

DOGS
FOR
GOOD

Our 2024 Annual Report



About us

We're Dogs for Good. We help people connect with dogs, because we know the life-changing differences these connections can make.

We work with individuals, families and groups with complex health and social care needs, often due to disability, dementia, autism or mental ill health. The support we and our dogs provide is all about enabling them to better access the world around them.

We know that dogs can open doors, build connections and bring families and communities together. We see them helping people to feel more included, valued and empowered. And our years of groundbreaking work have shown us how to make the most of the unique bond that we share with them.

By understanding each person and dog we work with, we aim to find the solution that benefits both. Whether through carefully matched partnerships or tailored training and activities, together they're able to build the confidence, independence and skills that can make everyday life possible in so many ways.



For making life possible

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Welcome from Ed, CEO & Annabelle, Chair of Trustees

Once again as I look back over the past year at Dogs for Good, I'm amazed at how far we've come and how much we have managed to achieve.

This time last year, we had just finalised our new strategy, setting our direction for the future. If 2023 was about the “what”, 2024 has been the year of the “how”: setting out a theory of change that provides a clear model for how we deliver the impact that makes our work so important.

We are already making significant progress on that journey. Go back just a couple of years and I think for many, the answer to the question “What does Dogs for Good do?” might well have been, “We train dogs.” Now, I suspect those answers would be much more focused on outcomes and impact, not just on the individuals we work with but on their families and friends, and the wider community.

By delivering a better quality of life for people and dogs, we are contributing to bigger goals: encouraging independence, reducing reliance on public services, and building a more inclusive society.

It's all – quite rightly – serious stuff. But it's important to remember the lightness and the laughter too. It's hard to think about 2024 without mentioning Walt, the community dog taught to skateboard by young inpatients at the Highfield Unit. For me, those pictures capture the essence of Dogs for Good: rigorous, evidence-based work that delivers real impact, combined with the playfulness and fun that only dogs can bring.

It's a powerful combination, and I look forward to seeing where it takes us in 2025.

Ed Bracher, CEO, Dogs for Good



This has been a year in which Dogs for Good has laid solid foundations for the future.

We've seen a number of significant new appointments including our first ever Director of People, and a new Head of Scotland responsible for taking forward our work north of the border. And we've strengthened our board of trustees, bringing in fresh perspectives and new skills including working with volunteers, and experience in social care.

We've also been fortunate enough to receive a significant legacy. The generosity of this donor will enable us to continue investing in our people, as well as supporting the delivery of more integrated services including through our hub model. We plan to invest in our fundraising capacity too, to ensure that all these changes are sustainable in the long term.

As I prepare to step down after six years as a board member, and hand over to our new co-chairs Ruth and Helen, I feel that Dogs for Good is at a really exciting point in its development. The pace of change increases all the time, and it's been great to see such an emphasis on collaboration and a recognition of the contribution our incredible volunteers can make.

As we move forward, the positive impact of our work can only increase. Being involved with Dogs for Good has been an immensely rewarding experience, and I look forward to watching it develop and grow.

*Annabelle Charman,
Chair of the Board of Trustees*

Our promise

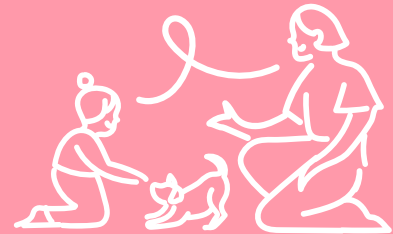
Our promise is unique to Dogs for Good, and reflects our commitment to the health and wellbeing of the people we support, and to our dogs. Based on input from our staff and volunteers, it also reflects our determination to make sure Dogs for Good is a great place to work and to volunteer.

To our community, to the people we support and the dogs we work with, we promise that we will...



SEEK TO UNDERSTAND

We see, hear and understand each other, every person and dog we work with, as individuals.



RESPECT ALL NEEDS

We take into account that everyone's needs are different and, person or dog, equally as valuable.



MAKE POSITIVE CONNECTIONS

We all play a part in building the connections that make life feel possible, and which make for a more supportive community.



“

I've had four dogs from Dogs for Good. The confidence the charity has given me is incredible. I go out and give talks about my dogs and what they do and how they help. They've made such a difference in my life. Now I just want to be able to sponsor a dog for someone else to get the kind of life I've got with mine. That's the icing on the cake.

Mary Lamb

In June, Mary Lamb (pictured) became the first woman in a wheelchair to complete the Three Peaks challenge: climbing Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon. With the support of soldiers from the British Army, husband Mike and assistance dog Sheldon, Mary completed the feat in three days, raising more than £15,000 to date for Dogs for Good. Find out more about [Mary's story](#).

Our impact in 2024

Community activities raised

£227,000

221

people were supported by
assistance dogs

In all, our services provided
support for

1,099

young people and adults



£31,000

raised through challenge events,
including the London Marathon



600

animal-assisted interventions
and activities delivered,
providing flexible support for
people with a range of needs



165

people attended
family dog workshops



We welcomed

118

new volunteers, bringing
the total to 688



40

new puppies were bred by
Dogs for Good, along with six
from external breeders



Developing a strategy for the future

Throughout 2024, we've been exploring ways of providing support that reflects the needs of individuals and communities, including by removing barriers between services, continuing our shift to a hub-based model and building capacity in our team.



THE THEORY BEHIND THE PRACTICE

In 2024, we built on the work already done to develop our new strategy, setting out a theory of change and establishing new branding and tone of voice guidelines. "Having defined what we wanted to do, we now have a set of principles to guide how we do it – and a consistent way of communicating our progress," says CEO Ed Bracher. "That helps to create clarity around what we do – and what we don't – so we can focus on our strengths and really drive progress towards our goals."

In some cases, that might mean signposting them to other organisations, where we feel those services can better meet the individual's needs.

It's part of an ongoing process to revamp processes and touchpoints that will continue throughout 2025, including the relaunch of our website.

"We're continuing to move away from those labels – assistance dog, family dog, community dog – that mean a lot to us internally but not so much to someone approaching us for the first time," says Duncan. "The question should be not how do you fit with our offer, but how can we adapt our offer to fit you and deliver the outcomes you need?"

2. Delivering joined up services

Alongside these changes goes a more flexible approach to the way services are delivered. Our work with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services at the Highfield Unit in Oxfordshire is a fantastic example of how a more agile approach is enabling us to reach new audiences and unleash the creativity of our people (see page 17 for more).

In some cases, colleagues are taking on new responsibilities. In the south west for example, our assistance dog instructor Jane Ball has been trained to take on community dog responsibilities, enabling her to offer a broader range of support and to deliver services in a more joined up way. Elsewhere, we are strengthening our team, including recruiting a new Head of Scotland, Kirsten Law, to explore ways of increasing our reach and impact there.

1. Putting people first

Providing support that is truly person-centred is at the core of what we do. Our aim is always the same: to help people get the most from their connection with a dog. That starts by first understanding their needs and goals.

Throughout 2024, we continued to work to break down barriers to accessing our services. One key change has been to our standard application form. Now, instead of requiring applicants to work through a lengthy list of questions, we ask for some basic information, then follow up with a phone call or email.

"It almost sounds like a step back in time, calling people on the phone and talking to them about what they need," says Duncan Edwards, Strategy and Quality Assurance Manager.

"We've found that it's actually more efficient to spend time with somebody, listening to them and asking the right questions. You learn much more that way. Then we can work with them to figure out how we can best support their needs with the resources we have."



3. Community-led services

The development of our hub model is also key to delivering integrated services that meet the needs of the people and communities we serve. In 2024, we laid the groundwork for a pilot Dog Supply Hub project which will launch in 2025, led by our new Head of Hub Development Jude Palmer. The aim is to test a new approach to preparing our dogs from puppy to placement, in a community setting supported by a small team of staff and volunteers, ahead of potential roll out across the organisation.

“It’s an opportunity to trial different approaches, observing and guiding our dogs’ development at their pace as they experience day-to-day life in the home and their community,” says Jude. “The goal is to create insights and evidence about changes we can make in order to maximise our dogs’ enjoyment, wellbeing and development alongside our amazing volunteer network.” The second hub, focusing on service delivery, is also launching in 2025.

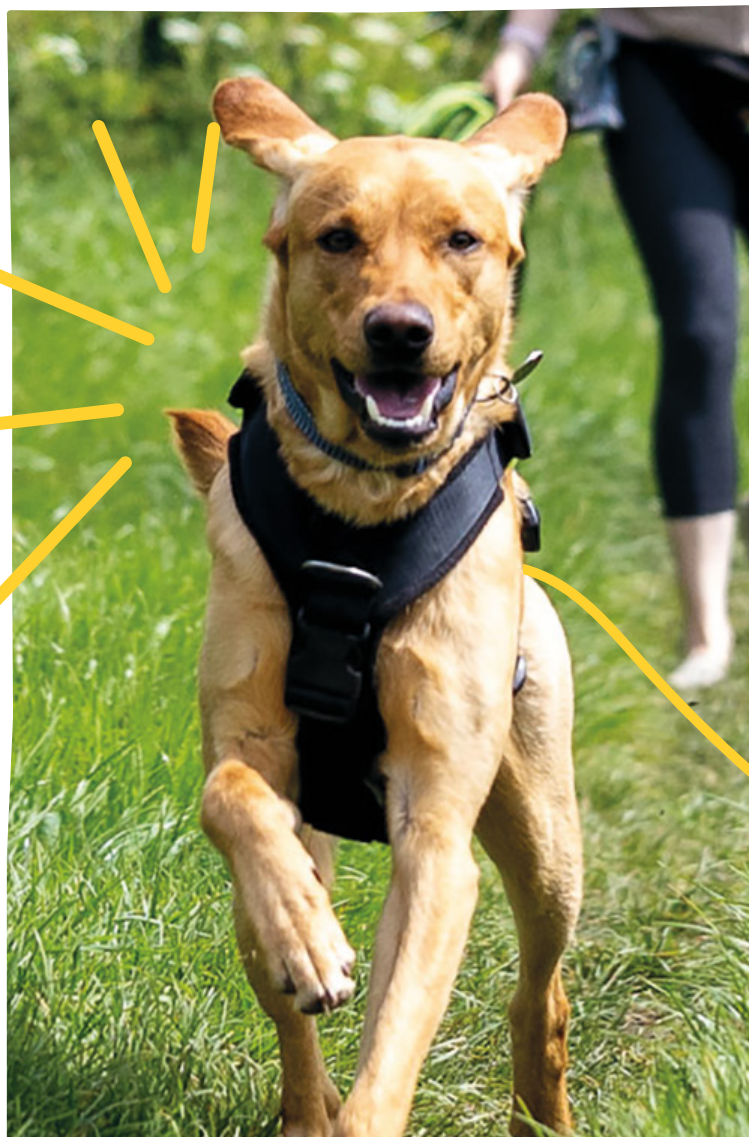
HAPPY, HEALTHY DOGS

Happy, healthy dogs are the foundation that underpins everything we do. This year we took steps towards a more joined up approach to dog welfare, increasing the reach of our Health and Welfare team so that all our puppy socialisation teams now have access to regular support and a dedicated point of contact.

“We’re attending puppy classes and delivering workshops for colleagues and volunteers,” says Gemma Oliver, Health and Welfare Manager. “That’s raising awareness and increasing understanding of health issues.” In the north, a new pilot health and welfare role will enable us to trial extending our support beyond the first year of the dog’s life, providing continuity and valuable insights into later-in-life health issues that can then be fed back into our breeding programme.

Our new Early Socialisation Programme is also aimed at increasing the flow of information, this time about the first eight weeks of a puppy’s life. “A lot of this work was already happening, we’re just approaching it in a more structured way,” says Vicki Mark, Dog Supply Manager. That includes putting in place processes for breed stockholders to share insights that can help us match puppies to the right volunteer home.

“It’s about using everything we can to help set our dogs up for success.”



4. Building a stronger team

Building a stronger team means developing our capacity, whether by recruiting new team members or working more effectively with those we already have. Underpinning this is our “one team” approach, where volunteers are viewed – and valued – in the same way as colleagues, in terms of the contribution they can make to our overall goals.

“It’s strength in numbers,” says Erica Mackay, our newly appointed Director of People.

“To achieve our goals, we need a diverse range of skills, and there’s a huge amount of knowledge and experience among our volunteers. There’s a lot we can learn from each other.”

Work to embed this approach is already under way. This year, we introduced awards for our employees – and dogs! – alongside our longstanding Volunteer National Excellence Awards, which are in association with The Marsh Charitable Trust. From 2025, we hope to combine these into a single event. We have also increased our focus on providing learning and development opportunities for both volunteers and employees, including through our new learning management system.

We carried out employee and volunteer surveys, the findings of which will form the basis for a new people strategy. “Our employees told us they wanted a greater focus on communication, wellbeing and more collaborative working across departments,” says Erica. “We’ve already made a start, with a leadership development day for our managers and the introduction of town hall meetings from the start of 2025. We’ve also trained five Mental Health First Aiders, in response to specific survey feedback.”

FOCUS ON VOLUNTEERS

The results of our volunteer skills audit, which concluded in early 2024, confirmed what we already knew – that our volunteers are a rich source of knowledge and expertise. “The audit has been amazing,” says Jamie MacDonald, Head of Volunteering. “It’s enabled us to ask volunteers to support us in so many ways we would never have known were possible.” For example, one of our temporary boarders now sits on our digital steering group, while another is offering valuable advice on construction and planning.

We are also focusing on other ways of strengthening connections, including through pop-up cafés at each of our three UK service areas, where staff and volunteers can come together. The volunteer reception and admin team at our Banbury HQ has more than 10 new members – part of a total of almost 100 new recruits, a remarkable achievement in what are testing times for many charities.

At our second National Volunteer of the Year Awards, supported by the Marsh Charitable Trust, 12 of our volunteers were rewarded. In 2024 we also asked our volunteers how they would like to be recognised and thanked for their contributions, and will shortly be launching a programme based on those findings.



Integrated services

This year, our focus has been on finding ways to deliver more joined-up services, offering creative, adaptable support and guidance for individuals, families and groups with a diverse range of needs.

Reaching more people

Our family dog service is a well established source of support for people with a range of needs, in particular families with an autistic child, and individuals living with dementia. This year we built on our work to expand the service, including moving six dogs out of our assistance dog programme to become family dogs – a better fit for their strengths and capabilities.

We set out to provide more support for those living with a physical disability too, offering specially tailored family dog workshops for this cohort. We have also drawn on the expertise of our volunteer occupational therapist Bridget Jeffery to provide advice and guidance, for example on equipment and adaptations, and to signpost other useful services.

We opened up our established programme of online family dog workshops to everyone on the waiting list for an assistance dog. “The feedback has been really positive,” says Kelly Jennings, Service Manager. “Even if people have had an assistance dog before, it might have been 10 years since they last had a dog in the house. Just having the opportunity to update their knowledge and talk to other people in the same situation is proving so helpful.”

I would really recommend anyone who is waiting for an assistance dog to do the family dog workshop, it was so helpful and made me feel more prepared and confident.

Family dog workshop attendee

We also ran a number of workshops for a professional audience, including representatives from dog rehoming organisations, educators and occupational therapists, with the aim of raising awareness of the Dogs for Good offer, and encouraging them to signpost people to us.

And there was a welcome return to real life interaction, with our first face-to-face family dog workshop since before the Covid-19 pandemic. “The response was amazing,” says Kelly. “Online workshops are fantastic, but face-to-face is brilliant for making connections and building community.” Looking ahead, the plan is to run one face-to-face workshop per quarter, to supplement the online offer.

30+

New assistance dog partnerships created this year



"She stroked the dog and you could see in her face there was an instant connection"

Supporting local communities

We continued to develop our work with communities, exploring opportunities for collaboration and ways of increasing our capacity to deliver. In Bracknell, where Community Dog Practitioner Lucy Purchase has been leading our exploratory work since 2023, we focused on volunteers, creating a more structured induction and training programme and supporting some to start delivering sessions with their own dogs.

In Scotland, we continued to explore ways of expanding on our current partnership with Alzheimer Scotland and we also looked at expanding our support for new audiences, for example through our work with Scottish Autism. In September we appointed Kirsten Law, our new Head of Scotland, to take this work forward, reflecting our commitment to meeting the needs of people in Scotland. In Bristol, we continued our collaboration with Side by Side, a befriending service run by the Alzheimer's Society. And closer to home, we continued our successful project to support young people with mental health issues at the Highfield Unit (see next page).

"As we move forward with the development of our hub model, all these projects are a vital source of learning and insights," says Selina Gibsone, Development Manager. "All the time we are developing our networks, expanding our teams – including our volunteers – and learning how to operate effectively in a range of different settings where flexibility is key."

Our work in Bracknell over the past year demonstrates the many ways dogs can make a positive difference. For example, those taking part in our walking and activity group for adults with learning disabilities report improved fitness, confidence and self-esteem. According to the support team working with one participant, Jack, "He seems happy and relaxed after the sessions, and it's enabled him to make new friends."

Our programme of visits to care homes and assisted living facilities in the local area is giving older people with a dementia diagnosis opportunities to interact with dogs. The feedback focuses on the calming effect of being around the dog, and how residents are more engaged – even after the dog has left. "This is what the older people need," said one care home worker. "She stroked the dog and you could see in her face there was an instant connection."

Other activities include a walking group for people with profound and multiple learning difficulties. For many participants, this opportunity for positive interaction with a dog marks a step change in their ability to communicate and connect. Our dogs are also taking part in befriender visits, supporting people with dementia who are at risk of social isolation, and working with adults facing mental health challenges.



"Even when Walt wasn't there, he was having an impact."

Our partnership with Oxfordshire Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, which began in 2023, continued to evolve this year. Following an initial pilot involving community-based activities, the team – comprising colleagues from Dogs for Good and the Highfield Unit – decided to base their sessions from Highfield's education unit with the aim of reaching more young people and encouraging them to engage with learning.

Community dog Walt and handler Sarah Tosh-Robb offered a range of activities – including dog skateboarding! – working with patients in groups and one-to-one. "We would see changes in engagement, motivation and mood that would last throughout the week," says Tori Broom, Highfield's Head of Occupational Therapy. "Even when Walt wasn't there, he was having an impact."

Now the hope is that the sessions will continue throughout 2025, and that a full evaluation will be carried out. "The key learning for us is about how we combine flexibility and responsiveness with the structures and safeguarding we need to maintain the right environment for our people and our dogs," says Selina Gibsone.

"This has been a hugely valuable experience for us. Looking ahead, you can see the potential for us to continue working with these young people once they leave the unit – and for us to apply these learnings elsewhere."

“

For some young people, this can be a major step in thinking outside of their 'illness', and what other roles they can have in their life apart from what has led them into hospital.

Highfield project evaluation report

Building a strong evidence base

By working with partners to explore the impact of our work, we continue to deepen our knowledge of the relationship between people and dogs, developing insights and expertise that help boost impact and advance understanding.

Our ongoing Quality of Life (QoL) survey provides us with a comprehensive picture of the impact our assistance dogs have on people's lives, looking at a broad range of indicators including mental wellbeing, access to opportunities and social interaction, as well as functional and practical measures.

This year, we furthered our research partnership with the University of York, who worked with us to analyse our QoL findings in 2023 and to support the evaluation of our family dog service and our Bracknell project (see page 15). We began a collaboration with Ceva Animal Health and tech company Vet-AI to produce an outcomes survey which we will be sending to all our clients.

We are also working with Assistance Dogs UK to support the development of a common outcomes framework that can be used across all assistance dog organisations to support the gathering and sharing of information.

"Looking ahead, we're exploring ways of merging our QoL findings with these surveys and frameworks to create a single source of information on our impact and outcomes,"

says Selina Gibsone, Development Manager. "We are also gathering valuable information from our new person-centred inquiry process about the needs of the people approaching us, all of which can feed into future service development."





TAKING THE LEAD

We are playing a role in shaping the future of assistance dog work through our involvement with industry organisations such as the newly renamed Animal Assisted Services International (AASI), a member organisation that sets standards and provides accreditation for practitioners and trainers.

A number of colleagues sit on AASI committees, and Development Manager Selina Gibsone is the current chair. “Being closely involved with the AASI is vital to staying informed and maintaining a strong network,” says Selina. “But it also enables us to raise awareness of what we do, and to use our expertise and experience to influence thinking about how we work effectively with animals.”

Making **everyday** possible



We feel so lucky to have Marley in our family. We can already see the benefits for both our girls, but particularly for Anna who will have a friend by her side as she navigates growing up. We can't thank you all enough for putting us together.

*Emily, Mike, Anna and Matilda,
family dog participants*

"Zacki is such an intelligent dog, and gives 100% in everything he does. A real highlight has been watching our client go out alone with Zacki, something she hasn't done in a long time. Now she has the confidence to do it with him at her side."

Zacki's instructor



They're best friends. They do everything together. Just having that is amazing. It helps bring my daughter down, it's someone she doesn't have to explain anything to. It's that utter acceptance that a dog brings. The bond between them is really strong.

Family dog participant





“

Greg doesn't see any disability or illness just me as an individual, as Martha. Greg didn't just change my life, he gave me a life. He's given me new friends, new connections, confidence, mobility, freedom. He makes me feel happy and comfortable being me.

Martha and Greg

"When Kiki came into my life it was perfect timing. Goodbye carers, hello freedom. We laugh, we play, we cuddle, and she's helped me find the confidence to go places on our own. Thank you Dogs for Good for this wonderful gift."

Sue, assistance dog client



“

Before meeting Ned, I didn't walk very far without sitting down. Now I can go on longer walks and play games too.

Simon, walking group member

Financial overview

2%

Charitable activities,
other trading activities,
investment
income

28%

Donations and gifts
(unrestricted)

23%

Fundraising

INCOME

Total: £4.77m

66%

Legacies

4%

Donations
and gifts
(restricted)

EXPENDITURE

Total: £3.92m

77%

Charitable activities

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

We are grateful for all the support we receive through donations, fundraising and legacies. Special thanks go to the following companies and charitable trusts who supported us in 2024...

- Škoda UK
- Pets Foundation
- Wooden Spoon Charity
- No Fear Bridge
- Wheelwrights' Charity
- Hodge Foundation
- Hospital Saturday Fund

SKODA

**Pets
Foundation**

Looking ahead

Over the next 12 months, we will build on the foundations laid down in 2024 as we continue to develop our integrated and personalised approach, supporting everyone we work with to reach their goals. Here's how, in five steps:

1

DEVELOPING OUR HUB MODEL

We plan to launch two pilot projects, one focusing on service delivery and one on dog supply, with the aim of developing a more inclusive socialisation experience. Our Dogs for Good Scotland plan will be integrated into our overall hub development.

2

SETTING OUR DOGS UP FOR SUCCESS

An Early Socialisation Programme for puppies will be rolled out across our breeding programme, ensuring all dogs have the best possible start in life to prepare them for their future roles.

3

ENHANCING OUR ENVIRONMENT

We will continue to turn our vision of a welcoming and accessible place for all into reality, with the completion (or near completion) of our dedicated puppy block and the submission of plans for upgrading our admin building and health and welfare centre.

4

MEASURING IMPACT

As part of our ongoing efforts to gather more evidence on the impact of our work, we will develop our measurement of outcomes for service delivery, based on our theory of change, and implement a clear impact measure and research plan across our work.

5

SHARING A UNIFIED VISION

We will define our "one team" plan for staff and volunteers, and develop a new website as part of a wider brand refresh. We will also develop a framework for an advocacy programme, based on the lived experience of the people we support.

For making everyday life possible

dogsforgood.org



For making life possible

