



Promoting, preserving and providing the power of animal companionship

Annual Report 2021 - 2022





*THANK YOU TO
ALL OUR DONORS*

*We would not exist without
your generous support*

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

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Belinda and Rolo

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

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

RIP Rolo

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD 2022

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mark Johnston - Chair of the Trustees



OUR VISION

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

OUR MISSION

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

OUR GOALS

1. To **develop** and **demonstrate** the **role** of an **Animal Companionship Practitioner** (ACP) and the effective application of **Animal Companionship Support Services** (ACSS) to vulnerable people in society as a functioning unit in its current location.
2. To **deliver** and **evidence** outstanding ACSS in our current location
3. To **expand** the adoption and provision of ACSS locally, through outreach, education, training and partnerships with like-minded organisations and agencies and secure budgetary support from them.
4. To **ensure** financial stability.
 - a. To ensure our sustainability as a provider of ACSS in the current locality.
 - b. To enable the expansion of properly resourced animal companionship support services in other locations.

Case Study **Maureen and Tate**



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

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

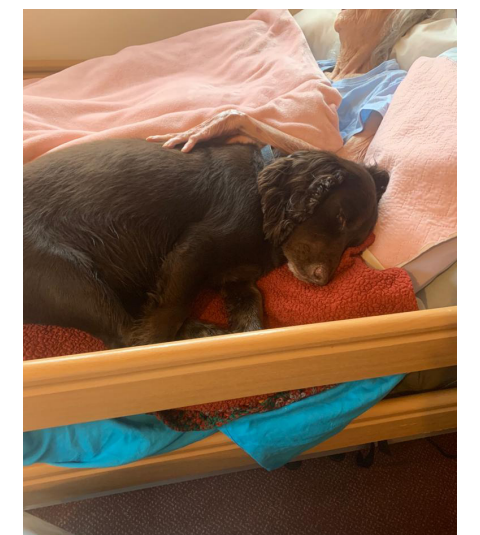
and wanted Maureen to rehome Tate, but her nephew felt rehoming Tate would 'kill' his aunt.

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

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

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

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





From left: Councillor Margaret Marks and Belinda Johnston

CEO'S REPORT

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

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

Not surprisingly, direct requests for financial help also increased throughout the year and these were

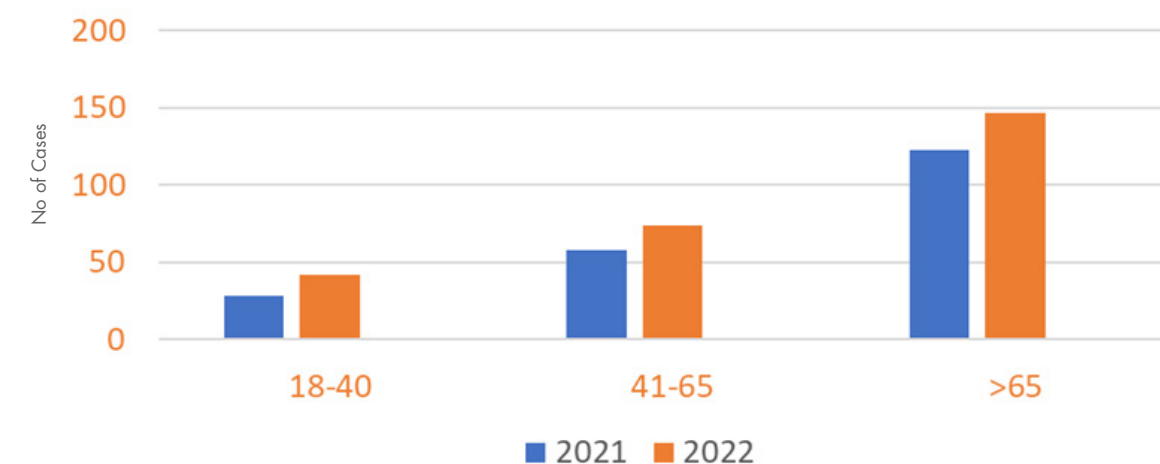
overwhelming our capacity so we encouraged the support agencies we work with to contact us on their client's behalf, rather than signposting them directly to us. This effectively added a layer of triage which has facilitated and increased our collaboration and made our case management process easier to navigate.

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

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

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

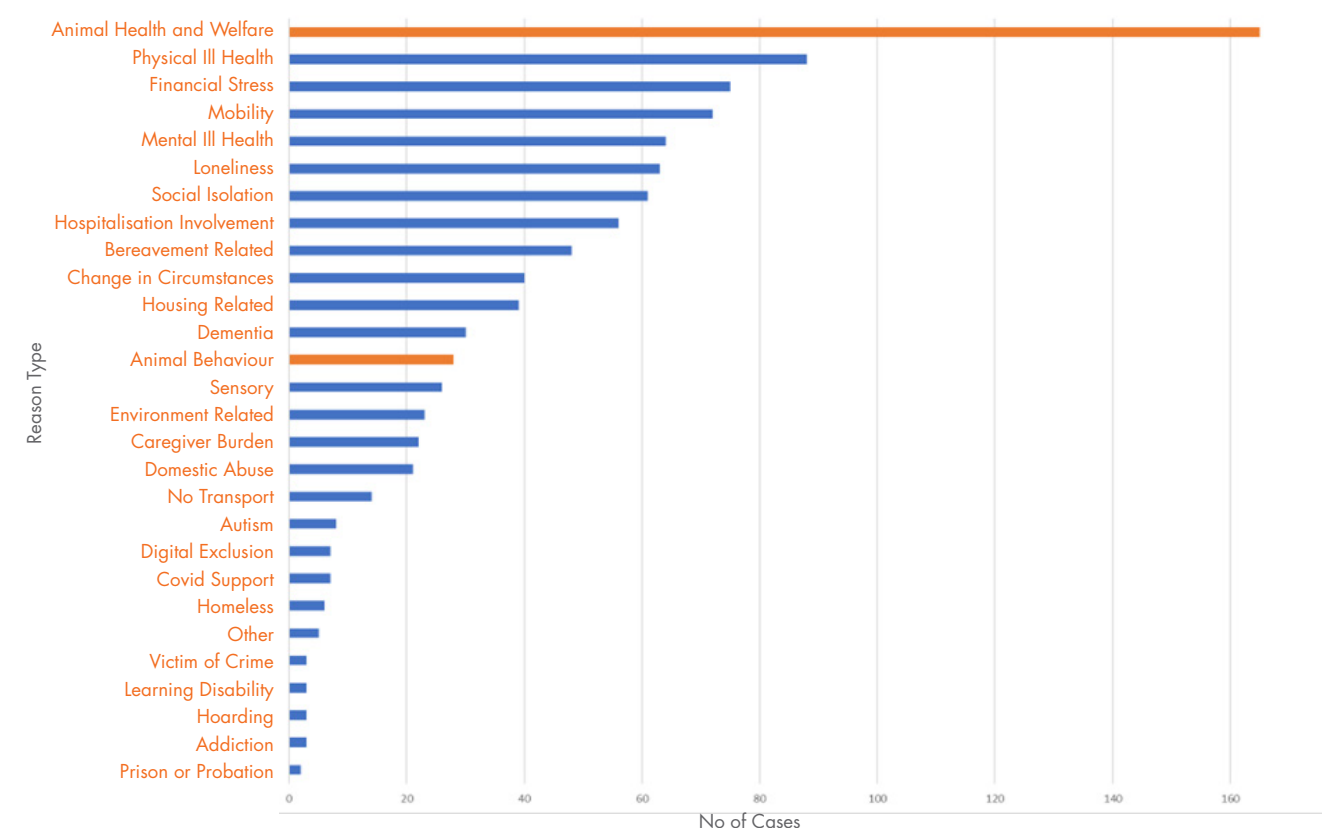
Age Range of People Needing Our Support*



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

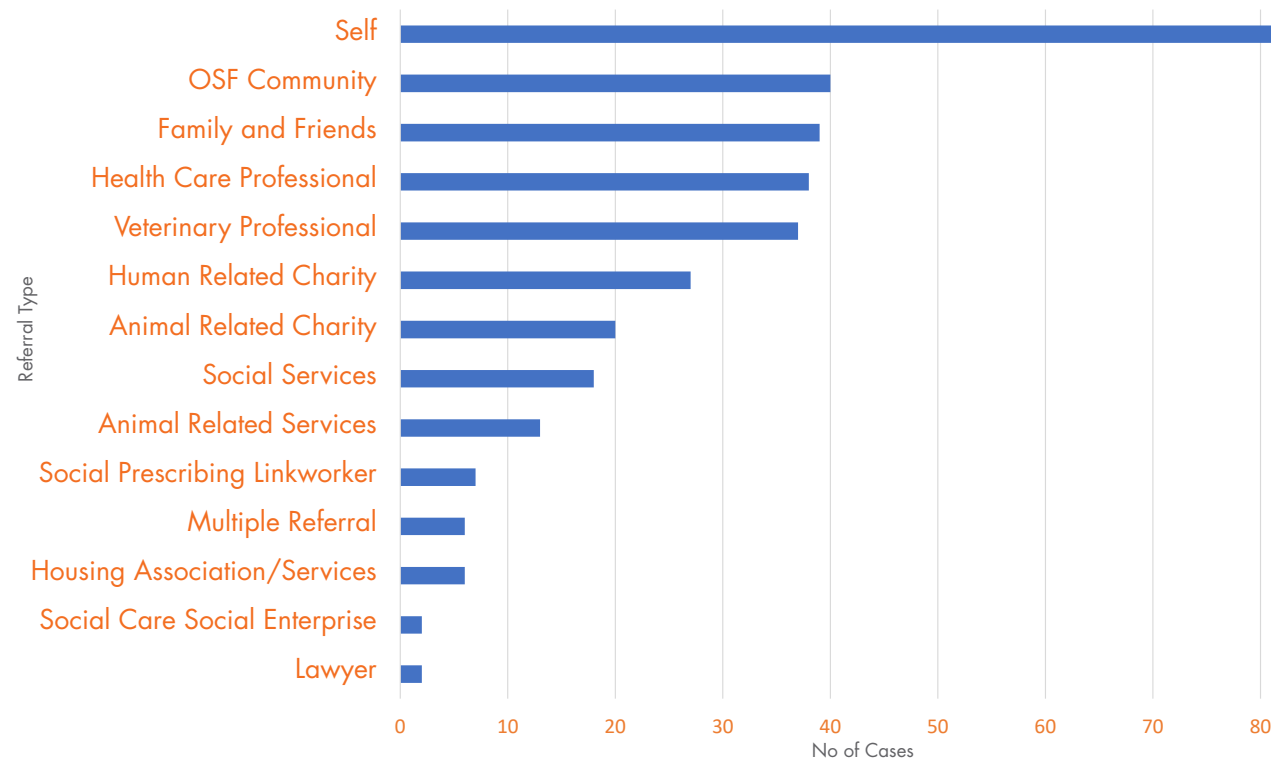
* Only includes clients for whom we have age data

Reasons People Need Our Support



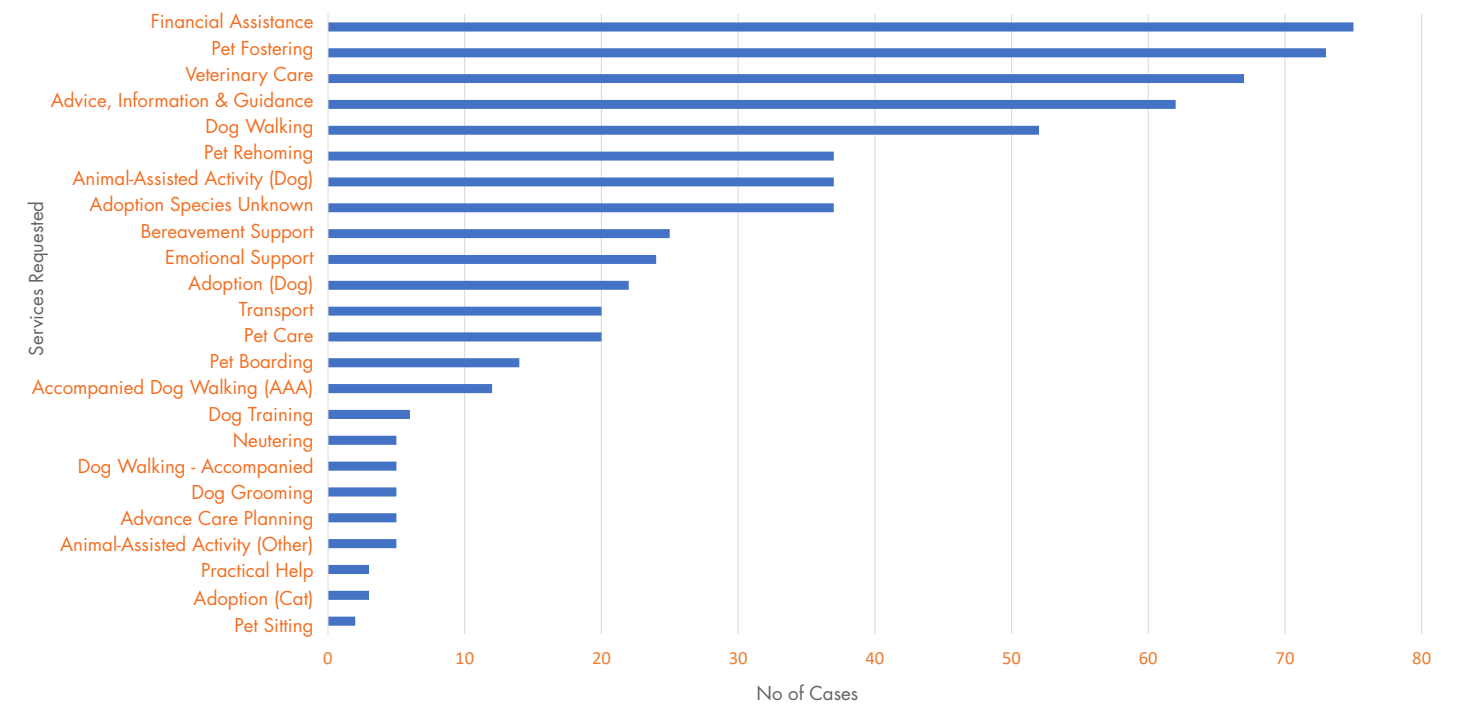
The main reasons that people needed the help of OSF last year related to the health and welfare of their animal companion, their own physical ill health and financial worries. Many of the cases we supported involved multiple characteristics from the chart above.

Sources of Referrals



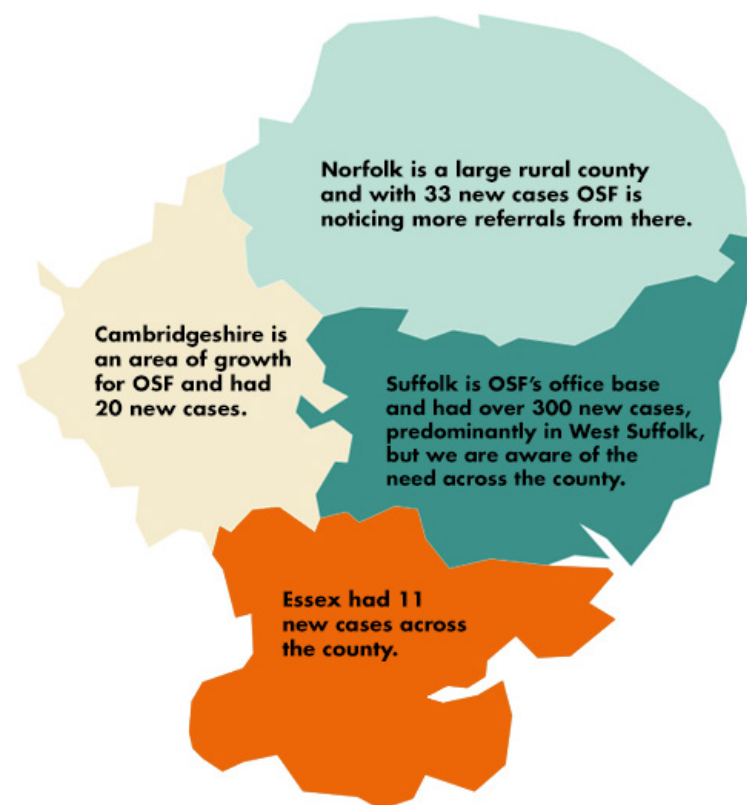
Self-referrals are the principal source of our cases but we have also seen a significant rise in all the secondary referral routes this year. Notably, we have seen an increase of over 140% in our referrals from human related and animal related charities which we believe is due to our engagement and networking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

Services Requested

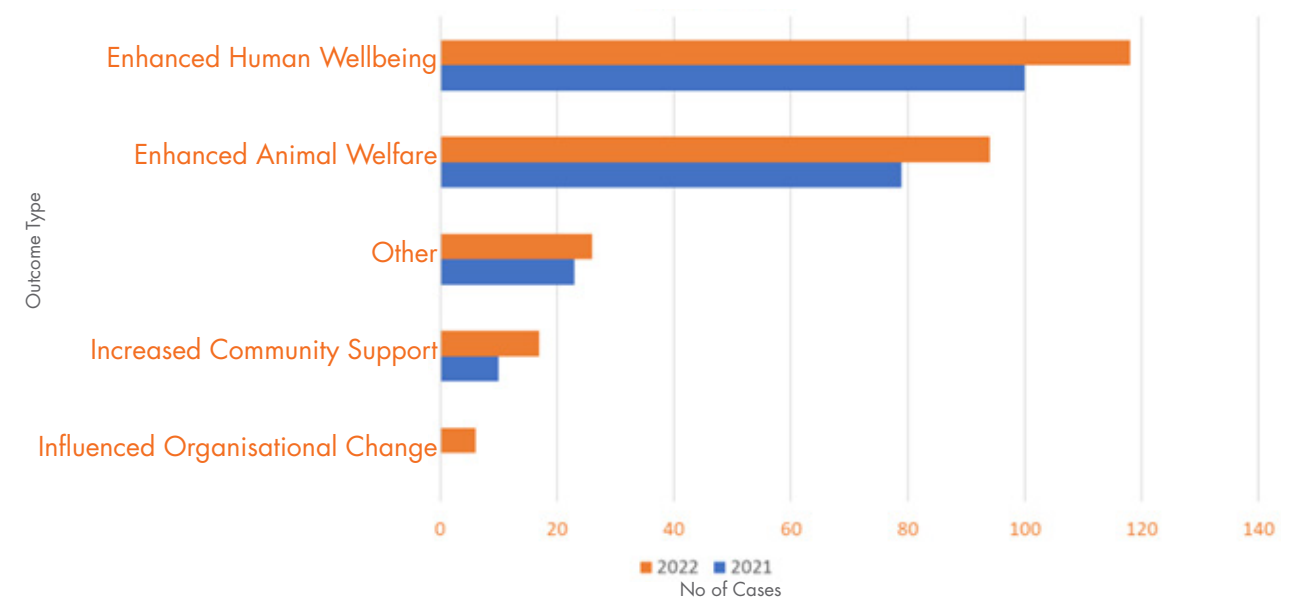


We had a broad range of our services requested again this year with financial assistance, pet fostering, veterinary care, advice and support making up the majority of the requests. We are also very proud of our work around rehoming, AAA, fostering and adoption where the aim is to respect the human animal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

Where We Work - East Anglia



Outcomes



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

Case Study Andrea and Her Cats*

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

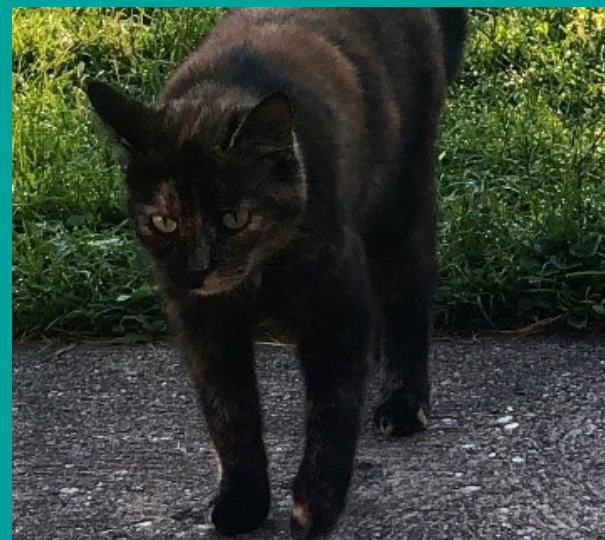
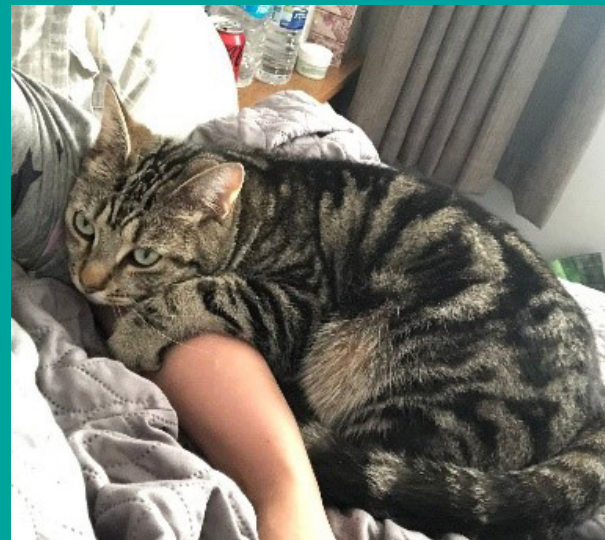
OSF immediately worked to find a solution for Andrea and her beloved cats. Sadly, there were no fostering options available over the Christmas period. Finding a cattery that would take them was also a challenge because the cats were not up to date with their vaccinations. Fortunately, OSF identified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

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

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

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

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



Andrea's cats settled in quickly at their foster home

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

Case Study The Atkins Family and Cody



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

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

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



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



VOLUNTEER SUPPORT MANAGER'S REPORT



Frances Roach

An overview

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

Supporting our volunteers

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

Recruitment and resignations

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

Challenges and plans for the year ahead

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

Our Special Friends Volunteer Survey



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



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



90%

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



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

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

QUOTES FROM OUR VOLUNTEERS

I benefit from the social interaction with people I meet.

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

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

Volunteering has given me a sense of achievement.

I feel valued by the owners and their family members.

Feeling part of a team.

Its been hugely rewarding!

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

Volunteers are well supported and offered regular training sessions.

VOLUNTEER STORY – Ann and Kasha

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



Ann and Kasha taking a rest during a walk

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

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

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

But all of a sudden, things changed very quickly for both Ann and Kasha. After a serious car crash, instead of visiting her client, it was Ann who was, in her words, “shuffling around with a walking frame due to fractures, and needing my husband Brian’s help with showering and dressing. Meals from the same caterers my client uses were ordered as we could not cope with buying and cooking food.” Ann and Brian were struggling with their situation: overwhelmed by the trauma, regular liaison with officials and the insurance company, having to cancel a holiday and other engagements, and even by the constant flow of kind phone calls, cards and flower deliveries. Brian had been fatigued since catching Covid three months previously, and with Ann

needing so much support, walking Kasha had now become an additional chore rather than a pleasure. Due to the stressful situation, Ann and Brian sometimes snapped at Kasha, who couldn’t understand why they weren’t paying her the usual amount of attention.

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

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



VOLUNTEER STORY – Sophie and Fenton

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Sophie Ignarski & Fenton

HOW WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Agency

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

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

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

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

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

From a Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker

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

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

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

From an Addiction Support Worker

AAA leading to adoption

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

From a Community Psychiatric Nurse

Foster care and boarding to reunite, urgent mental health admission

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

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

Client

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Volunteer

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

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

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

From a Volunteer and their dog Bailey

Visiting in the community

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



Maureen enjoying volunteer Bee and Wiggos' visit

THE YEAR AHEAD

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

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

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

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

As a charity that relies on voluntary funding we know that being able to demonstrate the impact of our support continues to be a high priority and we will develop

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

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

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

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

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





Our Special Friends

Financial Statements for the year ended 30 April 2022

FINANCIAL REVIEW

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

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

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

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

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

Our Special Friends

Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2022

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Our Special Friends

Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2022

Report to the trustees of Our Special Friends

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

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

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

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

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

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

Marguerite EM Nice

Marguerite EM Nice ACA ATA
Chartered Accountant, Chartered Tax Advisor

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

18 July 2022

Our Special Friends

Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2022

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

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

Our Special Friends

Financial statements for the year

Balance sheet

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

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

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

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

Approved by the Board and signed on its behalf by


Robert Ferguson
Director

Date 30 June 2022

Our Special Friends

Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2022

Notes to the accounts

1 Basis of preparation

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

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

2 Accounting policies

Recognition of income

Income is included in the Statement of Financial Activities when:

- the charity becomes entitled to the resources;
- it is more likely than not that the trustees will receive the resources;
- the monetary value can be measured with sufficient reliability.

Offsetting

There has been no offsetting of assets and liabilities, or income and expenses, unless required or permitted by the FRS 102 SORP or FRS 102.

Grants and donations

Grants and donations are only included in the Statement of Financial Activities when the general income recognition criteria are met.

Legacies

Legacies are included in the Statement of Financial Activities when receipt is probable, that is, when there has been grant of probate, the executors have established that there are sufficient assets in the estate and any conditions attached to the legacy are either within the control of the charity or have been met.

Volunteer help

The value of any voluntary help received is not included in the accounts but is described in the trustees' annual report.

Liability recognition

Liabilities are recognised where it is more likely than not that there is a legal or constructive obligation committing the charity to pay out resources and the amount of the obligation can be measured with reasonable certainty.

Governance and support costs

Support costs have been allocated between governance costs and other support. Governance costs comprise all costs involving public accountability of the charity and its compliance with regulation and good practice.

Tangible fixed assets for use by charity

These are capitalised if they can be used for more than one year, and cost at least £250. They are valued at cost and depreciated over 3 years.

Our Special Friends

Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2022

Notes to the accounts

3 Analysis of income

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

4 Analysis of expenditure

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

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

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

Our Special Friends

Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2022

Notes to the accounts

5 Staff costs

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

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

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

6 Debtors and prepayments

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

7 Creditors and accruals

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

Our Special Friends

Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2022

Notes to the accounts

8 Restricted funds

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

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

GOVERNANCE AND SPECIAL ADVISORS

Patron

Lord Fairhaven DL KStJ

Board of Trustees

Robert Ferguson, Treasurer

Mark Johnston, Chair

Elizabeth Ormerod

Carolyn Bradburne

David Wright

Jill Gurney

Team

Belinda Johnston, CEO and Founder

Susan Bradwell, Financial Support

Mark Toller, Financial Director

Sally Bycroft, Marketing and PR

Anna Hunt, Fundraising

Gemma Reid, Animal Companionship Practitioner

Frances Roach, Volunteer Support Manager

Linda Sadler, Animal Welfare Support

Bil Thorn, Office Administrator

Supported 'in the office' by volunteers:

Rebecca Clarke, Marketing and PR

Karen Mallett, Christine Singleton, Service Delivery

Jan Webb, Eva Shipp, Catherine Guy, Sophy Day, Volunteer admin

Voluntary Advisers

Jeremy Bradburne

Deidre Carson BVSc(Syd) MRCVS

Deborah Rook

Nicki Glen, NGM

Helen Crawford

Lisa Dickson, Caseron

John Grossart

Janet Littlewood MA PhD BVSc(Hons) DVR DVD MRCVS,

Veterinary Dermatology Referrals

Christopher Mayer, Consultant Psychiatrist

Philippa Morphew FCIPD

Alan Reynolds

Accountant

Marguerite Nice

The Green Farmhouse

Barrow

Bury St Edmunds

Suffolk

IP29 5AA

Bankers

Barclays Bank plc

20/21 Cornhill

Bury St Edmunds

Suffolk

IP33 1DY

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We would not exist without your generous support.

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Pets at Home

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



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

