




Making life **possible,** every day

Annual Report | 2023



Contents

| | |
|----|--|
| 4 | Introduction from our Chair of Trustees |
| 5 | Welcome from our CEO |
| 6 | Making life possible in 2023: highlights |
| 8 | Our Promise |
| 10 | Seek to understand |
| 12 | Respect all needs |
| 14 | Make positive connections |
| 17 | Our partners and supporters |
| 18 | Making everyday extraordinary |
| 20 | Looking ahead |
| 22 | Finance summary |

 **Dogs for Good exists to advance the boundless possibilities of what a connection between people and dogs can enable – in making everyday life **fuller, healthier and happier** for everyone involved.**

Welcome to the Dogs for Good 2023 annual report

I first joined the board of trustees at Dogs for Good five years ago. What struck me then was the dedication and skill of the team, and the sheer innovative brilliance of the work they were doing to connect people and dogs. It also felt like a family from day one. None of these things has changed.

This year, following the sad loss of John Farrell, I was invited to take over the role of chair of the board of trustees. John's are big shoes to fill, but I am honoured to be able to give the charity some continuity at this time, and excited at the prospect of playing a part in its future plans.

The strategy put together by Ed and the team this year sets a new direction, while building on the strong foundations we already have. The recent generous grant we have received is testament to the power of that vision, and shows that people are ready and willing to invest in our future.

Over the past five years, I have watched the charity grow, constantly adapting to the evolving needs of the people we support to offer a truly person-centred approach that treats every person – and every dog – as an individual. I've also seen us raise our profile to become one of the leading lights in the field, setting a standard for others to follow.

Everyone involved in Dogs for Good should feel proud of the work they do and the positive contribution they make. I look forward to seeing us go from strength to strength.


**Annabelle Charman,
Chair of Trustees**



Annabelle Charman

Remembering John

John Farrell, former chair of our trustee board, sadly passed away in late 2023. John was appointed to the board in 2015, and became chair in 2018. Known for his leadership, expertise and sense of fun, his energy and passion for the charity was a huge inspiration to the board, staff and volunteers. A compelling advocate for Dogs for Good, John truly understood the difference dogs can make to people's lives. He will be much missed.



John Farrell

My first full year at Dogs for Good has been about both taking stock, and looking ahead. It's been a year of talking but more importantly listening – to colleagues, to the people we support, and to our volunteers and supporters – as they shared their insights and ideas about our future direction.

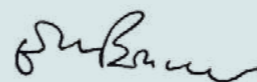
What is clear is that there is huge potential for us to do more, and that the Dogs for Good team has the will and the energy to turn that potential into reality. The result of this talking and listening is a new strategy which I believe captures that drive and ambition and creates a framework to guide us in the years to come.

As we move into 2024, one of our first priorities is to develop our new community hub model. As you read this report, you'll find many examples of the ways we're already broadening out our person-centred approach to community level, engaging with local groups and organisations to understand their needs, and strengthening our volunteer network. Thanks to the generosity of a new donor, we hope to have established our first hub before the end of the year.

As part of our review of existing operations, we've also identified a number of areas where we need to boost capacity, including fundraising. This is essential to support the delivery of our ambitious plans, including the redevelopment of our site here in Banbury. All this will put us in a stronger position to deliver on our long-term goal of more than tripling the number of people we impact through our work.

In embracing change, though, it's also important to reflect on the many, many things that we are already doing so well, as powerfully demonstrated by the stories in this report and the quotes from just a few of the people whose lives we have touched. I am continually amazed by what we are able to achieve by connecting people with dogs.

Our team is making a positive difference to people's lives every day, and I would like to thank every one of them for their contribution, as well as of course the generous donors and supporters who make our work possible.


**Ed Bracher
Chief Executive**



Ed Bracher

Making life possible in 2023...

We welcomed **81 new volunteers**, bringing the total to 650

We celebrated  **10 years of Dementia Dog**

242 community dog sessions took place, helping individuals and groups to meet their goals



Three new assistance dog trainers and two new instructors were appointed, bringing the team back to full strength

Local supporters Southam College chose us as their Charity of the Year and far exceeded their original target, raising a whopping **£15,000**

Our friends at MORE THAN generously match funded our Winter Appeal, bringing total funds raised to **£61,400**

Since 2008, **2000 parents** have attended a family dog workshop to help them support their family and an autistic child

Our London Marathon runners raised **£27,500** for Dogs for Good 

We trained **35 dogs** 

We held our first Gala Dinner event, with special guest **Clare Balding**, to celebrate the contribution of our volunteers

We supported a further **224 families** through our family dog workshops

Volunteer Anna was the recipient of a Coronation Champions Award, one of only 500 across the country



Our Promise

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

In 2023, our staff and volunteers collaborated to produce Our Promise, a commitment to make Dogs for Good a great place to work and volunteer.

Our Promise is unique to Dogs for Good, and reflects our commitment to the health and wellbeing of both the people we support and our dogs.

Seek to understand

We see each other, every person and dog we work with as an individual.

Respect all needs

We listen and see the needs of each person and every dog to give the best and most informed outcomes.

We will...

Make positive connections

Everyone has a part to play in building positive connections to make life feel possible.



Seek to understand

Understanding is key to providing services that are truly informed by the needs of people and dogs. Our work over the past year has focused on exploring new and more flexible ways of working, and looking at the potential for delivering our services at a community level.

2023 saw the start of the second year of our two-year exploratory project in Bracknell. Led by Community Dog Practitioner Lucy Purchase, a key goal has been to build networks and develop links with individuals, groups and organisations to better understand the needs of the community and identify gaps in provision.

New funding enabled us to widen our scope to support more people to feel better connected and that they are part of a community. Information days for local groups and organisations have also helped connect us with new audiences, including those

with early onset dementia, mental health challenges, and children who are being home schooled or not regularly able to attend school.

The appointment of our new Community Engagement Officer Hayley Ring has highlighted the importance of building capacity for this kind of engagement. "That's definitely been one of the key learnings for us this year," says Selina Gibsone, Development Manager. "The collaboration between Lucy and Hayley has enabled us to provide strong outreach as well as effective, focused delivery."

"The whole aim is to go into a community, and rather than telling them what we can offer, asking them what they want from us. Then we can tailor our services to those needs."

Selina Gibsone, Development Manager

Blended interventions

Another key learning has been around the benefits of combining structured, goal-oriented dog-assisted interventions, with more open-ended, informal dog-assisted activities. "The two ways of working really complement each other," says Selina.

"These activities are effective at increasing engagement and having a positive impact, and they can also help us identify individuals that might benefit from a more focused intervention. Similarly, if a person we are supporting has achieved their goals through structured sessions and wants to stay connected with us, there's now the option for them to get involved with activities such as wellbeing walks or dog bingo."

Having the same team delivering both approaches helps provide continuity, and builds stronger engagement with the people we are supporting as well as health professionals. Dogs for Good volunteers are also helping support activities across different parts of the country (see page 14), further reinforcing our links with the communities around us.

Supporting young people: working with Oxfordshire CAMHS

This year, Dogs for Good was approached by Oxfordshire Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to run interventions and activities with young people in a CAMHS in-patient ward. We ran two sessions per week during the six-week summer holiday, with further follow-ups throughout the rest of the year. Now the CAMHS team has secured funding to support a further six-month project with Dogs for Good, focusing on how dogs can help increase engagement and support learning in a classroom environment. Together we are working to create a framework for formal evaluation to understand the impact of the sessions. "It's been really successful," says Selina. "We've already had other CAMHS teams contacting us about doing something similar. It's been a highly effective way of showing people the range of what we can offer."



Respect all needs

We take time to understand the needs of every person and every dog we work with, enabling each individual to overcome challenges and reach their goals, and finding the right role for each dog to flourish.

Creating a single point of entry to our services is a significant step forward in terms of helping us towards our goal: to ensure that the needs of the people we support and the dogs we work with always come first. This year, we trialled a new approach, where people coming to us start by completing a form outlining their needs and the kind of support they're looking for.

In some cases, the outcome may not be what they originally expected. "One family completed a focused community dog intervention, with the intention of having an assistance dog," says Service Manager Kelly Jennings. "In the end they realised a well-trained companion dog would better meet their needs, and chose to go down the family dog route. For us that's a good indication that the new approach is working. Rather than putting people in a box, we're working with them to understand their needs, and identify which of our services is most appropriate."

Alongside this, instructors have been working with people waiting for an assistance dog, running education and handling sessions to help them improve their skills and fully understand the impact a dog will have on their lives before being matched. "It's a win-win," says Kelly. "People are getting the right support, and by targeting assistance dog resources where they are really needed we can reduce waiting times too."

Our family dog service continues to flourish. In May, we reached a milestone, having supported 2000 families with an autistic child since the service was launched in 2011. Our plan now is to extend the scheme to support people living with a physical disability. "It's logical that we use our expertise to help more families by enabling them to unlock the great potential that a companion dog could bring to their family," says Kelly. "Again, it will help us to support more families who we're not currently able to reach."

Dementia Dog

In Scotland, our Dementia Dog project, run in partnership with Alzheimer Scotland, marked its tenth anniversary (see below). This year, the project has also been exploring ways to better meet the needs of people and dogs through flexible, innovative approaches to delivery.

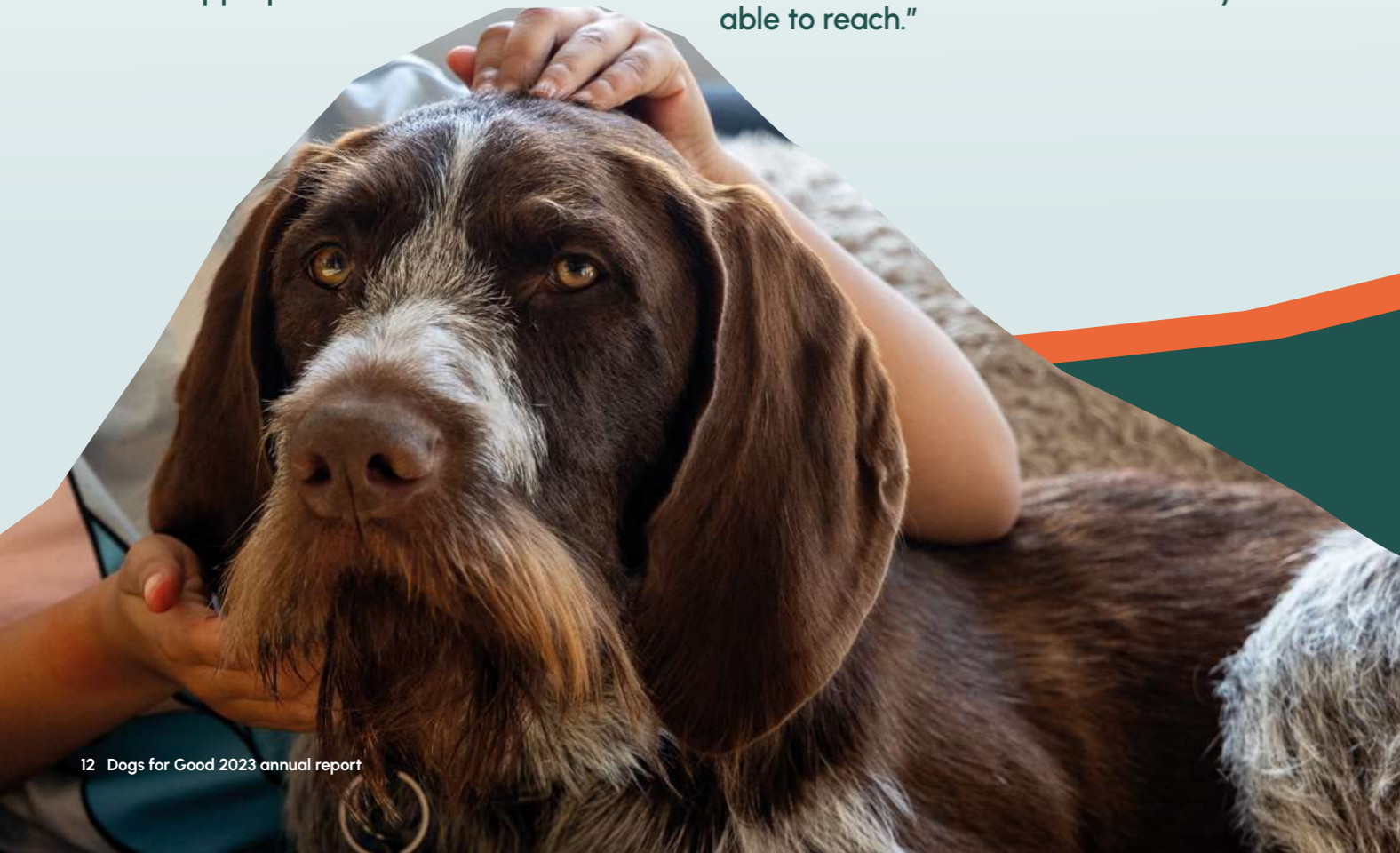
"This is the first year since the COVID-19 pandemic that we've been able to provide our full range of services," says Fiona Corner, Alzheimer Scotland's Head of Innovation and Development. "Taking on a second community dog handler has really helped to boost our capacity and ensure we can meet demand."

This year saw the delivery of four weekly group AAI sessions in partnership with Dementia Friendly Dunblane. Our handler Natashya Sheppard, along with canine sidekick Sandy, supported a movement class aimed at improving balance, motor skills and mobility, providing encouragement and motivation for those taking part.

"The outcomes included better balance and mobility, and increased confidence and physical strength, as well as the positive impact of interacting with a group," says Fiona. "This is definitely something we will look to be involved with again."

Celebrating 10 years of Dementia Dog

Our Dementia Dog project marked its tenth anniversary with an event at the V&A Dundee in June. People we support and their families, supporters, funders, staff and volunteers gathered to celebrate the initiative. "I wanted everyone that came to go away feeling they'd learned something new about Dementia Dog," says Fiona Corner. "So we put the voices of those who've benefited most front and centre. We showed an incredibly powerful video featuring our pioneer families – the first cohort to work with us in 2013 – and we had a speech from the Glasgow School of Art student, now a distinguished designer, who first came up with the idea. The whole day was one of the highlights of my career, and so emotional. I think everyone in the room was in tears at some point! It was such a powerful thing to reflect on what we've achieved so far and the strength and commitment of the community we've built, and of course to look ahead to what we can do in the future."



Make positive connections

Connections are the building blocks of an enabling, mutually supportive community. When we talk about connections, we mean between our colleagues, the people we support, our volunteers and of course our dogs – all of whom come together to make up the Dogs for Good family.

Volunteers have always made a major contribution to the work of the charity, and this year is no exception. It's notable that volunteers played a key role in helping to develop our new strategy and promise, the pillars of which provide the structure for this report. A new volunteer agreement is now in place too, setting out commitments and expectations from both sides.

Thanks to a recruitment push that encompassed social media as well as "real life" events such as pop-up café sessions where potential volunteers could find out more about Dogs for Good, volunteer numbers now stand at more than 650. In Scotland numbers trebled, a boost in capacity that has among other things supported

the reintroduction of our popular Dog Day events for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Increased capacity is also opening up opportunities for volunteers. "As well as boosting our numbers of puppy boarders and socialisers, we now have volunteers providing practical and logistical support for events," says Jamie Macdonald, who joined us as Head of Volunteering in July. "We also have an six-strong volunteer reception team welcoming visitors to our site in Banbury." Additional education sessions for our puppy and dog volunteers have helped to deepen their understanding of the dogs they care for and provide consistency in their training.

Focus on assistance dogs

Our assistance dog service is also key to creating connections. This year, we were delighted to welcome three new assistance dog trainers and two new instructors, bringing the team up to full capacity and enabling us to increase our target number of assistance dogs to 45 in 2024.

Our Quality of Life (QoL) survey, recently analysed in conjunction with the University of York, was started in 2017, providing us with important insights into the impact of assistance dog partnerships. Surveys are sent out to assistance dog users before they are partnered with a dog and then again after six months, 12 months and then two and three years. Where other studies focus on functional and practical impact, the QoL survey takes a broader view.

"Families report that the presence of the dog brings calmness to the home, and creates more opportunities for everyone to be active," says Selina Gibsone, Development Manager. "Being able to understand the impact of dogs not just in terms of practical support, but also mental wellbeing, increased opportunities and more social interactions is really important to us, as well as highlighting points where we may be able to provide more support."

In Scotland, one of our assistance dogs has joined our activity dog team, providing therapeutic visits for people living with dementia. "The idea is to extend people's journey with Dogs for Good," says Fiona Corner, "and to maintain that connection with them – and the dog – even if the circumstances that originally brought them to us change. It's good for them, and we benefit from their lived experience as a carer for someone with dementia."



Stronger links

Steps are also being taken to strengthen links with and within the volunteer community. Following 2022's volunteer-led engagement workshop, we drew up a list of practical measures to provide better support. Key achievements to date include expanding our online Volunteer Hub to include a dedicated section for temporary boarders, sending out a monthly newsletter and running a bi-monthly Volunteer Voices session online. We also carried out a skills audit, with a view to further broadening opportunities for volunteers to contribute in the future. Results will be available in early 2024.

In Scotland, a gathering event in November provided an opportunity for people to connect and – again – for Fiona and her team to gather useful input on how we can better support volunteers.

One area of focus is assessment and training. "We want to make sure all dogs and owners are getting the support they need to feel confident going out and presenting, fundraising and, in the case of our activity dogs, delivering therapeutic sessions," she says.

The team in Scotland has been developing connections with the broader community too, delivering two further webinars for canine professionals, including representatives from local dog rescue centres. "If we're encouraging people to get their own dog, we felt we should also do something to ensure that the community out there is supportive, by raising awareness of what dogs can bring to people with dementia," says Fiona. "There's been so much interest, we're now looking to develop tailored sessions for specific organisations."

Our partners & 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 2023...

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Foundation

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FOUNDATION

The Harry and Mary Foundation

Wheelwrights' Charity

Recognition for our volunteers

This year saw the launch of the first ever Dogs for Good National Excellence Awards, designed to recognise and reward our volunteers. Katy Naylor, who has worked with us since 2017, was named Community Impact Volunteer of the Year. "I was really humbled and overwhelmed to win," she says. "There are so many incredible volunteers throughout Dogs for Good and we all rely on one another. This award is for us all, and the impact we make collectively." We would also like to thank the Marsh Charitable Trust for their support and all those who helped to make the awards ceremony such a success, including our host Clare Balding.

Making everyday extraordinary...



“Spending time with dogs is just hopeful for me, but I don’t think it matters what age or ability you have, dogs can change things.”

Pearl, volunteer puppy boarder



“The moment Harvey came into our daughter’s life, things started to change not just for her, but the whole family.”

Alison, mum and family dog participant

“Our cockerpoo, Minnie, accepts Elsa for who she is, doesn’t ‘see’ autism and doesn’t judge. She just loves Elsa.”

Claire, Elsa’s mum and family dog participant

“Sherlock is gregarious and friendly and has helped me make friends and form relationships where people accept me for who I am. He’s helped me accept myself and my disability. He helps me go out and tackle the world.”

Kelsi, student



“Being a volunteer with Dogs for Good is not just about making life possible for the people the charity supports, it’s about the impact these incredible dogs have on everyone who meets them.”

John, volunteer brood stock holder

Looking ahead...

2023 has been a year of deepening our understanding of the need for our services, and of how we can shape them to support individuals, families and communities. Over the year, we have developed and formalised a set of key strategic aims which cover seven focus areas, and create a framework for our activities over the coming year (see opposite) and beyond.

Our strategic aims are based on our beliefs that:

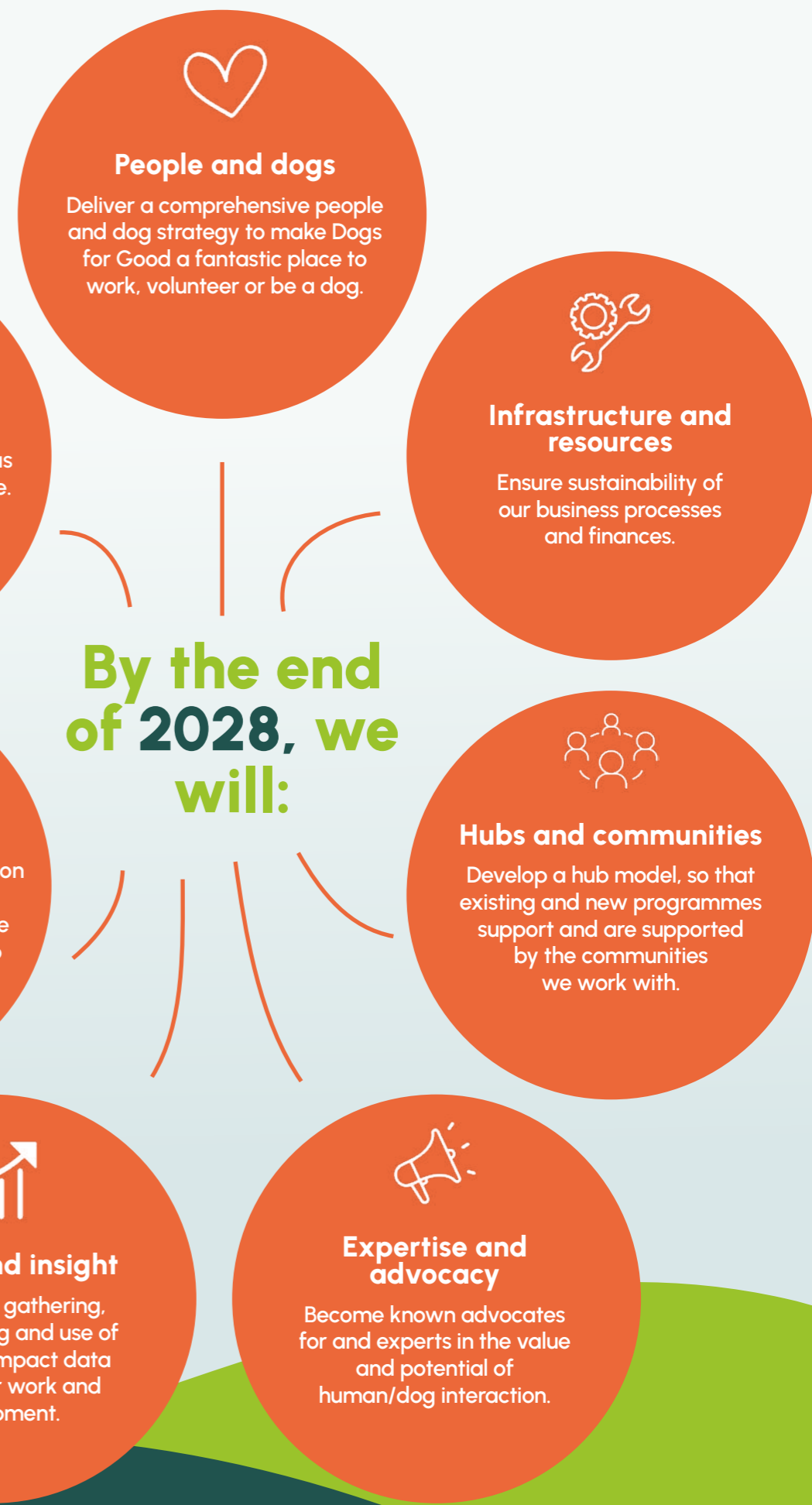
- Communities that are centred on people's needs are the key to a better social care system. Dogs can play a life-changing role in these communities.
- Understanding the needs of both dogs and people helps us realise what an extraordinary connection between them can enable.
- Without judgement or agenda, dogs can open doors for people who often find the world isn't made for them.

By the end of **2024** we hope to...

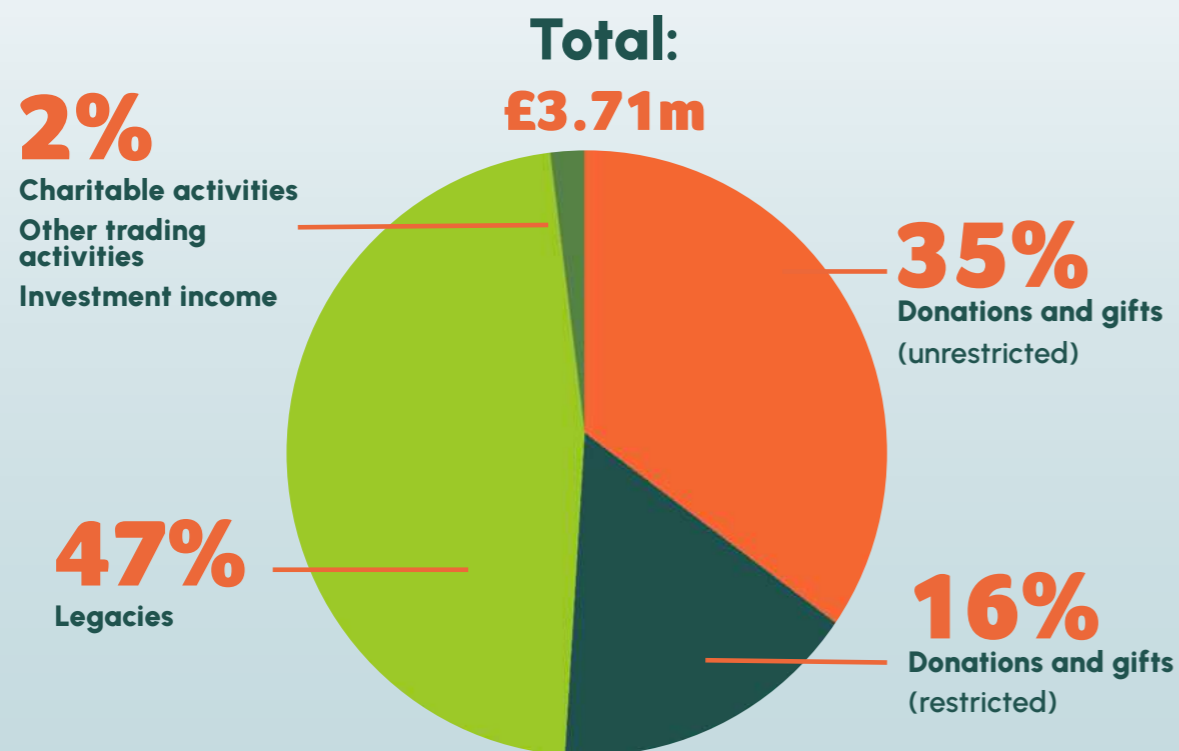
...deliver **45** new assistance dog partnerships

...welcome **300** attendees to family dog workshops

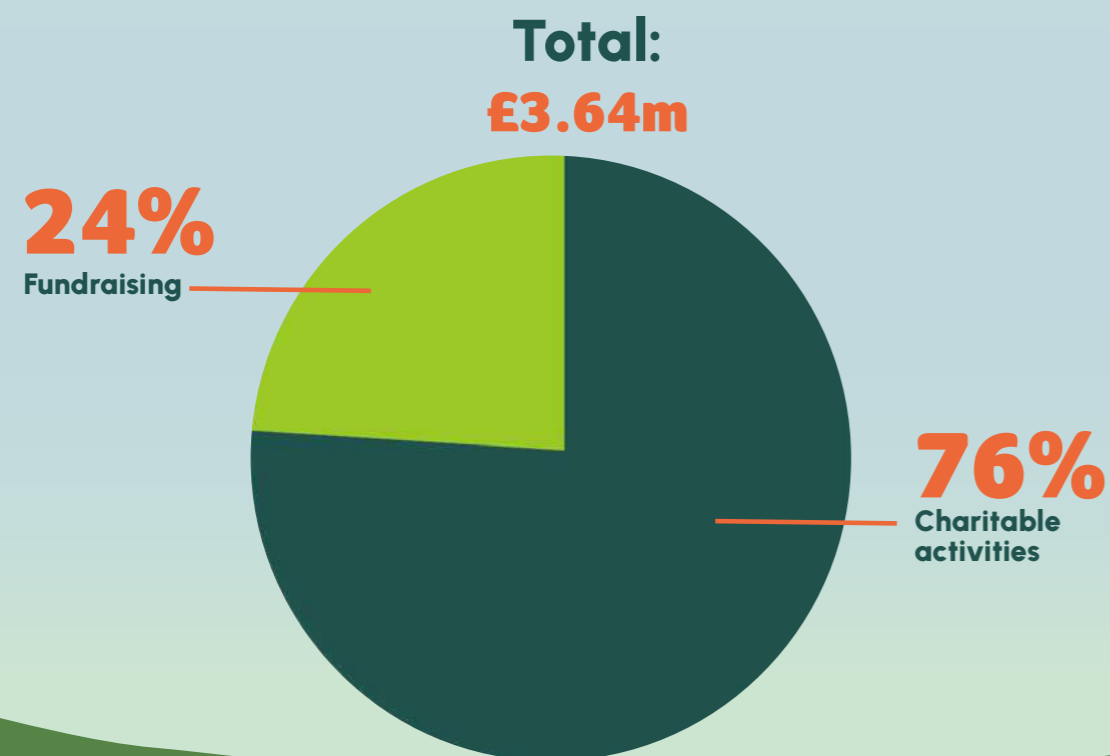
...and work with **250** community dog clients.



Income



Expenditure



These figures are based on our unapproved 2023 annual report and financial statements at time of print. Our approved figures can be found in full from June 2023 at www.dogsforgood.org/about-us/annual-report

“Dougie being with us makes it clear that we need a little bit of extra kindness, not judgement. And it's **astonishing**.”

Albie and Dougie





@DogsForGoodUK



@dogsforgood_uk



@dogsforgooduk



linkedin/dogsforgood

For making life possible

**DOGS
FOR
GOOD**

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