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

CONTENTS

1. Tribute to Graham *4*
2. Chairman's Foreword *5*
3. Our Aims *6*
4. A Happy Ending for Ken and Lacy *7*
5. CEO's Report *8*
6. Case Study - Sally Surr and Murphy *12*
7. Case Study – Christine Matthews and Syri *13*
8. Volunteer Support Manager's Report *14*
9. Volunteer Story – Jane Constable *16*
10. Volunteer Story – Julie Lyman *17*
11. How We Make a Difference *18*
12. The Year Ahead *21*
13. Financial Review *22*
14. Financial Report *23*
15. Governance and Special advisors *32*

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.

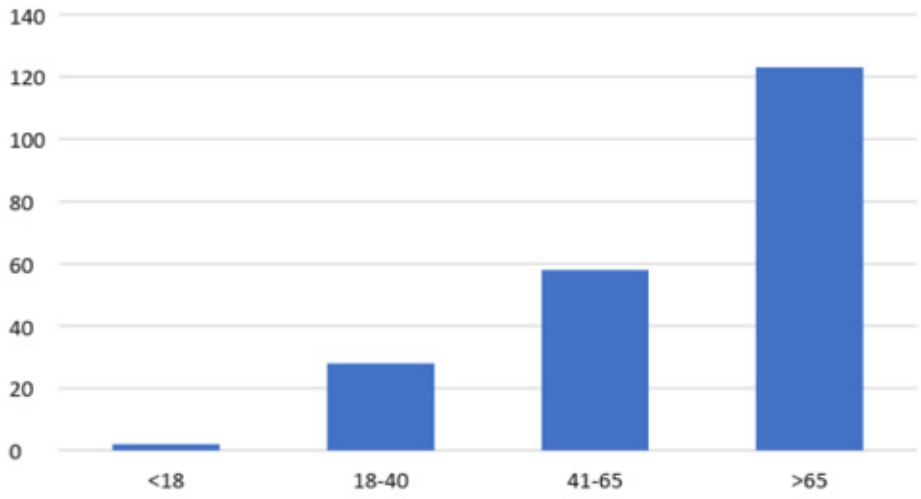
During the year, Our Special Friends became homeless when our former landlord, the Animal Health Trust, sadly went into liquidation. Initially, as we continued to follow government advice to work from home, there was little change to our day to day working, although it has been extremely helpful to be 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.

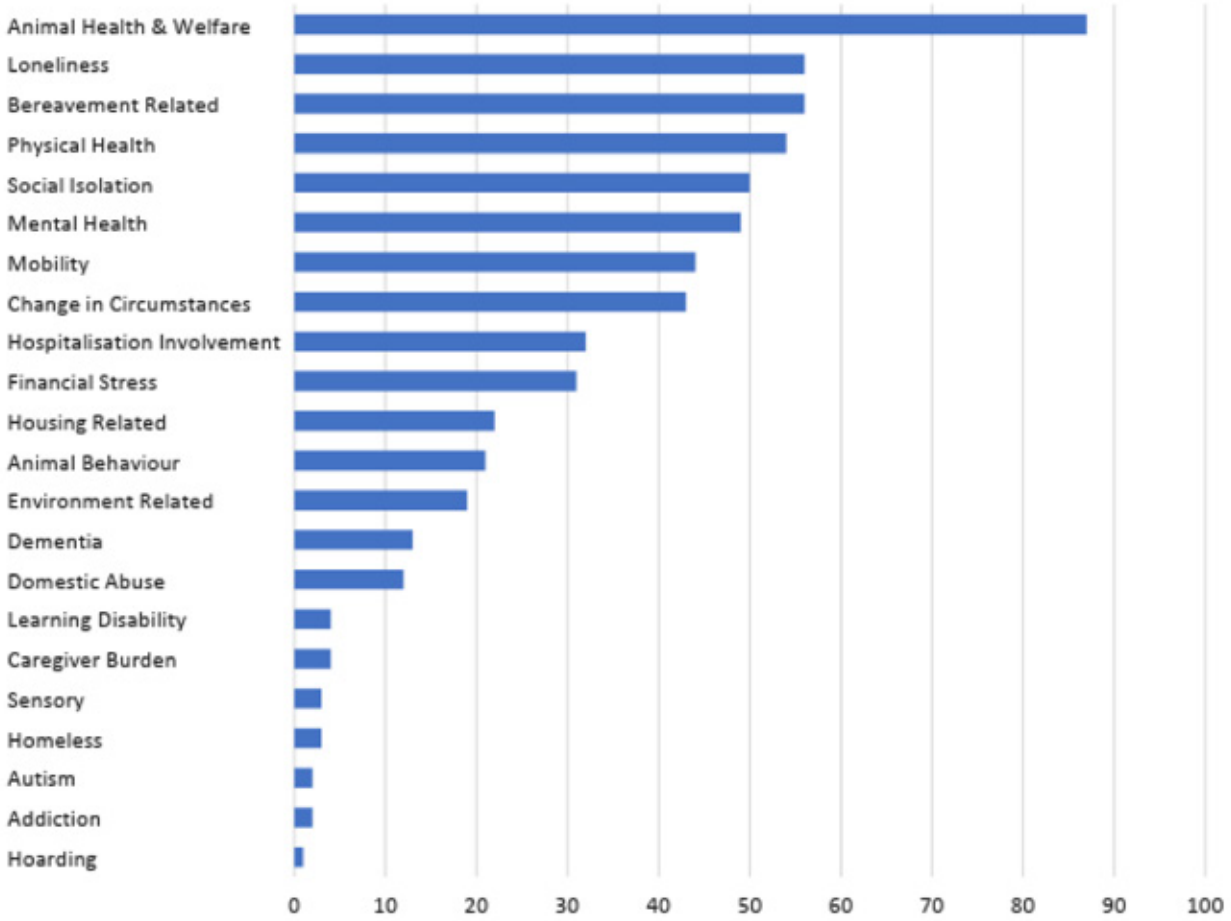
Age Range of People Needing Support



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

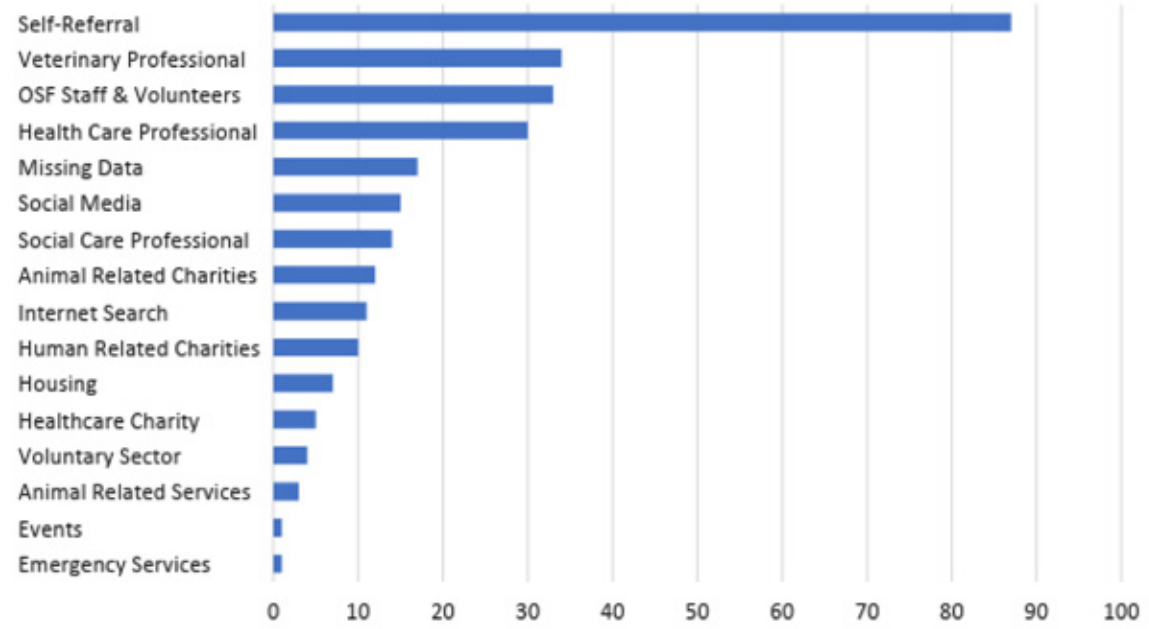
**Only indicated clients for whom we have age data*

Reasons People Need our Support



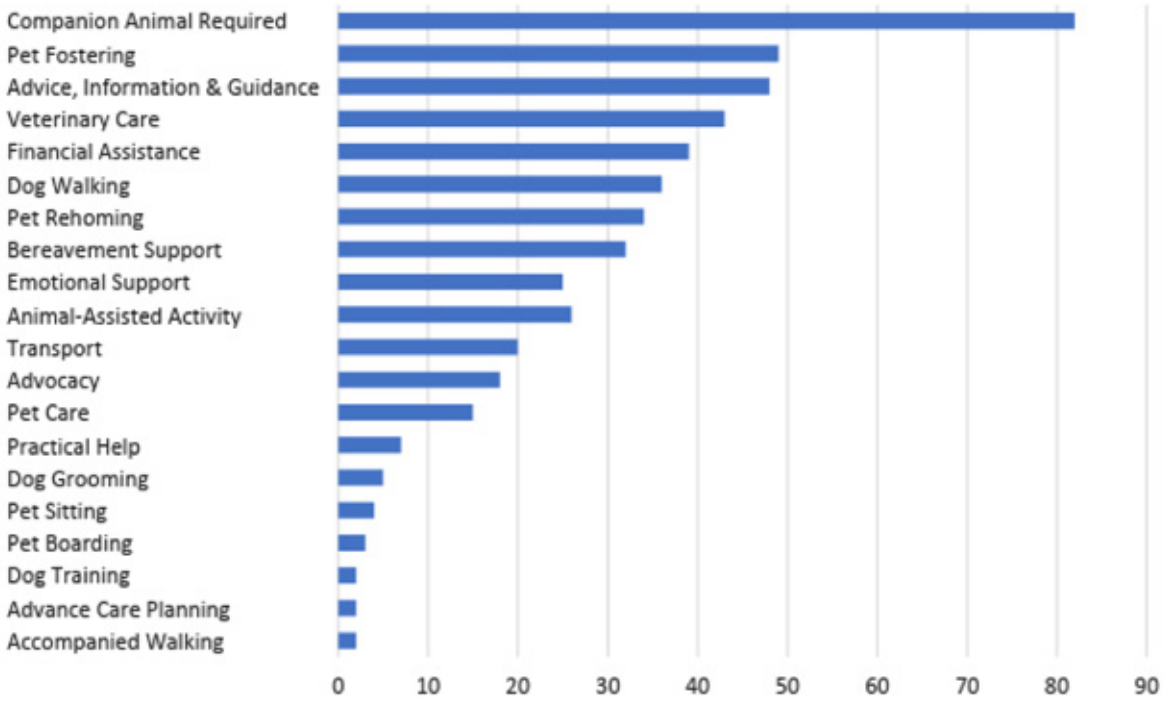
The main reasons that people needed the help of OSF last year related to the health and welfare of their animal companion, loneliness and bereavement. The increase in loneliness during the pandemic was significant. Many of our cases involved multiple reasons for support.

Sources of Referrals



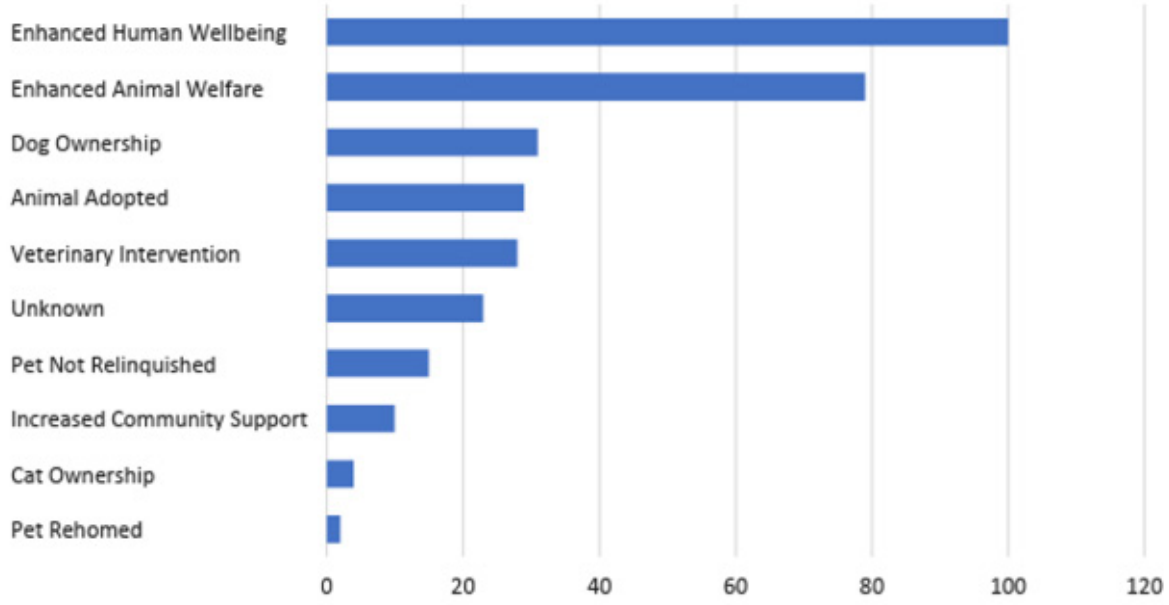
Self-referrals are the principal source of our cases. However, as the reputation of OSF grows, it is encouraging to see our relationship with the veterinary profession and other support agencies develop.

Support Needed

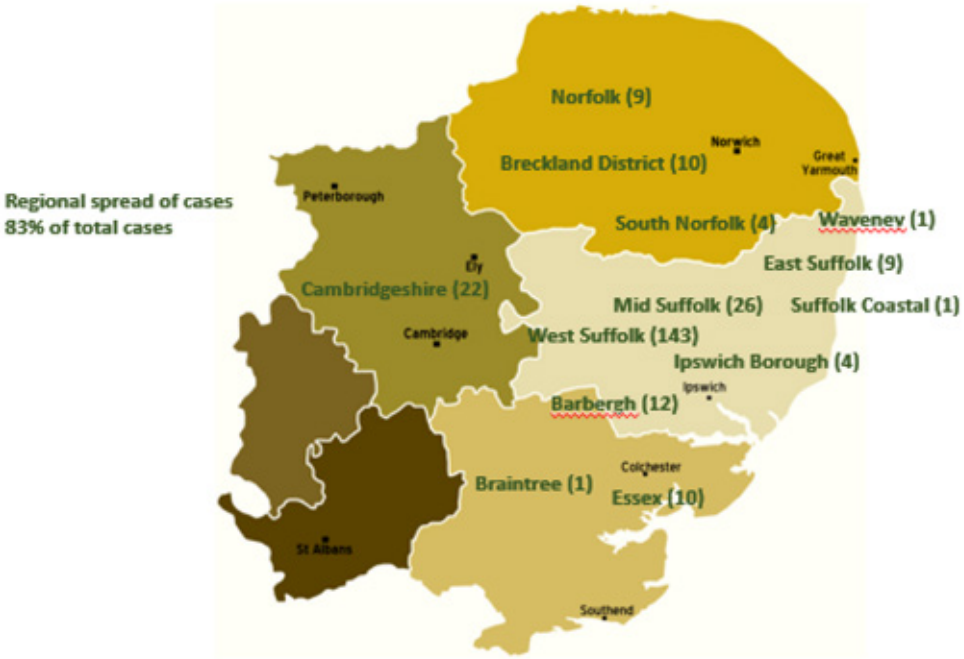


During the pandemic we were restricted in the amount of face to face animal-assisted activity we were able to offer. At the same time requests for support with animal adoption, pet fostering and animal companionship support increased.

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."

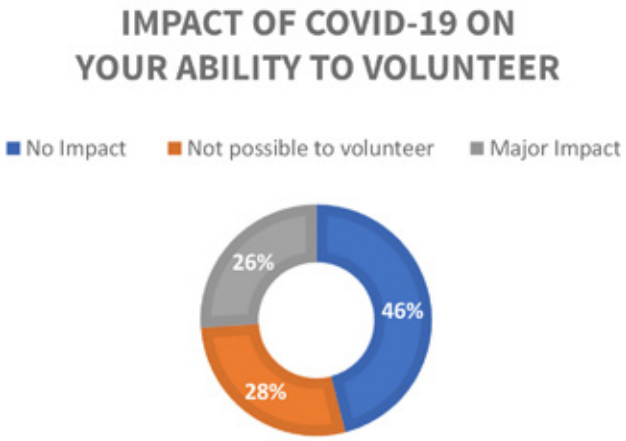
Chris Matthews

VOLUNTEER SUPPORT MANAGER'S REPORT

An overview

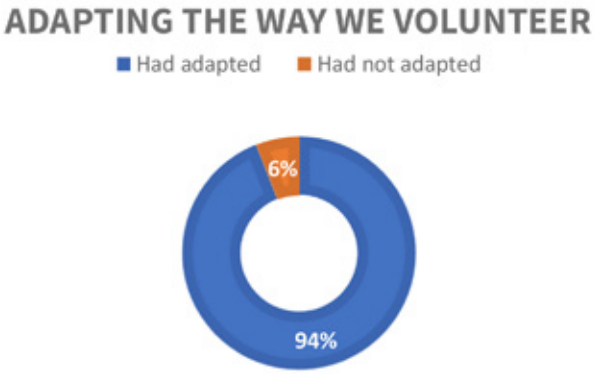
A survey of 29 of our volunteers provided, in February, an overview of their volunteer experience and how it was affected by the pandemic. Hours volunteered dropped by 86% between February and March thus demonstrating the significant impact the pandemic had on our volunteer's ability to support our clients. 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.



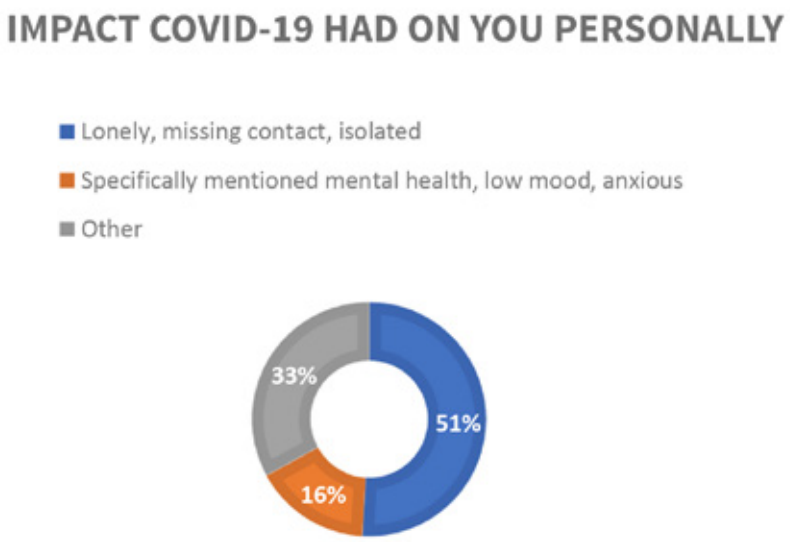
Impact on our volunteers

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

Our Special Friends

Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2021

Contents **Page**

Independent Examiners Report	1
Statement of Financial Activities (incorporating summary income and expenditure account)	2
Balance Sheet	3
Notes	4-7

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

Our Special Friends

Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2021

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.

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***

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

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR DONORS

We would not exist without your generous support

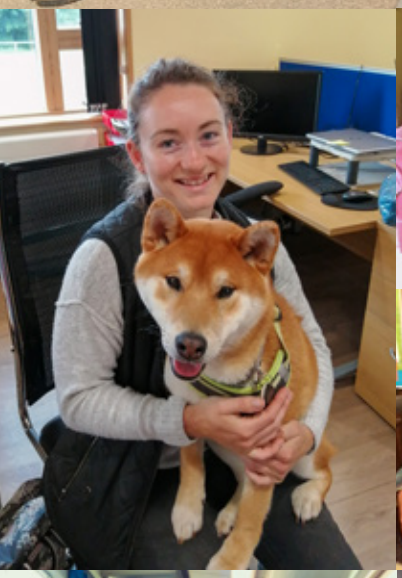
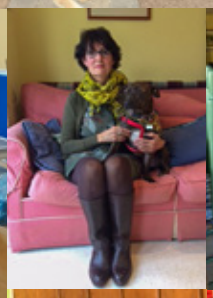
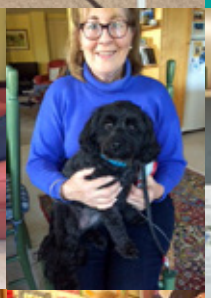
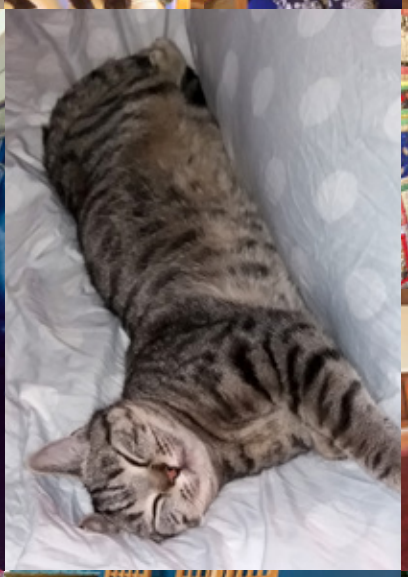
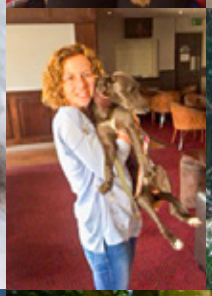
We are very grateful to our corporate sponsors who have donated their time or products which, amongst others include:

Fish4dogs
Caseron
Purple Haze UK Ltd
Royal Canin
Pitpat
Pet Remedy
Pet-ID Microchips
Purina
Co-op

We are particularly grateful to **Ashtons Legal** for their invaluable pro bono legal tenancy advice.

Our special thanks to Max Caine at **Caine Design** for the pro bono design services towards the production of this Annual Report.

© Copyright 2021 *Our Special Friends*

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.