



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

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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.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Mark Johnston'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

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*



472 new cases

**145 other cases
in the period**

**615 cases in
the year**



The difference we made

2023/2024



Beneficiaries

Direct: 721

Indirect: 385



1106

people supported

365

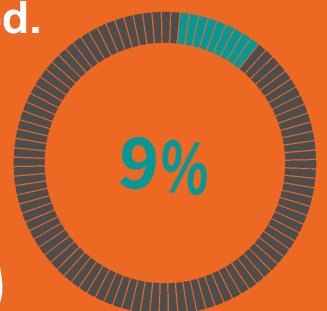
dogs supported

152

cats and small animals
supported

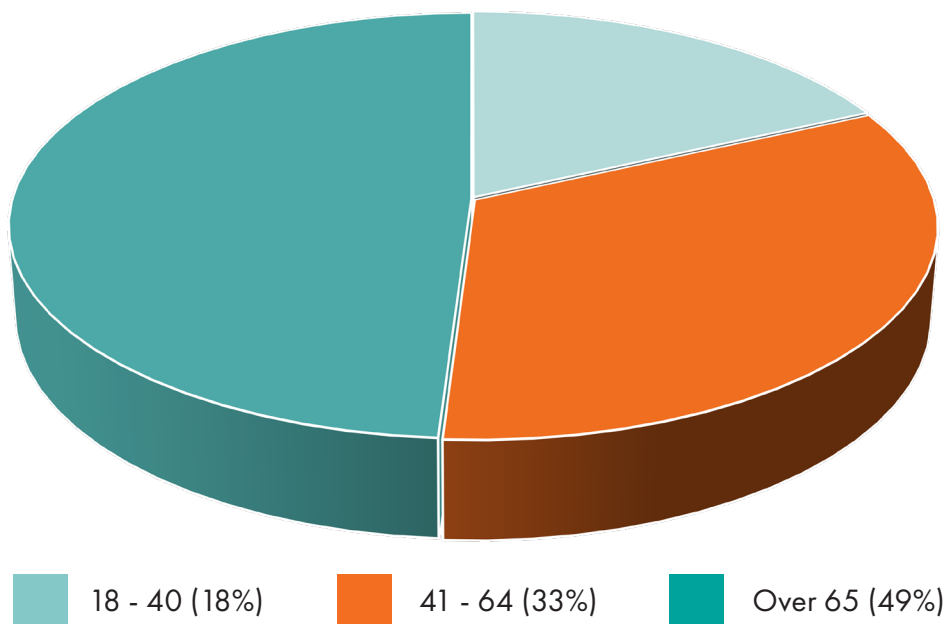


9% of our clients have
requested support
more than once in this
reporting period.



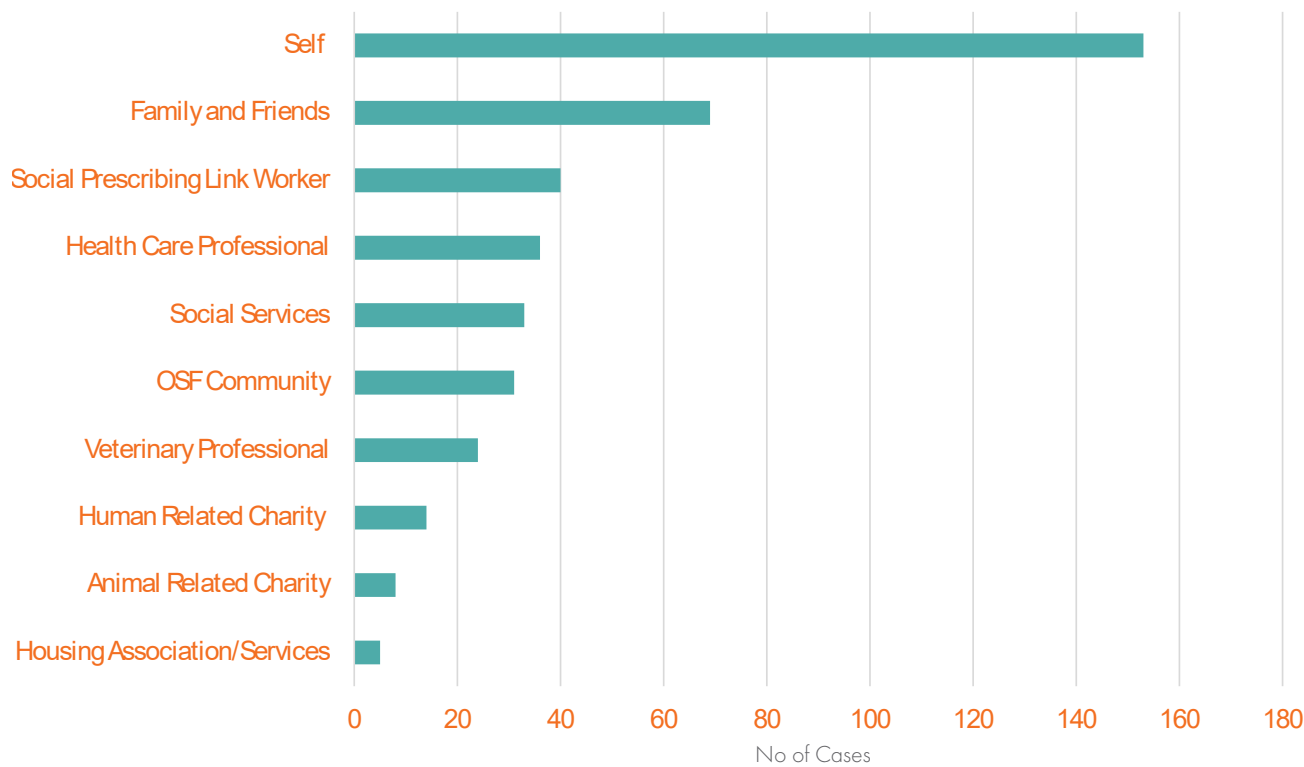
CASE DATA

Client Age Range



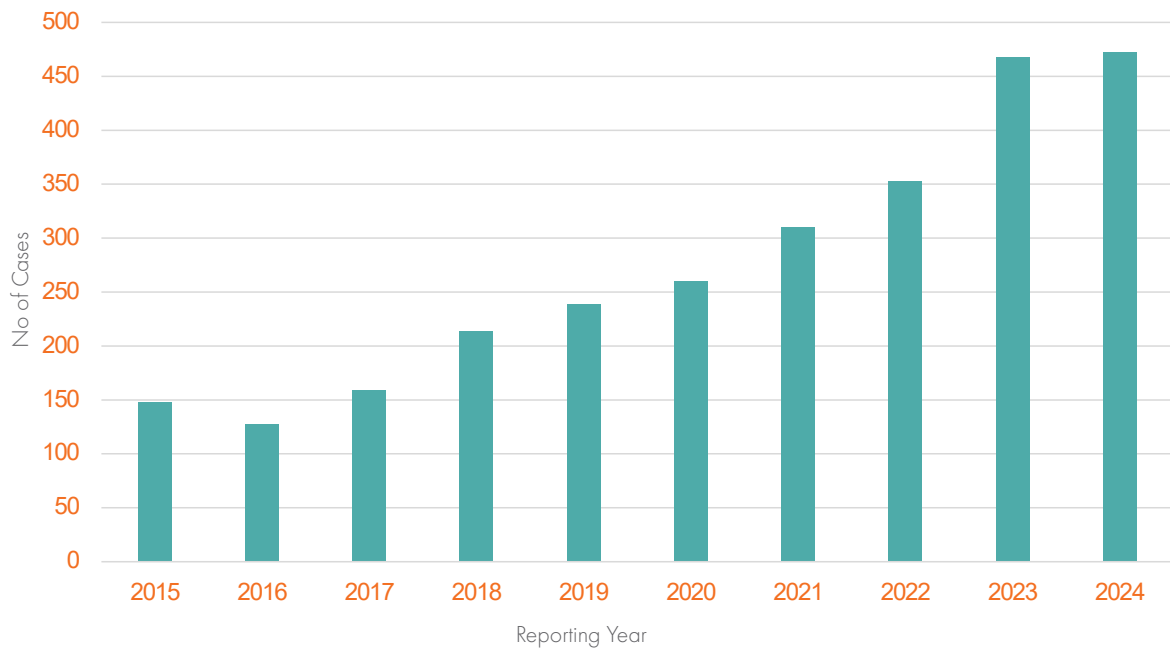
We support people of all ages, and for clients for whom we have age data, the largest proportion is over 65.

Source of Referrals



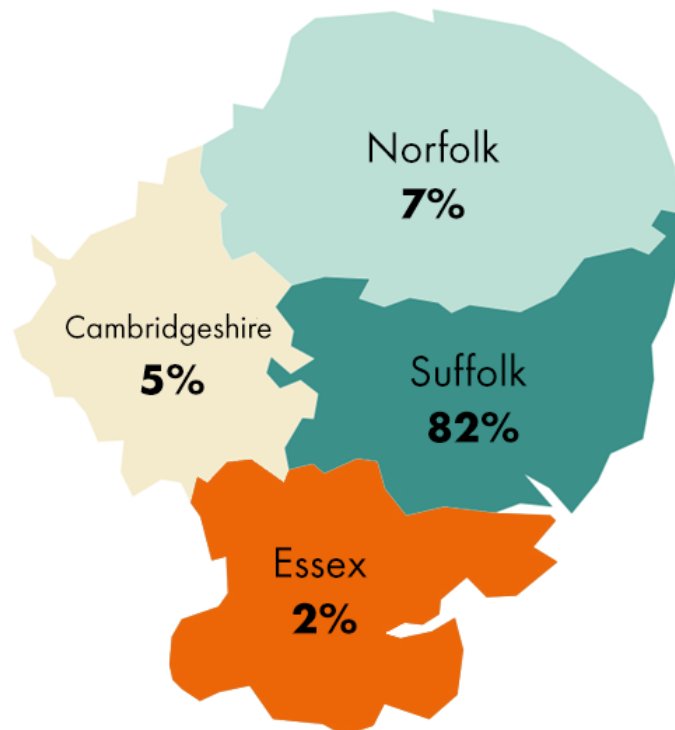
The leading source of cases continues to be self-referral with a broad range of others.
Social Prescribing Linkworker referrals have increased by 43%.

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 .

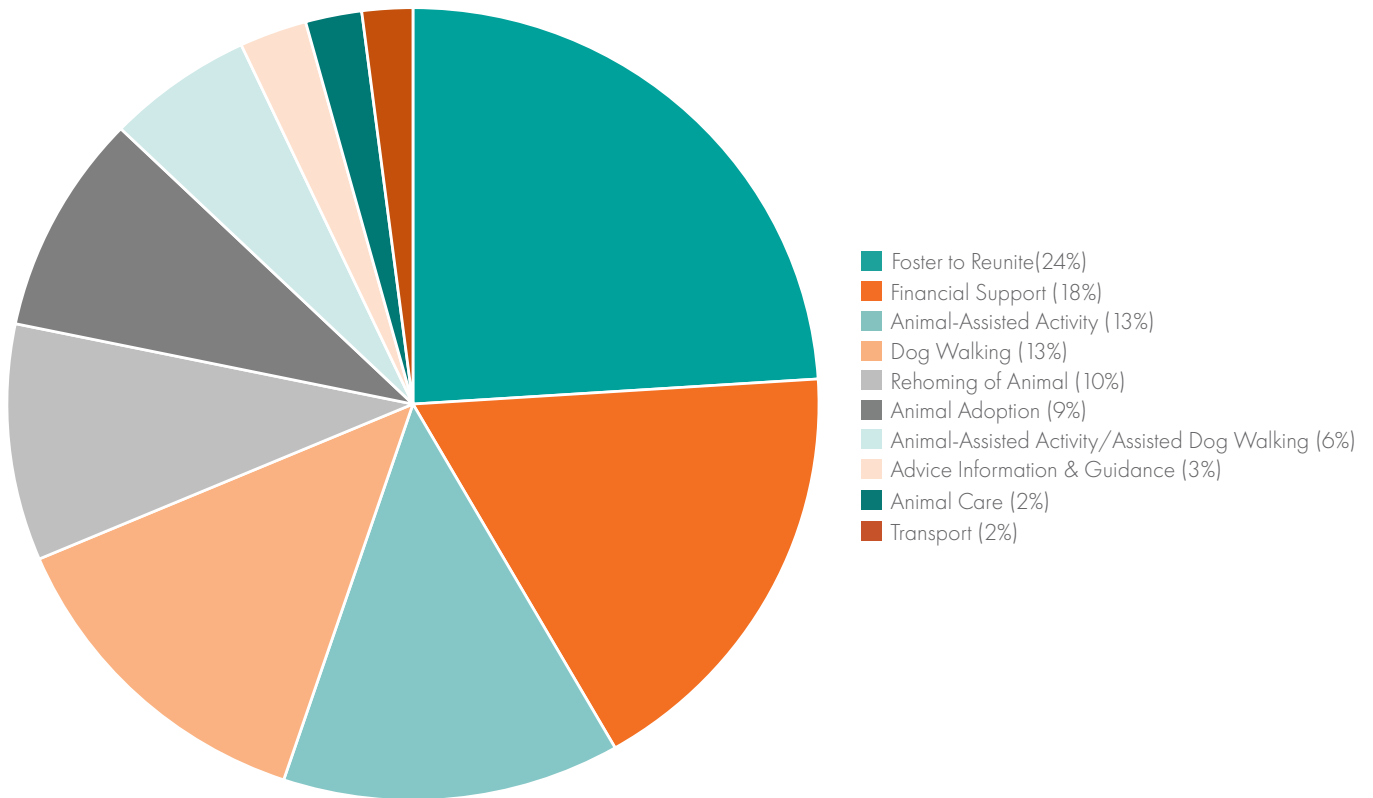
Location of New Cases in East Anglia



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.

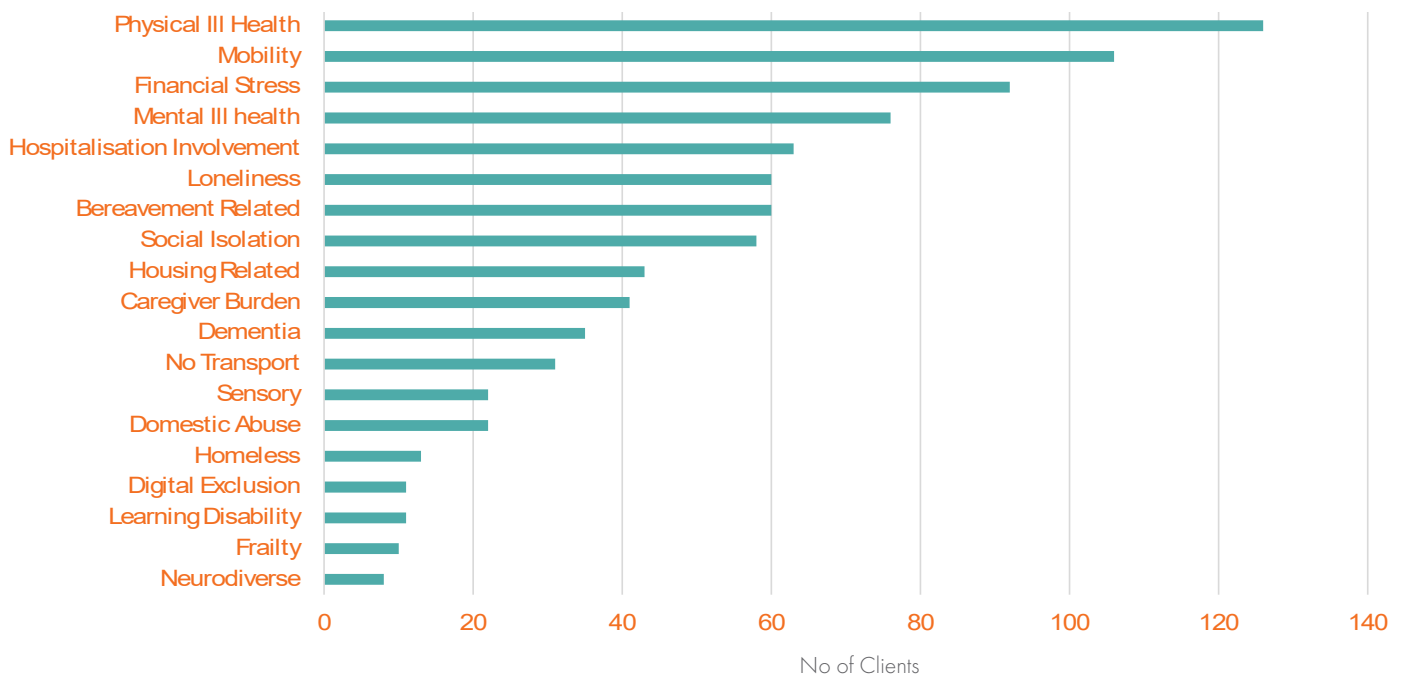
Where the postcode is available, 4% of new cases are outside East Anglia

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."

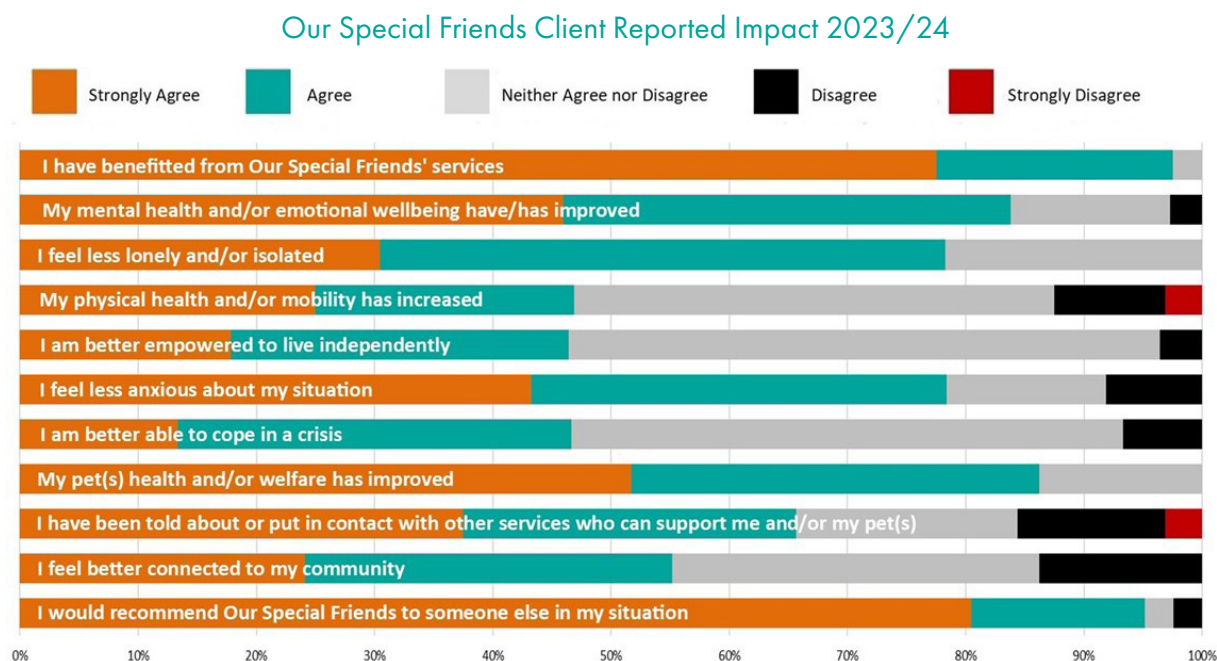


Stock image for illustrative purposes

OUR SPECIAL FRIENDS IMPACT

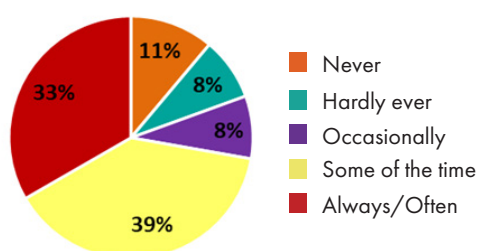
Feedback Form Statistics and Comments 2023/24

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:

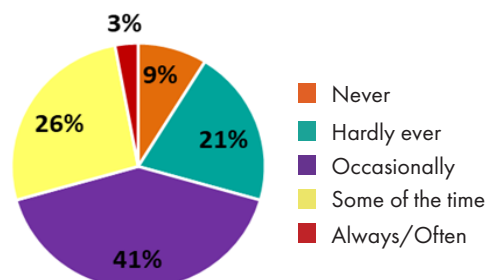


Reducing loneliness and isolation is a key outcome for Our Special Friends. The following pie charts show the responses to questions asking clients to self-assess their feelings of loneliness both before and after receiving help from Our Special Friends. This demonstrates a significant reduction in clients 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.

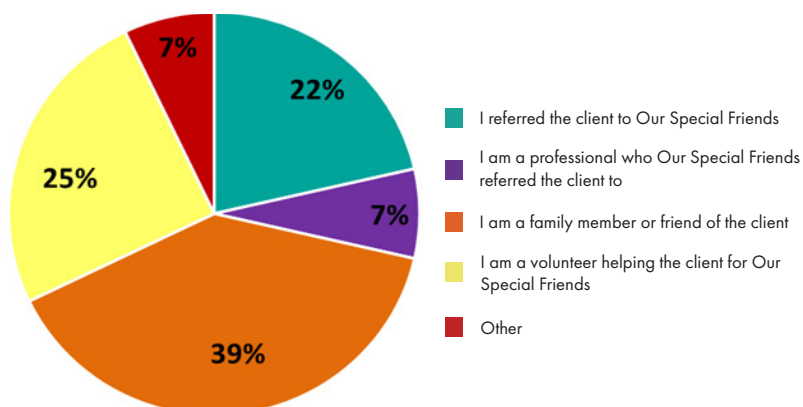
They went above and beyond, checked in on me to show me they were still there to support me while I was at my lowest. Until they contacted me, I felt there was no one who could or would help ... Our Special Friends went out of their way to support me in every way they could ... They gave me light at 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:

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:

Third Party's Relationship with Client %



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.

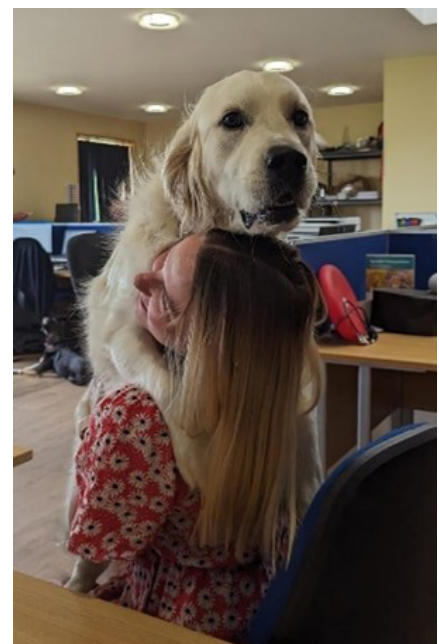
So, I took the leap of faith and decided to apply. I was very excited when I was offered an interview but also super nervous. I hadn't had an interview outside of teaching for over 12 years. However, once I arrived at the office in Newmarket, and was greeted by the waggy tails and wet noses of the office 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.

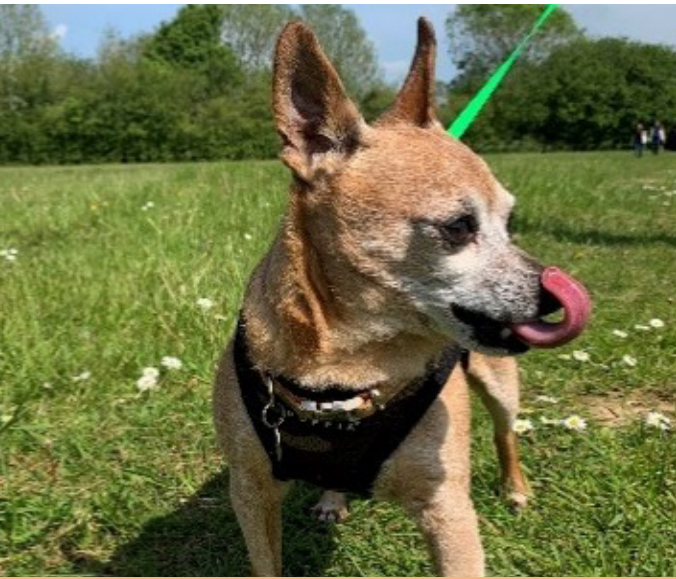
My job as an Animal Companionship Coordinator is a very varied role, where no two days are the same. It involves meeting and assessing clients in the community for our Animal-Assisted Activity programme or for dog walking support. I still sometimes pinch myself that I get paid for having a chat with 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

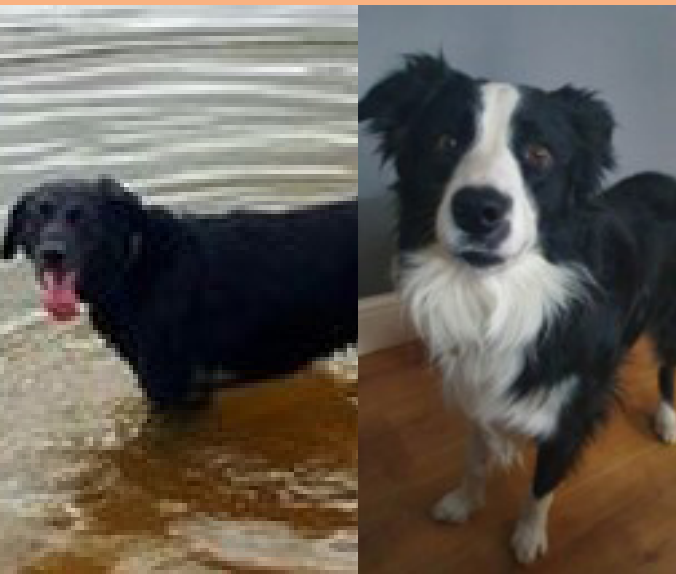


Dog Walking

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"

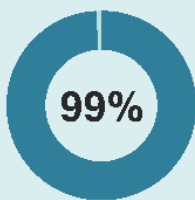


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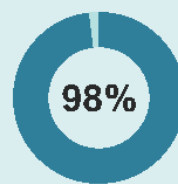
in house training
opportunities



"Makes volunteers
feel valuable"



reported they have
been offered
relevant and useful
training



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 became 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



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.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Financial statements

Year ended 30 April 2024

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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)

Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

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Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' annual report (incorporating the directors' report) *(continued)*

Year ended 30 April 2024

Patron	Lord Fairhaven DL KStJ
Team	Dr B Johnston MRCVS, CEO, <i>Founder and Lead Practitioner</i> G Reid, <i>Animal Companionship Practitioner</i> F Day, <i>Volunteer Support Manager</i> T McManus, <i>Office Coordinator</i> J Connolly, <i>Charity Manager</i>
Supported 'In the office' by volunteers:	R Clarke, <i>Marketing and PR</i> K Mallet, <i>Service Delivery</i> C Singleton, <i>Service Delivery</i> J Webb, <i>Admin Support</i> C Guy, <i>Admin Support</i> S Day, <i>Admin Support</i> C Gordon, <i>Admin Support</i>
Assisted by:	S Bradwell, <i>Finance</i> M Toller, <i>Finance</i> A Hunt, <i>Fundraising</i>
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

Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' annual report (incorporating the directors' report) *(continued)*

Year ended 30 April 2024

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 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.

Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' annual report (incorporating the directors' report) *(continued)*

Year ended 30 April 2024

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.

Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Trustees' annual report (incorporating the directors' report) *(continued)*

Year ended 30 April 2024

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

Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

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

			2024		2023
	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £	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		<u>92,494</u>	<u>134,783</u>	<u>227,277</u>	<u>222,569</u>
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		<u>158,890</u>	<u>117,371</u>	<u>276,261</u>	<u>239,446</u>
Net expenditure and net movement in funds		<u>(66,396)</u>	<u>17,412</u>	<u>(48,984)</u>	<u>(16,877)</u>
Reconciliation of funds					
Total funds brought forward		142,259	43,610	185,869	202,746
Total funds carried forward		<u>75,863</u>	<u>61,022</u>	<u>136,885</u>	<u>185,869</u>

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		<u>139,010</u>		<u>196,135</u>	
		198,574		199,783	
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	16	<u>(61,689)</u>		<u>(13,914)</u>	
Net current assets			136,885		185,869
Total assets less current liabilities			<u>136,885</u>		<u>185,869</u>
Net assets			<u>136,885</u>		<u>185,869</u>
Funds of the charity					
Restricted funds			61,022		43,610
Unrestricted funds			<u>75,863</u>		<u>142,259</u>
Total charity funds	19		<u>136,885</u>		<u>185,869</u>

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 2024, and are signed on behalf of the board by:



R Ferguson
Trustee and treasurer

Company registration number: 08769892

Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Notes to the financial statements

Year ended 30 April 2024

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:

Company no 08769892

Charity no 01156778

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Notes to the financial statements *(continued)*

Year ended 30 April 2024

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 |
|--------------------|---|-------------------|

Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Notes to the financial statements *(continued)*

Year ended 30 April 2024

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	<u>1,847</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>1,847</u>
	<u>31,852</u>	<u>20,500</u>	<u>52,352</u>
	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds 2023 £
Donations			
Donations and gifts	31,448	—	31,448
Gift aid	<u>2,099</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>2,099</u>
	<u>33,547</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>33,547</u>

6. Charitable activities

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds 2024 £
Grants	<u>58,950</u>	<u>114,283</u>	<u>173,233</u>

Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Notes to the financial statements *(continued)*

Year ended 30 April 2024

6. Charitable activities *(continued)*

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds 2023 £
Grants	<u>79,812</u>	<u>108,585</u>	<u>188,397</u>

7. Other trading activities

	Unrestricted Funds £	Total Funds 2024 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Total Funds 2023 £
Fundraising events	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>309</u>	<u>309</u>

8. Investment Income

	Unrestricted Funds £	Total Funds 2024 £	Unrestricted Funds £	Total Funds 2023 £
Interest receivable	<u>1,692</u>	<u>1,692</u>	<u>316</u>	<u>316</u>

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	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>
	<u>10,934</u>	<u>20,000</u>	<u>30,934</u>

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

Company no 08769892
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Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Notes to the financial statements *(continued)*

Year ended 30 April 2024

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
	<u>147,956</u>	<u>97,371</u>	<u>245,327</u>

	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
	<u>102,383</u>	<u>98,152</u>	<u>200,535</u>

11. Independent examination fees

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

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
	<u>172,733</u>	<u>135,648</u>

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).

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Notes to the financial statements *(continued)*

Year ended 30 April 2024

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	<u>3,852</u>
Depreciation	
At 1 May 2023 and 30 April 2024	<u>3,852</u>
Carrying amount	
At 30 April 2024	<u>—</u>
At 30 April 2023	<u>—</u>

15. Debtors

	2024 £	2023 £
Prepayments and accrued income	59,077	3,648
Other debtors	<u>487</u>	<u>—</u>
	<u>59,564</u>	<u>3,648</u>

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	<u>—</u>	<u>2,262</u>
	<u>61,689</u>	<u>13,914</u>

17. Deferred income

	2024 £	2023 £
Amount deferred in year	<u>56,650</u>	<u>—</u>

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).

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Notes to the financial statements *(continued)*

Year ended 30 April 2024

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)	—	—
	<u>43,610</u>	<u>134,783</u>	<u>(117,371)</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>61,022</u>

Unrestricted funds

General funds	<u>142,259</u>	<u>92,494</u>	<u>(158,890)</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>75,863</u>
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Company no 08769892

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Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Notes to the financial statements *(continued)*

Year ended 30 April 2024

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)	—	—
	<u>40,574</u>	<u>108,585</u>	<u>(105,549)</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>43,610</u>

Unrestricted funds

General Funds	<u>162,172</u>	<u>113,984</u>	<u>(133,897)</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>142,259</u>
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Company no 08769892
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Our Special Friends

Company Limited by Guarantee

Notes to the financial statements *(continued)*

Year ended 30 April 2024

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.

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Notes to the financial statements *(continued)*

Year ended 30 April 2024

- 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

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Notes to the financial statements *(continued)*

Year ended 30 April 2024

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.

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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:

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Denzel's	Pet Remedy Ltd
Everyman Cinema	Scrumbles
Glasswells	Vetstream Ltd

And to Trusts and Foundations which, amongst others include:

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



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

