Our Special Friends – Registered Charity No 1156778

Impact Report 2025/26

Our Special Friends (OSF) is a registered charity which recognises the powerful role companion animals play in people's lives and wellbeing. When illness, disability, bereavement, isolation or other challenging circumstances threaten that relationship, we provide practical and emotional support to help people continue to benefit from the companionship of animals, while safeguarding animal welfare.

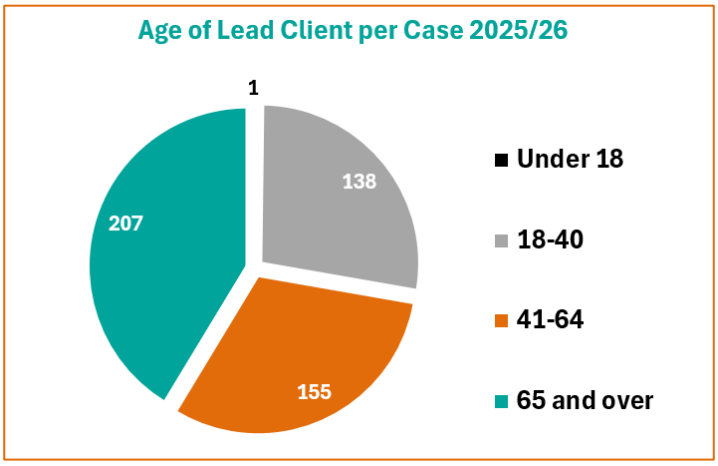
This report demonstrates the reach and impact of our work during 2025/26.

Beneficiary Numbers

During 2025/26, OSF supported a total of **501 cases**, including opening **378 new cases**. This resulted in a total of **1,282 people** who benefitted from our support. A further 24 cases were referred and assessed but did not receive direct services for a variety of reasons.

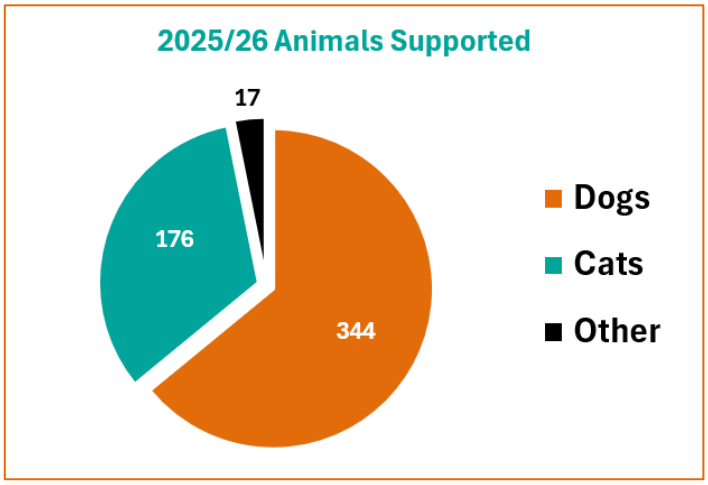
Of the beneficiaries, 706 were OSF clients who directly benefited, and the remaining 576 indirectly benefited from the support we gave to the client – for example, the family or carers. Volunteers working on cases are also included as indirect beneficiaries.

In some cases, more than one person benefits directly. However, age data is recorded for the lead client only. The breakdown of ages of lead clients is shown in the chart on the right.



Animal Beneficiaries

We also supported a total of **537 animals**, made up of 344 dogs, 176 cats, and 17 other pets, including guinea pigs, rabbits and rats. This includes the beautiful Smokey, pictured below, who we fostered while her owner was undergoing detox treatment.

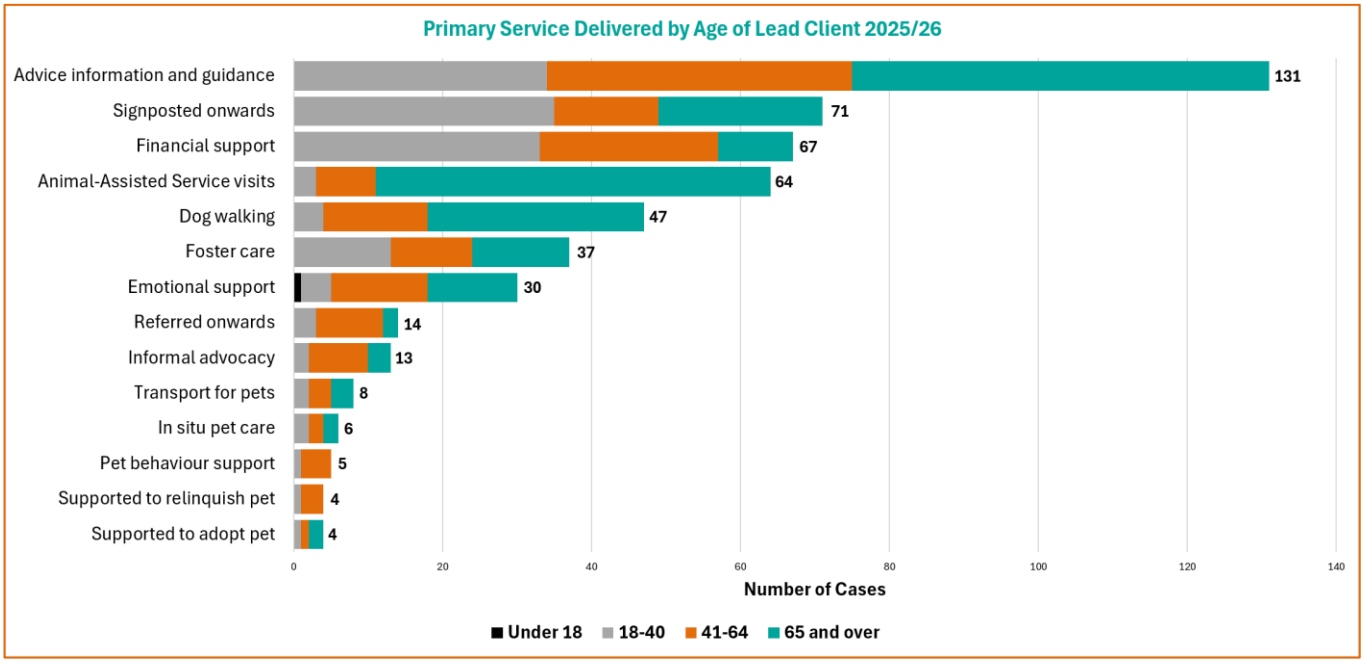




We supported 57 animals through our Animal Welfare Support Fund, which offers financial assistance towards essential veterinary or other animal care costs. A total of 44 dogs, 11 cats, one guinea pig and one rabbit were supported financially. This has included 15 dogs which were in OSF's foster care due to their owners experiencing a time of crisis. A total of £12,331.50 was contributed towards cases, with amounts varying depending on the needs of the case, but the average was £216 per animal.

Breakdown of Services Delivered

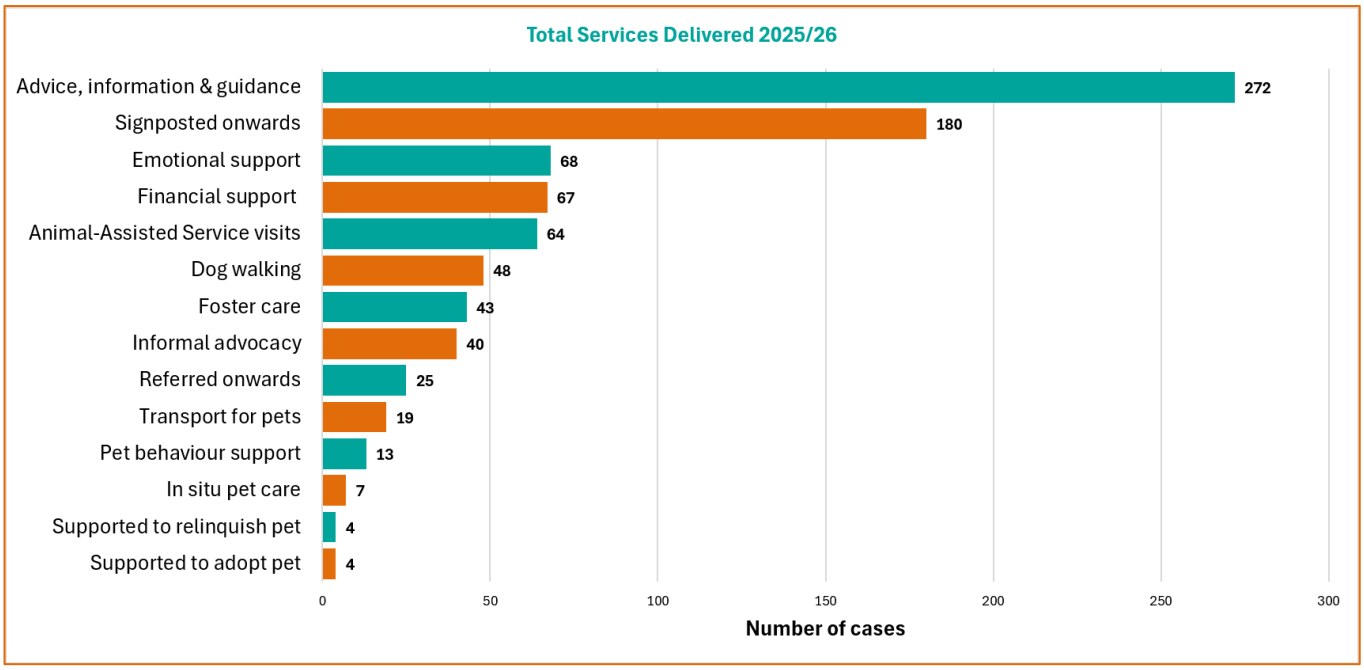
For each case, OSF records the primary service we deliver. This is further broken down by age of the lead client as follows:



While most services are represented fairly evenly across age groups, our Animal-Assisted Service, which provides visiting dogs to isolated and lonely people, is primarily used by older people (83% being 65 or older). Beryl, right, loves her weekly visits from friendly spaniel Molly and volunteer owner, Suzy. Similarly, nearly two thirds (62%) of clients supported with dog walking are 65 or older.



Many of the cases OSF supports are complex and require multiple different services and/or are supported for weeks, months or even years. Others are simple calls that can be resolved with providing advice, information and guidance and/or signposting to other services. Across the 501 cases supported in 2025/26, we provided **854 separate services**, the breakdown of which are as follows:



Case Study – Lee and Teddy

Lee was referred to Our Special Friends (OSF) via his support worker at Anglia Care Trust. Battling addiction, chronic pain and depression, Lee was due to be going into rehab for three months and needed someone to look after his beloved dog Teddy. While Lee wanted to go into rehab, he was worried this would result in him losing Teddy, who his Drug and Alcohol Recovery Outreach Officer referred to as his "*lifeline.*"

OSF visited Lee to conduct an assessment and found him struggling with low moods, lack of motivation and chronic pain which had led him to using drugs to cope. It was instantly apparent that Lee would do anything for Teddy and that there was a strong bond between them. Lee expressed how he felt immense guilt for days when he was not able to properly provide all the care Teddy that needed. However, he felt very positive about the future and was determined to beat his addiction. At this point he had not used for two weeks, so OSF agreed to look for foster care for Teddy for when Lee went into rehab.

We instantly identified a volunteer, Jim, who regularly volunteered with dog walking and had previously fostered a dog for OSF. Speaking to Jim, he was delighted to be able to help by fostering Teddy when Lee went into rehab. While Lee was waiting to have the dates confirmed, he had several hospital appointments and was struggling find someone to look after Teddy on the days he had to attend the appointments. OSF felt this could be a good opportunity for Jim to look after Teddy so they could get used to each other before the planned three month foster. Jim was more than happy to accommodate this and offered to help as often as needed. Initially, we arranged a meeting in our office for Jim to meet both Lee and Teddy - and no one could have imagined the friendship that would ensue, the stability it would give Lee, and the strength to stay clean and get to rehab.



Lee (right) and Jim with Teddy

For a couple of months, Jim welcomed Teddy into his home on many occasions and went on lovely walks, which has allowed Lee to attend his appointments. Lee told OSF "*I'm so grateful and happy that Jim can be with my baby. Ted loved him and it was such a pleasure to meet Jim. Jim is such a kind, lovely man.*"

There followed some good news from Lee's Drug and Alcohol Recovery Outreach Officer, that they had found a rehab facility which would allow him to take Teddy with him. However, the down side was that this facility wanted Lee to stay off drugs for a further three months before they accepted him. This could have had a negative impact on Lee, as emotional distress was a trigger for his drug use, but knowing Teddy could accompany him in rehab was a huge relief and a motivation to keep clean in the meantime.

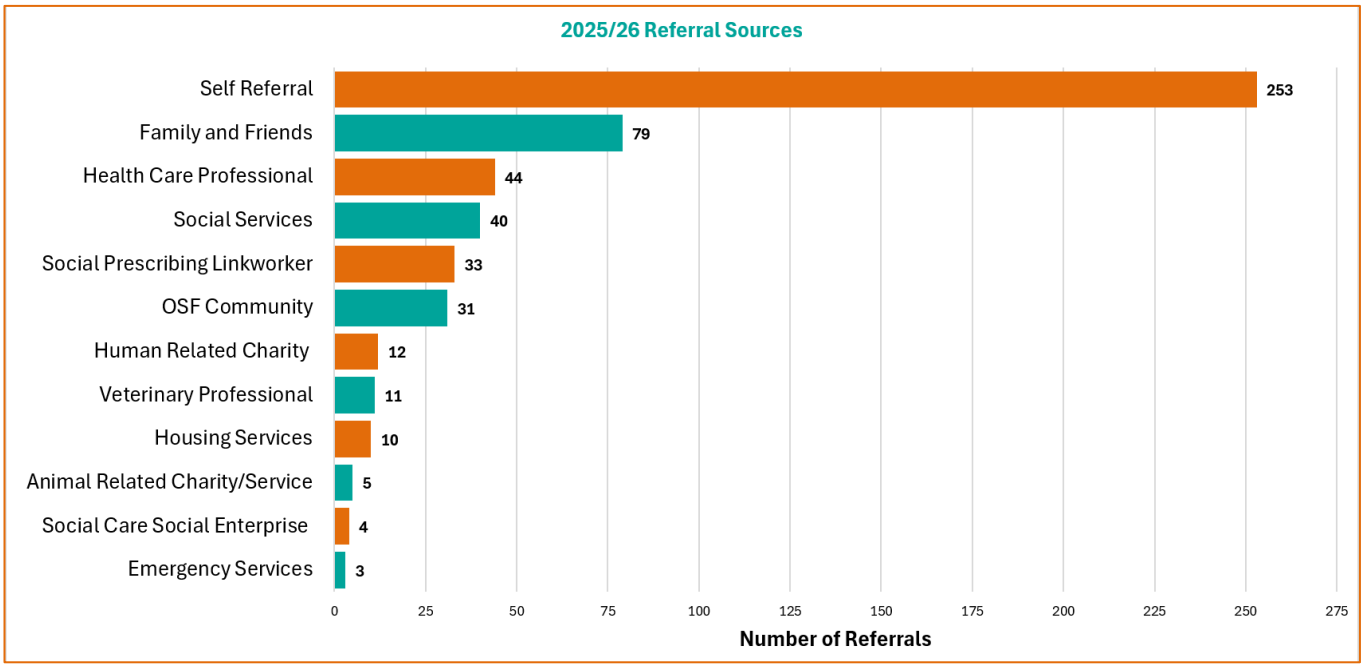


Lee with his "world", as he describes Teddy

Lee has been attending weekly sessions with Turning Point to address his drug use, and at the time of writing is 17 weeks clean. It has been very heartwarming for OSF to see the transition in Lee over the past few months. He is constantly grateful for all the support he has around him, saying "*Thank you all for your amazing kindness and support. It's really helping me change my life for the better. Jim has been a wonderful support and lovely friend. It's a pleasure seeing him.*" Jim stays on hand to dog-sit Teddy if needed, saying "*I love seeing him, any day.*" Meanwhile, Lee's support worker says Lee has "*a new life on the horizon with dear Teddy.*"

Referral Sources

Self-referrals make up nearly half of our cases (48%), with family and friends contacting us on behalf of the client making up a further 15%. We also receive referrals from a variety of other organisations and services, with sources for all referrals received in 2025/26 shown below:

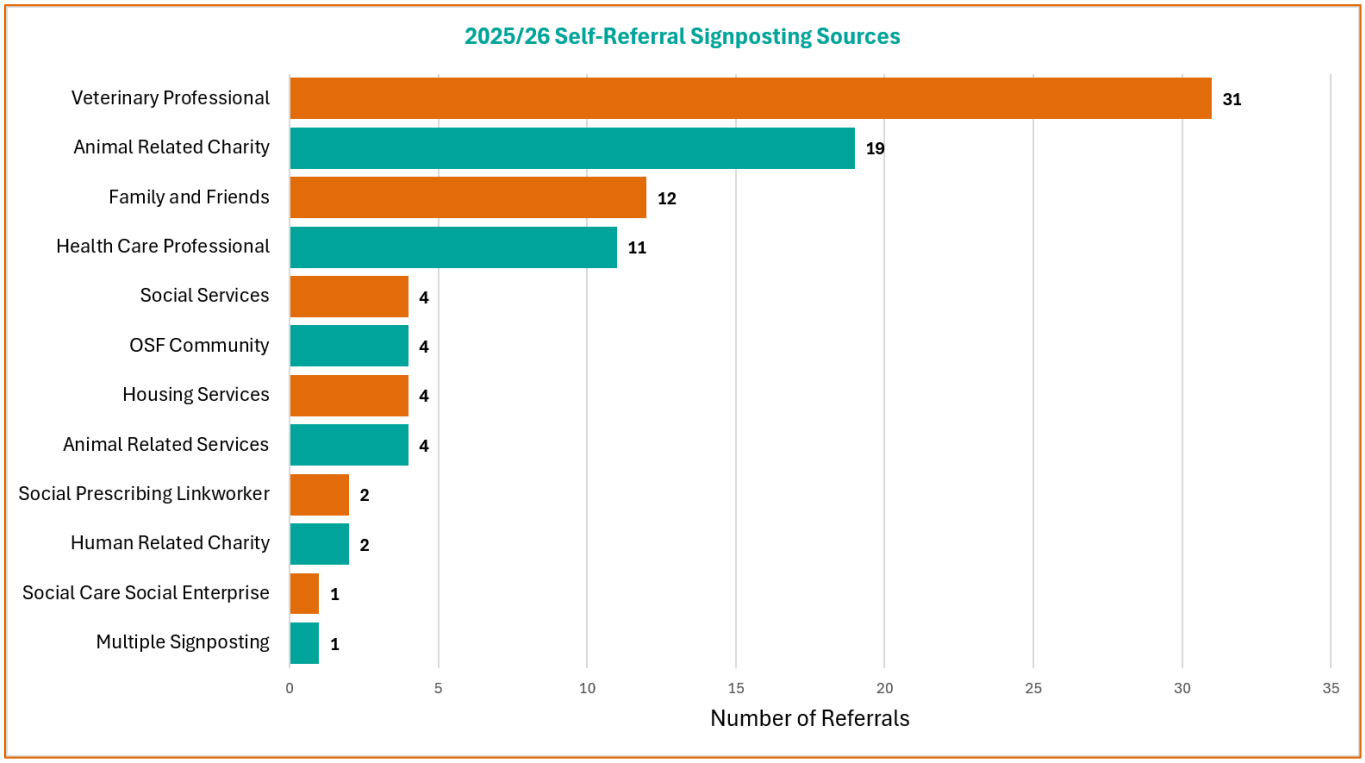




Mo, right, was referred to OSF by his daughter who thought he would benefit from regular visits from a volunteer and their dog after his wife had moved into a care home.

Self-Referral Signposting Sources

Some people who self-refer to OSF find us by an internet search or seeing our publicity materials. Others are told about us by another organisation or service but are not formally referred by that service. The breakdown of signposting sources for self-referrals in 2025/26 is shown below:



Client Self-Reported Impact

To measure OSF's impact, we send Feedback Forms to clients to gather their opinions on our services and the difference it has made to their lives. We ask clients to rate how much they agree to statements on a five-point scale from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. Client Feedback Forms received in 2025/26 showed the following:



Our Feedback Form also has open questions for clients to tell us the difference OSF have made for them, what we did well, and where we could improve. Forms received in 2025/26 included the following comments:

> You helped my dog, who is my world. She is my rock, she's supported me through all my cancer and I want to make sure she's ok too. With your help this was made achievable.

> Listening, non judgmental, empathic, suggestion guiding and solution offering, kindness, understanding and supportive. They acknowledged my panic and guided me down to a level of rational and calmness that enabled me to build a manageable plan going forwards. They helped me see that what I thought was doom, gloom and darkness for my pony and I actually wasn't. There were things I could do/try that would enable me to continue to provide the right care for my pony. They just seemed to know how to help calm my overwhelming sense of letting my pony down because I was ill.

> The support was amazing. Contact was consistent … and the help I received was invaluable.

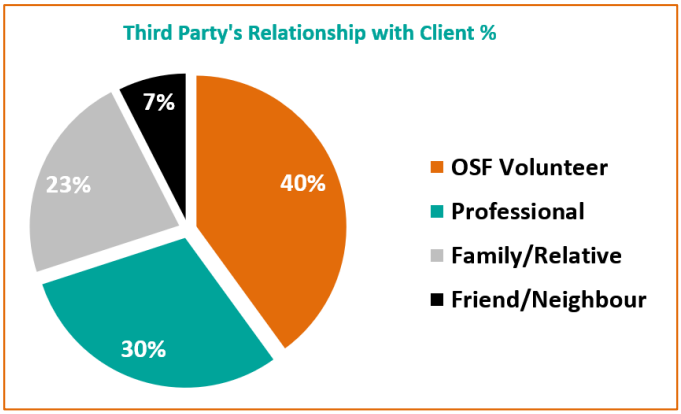
> It has made the biggest difference when I am having a bad day, my dogs are still able to go for a walk and don't miss out resulting in me feeling guilty.

> You're wonderful and I genuinely couldn't have gotten through the last couple of months without you.

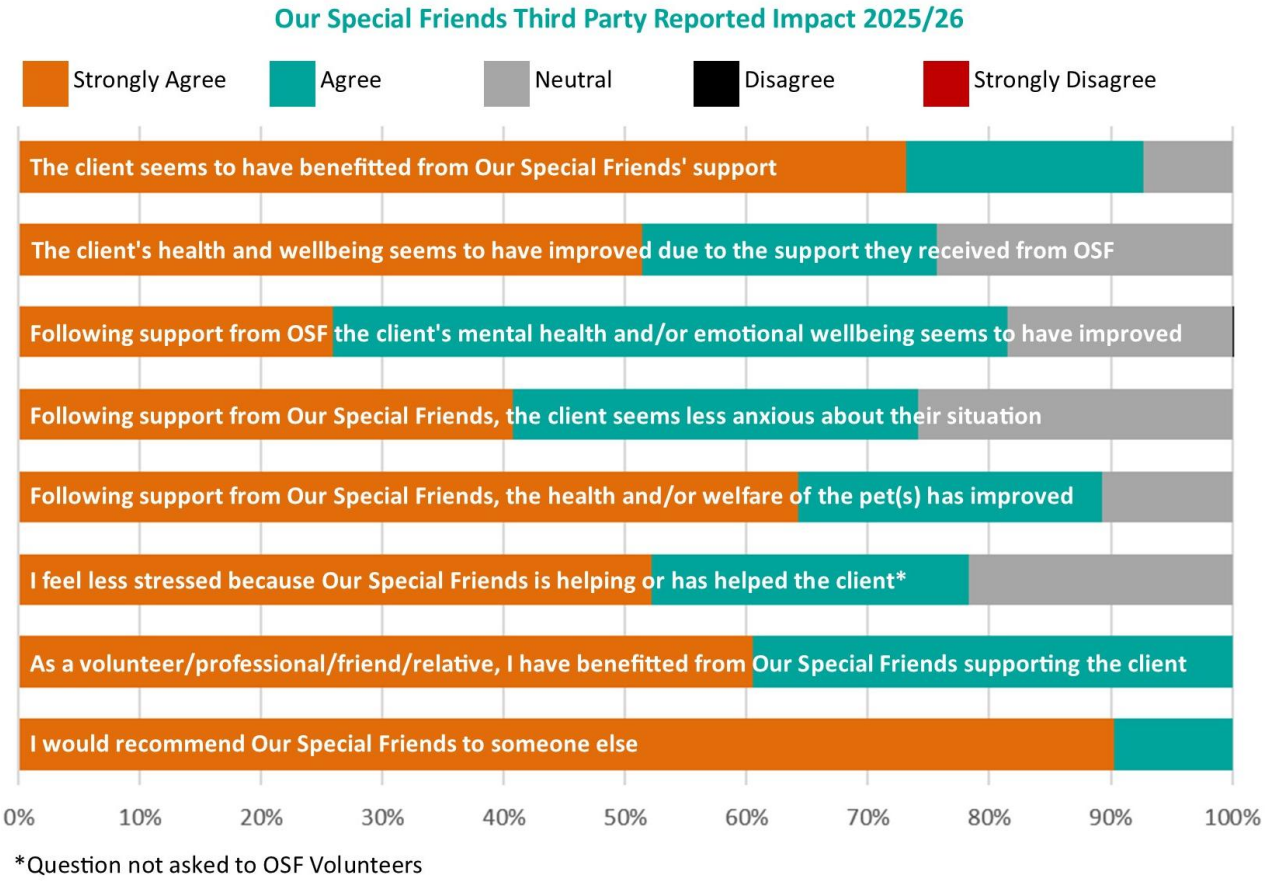
> I will always be eternally grateful to Our Special Friends who's [sic] kindness, at a time of great darkness for me, helped me see some light and gave me hope. Thank you so much.

Impact Reported by Third Parties

Feedback Forms are also sent to people involved with the client (Third Parties) for their opinion on how both they and the client have benefited from OSF's services. The pie chart on the right breaks down the type of relationship respondents to the Third Party Feedback Form had with the client for forms received in 2025/26:



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



*Question not asked to OSF Volunteers

Narrative feedback from third parties included:

> The visits gave Alan something to look forward to. He enjoyed feeding and cuddling Duggie ... It was lovely to see Alan enjoying his visits.
> *Family member*

> Without intervention from OSF [the client] would have given up and not sought effective treatment for her cat's injury.
> *Veterinary professional*

> Client was able to access an inpatient alcohol detox because Our Special Friends arranged for her cat to be looked after.
> *Drug & Alcohol Worker*

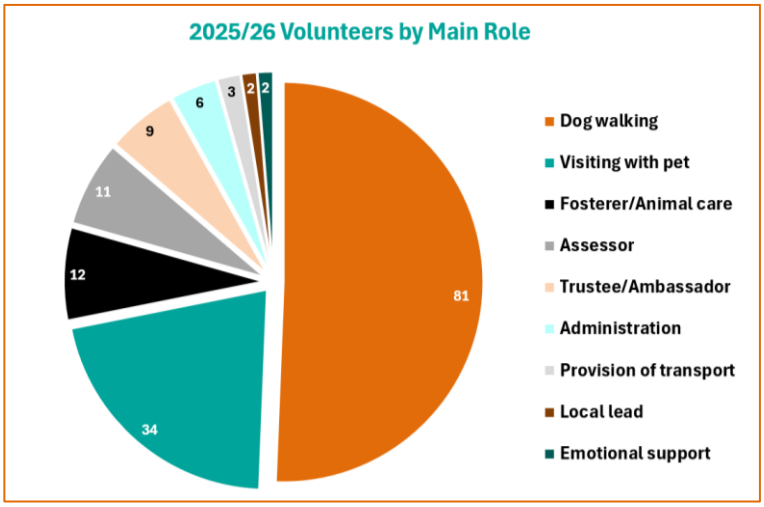
> A big stress lifted off my shoulders.
> *Family member*

> Having OSF involved has meant ... that I am able to support the client in different ways more relevant to my social work role. I always love working with OSF
> *Social Worker*

Volunteering Statistics

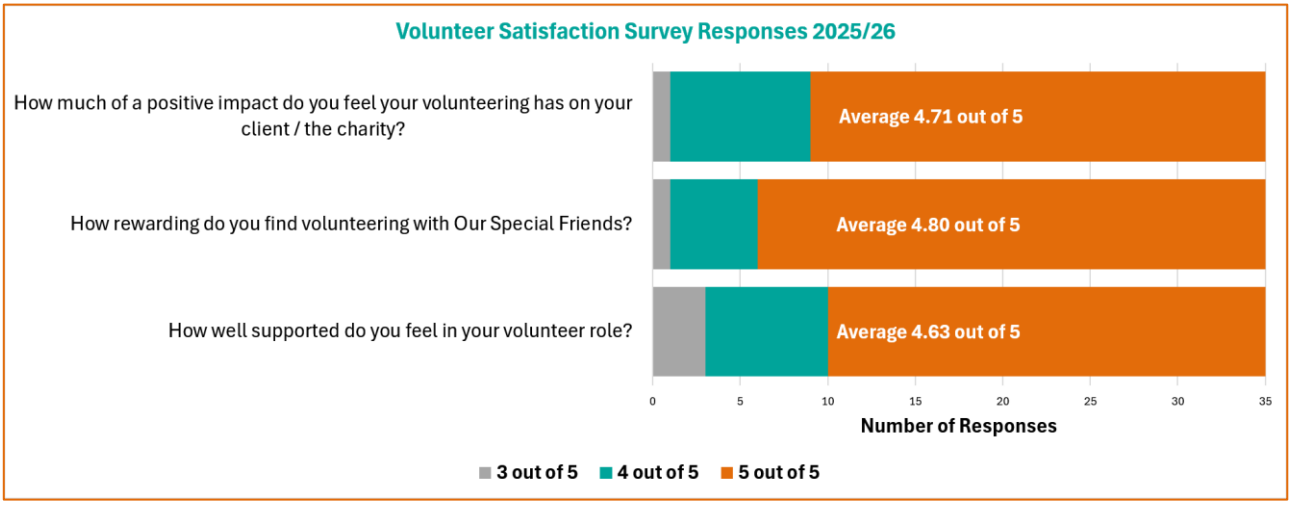
None of OSF's work would be possible without the generosity and commitment of our team of volunteers. Every hour they give helps to make a difference, enhancing the lives of people (and pets) in need.

During 2025/26, support was provided by an amazing **160 volunteers**, including **40 new volunteers** recruited during the year. The chart on the right splits out our volunteers by the main role they undertake.



We estimate that collectively, our volunteers contributed a total of **15,936 hours over the year**, which equates to an astonishing **£194,579** paid at the National Living Wage during the year.

OSF runs an annual Volunteer Survey to better understand our volunteer activities and gather feedback on their opinions of the charity. In our survey from April 2026, we received 35 responses, with 89% saying they were female and 11% male, and none selecting 'non-binary' or 'prefer not to answer' options. The majority of respondents (60%) were aged 65 and over, with 34% being 41-64 and the final 6% aged 18-40. We asked volunteers to rate their satisfaction with OSF across three different measures, on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being lowest and 5 being the highest. No respondent gave a rating lower than 3, with most giving a 4 or 5, as breaks down below:



Volunteers' responses to open questions in the survey about the support OSF provides to volunteers and the difference their volunteering makes were as follows:

> [My volunteering made a difference] when visiting [an] elderly lady, who had mobility issues and dementia with my own dog. It gave her so much pleasure seeing the dog regularly.

> Every time I visit because it gives the client someone to talk to, someone to make a coffee, someone to listen, someone to do small jobs that make a big difference.

> [OSF] makes me feel appreciated and offers support when needed

> The OSF … team are very understanding and supportive of volunteers. They also provide training and learning opportunities to improve knowledge and skills that are useful to volunteers such as dog behaviour, dog walking skills and understanding mental health and dementia in clients.

Volunteer Story

Poodle/Cavapoo cross Peggy spent her first three years with a young family in Yorkshire, where she became a malnourished, ungroomed and nervous dog.

Meanwhile, in Suffolk, John and Monica were looking to adopt a rescue dog. They had been turned down by several rescue centres and charities because, in their 70s, the couple were considered 'too old', despite being experienced dog owners and still active. Facing this barrier, John and Monica advertised online for a dog to adopt. The family in Yorkshire saw the advert, and realising that they were struggling to care for Peggy, responded and arranged to meet John and Monica at a motorway service station.

Peggy's condition shocked the couple, but they agreed to take her as they could not bear the thought of her continuing to suffer. After extensive veterinary investigations, medication, an appropriate diet, a thorough grooming, and lots of love and attention, Peggy transformed into a healthy, relaxed and affectionate dog.

A chance encounter in a garden centre café in 2024 with a young autistic man revealed Peggy's empathy with people with physical or mental limitations. Lying next to John, she crept towards the man, laid her chin on his knee and allowed him to stroke her. The carer said she had never seen the young man react like that and asked John if they could stay a little longer, and John was happy to oblige.

Peggy's behaviour prompted John to look up a card about Our Special Friends which he remembered picking up at an event some time previously. He enquired about volunteering with the charity, and both he and Peggy were assessed as suitable for our service which matches volunteers and their dogs with lonely and isolated people who are unable to have pets of their own to make regular visits. John and Peggy were matched with a client who has issues with mobility and memory and lives in sheltered accommodation. Although the client has a private apartment in the complex, John and Peggy's visits are often in the communal lounge. "*The other residents also love seeing Peggy, and she loves the attention*," said John. "*The manager fully approves and says our visits have prompted another resident to speak properly for the first time in a long while*."

John regularly takes his client out to a local café and has also recently taken on a second client. He says "*Volunteering has given me a new interest in retirement, too. I enjoy meeting other volunteers and their dogs at monthly meetings, and I and Peggy represent the charity at local events*."



John and a happy, healthy Peggy, ready to bring joy with another visit

Conclusion and Thank You

The evidence from 2025/26 demonstrates that supporting the bond between people and their companion animals can have an impact far beyond animal welfare alone. OSF's work helps reduce isolation and anxiety, supports people through periods of illness and crisis, and can enable access to wider health and support services.

We are enormously grateful to the Trusts, Foundations, donors, volunteers and partners whose support makes this work possible. *Thank you.*