost or transaction value.

The accounts have been prepared in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice: Accounting and Reporting by Charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) issued on 16 July 2014, and with the Charities Act 2011

2 Accounting policies

Recognition of income	Income is included in the Statement of Financial Activities when: · the charity becomes entitled to the resources; · it is more likely than not that the trustees will receive the resources; · the monetary value can be measured with sufficient reliability.
Offsetting	There has been no offsetting of assets and liabilities, or income and expenses, unless required or permitted by the FRS 102 SORP or FRS 102.
Grants and donations	Grants and donations are only included in the Statement of Financial Activities when the general income recognition criteria are met.
Legacies	Legacies are included in the Statement of Financial Activities when receipt is probable, that is, when there has been grant of probate, the executors have established that there are sufficient assets in the estate and any conditions attached to the legacy are either within the control of the charity or have been met.
Volunteer help	The value of any voluntary help received is not included in the accounts but is described in the trustees' annual report.
Liability recognition	Liabilities are recognised where it is more likely than not that there is a legal or constructive obligation committing the charity to pay out resources and the amount of the obligation can be measured with reasonable certainty.
Governance and support costs	Support costs have been allocated between governance costs and other support. Governance costs comprise all costs involving public accountability of the charity and its compliance with regulation and good practice.
Tangible fixed assets for use by charity	These are capitalised if they can be used for more than one year, and cost at least £250 They are valued at cost and depreciated over 3 years.

Notes to the accounts

3 Analysis of income

		Unrestricted funds £	Restricted income funds £	Total funds £	*Prior year £*
Donations and legacies:	Donations and gifts	67,240	1,726	68,966	*24,284*
	Gift Aid	5,045	-	5,045	*5,444*
	General grants provided by govt/other charities	112,400	51,029	163,429	*208,784*
	Other	-	-	-	*887*
	Total donations and legacies	184,685	52,755	237,440	*239,399*
Charitable activities:	Fundraising events	24	-	24	*1,057*
Other Income:	Interest	14	-	14	*31*
Total Income		**184,723**	**52,755**	**237,478**	**240,487**

4 Analysis of expenditure

		Unrestricted funds £	Restricted income funds £	Total funds £	*Prior year £*
Expenditure on raising funds	Staff costs	25,602	8,673	34,275	*26,991*
	Advertising, marketing, direct mail and publicity	2,887	-	2,887	*1,658*
	Total expenditure on raising funds	28,489	8,673	37,162	*28,649*
Expenditure on charitable activities	Volunteer costs	2,856	-	2,856	*653*
	Animal care costs	-	19,725	19,725	*9,413*
	Office expenses	16,238	11,624	27,862	*13,966*
	Staff costs	78,550	38,767	117,317	*87,479*
	Total expenditure on charitable activities	97,644	70,116	167,760	*111,511*
Total expenditure		**126,133**	**78,789**	**204,922**	***140,160***

No fees were paid in respect of the Independent Examination of the financial statements in the current or prior year.

No trustee expenses were incurred in the current or prior year.

Our Special Friends
Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2022

Notes to the accounts

5 Staff costs

	This year £	*Prior year £*
Salaries and wages	91,840	*63,665*
Social security costs	3,801	*2,221*
Pension costs (defined contribution scheme)	1,726	*1,168*
Self employed staff costs	51,719	*45,657*
Staff training and expenses	2,506	*1,759*
	151,592	***114,470***

No employees received employee benefits (excluding employer pension costs) for the reporting period of more than £60,000.
The company provides pension benefits under the NEST scheme

The full time equivalent number of staff working for the charity during the year was 5 (2021: 4)

6 Debtors and prepayments

	This year £	*Prior year £*
Prepayments and accrued income	540	*3,303*
	540	***3,303***

7 Creditors and accruals

	Amounts falling due within one year	
	This year £	*Prior year £*
Accruals and deferred income	6,062	*6,863*
Taxation and social security	2,311	*1,647*
	8,373	***8,510***

Notes to the accounts

8 Restricted funds

Current Year	Purpose and Restrictions	Fund balances brought forward £	Income £	Expenditure £	Fund balances carried forward £
Mrs Smith & Mount Trust	Animal - Assisted Activity	1,800	-	(1,800)	-
Godolphin	Office Rent	4,547	-	(4,547)	-
Individual Grant	Office Rent	4,548	-	(4,548)	-
Suffolk Community Foundation					
Fonnereau Road Health Foundation	Animal - Assisted Activity	1,573	-	(1,573)	-
David & Jill Simpson Fund	Core costs	-	4,000	(3,000)	1,000
Pargiter Trust Fund	Core costs	-	10,000	(7,500)	2,500
Miller Trust Fund	Core costs	-	2,000	(1,500)	500
Sir George Earle Benevolent Fund	Core costs	-	3,000	(3,000)	-
Shadwell Trust Fund	Core costs	-	500	-	500
Helen Roll Charity	Animal Companionship Practitioner		5,000	-	5,000
West Suffolk Council	Volunteer Support Manager	-	10,000	-	10,000
West Suffolk Council	Animal Companionship Practitioner	25,000	-	(17,710)	7,290
St Edmunds Trust	IT work stations	-	2,529	(2,529)	-
Individual Grant	Fundraiser salary	-	10,000	(2,603)	7,397
Individual Grant	Fundraiser salary	6,070	-	(6,070)	-
Charles Hayward Foundation	Animal - Assisted Activity	-	4,000	-	4,000
Helen Roll Charity	Volunteer support	2,685	-	(2,685)	-
Animal Welfare Support Fund					
Petplan Charitable Trust 2020	Animal Welfare Support	385	-	(385)	-
The Hobson Charity	Animal Welfare Support	5,000	-	(5,000)	-
Petplan Charitable Trust 2021	Animal Welfare Support	10,000	-	(10,000)	-
Kennel Club Charitable Trust	Dog Welfare	5,000	-	(2,613)	2,387
	Total Restricted Funds	**66,608**	**51,029**	**(77,063)**	**40,574**

Previous year	*Purpose and Restrictions*	*Fund balances brought forward* £	*Income* £	*Expenditure* £	*Fund balances carried forward* £
The Hobson Charity	*Vets fees*	*1,212*	*-*	*(1,212)*	*-*
Mrs Smith & Mount Trust	*Animal - Assisted Activity*	*-*	*1,800*	*-*	*1,800*
Individual Grant	*Fundraiser salary*	*-*	*5,000*	*(5,000)*	*-*
Guernsey Charitable Trust	*Animal - Assisted Activity*	*-*	*18,514*	*(18,514)*	*-*
St Edmunds Trust	*IT funding*	*-*	*7,426*	*(7,426)*	*-*
Godolphin	*Office rent*	*-*	*5,000*	*(453)*	*4,547*
Individual Grant	*Office rent*	*-*	*5,000*	*(452)*	*4,548*
Newmarket Festival	*Animal - Assisted Activity*	*-*	*1,000*	*(1,000)*	*-*
West SuffolkCouncil	*Locality funding*	*-*	*500*	*(500)*	*-*
Suffolk Community Foundation					
Fonnereau Road Health Foundation	*Animal - Assisted Activity*	*-*	*5,000*	*(3,427)*	*1,573*
Suffolk Community Trust	*Core costs*	*-*	*5,000*	*(5,000)*	*-*
Coronavirus Community Fund	*Core costs*	*-*	*5,000*	*(5,000)*	*-*
Martineau Fund	*Salaries*	*-*	*2,000*	*(2,000)*	*-*
Reviving Our Community	*Core costs*	*-*	*5,000*	*(5,000)*	*-*
Maurken Fund	*Core costs*	*-*	*1,500*	*(1,500)*	*-*
West Suffolk Council	*Animal Companionship Practitioner*	*-*	*25,000*	*-*	*25,000*
Individual Grant	*Fundraiser salary*	*-*	*10,000*	*(3,930)*	*6,070*
Helen Roll Charity	*Volunteer support*	*-*	*5,000*	*(2,315)*	*2,685*
Animal Welfare Support Fund					
Petplan Charitable Trust 2020	*Animal Welfare Support*	*-*	*5,000*	*(4,615)*	*385*
The Hobson Charitable Trust	*Animal Welfare Support*	*-*	*5,000*	*-*	*5,000*
Petplan Charitable Trust 2021	*Animal Welfare Support*	*-*	*10,000*	*-*	*10,000*
Kennel Club Charitable Trust	*Dog Welfare*	*-*	*5,000*	*-*	*5,000*
	Total Restricted Funds	***1,212***	***132,740***	***(67,344)***	***66,608***

GOVERNANCE AND SPECIAL ADVISORS

Patron

Lord Fairhaven DL KStJ

Board of Trustees

Robert Ferguson, Treasurer
Mark Johnston, Chair
Elizabeth Ormerod
Carolyn Bradburne
David Wright
Jill Gurney

Team

Belinda Johnston, CEO and Founder
Susan Bradwell, Financial Support
Mark Toller, Financial Director
Sally Bycroft, Marketing and PR
Anna Hunt, Fundraising
Gemma Reid, Animal Companionship Practitioner
Frances Roach, Volunteer Support Manager
Linda Sadler, Animal Welfare Support
Bil Thorn, Office Administrator

Supported 'in the office' by volunteers:

Rebecca Clarke, Marketing and PR
Karen Mallett, Christine Singleton, Service Delivery
Jan Webb, Eva Shipp, Catherine Guy, Sophy Day, Volunteer admin

Voluntary Advisers

Jeremy Bradburne
Deidre Carson BVSc(Syd) MRCVS
Deborah Rook
Nicki Glen, NGM
Helen Crawford
Lisa Dickson, Caseron
John Grossart
Janet Littlewood MA PhD BVSc(Hons) DVR DVD MRCVS, Veterinary Dermatology Referrals
Christopher Mayer, Consultant Psychiatrist
Philippa Morphew FCIPD
Alan Reynolds

Accountant

Marguerite Nice
The Green Farmhouse
Barrow
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP29 5AA

Bankers

Barclays Bank plc
20/21 Cornhill
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP33 1DY

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR DONORS

We would not exist without your generous support.

We are very grateful to our corporate sponsors who have donated their time or products which, amongst others include:

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Pitpat
Royal Canin
Pets at Home

Our very special thanks to Vetstream for the pro bono design services towards the production of this Annual Report.

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THANK YOU TO ALL OUR VOLUNTEERS

Our thanks go to all our volunteers for their continued support and commitment over the years. It goes without saying that Our Special Friends would not exist without them

OUR SPECIAL FRIENDS

England & Wales - Charity number 1156778

Accounts

Our Special Friends

Promoting, preserving and providing the power of animal companionship

Annual Report

2020 - 2021

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR DONORS

We would not exist without your generous support

Front cover: Gloria receiving a bit of love from AAA dog, Percy *Above: Matthew and Henry reunited after being homeless*

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Graham and Mr Snickers

TRIBUTE TO GRAHAM

Our Special Friends would like to offer our heartfelt thanks to the late Dr Graham Milligan MRCVS for joining our steering group and helping us to develop our marketing and communications strategy.

Graham was especially engaging, wonderful to work with and determined to maintain his involvement despite his significant health challenges.

His belief and passion for the power of animal companionship, alongside his experience of marketing in the veterinary industry, and his leadership role at the Queen Mother Hospital at the Royal Veterinary College (where he championed research, practice and teaching) meant that he brought exceptional talent and insight. Graham will be greatly missed but his contribution will remain with Our Special Friends forever.

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD 2021

At the beginning of 2020 none of us could have imagined the impact that COVID-19 would have on our lives and the devastation that it would leave across our planet. Throughout the pandemic ***Our Special Friends*** continued our work of helping and supporting people at some of the most vulnerable times in their lives.

Demand for our services has never been greater and, whilst we had to pause some of our services during the various lockdowns, many of our volunteers continued to provide support to vulnerable members of our community by maintaining contact in these exceptional circumstances.

We are truly grateful to the growing number of people who freely give of their time to help ***Our Special Friends*** bring the power of animal companionship to the lonely, the sick and other people at difficult times. Without these wonderful volunteers we would not exist and without ***Our Special Friends*** many people would be without the lifeline that animal companionship can bring.

Following government guidelines our team worked remotely for much of the year. Our small office-based team showed immense flexibility and adaptability, going above and beyond what was asked to ensure client, volunteer, partner and stakeholder needs were addressed. We are delighted to be able to return to office working once again. Unfortunately, our landlord, The Animal Health Trust was placed into administration during 2020 necessitating the move to a new office at the British Racing School on the outskirts of Newmarket.

The demand for our innovative approach continues to grow and we are immensely grateful for the financial support we have received throughout the past year. ***Our Special Friends*** does not charge for the services that we provide and we receive no ongoing central or local government funding. We are entirely reliant on individual donations, fundraising, and grants from local authorities, corporate and community trusts and individual benefactors. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart. Without your support, hundreds of individuals experiencing vulnerability would not have benefitted from the healing power of animal companionship.

Our Special Friends has proven that supporting people at times of vulnerability through promoting, preserving and providing animal companionship is hugely beneficial to both the person and the animal involved. Whether we help people look after their pets when they are unable to, make regular calls with a visiting dog or arrange for temporary fostering, our interventions are relatively low cost and immensely powerful.

Once again, I offer my grateful thanks to our staff, our volunteers and our supporters and I look forward to ***Our Special Friends*** being able to help even more people and animals next year.

Mark Johnston - Chair of the Trustees

OUR AIMS

1. To deliver outstanding animal companionship support services to as many people as we can, providing a sense of comfort and safety, reducing anxiety for people at vulnerable times in their life.

2. To establish financial sustainability for Our Special Friends enabling us to expand our support to more people experiencing loneliness and vulnerability.

3. To become an integral part of Social Prescribing in the UK and, through our proven low-cost interventions, help to reduce the burden on other already stretched services.

4. To become the organisation of choice for those seeking employment or volunteering opportunities in our sector.

5. To champion the adoption and provision of animal companionship support services nationally, sharing our knowledge and experience with like-minded organisations and agencies.

A Happy Ending for Ken and Lacy

Ken Root with his new adopted friend, Lacy

This case was self-referred after we were recommended to Ken by his vets. At 90, Ken had been living on his own since his father died 30 years ago, and he was shielding during COVID-19. Shortly before the outbreak, Ken's dog had died and his efforts to look for a new companion were brought to an abrupt halt when the UK went into lockdown. Ken had never been without a dog and was extremely lonely. Within five days of Ken's call, we had identified a dog, Lacy, who needed urgent rehoming. Her owners had multiple health issues and were living in a first-floor apartment in retirement housing, meaning they could no longer care for Lacy. They had tried without success to rehome Lacy within their own family – and then an Our Special Friends volunteer came to hear about their situation. Ken was keen to take Lacy on, and a trial period was agreed to ensure they were a good match. Our Special Friends took Lacy to Ken with all her bedding, a month's supply of food and 3- months' supply of donated Yumove supplement.

We arranged and took her to a vet appointment to have a vaccination booster and a full health check, and updated her Petlog registration to Ken's name. Ken said:

'After Misty (my previous dog) it was a very bleak time as I have always had the company of a dog. What you did was to prove what a wonderful charity OSF is and you found me a dog and since Our Special Friends' involvement, I am hardly ever lonely.'

From left: Bil Thorn, Belinda Johnston and Linda Sadler at the opening of our new offices at The British Racing School

CEO'S REPORT

In the eight years since I set up Our Special Friends, none has been as challenging as the past 12 months. Pandemic-induced lockdowns have created the perfect storm, sending demand for our services higher, whilst putting barriers in the path of delivering some of these services. All of this whilst we try to establish a sustainable funding model that allows Our Special Friends to bring the healing power of animal companionship to more people at lonely and vulnerable times in their lives.

I am indebted to the small dedicated team of staff and our wonderful volunteers who have helped us weather this storm. More importantly, their resilience and flexibility has enabled Our Special Friends to continue to deliver a range of desperately needed services throughout the pandemic ensuring many people, going through a difficult time, continue to benefit from the help we can offer.

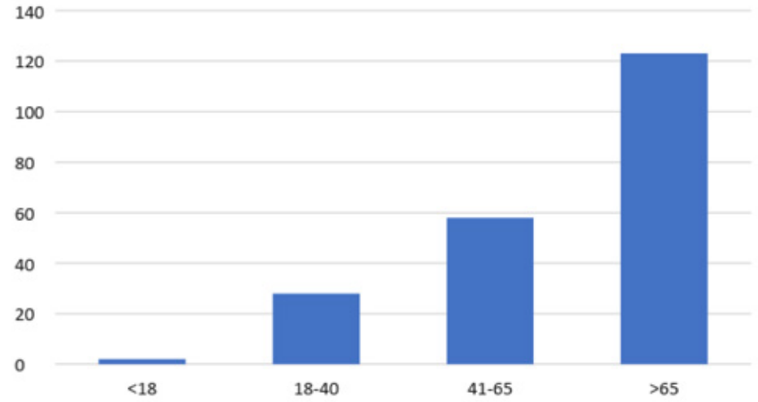
During the year, Our Special Friends became homeless when our former landlord, the Animal Health Trust, sadly went into liquidation. Initially, as we continued to follow government advice to work from home, there was little change to our day to day working, although it has been extremely helpful to be able to get everyone together in our new office at the British Racing School now we are able to return to office working.

As I indicated in last year's Annual Report we began a strategic review of the organisation's plans for the future and much progress has been made, albeit there were times during the year when we had to pause our planning in order to give greater focus to the increasing number of people who needed our support during lockdowns and beyond. We will continue to develop our plans into next year and hope that our refreshed communication and evidence of effective low-cost interventions will encourage more people to support us. I truly believe that with the right resources, Our Special Friends will be able to help more people through promoting, preserving and providing the power of animal companionship.

As we exit this period under review I am delighted to inform you that our team will shortly be joined by a full time Animal Companionship Practitioner and Volunteer Manager and with these additional resources we will feel better equipped to face the challenges in 2022.

We are also indebted to our volunteers, funders and other supporters as without them our services would not exist.

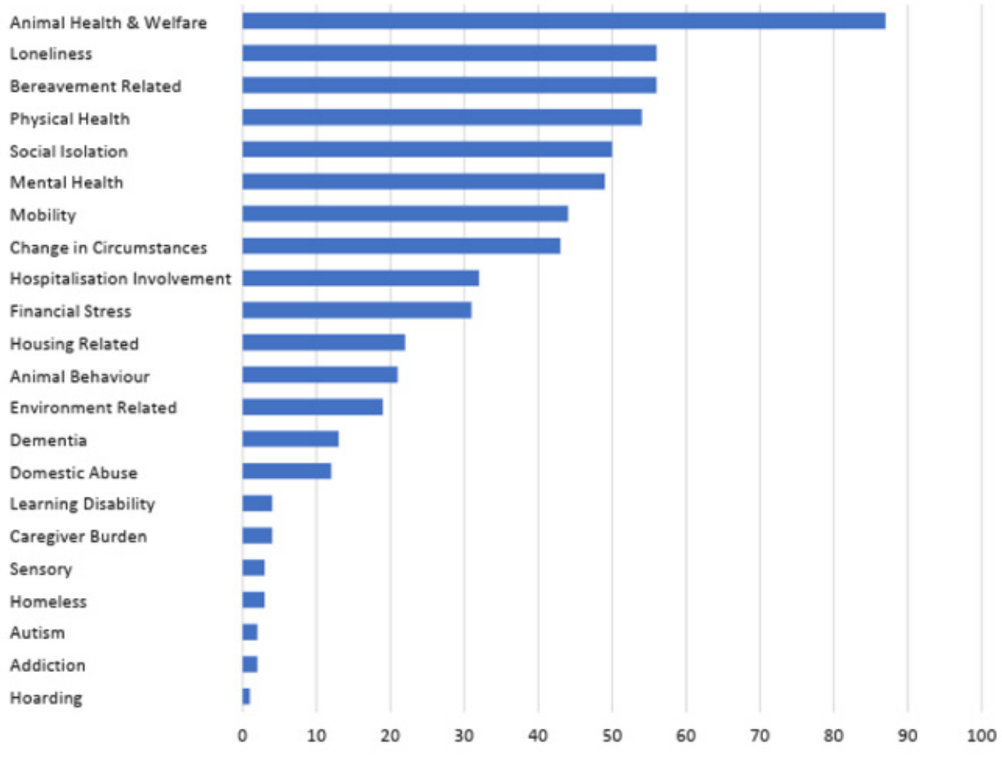
Age Range of People Needing Support



Whilst just over 50% of clients are aged over 65, OSF continues to support people across all age ranges.

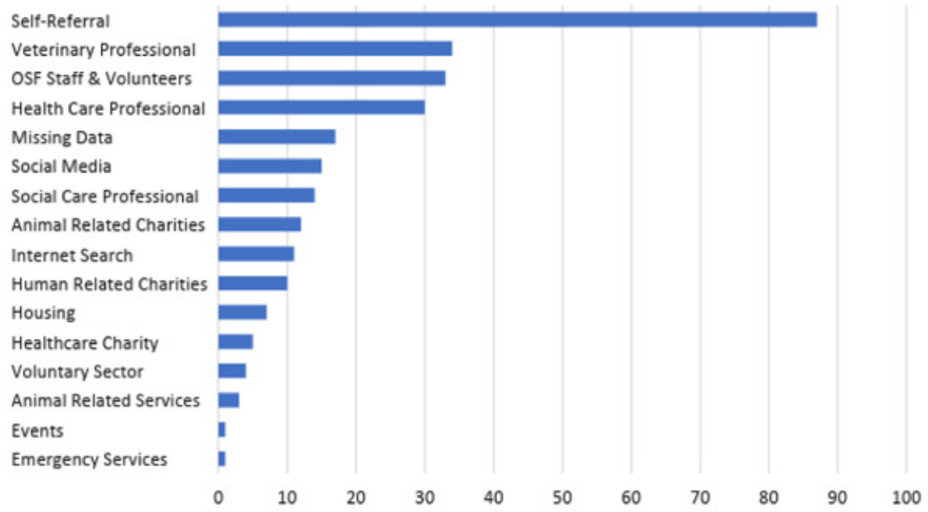
**Only indicated clients for whom we have age data*

Reasons People Need our Support



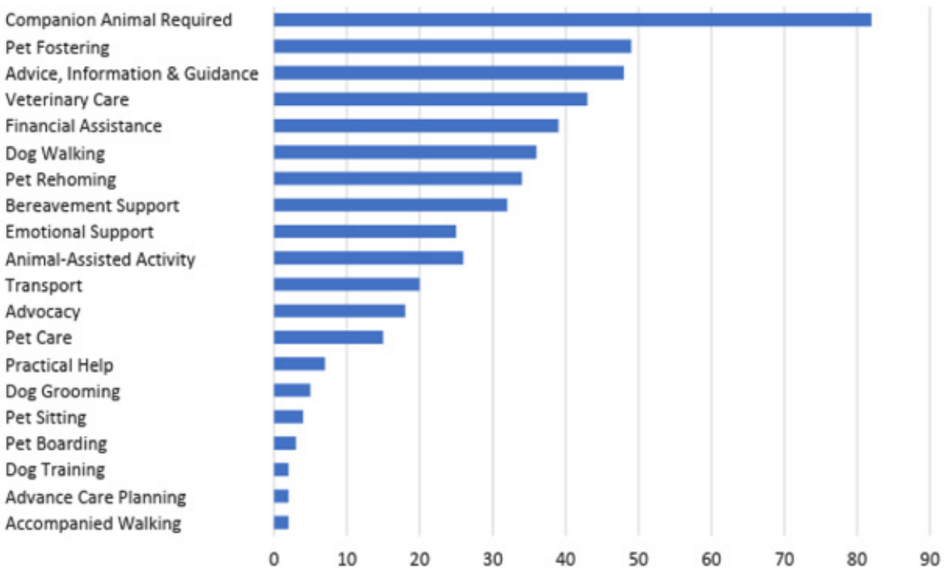
The main reasons that people needed the help of OSF last year related to the health and welfare of their animal companion, loneliness and bereavement. The increase in loneliness during the pandemic was significant. Many of our cases involved multiple reasons for support.

Sources of Referrals



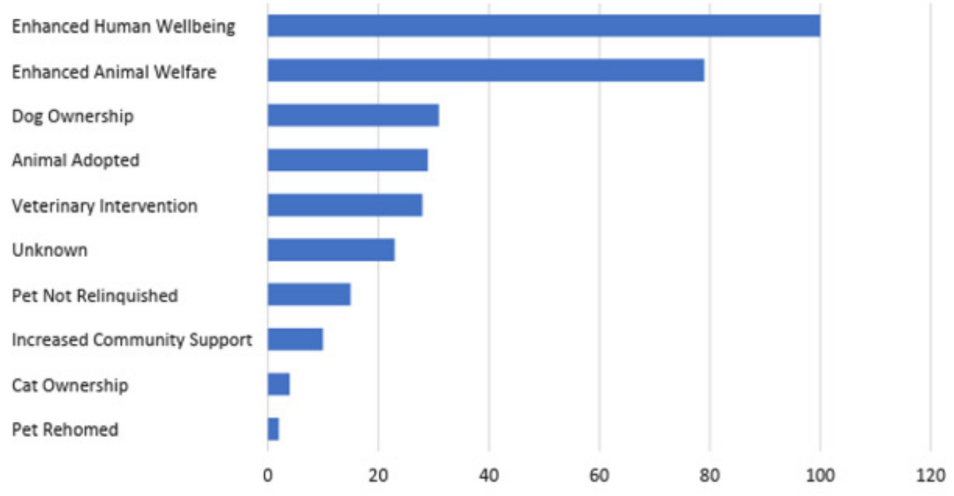
Self-referrals are the principal source of our cases. However, as the reputation of OSF grows, it is encouraging to see our relationship with the veterinary profession and other support agencies develop.

Support Needed

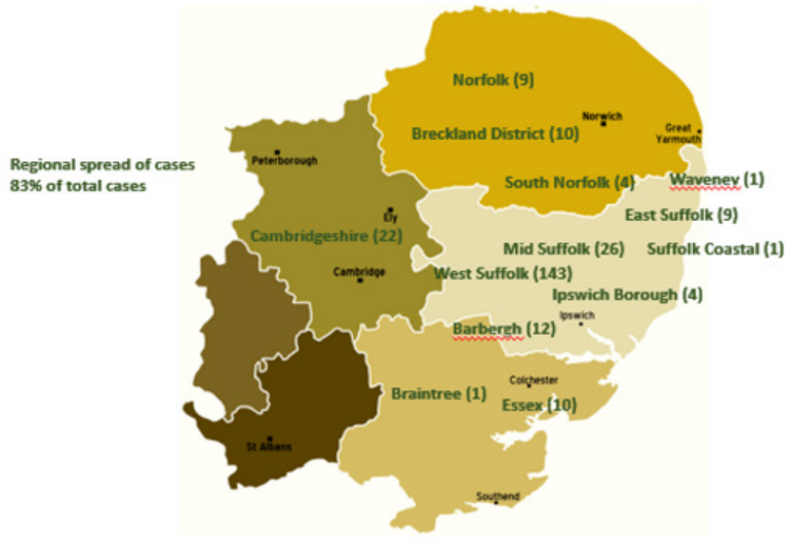


During the pandemic we were restricted in the amount of face to face animal-assisted activity we were able to offer. At the same time requests for support with animal adoption, pet fostering and animal companionship support increased.

Outcomes



It is encouraging to report that enhanced human wellbeing and enhanced animal welfare remain at the forefront of the work we do to promote, preserve and provide the benefits of animal companionship.



When compared with the previous year, the spread of cases across the region demonstrates that our reach is broadening across its original boundaries.

*There is an overlap with some of our statistics. This is constantly being developed so that we can refine our recordings.

CASE STUDY

Change in Circumstances/Housing Related/Mental Ill Health/Social Isolation

Sally and Murphy settle in to their new life

Case Summary

We came across this case when we were asked to visit a lady living in a hotel room with a very large dog to dog sit for an hour whilst she went to get groceries. She could not leave the dog on its own, nor could she take it with her.

Sally had recently lost her husband, and relocated to this area to be nearer to her partially sighted sister and her sister's blind husband in Thetford, with a view to becoming a carer. Unbeknown to Sally, by relinquishing the keys to her previously rented accommodation, she lost her eligibility for housing. With no address, no photo ID or references she was unable to apply for jobs or tenancies. She could not apply for any benefits because she was homeless. When she asked for help she was told to go online, but did not know how to use a computer.

It was hard to comprehend that a 57-year-old British citizen could end up homeless purely because she had a lack of understanding and IT skills and that she was a dog owner.

She had been living in a Travelodge for 6 weeks, running out of money and finding it impossible to find accommodation for her and her dog. She was living in a small, hot, cramped room, taking the dog out 6 times a day and employing a dog walker so that she could get out to go to the shops. She had become very anxious and depressed. Along with the difficulties of being unemployed, trying to find employment with no fixed abode and worrying about the care of her beloved Lurcher she was left feeling desperate, and at times, suicidal.

Murphy, a large Lurcher, was strong, (although he was good on the lead). He was quite a vocal dog, and he suffered from separation anxiety and fear aggression. He had not been socialised and had never been off the lead so it was going to take a pretty special person to take on this case.

Sally couldn't bear to give Murphy up after losing her partner and everything else she had endured in the last few months.

Intervention

Within days, Sally was matched to Our Special Friends volunteer, Anne Emery, who has extensive experience in housing, human and animal support. Anne put a huge amount of care into this case going above and beyond the expectations of any volunteer. Anne arranged meetings, helped with advocacy, transportation and housing information. She invested her time, supporting Sally who had been at such a low point in her life. Murphy was initially put into a local kennel which was financed by Our Special Friends (as no immediate foster home could be found). Anne took Sally into her own home and made it possible for Murphy and Sally to be reunited. She taught Sally some basic IT skills, and helped her to get into volunteering and to gain employment, and also provided her with an independent place to live.

Outcome

Enhanced Human and Animal Wellbeing

Anne completely transformed Sally's life. Within 4 months Sally was able to start volunteering leading to her gaining employment in the local residential care home. After some time in gainful employment, Sally was able to apply for pet-friendly housing which allowed her to continue to stay with the only friends she had whilst she lived through some of the worst months of her life.

"It means the world to me knowing that I can keep Murphy with me."

Testimonial

I am writing to you to say "thank you" for sending Anne to help me and Murphy. She has been a big help to me and has given me a lot of support. Without her help I would be out on the streets by now.

Murphy would like to say "thank you" to all of you. He says "I can stay with my Mum". Murphy is doing a lot better now.

If there is anything I can do in any way to help or support Our Special Friends just let me know. It means the world to me knowing that I can keep Murphy with me.

I had never heard of Our Special Friends before. I think you all do a wonderful job in the way you help people keep their dogs in their homes with their owners.

Murphy and me would just like to say a big "Thank you" to you all from the bottom of my heart.

Sally Surr

CASE STUDY

Bereavement/Anxiety/Depression/Social Isolation/Loneliness

Syri has given Christine a reason to get up in the morning

"You didn't just save me, you saved dear Syri too!"

Case Summary

Chris had been caring for her husband who had been living with Alzheimer's for many years. They recently lost their beloved dachshund, Dora, and a few weeks later, during lockdown, Chris developed pneumonia and her husband subsequently moved into long term residential care before sadly passing away.

Although Chris was in regular contact with friends and family, she felt very lonely, became anxious and depressed and started to find it difficult to socialise and go outdoors. Chris said she found herself in a 'very dark place'.

Chris chatted to her friends about the possibility of adopting a rescue dog and asked her neighbour, whom she knew was an OSF volunteer, for advice. The volunteer discussed how OSF could help and after several weeks of careful consideration, Chris contacted OSF to ask if they could find her a suitable dog. Chris wanted a dog that would not only give her long term companionship but was also child and dog-friendly.

Intervention

OSF conducted an extensive search which was more challenging than usual due to the COVID-19 lockdown and inaccessibility to larger animal charities. However, within two weeks, Syrup was identified at a local charity, through Facebook.

Outcome

Animal Adopted/Dog Ownership/Enhanced Animal Welfare/ Human Wellbeing/ Increased Community Support

OSF supported Chris throughout the adoption process, coordinated necessary administration, provided transport and accompanied Chris to visit Syrup and contributed towards the adoption costs. Additionally, when Syrup was rehomed, our volunteer facilitated dog training at Chris's home which she found extremely beneficial. More importantly Chris reported that she was becoming more involved with the local community, meeting other dogs and their walkers and feeling almost back to 'normal'.

Testimonial

Chris was very happy with us for finding Syrup (renamed Syri) and the subsequent support we offered.

"They found me a lovely dog called Syri, but I was going to struggle to pay for her, as I'm on a basic pension and the cost of rescue dogs is not cheap. Our Special Friends helped with a donation towards the cost so I could have her. Since having her in my life I feel so much better and I have a reason to get up in the morning and go out for a walk. She has changed my life. Words cannot express how grateful I am to Our Special Friends because you just didn't save me, you saved dear Syri too. Thank you."

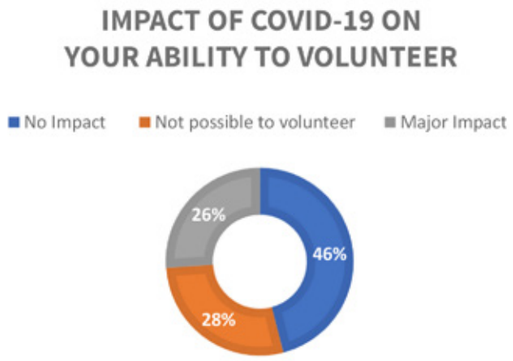
Chris Matthews

VOLUNTEER SUPPORT MANAGER'S REPORT

An overview

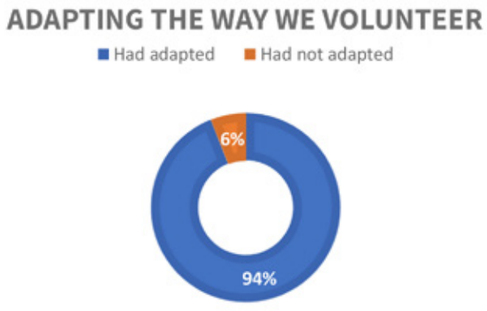
A survey of 29 of our volunteers provided, in February, an overview of their volunteer experience and how it was affected by the pandemic. Hours volunteered dropped by 86% between February and March thus demonstrating the significant impact the pandemic had on our volunteer's ability to support our clients. With a blanket ban placed upon animal-assisted activity (AAA) visits, following the government's first announcement in March, many of our volunteers were unable to carry out their usual tasks. Dog walking and AAA activities were significantly reduced, yet the need for animal companionship support services grew evermore.

Impact on ability to volunteer and the volunteer themselves



54% of our respondents reported that COVID-19 had some degree of impact on their ability to volunteer, with 26% reporting a major impact. This is a snapshot of a much wider picture and we are continuously learning how our volunteers have been affected over the past year. Of the 46% who report no impact, these were predominantly dog walkers and some administrative volunteers who could continue whilst remaining 'COVID secure'.

94% of our volunteers reported that they had to adapt the way in which they volunteered in some way. Some sent cards and dropped off food packages, whilst others were more comfortable having a weekly chat over the phone with their client. We have witnessed how willing and robust our volunteers are, thinking of innovative ways to continue their support through some of the most challenging months.



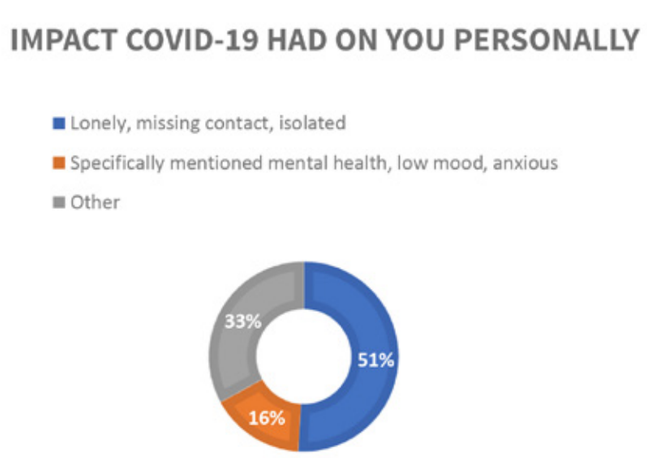
Impact on our volunteers

Qualitative data demonstrated the impact and adverse effects this enforced isolation had on our volunteers, and their animals alike. 84% used wording associated with negative mental health including 'lonely' and 'anxious', with 16% of these specifically using the term 'mental health'. For those AAA volunteers, it became evident that both the human and animal were suffering.

Many volunteers reported change in character in their own animal, as they were also missing out on visiting their AAA human companion.

There is no doubt that the psychological wellbeing of our volunteers has been a key focus of Our Special Friends, and continues to be so.

How we supported our volunteers



The volunteer support team tried to maintain regular communications with volunteers, albeit remotely, throughout lockdown. Regular weekly drop-ins were held up until February ensuring those who wanted to connect could do so and we offered a visual remote connection point for socialisation. The monthly newsletter was utilised as a regular touchpoint with interesting features and key information. Facebook is also used as a regular source of two-way communication which continues to be valued and supported by over 40% of volunteers.

Our survey asked volunteers to score OSF's contact over the year. Some comments highlighted the challenges of virtual meetings. Considering the demographic of our volunteers, Our Special Friends were keen to resume face to face contact and review the frequency and format of our contact.

Recruitment and resignations

The welfare of our volunteers has been paramount over the past year in recognition that they may be struggling. A review of Our Special Friends' volunteer team saw that 18 volunteers had resigned, but that the charity has successfully attracted, and fully recruited, 21 new volunteers - a very positive statistic. We understand that many individuals reflected on their capacity to volunteer. Sadly, several of our volunteers needed to shield, leaving many deeply affected by isolation and the general fear around contact. It has irreversibly impacted a number of their lives and we continue to support all of our volunteers during these times. We have seen increasing evidence of the fluidity of our service, whereby volunteers become clients, and clients become volunteers. We believe this highlights the reactive nature of our service and ability to offer support for volunteers and clients alike is what makes Our Special Friends so valuable.

VOLUNTEER STORY – Jane Constable

"It didn't take me long to decide that I would like to volunteer for Our Special Friends…"

Jane Constable recalls her volunteering journey with Our Special Friends. If she wasn't busy before, she certainly is now...

In 2018 we lost our Labrador Arnie and wanted to donate some of his possessions to a charity and I'm pleased to say that I came across Our Special Friends.

After meeting with Belinda, who explained what the charity was all about, it didn't take me long to decide that I would like to volunteer for them. I had my interview and before I knew it, I was walking Roxy and Pepper in Lakenheath, mother and daughter Staffie crosses, who are totally scatty but adorable dogs. I was also encouraged to take on the role of Assessor and Local Lead volunteer for Mildenhall. I've enjoyed the roles I've taken on for OSF, from manning an awareness table at Sainsburys to attending Lakenheath carnival, both pre-COVID and with the help of some great volunteers, to make the public more aware of the work of the charity.

In July, we were lucky enough to adopt a dog from the local RSPCA. He's a 2yr old Boxer called Bentley and he's settled in so well and definitely keeps us on our toes.

Jane Constable

Bentley finds a happy home

VOLUNTEER STORY – Julie Lyman

"The very special relationships that we nurture with our animal companions will last forever..."

Billy's final visit to a special lady

Billy and I have been visiting MS for 2 years. She is a lady in her late 90's, fiercely independent, still living in her own home with a live-in-carer. She had lots of stories, she had been a ballroom dancer; loved her dancing and adored seeing Billy. We had to stop visiting during the first lockdown, as I had to take a step back due to my own family circumstances. On a Monday early in January I received a call from MS's carer saying that MS was obviously at end of life, the Doctor reckoned only a couple of days, this was not COVID. MS had requested a visit from her beloved dogs, her last wish. I felt that it was necessary to make the visit. So we went with plenty of PPE for protection.

On arrival, the carer took us through to the bedroom where MS was asleep in bed, she moved MS over a little to make room on the bed for Billy to lay with her. Billy curled up right tight beside her, and the carer laid MS's hand on to Billy's back. Even though MS was not responding to us humans, in any way, she started to move her hand on Billy.

While I was there a family member arrived and he was so thankful that we had made the visit and he saw MS respond to Billy being beside her, Billy was so good and stayed with her and was so still, as if he knew that she was unwell. All the humans in the room felt MS was getting comfort from the contact.

Sadly, the carer contacted me on the following morning to say that MS had passed away peacefully overnight.

I am so pleased that Billy made that one last visit to a very special lady.

Julie Lyman, Sudbury

Billy's last visit

HOW WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Client

Bedbound client's sister on receiving regular dog walking

Arranging and matching a volunteer

'You have helped us so much. Having your volunteer to walk the pups has helped so much. And, you found someone to give my birds a home. You have made such a difference, it's made our lives so much easier and now I have my birds safe. I would like to thank you all so much. You are so kind, you have made us feel if we ask so many questions, you come through every time. You are all marvellous. We are so pleased with (Volunteer name) walking the dogs, she is a lovely young lady; the animals adore her. Thank you.'

Client after hospital care

Urgent foster to reunite of dog and bird for client suffering with Mental Health

'Our Special Friends saved me worrying and helped me immediately in looking after my dog and bird. They saved my life.'

Client after receiving support when her dog fell ill

Advice, guidance and financial support

'I was in a very difficult position financially when my Springer Spaniel fell ill. I emailed Our Special Friends, in hope of support. I was contacted back within a couple of hours, which I found amazingly quick, also very comforting. We spoke about the situation and the medication and treatment needed for my dog, also the possibility of future care depending on the progress he made with the medication and treatment.

The help Our Special Friends offered was incredibly generous, and supportive. It was a total relief to know that the help my dog would continue to receive, in order to help him get better, left me with only one worry; my dog's health improving and him responding to his treatment.

I was so relieved, and happy, that within a very short period of time my dog had responded well to the medication and treatment he'd received from the vets, and he's now on the road to recovery.

I have to say a very big thank you to Our Special Friends, for their help, fantastic knowledge, and support, that they instantly showed and provided. Thank you, Our Special Friends.'

From a client after Our Special Friends arranged for a volunteer to visit with her dog

Animal-assisted activity (AAA)

'Our Special Friends has changed my life. I have improved greatly since I have been receiving their help. They were so understanding and being confined indoors, showed me I was a human being. Just keep up what you are doing, thank you.'

Volunteer

From a volunteer after she started volunteering

From the volunteer survey: about the benefits of volunteering

'I was quite unwell for such a long while following my Dad's death in May'18. Our Special Friends was the first thing I became involved with since and my volunteer work has gone from my initial step moving forward with my life, to something that is definitely keeping me going. Because of my volunteering I now feel much better and I am in a position to actively look for a new job. I would not have believed that volunteering could do that for me 12 months ago… so thank you Our Special Friends.'

Agency

From a Family and Communities Officer at West Suffolk Council

Support for vulnerable resident before and after hospitalisation

'OSF highlighted concerns for a resident in Haverhill who was being supported by West Suffolk Council's Home but Not Alone service. OSF highlighted concerns for a resident in Haverhill they have been supporting. Throughout the five months of COVID-19, OSF have continually stepped in to support this resident. In recent weeks the resident has had to have a spell in hospital and OSF triggered and coordinated the communication to keep everyone updated, but more than this, they removed the burden and stress for the resident by finding a foster carer for their dog. The dog is the resident's companion and maintains their well-being, so to have OSF take the lead and organise this has supported the resident being able to be in hospital, and also supported the reunion coming out of hospital.

Whilst the focus has been on the treatment and care for the resident, the resident's thoughts have been about their companion. OSF has made the difference between the resident going into hospital without the worry and additional stress that going to hospital brings, especially during COVID-19. OSF offer more than befriending for people and animals. This is a holistic approach to well-being and places the person at the centre of the support required. They have also taken the lead as they have the most interaction with the resident in keeping the other professions and interested parties updated. In doing this, it has kept everyone up to date, without the need for chasing, so everyone is on the same page.'

"I believe they have made the professionals' work much easier."

From a Mental Health Support Worker

Dog walking for client to alleviate her anxiety when attending her weekly dialysis

'Thank you for not losing your compassion. Your compassion remains when many people would have stepped back; you go beyond the bounds and offer an amazing service. Thank you.'

From a Social Worker at Suffolk Social Care

Dog walking and befriending for client struggling with mental and physical disabilities

'I would like to thank you and on behalf of Bernice a very big thank you for all the help you provided in her case of need. It has helped me to understand the necessity of including the client's animals care and support when they are hospitalised. The members of staff who I spoke with at Our Special Friends were calm when I was anxious, knowledgeable when I was not and some have gone out of their way to put the dog first which is so lovely.'

From a Carer at St Nicholas Hospice

When offering services which would normally fall outside the radar of most services

'I can never sing your praises highly enough – and this case has deepened my respect for you and all your volunteers – What stars!'

THE YEAR AHEAD

More than any other year, the last 12 months have shown us at Our Special Friends the deep need for our animal companionship support services. With the increase of loneliness, social isolation and associated mental health issues we have witnessed the healing power of animal companionship to those who needed it most. This gave us the chance to prove that so often Our Special Friends prevents people's situations from deteriorating and necessitating additional involvement from other agencies.

Whilst we are hopeful that lockdowns are now confined to history, we have no doubt the demand on our services will increase in 2022 and beyond. Our aim is to support as many people as we can whilst building organisational capacity and competence to ensure we are around to support future needs.

We will continue to evolve and evaluate the services we offer, developing best practice and evidencing how our interventions have made a real difference to the lives of so many people. Alongside this, we will develop our links with local authorities, the NHS, the veterinary profession and other agencies, building a mutual understanding and integrated approach to supporting those who need our services.

Having moved into our new office at the British Racing School, just outside Newmarket, we are benefiting enormously from the ability to share information and experience with colleagues in real time. We extend an invitation to all of our stakeholders to come and see us if you are ever in the area.

With a full-time Volunteer Manager and an Animal Companionship Practitioner joining our team, Our Special Friends can and will do more to help those who need our services.

However, for this to be possible we need sustainable funding and we have to develop the means to increase our fundraising activity in 2022.

Left: Jethro and Willow looking optimistic!

Above: Foster to reunite cat whilst owner was recovering in a mental health ward

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Income is primarily derived from grants and increased by 67% to £240,487 (2020: £143,989). At the beginning of the year, we had been concerned that the pandemic would reduce our success rate with grant applications, because of competition from an increasing number of worthy causes. In the event our success rate not only held up, but we attracted funding from some important new funders. The average amount of each grant is still relatively low, so we continue to rely on a constant flow of successful applications to maintain our cash reserves.

Expenditure increased by 15% to £140,160 (2020: £122,244). Expenditure on charitable activities was broadly the same as the previous year at £111,511, while expenditure on fundraising activity increased, reflecting a full year of the investment we began last year.

Reserves grew to £170,190 of which £103,582 (2020: £68,651) is unrestricted and is already being deployed in expanding our staff team. This level of unrestricted reserves equates to approximately 5 months of our expanded operating costs, which the Trustees are satisfied provides sufficient security.

Our Special Friends

Financial Statements for the year ended

30 April 2021

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Report to the trustees of Our Special Friends

I report to the charity trustees on my examination of the accounts of the Company for the year ended 30 April 2021 set out on pages 2 to 7.

As the charity's trustees of the Company (who are also the directors of the company for the purposes of company law), you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 ("the 2006 Act").

Having satisfied myself that the accounts of the Company are not required to be audited for this year under Part 16 of the 2006 Act and are eligible for independent examination, I report in respect of my examination of your charity's accounts as carried out under section 145 of the Charities Act 2011 ("the 2011 Act"). In carrying out my examination, I have followed the Directions given by the Charity Commission (under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act.

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention which gives me cause to believe that:

- accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 386 of the Companies Act 2006; or
- the accounts do not accord with such records; or
- the accounts do not comply with relevant accounting requirements under section 396 of the Companies Act 2006 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair' view which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination; or
- the accounts have not been prepared in accordance with the Charities SORP (FRS102).

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Marguerite EM Nice

Marguerite EM Nice ACA CTA
Chartered Accountant, Chartered Tax Advisor

The Green Farmhouse
The Green
Barrow
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP29 5AA

Statement of financial activities (including summary income and expenditure account)

	Notes	Unrestricted funds	Restricted income funds	Total funds	*Prior year funds*
		£	£	£	£
Income	3				
Donations and legacies		106,432	132,967	239,399	*137,329*
Charitable activities		1,057	-	1,057	*6,567*
Interest		31	-	31	*93*
Total income		107,520	132,967	240,487	*143,989*
Expenditure	4				
Raising funds		19,719	8,930	28,649	*12,654*
Charitable activities		52,870	58,641	111,511	*109,590*
Total expenditure		72,589	67,571	140,160	*122,244*
Net income/(expenditure)		34,931	65,396	100,327	*21,745*
Transfers between funds		-	-	-	-
Net movement in funds		34,931	65,396	100,327	*21,745*
Reconciliation of funds:					
Total funds brought forward		68,651	1,212	69,863	*48,118*
Total funds carried forward		**103,582**	**66,608**	**170,190**	***69,863***

Balance sheet

	Notes	Unrestricted funds	Restricted income funds	Total this year	*Total prior year*
		£	£	£	£
Current assets					
Debtors	6	1,493	1,810	3,303	*1,023*
Cash at bank and in hand		110,305	65,092	175,397	*80,518*
Total current assets		111,798	66,902	178,700	*81,541*
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	7	8,216	294	8,510	*11,678*
Net current assets		103,582	66,608	170,190	*69,863*
Total assets less current liabilities		103,582	66,608	170,190	69,863
Total net assets		**103,582**	**66,608**	**170,190**	***69,863***
Funds of the Charity					
Restricted income funds	8		66,608	66,608	*1,212*
Unrestricted funds		103,582		103,582	*68,651*
Total funds		**103,582**	**66,608**	**170,190**	***69,863***

For the year ended 30 April 2021, the company was entitled to exemption from audit under section 477 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

The members have not required the company to obtain an audit of its accounts for the year in question in accordance with section 476 of the Companies Act 2006

The directors acknowledge their responsibilities for complying with the requirements of the Companies Act with respect to accounting records and the preparation of accounts

These accounts have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to small companies subject to the small companies' regime and in accordance with FRS102 SORP

Approved by the Board and signed on its behalf by

Date 20 October 2021

Robert Ferguson
Director

Notes to the accounts

1 Basis of preparation

These accounts have been prepared under the historical cost convention with items recognised at cost or transaction value.

The accounts have been prepared in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice: Accounting and Reporting by Charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) issued on 16 July 2014, and with the Charities Act 2011

2 Accounting policies

Recognition of income Income is included in the Statement of Financial Activities when:

- the charity becomes entitled to the resources;
- it is more likely than not that the trustees will receive the resources; and
- the monetary value can be measured with sufficient reliability.

Offsetting There has been no offsetting of assets and liabilities, or income and expenses, unless required or permitted by the FRS 102 SORP or FRS 102.

Grants and donations Grants and donations are only included in the Statement of Financial Activities when the general income recognition criteria are met.

Legacies Legacies are included in the Statement of Financial Activities when receipt is probable, that is, when there has been grant of probate, the executors have established that there are sufficient assets in the estate and any conditions attached to the legacy are either within the control of the charity or have been met.

Volunteer help The value of any voluntary help received is not included in the accounts but is described in the trustees' annual report.

Liability recognition Liabilities are recognised where it is more likely than not that there is a legal or constructive obligation committing the charity to pay out resources and the amount of the obligation can be measured with reasonable certainty.

Governance and support costs Support costs have been allocated between governance costs and other support. Governance costs comprise all costs involving public accountability of the charity and its compliance with regulation and good practice.

Tangible fixed assets for use by charity These are capitalised if they can be used for more than one year, and cost at least £250
They are valued at cost and depreciated over 3 years.

Our Special Friends
Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2021

Notes to the accounts

3 Analysis of income

		Unrestricted funds £	Restricted income £	Total funds £	*Prior year* £
Donations and legacies:	Donations and gifts	24,057	227	24,284	*42,616*
	Gift Aid	5,444	-	5,444	*4,698*
	General grants provided by govt/other charities	76,044	132,740	208,784	*89,025*
	Other	887		887	*990*
	Total donations and legacies	106,432	132,967	239,399	*137,329*
Charitable activities:	Fundraising events	1,057	-	1,057	*6,567*
Other Income:	Interest	31	-	31	*93*
Total Income		**107,520**	**132,967**	**240,487**	**143,989**

4 Analysis of expenditure

		Unrestricted funds £	Restricted income funds £	Total funds £	*Prior year* £
Expenditure on raising funds	Staff costs	18,061	8,930	26,991	*11,075*
	Advertising, marketing, direct mail and publicity	1,658	-	1,658	*1,579*
	Total expenditure on raising funds	19,719	8,930	28,649	*12,654*
Expenditure on charitable activities	Volunteer costs	653	-	653	*4,511*
	Animal care costs	3,359	6,054	9,413	*1,545*
	Office expenses	5,635	8,331	13,966	*24,274*
	Staff costs	43,223	44,256	87,479	*77,922*
	Depreciation	-	-	-	*1,338*
	Total expenditure on charitable activities	52,870	58,641	111,511	*109,590*
Total expenditure		**72,589**	**67,571**	**140,160**	***122,244***

No fees were paid in respect of the Independent Examination of the financial statements in the current or prior year.

No trustee expenses were incurred in the current or prior year.

Notes to the accounts

5 Staff costs

	This year	*Prior year*
	£	£
Salaries and wages	63,665	*55,793*
Social security costs	2,221	*1,350*
Pension costs (defined contribution scheme)	1,168	*939*
Self employed staff costs	45,657	*29,090*
Staff training and expenses	1,759	*1,825*
	114,470	***88,997***

No employees received employee benefits (excluding employer pension costs) for the reporting period of more than £60,000.

The company provides pension benefits under the NEST scheme

The full time equivalent number of staff working for the charity during the year was 4 (2020: 4)

6 Debtors and prepayments

	This year	*Prior year*
	£	£
Prepayments and accrued income	3,303	*1,023*
	3,303	***1,023***

7 Creditors and accruals

	Amounts falling due within one year	
	This year	*Prior year*
	£	£
Accruals and deferred income	6,863	*11,383*
Taxation and social security	1,647	*295*
	8,510	***11,678***

Our Special Friends
Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2021

Notes to the accounts

8 Restricted funds

Current Year	Purpose and Restrictions	Fund balances brought forward	Income	Expenditure	Fund balances carried forward
		£	£	£	£
The Hobson Charity	Vets fees	1,212	-	(1,212)	-
Mrs Smith & Mount Trust	Animal assisted activity	-	1,800	-	1,800
Individual Grant	Fundraiser salary	-	5,000	(5,000)	-
Guernsey Charitable Trust	Animal assisted activity	-	18,514	(18,514)	-
St Edmunds Trust	IT funding	-	7,426	(7,426)	-
Godolphin	Office rent	-	5,000	(453)	4,547
Individual grant	Office rent	-	5,000	(452)	4,548
Newmarket Festival	Animal assisted activity	-	1,000	(1,000)	-
West Suffolk Council	Locality funding	-	500	(500)	-
Suffolk Community Foundation					-
Fonnereau Foundation	Animal assisted activity	-	5,000	(3,427)	1,573
Difference	Core costs	-	5,000	(5,000)	-
Coronavirus Community Fund	Core costs	-	5,000	(5,000)	-
Martineau Fund	Salaries	-	2,000	(2,000)	-
Reviving Our Community	Core costs	-	5,000	(5,000)	-
Maurken Fund	Core costs	-	1,500	(1,500)	-
West Suffolk Council	Animal companionship practitioner	-	25,000	-	25,000
Individual Grant	Fundraiser salary	-	10,000	(3,930)	6,070
Helen Roll	Volunteer support	-	5,000	(2,315)	2,685
Animal Welfare Support Fund					-
Pet Plan Charitable Trust	Animal Welfare Support	-	5,000	(4,615)	385
The Hobson Charitable Trust	Animal Welfare Support	-	5,000	-	5,000
2021	Animal Welfare Support	-	10,000	-	10,000
Kennel Club Charitable Trust	Dog Welfare	-	5,000	-	5,000
	Total Restricted Funds	**1,212**	**132,740**	**(67,344)**	**66,608**

Previous Year	*Purpose and Restrictions*	*Fund balances brought forward*	*Income*	*Expenditure*	*Fund balances carried forward*
		£	£	£	£
West Suffolk Community Chest	*Administrator costs*	*7,740*	*6,000*	*(13,740)*	*-*
Godolphin	*Relocation costs*	*5,000*	*-*	*(5,000)*	*-*
The Hobson Charity	*Vets fees*	*-*	*2,000*	*(788)*	*1,212*
Suffolk Community Foundation					*-*
Realising Ambitions	*Practitioner salary*	*-*	*15,700*	*(15,700)*	*-*
Pargiter	*Animal assisted activity*	*-*	*5,000*	*(5,000)*	*-*
Suffolk Giving Fund	*Salary costs*	*-*	*1,000*	*(1,000)*	*-*
Simpson Fund	*Administrator costs*	*2,380*	*2,000*	*(4,380)*	*-*
Blue Bell Fund	*Administrator costs*	*2,000*	*-*	*(2,000)*	*-*
Helen Roll	*IT costs*	*-*	*3,000*	*(3,000)*	*-*
Mrs LD Rope	*Animal assisted activity*	*-*	*3,000*	*(3,000)*	*-*
Masonic Charitable Foundation	*Volunteer Coordinator salary*	*4,600*	*4,600*	*(9,200)*	*-*
Pet Plan Charitable Trust	*Outreach centre*	*-*	*10,000*	*(10,000)*	*-*
Kennel Club Charitable Trust	*Dog costs*	*-*	*5,000*	*(5,000)*	*-*
	Total Restricted Funds	***21,720***	***57,300***	***(77,808)***	***1,212***

GOVERNANCE AND SPECIAL ADVISORS

Patron

Lord Fairhaven

Board of Trustees

Robert Ferguson (appointed 25 July 2018)
Mark Johnston (appointed 20 January 2014)
Elizabeth Ormerod (appointed 25 July 2018)
Carolyn Bradburne (appointed 16 September 2020)

OSF Team

Belinda Johnston, *CEO, Founder and Lead Practitioner*
Susan Bradwell, *Financial Support*
Mark Toller, *Financial Director*
Sally Bycroft, *Marketing and PR*
Anna Hunt, *Fundraising*
Jane Paley, *Volunteer Support*
Tracey Le Gallez, *Volunteer Support*
Linda Sadler, *Animal Welfare Support*
Bil Thorn, *Office Administrator*

Supported 'in the office' by volunteers:
Rebecca Clarke, *Marketing and PR*
Janet Collins, *HR*
Karen Mallett, Christine Singleton, *Service Delivery*
Jan Webb, *Volunteer Admin*

Voluntary Advisers

Jeremy Bradburne
Nicki Glen, *NGM*
Lisa Dickson, *Caseron*
Hylke Knoop, *Ecollective*
Christopher Mayer, *Consultant Psychiatrist*
Alan Reynolds
David Wright, *Cranfield Trust*
Deidre Carson
Helen Crawford
John Grossart
Janet Littlewood, *Veterinary Dermatology Referrals*
Philippa Morphew
Graham Milligan

Accountant

Marguerite Nice
The Green Farmhouse
Barrow
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP29 5AA

Bankers

Barclays Bank plc
20/21 Cornhill
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP33 1DY

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THANK YOU TO ALL OUR VOLUNTEERS

Our thanks go to all our volunteers for their continued support and commitment over the years. It goes without saying that *Our Special Friends* would not exist without them.