Our Special Friends

Promoting, preserving and providing the power of animal companionship

Annual Report 2022 - 2023

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR DONORS AND VOLUNTEERS

We would not exist without your generous support

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

CONTENTS

Thank you to our Fundrasiers	4
Chairman's Foreword	5
Our Vision, Mission, and Goals	6
Case Study: Gwyneth, Jenny and Bonnie	7
CEO's Report	8
Case Data	9
Case Study: Joyce's Journey with Our Special Friends	12
Volunteer Manager Report	14
Volunteer Story - Tracey and Adi Nunn	16
Impact Feedback	18
Case Study: Tony and Digger	23
The Year Ahead	25
Financial Review	26
Governance and Special Advisors	36

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

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD 2023

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mark Johnston - Chair of the Trustees

OUR VISION

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

OUR MISSION

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

OUR GOALS

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

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

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

4. To ensure financial stability.

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

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

Case Study Gwyneth, Jenny and Bonnie

Gwyneth and Bonnie enjoying each other's company

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some of the team at Suffolk Dog Day

CEO'S REPORT

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

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

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

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

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

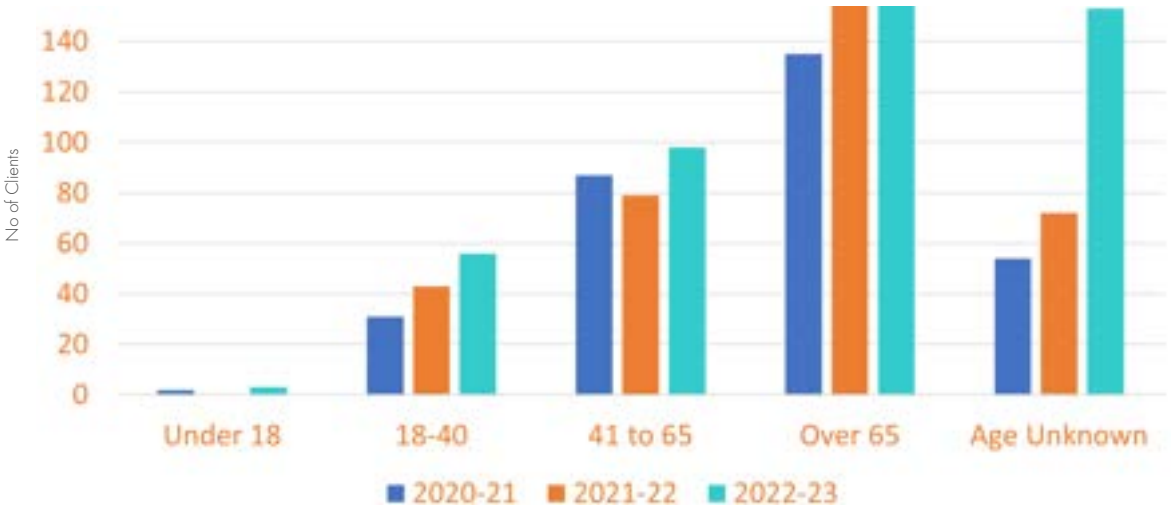
Seamus joined us in a new role of Charity Manager to review organisational procedures and compliance and implement new systems to improve administration and efficiency. This has enabled me to continue to lead and focus on the Animal Companionship Practitioner (ACP) role. Alongside the service delivery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

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

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

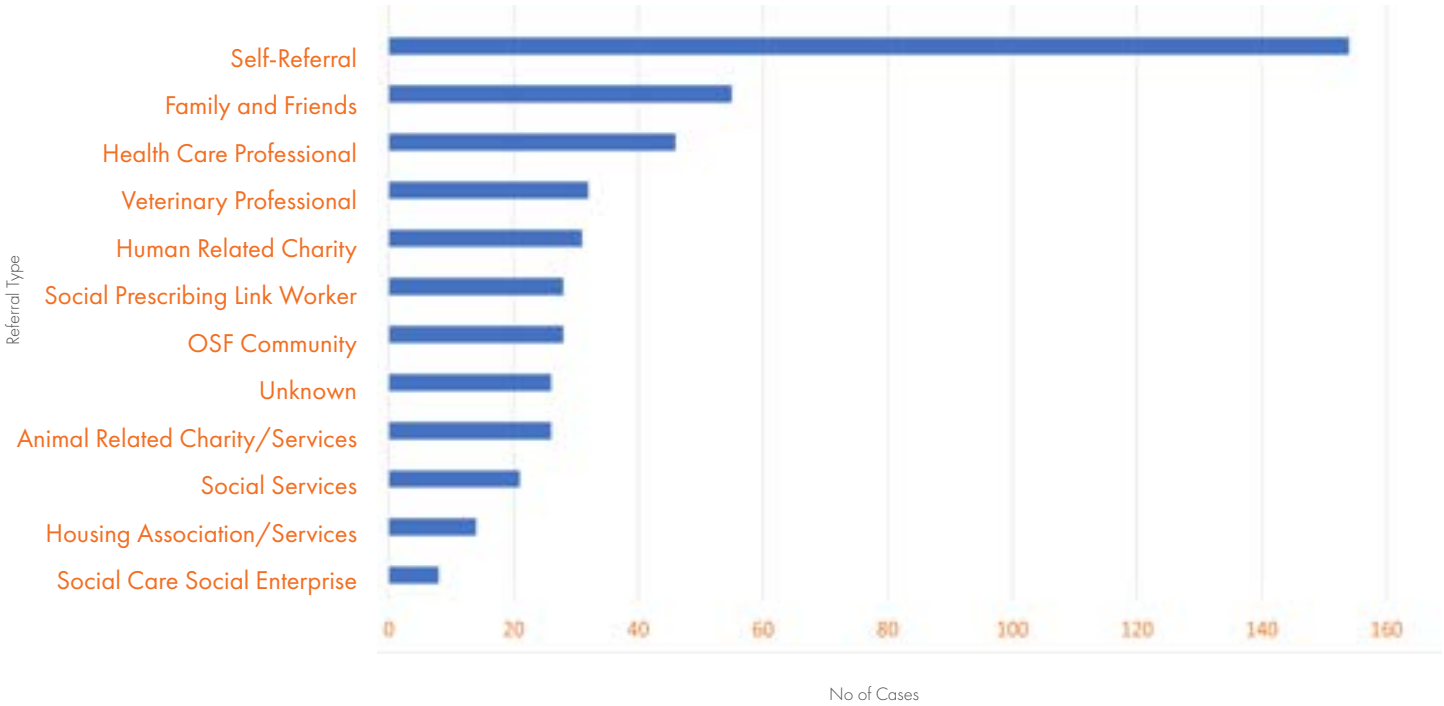
With crisis in all sectors, it is important to help people to keep pets with them wherever possible especially as rehoming centres are overrun, with no capacity in the system. It has never been more important to help to keep people and their beloved pets together and it is why we 'do what we do', and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

Age Range of Referred Clients for New Cases



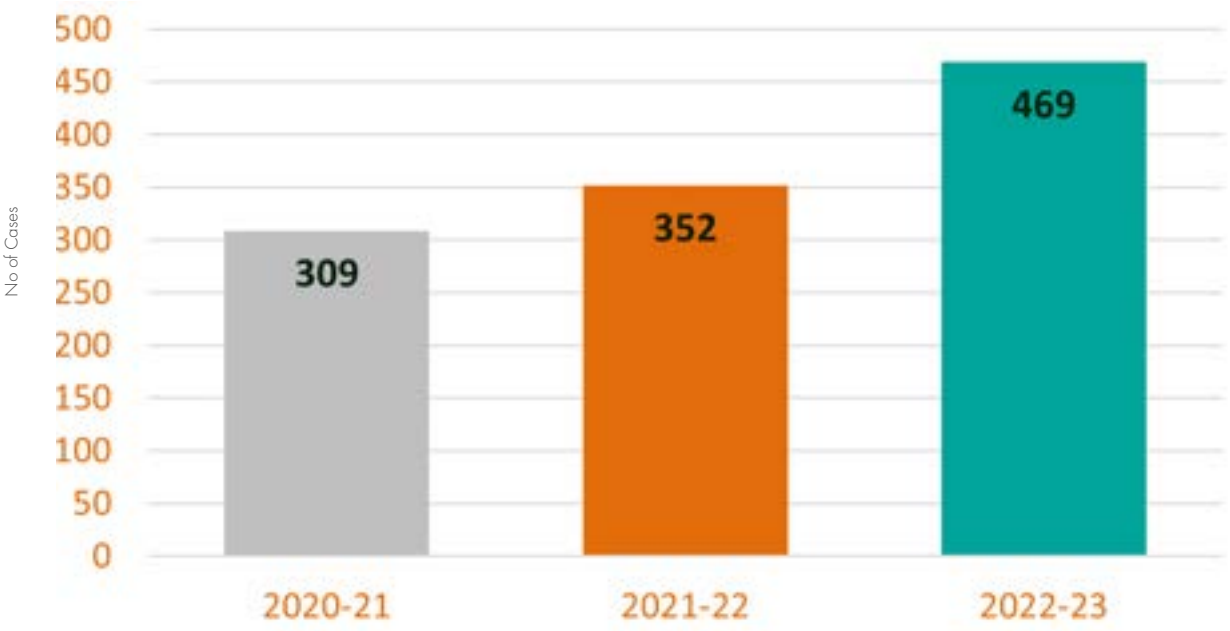
We support people of any age and a large proportion are over 65; with an increase in all demographics each year. It is not possible to collate age-related data on all clients due to the variety of circumstances and urgency of many cases.

Sources of Referrals



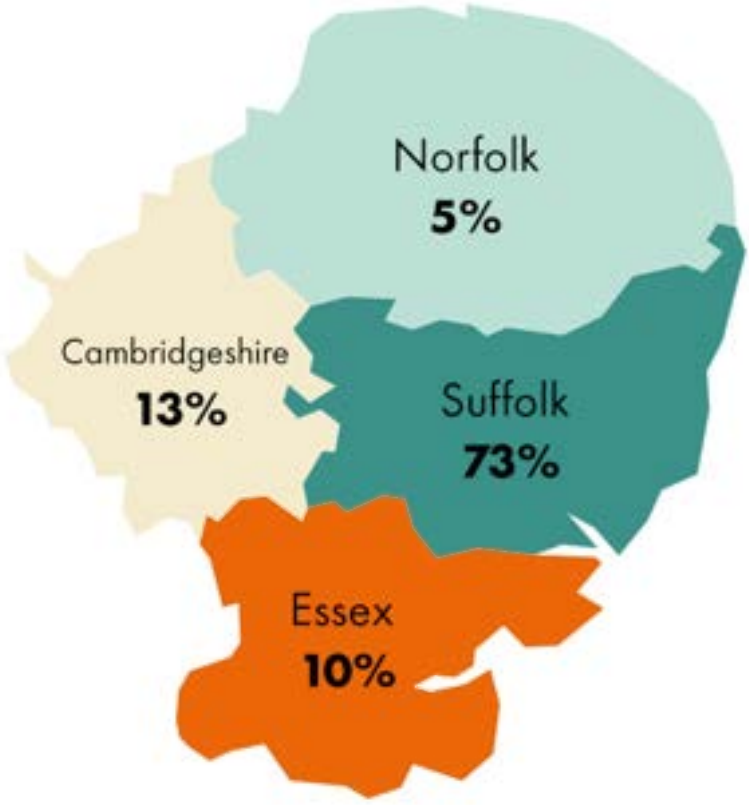
The single leading source of cases continues to be self-referral with a broad range of others. We continue to see a rise in secondary referrals, with a fourfold increase by Social Prescribing Link Workers compared to last year.

Growth in Number of New Cases



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

Location of New Cases in East Anglia



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

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

Case Study Joyce's Journey with Our Special Friends

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

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

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

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

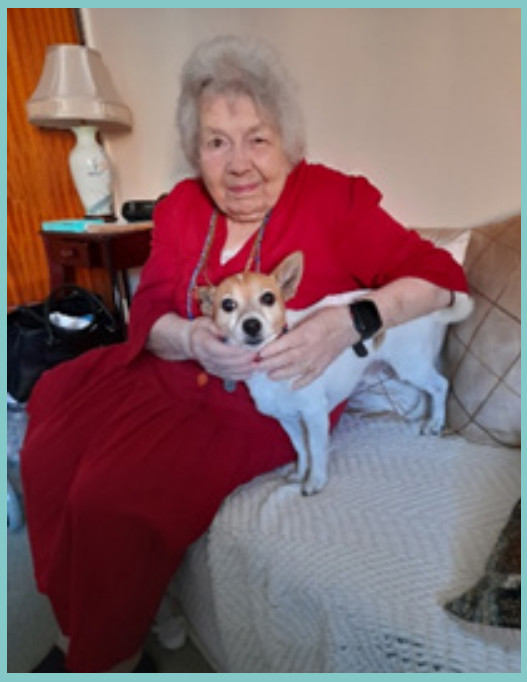
While Joyce decided whether she wanted another permanent canine companion, OSF arranged for her to receive weekly visits from a volunteer and their dog through our Animal-Assisted Activity (AAA) programme. Christina had previously adopted Griffle, a gorgeous, friendly dog through OSF and was matched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

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

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

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

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



Joyce with Archie

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

VOLUNTEER MANAGER REPORT

Frances Day, Volunteer Manager

Recruitment and Challenges

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

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

Survey

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

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

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

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

The year ahead

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

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

Our Volunteers

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

12,480
hours volunteered

1,872
AAA Visits

21
new volunteers

"Our clients feel someone cares about them"

"Always supportive with good communication"

2, 288
Dog Walks

11
in house training opportunities

"We love being part of OSF"

98% of volunteers find volunteering with Our Special Friends rewarding

96% of volunteers feel well supported in their volunteer role

Promoting, preserving and providing the power of animal companionship

VOLUNTEER STORY – Tracey and Adi Nunn

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

Tracey tells us about her experience volunteering for OSF.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

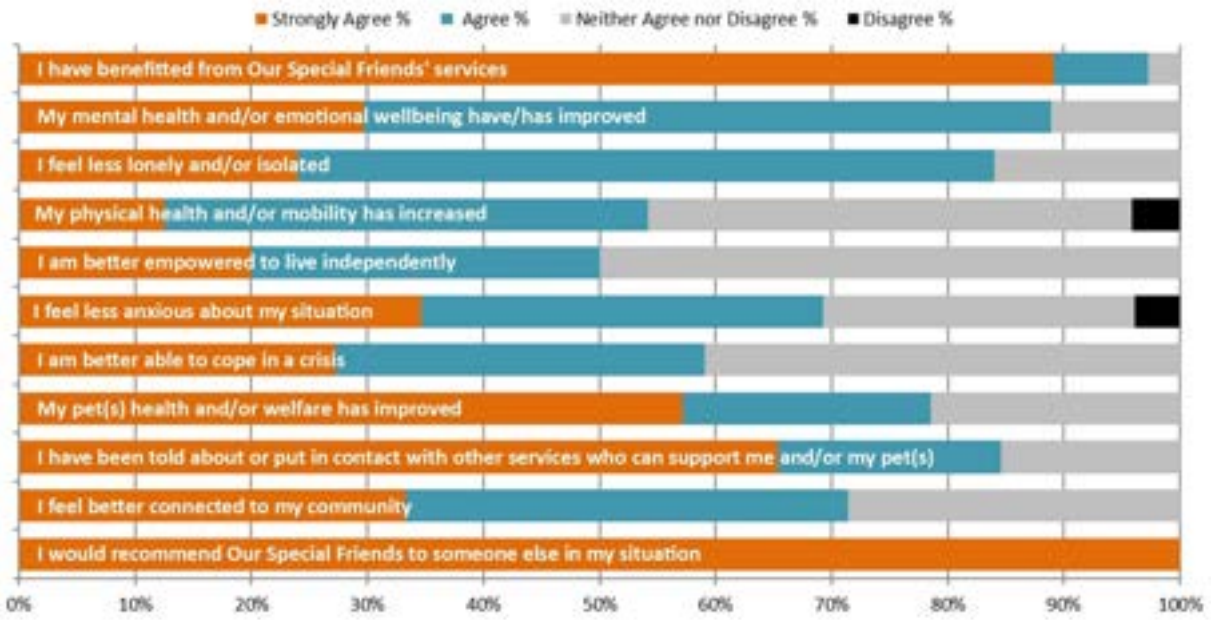
Image opposite: Tracey and Adi

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

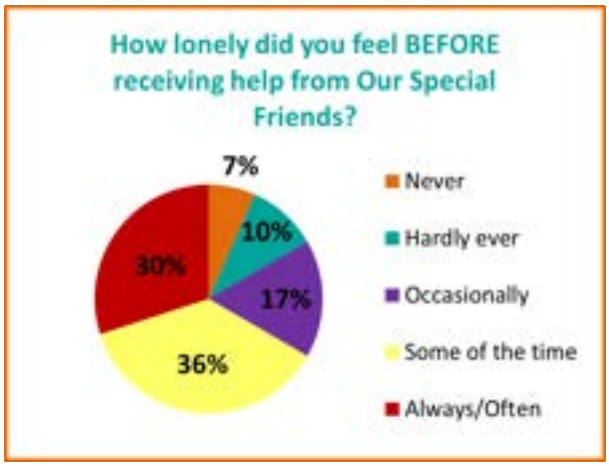
OUR SPECIAL FRIENDS IMPACT

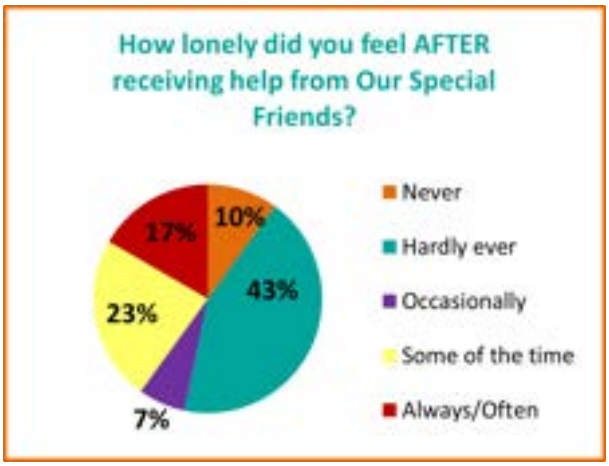
Client Feedback

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



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





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

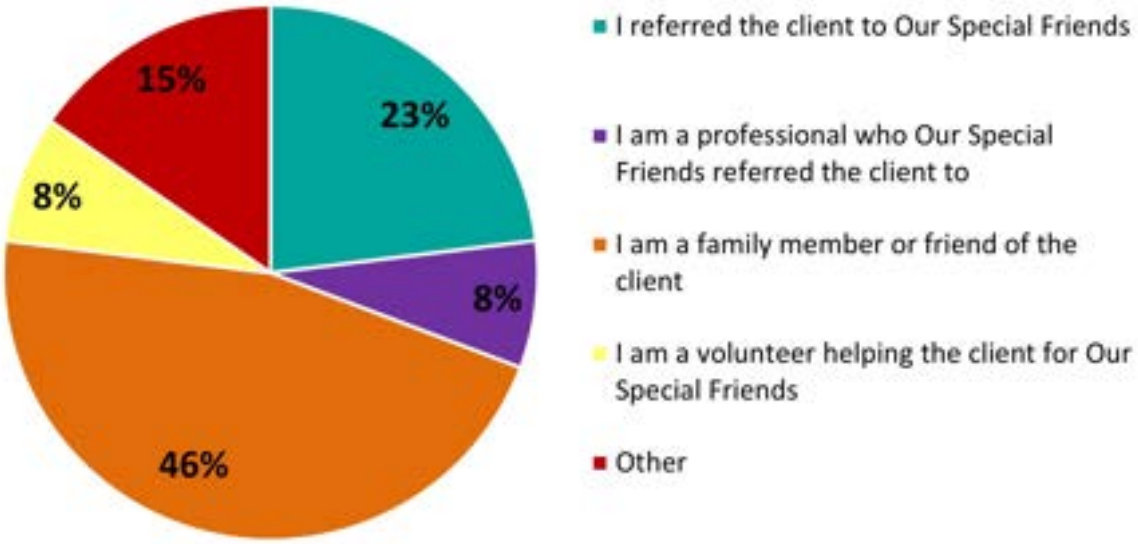
Clear communication of the different possibilities, fast response time, friendly understanding and supportive staff.

Reasons why our animal companionship support services are needed

Third Party Feedback

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

Third Party's Relationship with Client %



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

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

1. **Hospitalisation** *"Was hugely assisted at a very difficult time when my father was admitted to hospital in an emergency situation, enabling me to care for him, and to have the worry about his dogs welfare taken from my shoulders ."*

2. **Housing** *"Gave advice to me and spoke to my Housing association on my behalf regarding the no pet rule... I was given permission to keep my cat with us which in turn helped my mental health and got my autistic son talking again!"*

3. **Poor Physical Health** *"Our mum was able to keep her beloved dog and best friend with her in her darkest moments before she sadly passed away. Having the volunteer walker was such a god send to our mum."*

4. **Poor Mental Health** *" You have helped with my mental health in coping with the situation for a second time."*

5. **Loneliness** *"Not feeling totally alone with an insurmountable problem." "A world of difference I feel I have a family again"*

6. **Change in Circumstances** *"I have been able to keep my beloved boys when at one time was heartbroken to think that I would need to rehome them."*

7. **Bereavement** *"Helped me to understand the practicalities of losing our family dog and how to support our children and look after myself around the loss."*

8. **Mobility** *Client unable to walk her dog: "Empathic response to request for dog walker who would understand the needs of my dogs and consequently mine."*

9. **Financial** *"Helping to fund the surgery made a massive difference to our cat who had been left in a lot of pain."*

10. **Animal Health/Welfare** *"Immediately found a foster home for my cat." "Helped my dog get the help he needed which I couldn't afford"*

Case Study Tony and Digger

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

Tony and Digger were delighted to be reunited

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

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

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

THE YEAR AHEAD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Structure, governance and management

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

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

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

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

Financial review

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

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

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

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

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

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

Statement of Trustees responsibilities

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Robert Ferguson
Director

Our Special Friends
Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2023

Contents	**Page**
Independent Examiners Report	28
Statement of Financial Activities (incorporating summary income and expenditure account)	29
Balance Sheet	30
Notes	31-35

Company no 08769892
Charity no 01156778

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

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

Responsibilities and basis of report

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

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

Independent Examiner's Statement

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

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

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

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

Dated: 29 January 2024

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

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

Balance sheet

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

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

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

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

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

Approved by the Board and signed on its behalf by

Date

Robert Ferguson

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

Director

Our Special Friends

Financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2023

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

Notes to the accounts

1 Basis of preparation

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

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

2 Accounting policies

Recognition of income

Income is included in the Statement of Financial Activities when:

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

Grants and donations

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

Legacies

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

Volunteer help

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

Liability recognition

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

Governance and support costs

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

Tangible fixed assets for use by charity

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

Notes to the accounts

3 Analysis of income

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

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

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

4 Analysis of expenditure

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

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

Notes to the accounts

5 Staff costs

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

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

The company provides pension benefits under the NEST scheme

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

6 Transactions with trustees and related parties

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

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

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

7 Fixed assets

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

8 Debtors and prepayments

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

9 Creditors and accruals

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

Notes to the accounts

9 Restricted funds

Current Year	Purpose and Restrictions	Fund balances brought forward	Income	Expenditure	Fund balances carried forward
Government Grants		£	£	£	£
West Suffolk Council Community Chest	Volunteer Support Manager salary	10,000	-	(10,000)	-
West Suffolk Council Community Chest	Animal Companionship Practitioner salary	7,290	-	(7,290)	-
West Suffolk Council Community Chest	Crisis Support and Prevention	-	5,000	-	5,000
West Suffolk Council UK Shared Prosperity Fund	IT Upgrade	-	2,250	(2,250)	-
Mid Suffolk District Council	Animal Companionship Coordinator salary	-	20,000	-	20,000
Other Grants					
Kennel Club Charitable Trust - Chelsea & Mr French Fund	Animal Companionship Practitioner salary	-	10,000	(9,162)	838
Anonymous Trust	Charity Manager salary	-	39,190	(23,416)	15,774
Coco Joelle Foundation	Animal-Assisted activity	-	5,000	(5,000)	-
Suffolk Community Foundation					
Harris Family Fund	Core costs	-	2,000	(2,000)	-
David & Jill Simpson Fund	Core costs	1,000	-	(1,000)	-
Pargiter Trust Fund	Core costs	2,500	-	(2,500)	-
Miller Trust Fund	Core costs	500	-	(500)	-
Pargiter Trust Fund	Core costs	-	5,000	(5,000)	-
Shadwell Trust Fund	Core costs	500	-	(500)	-
Helen Roll Charity	Animal Companionship Practitioner salary	5,000	-	(5,000)	-
Co-op Local Community Fund	Animal-Assisted Activity	-	2,145	(2,145)	-
Green Hall Foundation	Animal-Assisted Activity	-	5,000	(5,000)	-
Anonymous individual	Fundraising costs	7,397	-	(7,397)	-
Charles Hayward Foundation	Animal-Assisted Activity	4,000	-	(4,000)	-
Association of Dogs and Cats Homes - Mars Food Fund	Pet Food	-	3,000	(1,002)	1,998
Pets at Home Foundation	Animal Welfare Support Fund	-	10,000	(10,000)	-
Kennel Club Charitable Trust	Animal Welfare Support Fund (Dogs only)	2,387	-	(2,387)	-
	Total Restricted Funds	**40,574**	**108,585**	**(105,649)**	**43,610**

Notes to the accounts

9 Restricted funds (continued)

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

GOVERNANCE AND SPECIAL ADVISORS

Patron

Lord Fairhaven DL KStJ

Board of Trustees

Robert Ferguson, Treasurer

Dr Mark Johnston MA VetMB PhD MRCVS, Chair

Dr Elizabeth Ormerod BVMS CF

Carolyn Bradburne

Dr Jill Gurney MB ChB, MA, appointed June 2022

Team

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

Sally Bycroft, *Marketing and PR*

Gemma Reid, *Animal Companionship Practitioner*

Frances Day, *Volunteer Support Manager*

Bil Thorn, *Office Administrator*

Trudi McManus, *Office Coordinator*

Seamus Connolly, *Charity Manager*

Laura Ferguson, *Office Administrator*

Supported 'in the office' by volunteers:

Rebecca Clarke, *Marketing and PR*

Karen Mallett, Christine Singleton, *Service Delivery*

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

Assisted by:

Susan Bradwell, *Finance*

Mark Toller, *Finance*

Anna Hunt, *Fundraising*

Voluntary Advisers

Jeremy Bradburne LLB (London) LLM Cantab

Dr Deidre Carson BVSc(Syd) MRCVS

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

Dr Helen Crawford BVSc PGCertSAECC MRCVS

Lisa Dickson CGMA MBA, *Caseron*

John Grossart MA MRICS

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

Dr Christopher Mayer MBBCh FRCPsych, Consultant Psychiatrist

Philippa Morphew FCIPD

Alan Reynolds

Independent Examiners

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

Bankers

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

Registered Office

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

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR DONORS

We would not exist without your generous support.

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

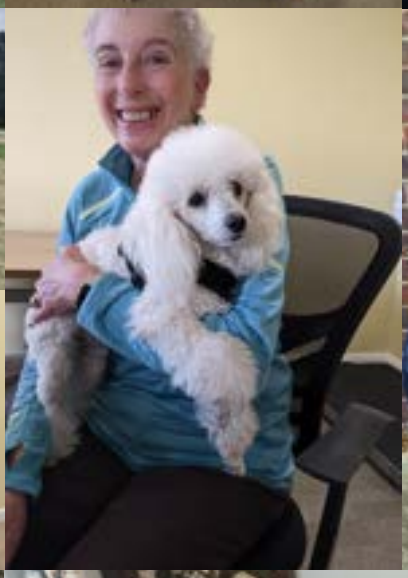
Barking Bags Ltd
Benebone Ltd
Caseron Cloud Accounting
Co-op Local Ltd
Everything Answered Ltd
Fish4Dogs Ltd
IntraOrbis Ltd
Kong Company Ltd
Pets at Home Ltd
Pet Remedy Ltd
Pitpat Ltd
Royal Canin Ltd
Vetstream Ltd

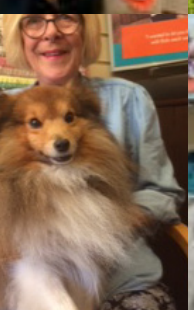
And to Trusts and Foundations which, amongst others include:

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

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

© Copyright 2023 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