

# Introduction to Our Special Friends

Registered charity number 1156778



Scientific evidence demonstrates that a positive relationship between humans and animals can have a vast impact on a person's mental, emotional and physical health. Pet ownership is proven to be particularly beneficial for those experiencing social isolation and/or mental health issues. Our Special Friends (OSF) is an innovative, grassroots charity supporting people who are experiencing difficulty and where ownership of a pet, or contact with an animal, is crucial to enable them to cope.

## Our Clients and Their Needs

Every day, OSF is approached by, or on behalf of, people facing all kinds of adversity who are desperate not to relinquish their beloved companion and vital source of comfort, stability and normality – or people who have lived with animals all of their lives but whose health or circumstances now make pet ownership impossible:

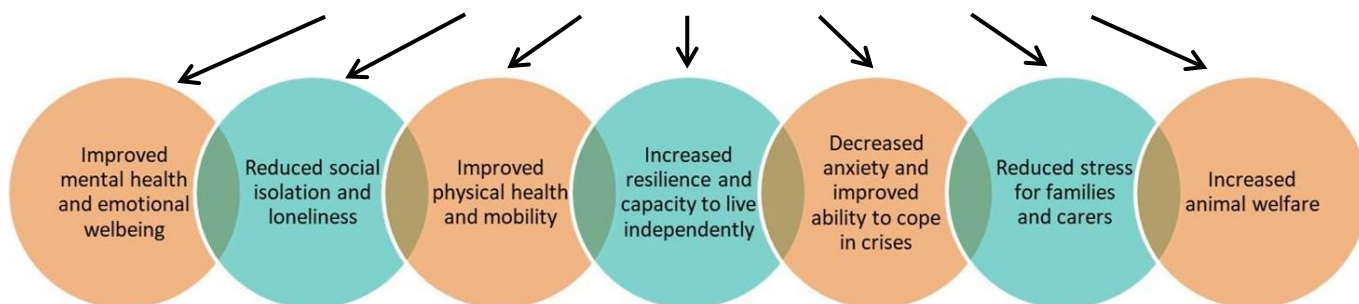
- Frail, isolated elderly people who go for several days without seeing or speaking to anyone
- Individuals with disabilities or debilitating mental health conditions who have no human support network
- People distressed about what to do with their pets as they prepare to flee domestic abuse
- Those neglecting their own health and welfare due to anxiety about losing their pets
- People facing homelessness and accessing temporary housing, which generally does not accept pets
- Those living in poverty, hardship and squalor, whose pets' welfare and veterinary needs suffer

OSF is committed to breaking down any and all barriers which prevent people from benefitting from animal companionship. Through our overt focus on animals, OSF is able to access hard-to-reach people normally averse to agencies becoming involved, particularly where they are socially isolated. We are therefore able to identify unmet health and social care needs and make appropriate referrals earlier than many other services.

## Services and Impact

OSF has established the need for an **Animal Companionship Practitioner (ACP)** and **Animal Companionship Coordinator (ACC)** and offers a variety of **animal companionship support services (ACSS)**, delivered predominantly by volunteers in the community, to meet the many needs of our clients and completely transform difficult situations in their lives:

| Our Special Friends' Animal Companionship Support Services  |
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| Providing <b>foster care</b> for pets in times of crisis, such as admission to hospital or fleeing domestic abuse   |
| Weekly <b>visits from volunteers with their pet</b> for lonely people unable to have a pet of their own             |
| <b>Dog walking</b> or accompanied dog walking for people with limited mobility                                      |
| Contributing towards the <b>costs of veterinary and non-veterinary care</b> when owners are in financial difficulty |
| Providing <b>emotional support</b> for those experiencing animal bereavement  |
| Sensitively facilitating <b>permanent rehoming</b> of pets whose owners can no longer provide sufficient care       |
| Sourcing <b>new animal companions</b> for lonely and isolated people  |
| Arranging for volunteers to <b>provide transport</b> to vets' appointments  |
| Liaising with and <b>cross-referring</b> to other relevant health and social care services                          |



OSF currently works in West Suffolk supporting around 600 people every year, wants to secure sustainable funding and has ambitious plans for growth. If you are interested in supporting OSF to transform the lives of at-risk people and their companion animals, please contact Dr Bin Johnston, Chief Executive, Lead Practitioner and founder of Our Special Friends on 01284 335351 or [bin.johnston@ourspecialfriends.org](mailto:bin.johnston@ourspecialfriends.org). Thank you.