

Annual progress update
2022-2023

Our year...





Wag & Company is the only visiting dog charity befriending older dog lovers in their own homes as well as in care or in hospitals across the North East of England.

With an hour or two most weeks, our professionally assessed volunteers and their special pet dogs provide elderly people, often in poor health, bereaved and isolated, with something to look forward to, some human company for a chat and a cuddle with that much missed furry friend.

An estimated 51,000 pensioners in the North East are chronically lonely and are 50% more likely to die prematurely than people with good social networks.

Many have always had a dog, so immediately connect with Wag volunteers, with two and with four legs, enjoying regular visits and forming often lifelong friendships which make a huge difference to their lives.

Our year...

Wag & Company's aim is that no older dog lover misses human friendship and the company of a dog. Every day across the North East, Wag volunteers are making a difference to the lives of elderly dog lovers.

Almost all the people we visit in their own homes are widowed, have health and mobility issues, they can't get out and about much or at all and spend too much time alone.

They badly miss the friends they've lost, two legged and four legged. With Wag & Company they get both a human friend and a furry friend visiting most weeks of the year... comfort for the individual who benefits and also for their families knowing that their loved one has someone to visit, to help or to raise the alarm if there are any problems and of course a lovely dog to make them smile... and laugh and cry!

Wag has no guaranteed income, we never charge our older friends so that no one has to miss out and we rely entirely on donations, fundraising and grants to make this important difference.

As David Dawson, Older Person's Specialist from Northumbria NHS Foundation Trust tells us:

“What you do in Wag is so important because when people's are lonely and socially isolated it is next to impossible to stay well.”



Our year...

Before 2016, visiting dogs were only available in care and medical establishments and so Wag & Company was created primarily to provide home visiting with dogs to fill this gap for older dog lovers.

We believed that regular visits from a friend with a furry friend would make a big difference to the way older, vulnerable dog lovers at home would feel about their lives. The actual experience over 7 years has surpassed anything we could have predicted. Life changing, life enhancing are all words our older friends have used to describe the way they feel about the impact their Wag friends have made.

Our 7th year of operation and we've made over 97,000 of these wonderful friend visits since we started benefitting nearly 3,000 people this year. Amazing really!

2022-23 was a good year, starting to stabilise after the prolonged impact of Covid-19. The pandemic brought the serious implications of loneliness into sharp relief resulting in even higher demand for our special befrienders, ironically coinciding with very challenging levels of volunteer turnover, recruitment and retention being more difficult than ever.

Even so by the end of March we had 425 Visiting Wag Teams befriending elderly dog lovers across our region.

We were regularly visiting 164 people in their own homes compared with 128 the previous March. Turnover in this population was sadly also unusually high at 51%.

At the end of March we were also visiting 176 care homes, hospices and hospitals and we have a longer than ever waiting list.

It's wonderful to see Wag volunteers making a big difference to older dog lovers right across the North East; just as we'd always hoped!





Our year...

Whilst home visiting has broadly been back on track for physical Wag visits since March 2021, starting outside on long leads, visiting care and medical establishments has been much more volatile.

Most care homes have settled back into a visiting routine now and our volunteers are less affected by closures and ever-changing visiting protocols, but at the end of March 2023, hospices had only just begun to invite their Friendship Dogs back in and many hospital wards were still not open.

We believe that volunteer turnover will also start to stabilise and gradually return to normal levels. The 15% turnover we experienced pre pandemic turned into 60% during the first year of the pandemic, 44% in 21-22 and at year end turnover had reduced again to 34%.

As we couldn't visit patients, visiting the medical staff with our Friendship dogs became a new service for the staff in A&E and Critical Care within those Trusts who work with us in partnership.

FD Whitley is making a huge difference to staff in Northumbria NHS Foundation Trust, **“We're proud to work with Wag & Company where dogs like Whitley provide emotional support and lower stress levels for staff across Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.”**

The increase in workload in the Wag office, mainly due to the significant turnover levels in volunteers and placements has been handled by broadly the existing staff levels.

Our new digitally enabled fundraising initiatives, financed by The National Lottery's Digital Fund grant, 2019-2022, are starting to show green shoots,

with an increase in donations and new participants in our supporters scheme, Friends of Wag, where individuals, Corporate and Community (care homes) through regular giving can support our work.

We are also seeing some signs that organisations who benefit from our work are becoming prepared to contribute.



The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

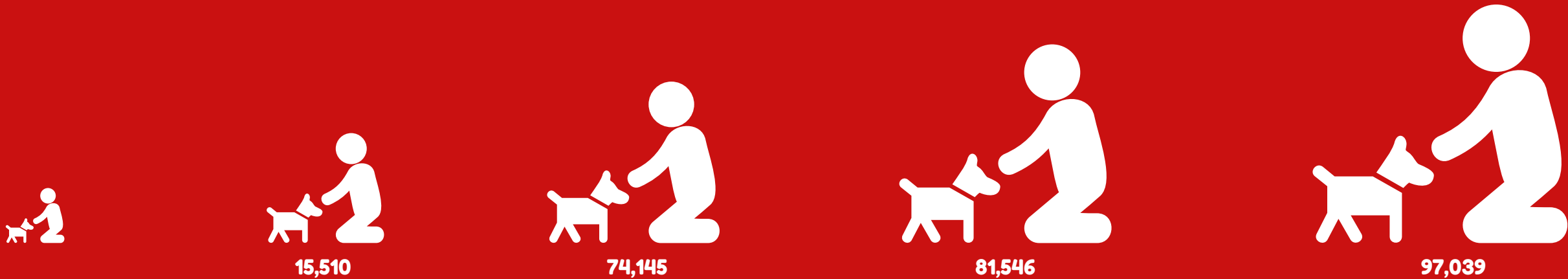
Finally, as recipients of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service we were particularly saddened by the news of the loss of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth in September 2022 and we were very honoured to feature in the BBC tributes to her life and work.

The Wag story so far...

Volunteers:



Friend visits:



Lives touching:



Launch 2016 2018 2020 2022 2023

Managing income, making a difference...

Generating income after a pandemic, Brexit, a war in Ukraine and a cost of living crisis whilst at the same time respecting our key principles below, is inevitably challenging, but so far - just about - so good!

Key principles:

- Financial contributions to Wag & Company are always voluntary.
- We never charge our elderly friends for our special service; it's important to us that they feel that they are receiving genuine acts of friendship and kindness, not either a paid for service nor a charitable one. We're a community of dog lovers of which they are a part.

- We never charge our volunteers for their deployment costs, core Wag assessments, insurance or uniform; these wonderful people give so much already.
- Our small office team are focussed on supporting our community of volunteers and safeguarding our elderly friends and placements in line with high standards of customer service and risk management.

We rely entirely on everyone's help to enable these life changing friendships and so far, whilst it's always nerve wracking, we are just about managing!



A breakdown of our income and costs 2022/23

Income*

Grants, including Digital Grant Staff	£94,218
Fundraising activities	£32,208
Donors and supporters	£29,996
Beneficiaries	£13,356
Legacies	£100

Total **£170,133**

Retained Surplus

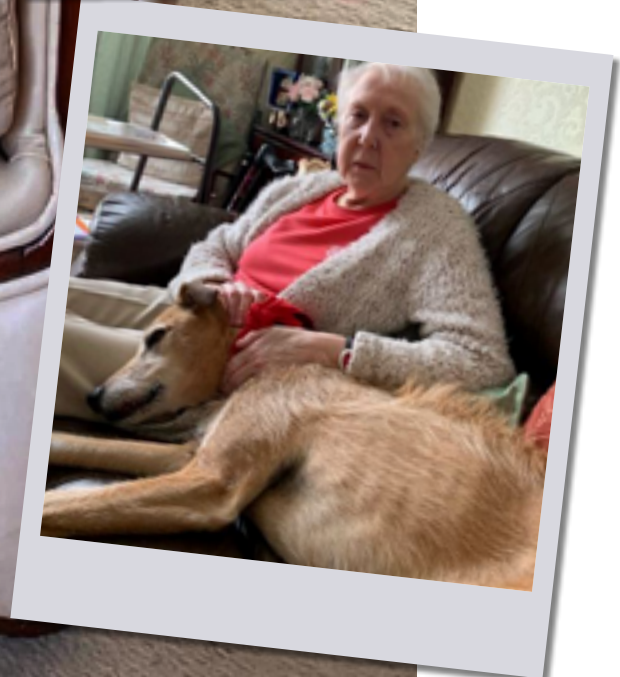
Total **£1,267**

Costs*

Staff, payroll and pensions	£143,817
WAG management system and website	£4,181
Volunteers recruitment, insurance and starter packs	£5,573
Fundraising and marketing materials	£6,914
Professional fees, accounts and general office	£5,456
Gifts for elderly friends	£2,925

Total **£168,866**

* Excluding Digital Grant Other Costs



Managing income, making a difference...

Our 2022/23 financial results were remarkably good with income of £170,133 coming close to budget of £173,462.

Costs remain under tight management at £168,866, so taken together, our overall year end result is positive at £1,267.

Our costs remain primarily staff costs with everyone focussed on enabling and supporting our service with high standards of governance for our older friends and volunteers as well as generating the income required to fund it.

Our office facilities and branded volunteer polo shirts are generously donated by local businesses and our leadership is still carried out on a voluntary basis; so our costs enabling the sustainable deployment of volunteers - recruiting, assessing, matching, inducting, insuring, equipping, deploying and supporting issues as they arise - as well as the ongoing monitoring of all our home placements and income generation and management.

Grants were the largest source of our income, £72,756 against a budget of £50,000 and some new Friend (supporter scheme) sign ups - including care home groups Solehawk, Popular as well as North East Luxury Hotel and Bar organisation, the Apartment Group.

Our 4 year National Lottery funded Digital Transformation Project was substantially complete for formal completion in July 2023 - a project which has enabled us to emerge with all the digital and fundraising tools to enable us the next phase of our development.

Sustainability relies on a long term leadership solution and our Founder, Diane, has led Wag for over 7 years as a volunteer but, at least semi-retirement looms, so the Trustees have set aside a designated reserve to enable the right solution to be put in place over the next two years leaving, at year end, unrestricted reserves of £66,826.

This satisfies Wag's reserve policy of always having 3 months running costs available to meet unexpected costs such as significant IT failures or sickness and temporary staff costs etc.

Making a difference!

What we spent in 2022/23...

56%
Recruiting and placing new Visiting Wag Teams

26%
Promoting our service and raising money to fund it

18%
Making sure our activities are compliant

£169k

...and the difference it made!



Each Visiting Wag Team cost us **£400** in 2022/23. We work this out by dividing our total costs divided by number of Visiting Wag Teams at year end and round to the nearest whole. So $£169/425=£400$.

425
2021/22

425
Visiting Wag Teams making people smile

2,871
People that are benefitting from our Visiting Wag Teams

3,170
2021/22

97,039
Friends visits since we started

80,447
2021/22



Highlights of 2022/2023

Visiting Wag Team, Alison and Zorro, visit Mrs Pauline R in her own home in Newcastle upon Tyne...

Mrs R's daughter lives abroad and when she heard about Wag in the local North East media, she got in touch to ask if we could visit her Mum.

She told us that her mum was living on her own in Newcastle and because at 95 years young her mobility isn't great, she had begun to feel quite trapped in the house!

Pauline has other family in the region who visit regularly but she was still spending more time on her own than she'd like and she's a huge dog lover! She'd absolutely love one of her own again now but she knows she couldn't look after one sadly.

So the family all thought that Wag and Company would be the perfect solution for their mum, she'd love it and having regular visits would make such a difference! We quickly matched Alison and Zorro who lived close by and it was love at first sight!

At their first meeting in May 2022, Pauline told Alison **"this is so nice! You can leave him here, I love him, I love him!"**

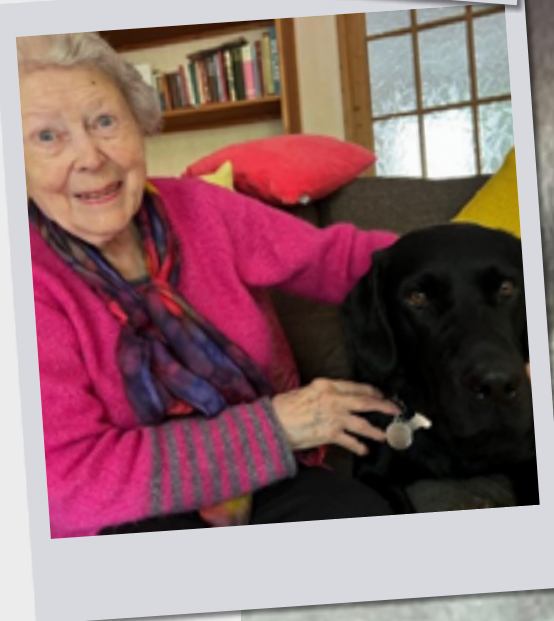
Alison and Zorro have visited ever since, officially every Thursday but as Alison lives close by, she often drops in with Zorro after their walks in the morning.

Pauline's daughter told us: **"The visits are really going beautifully. Mam loves Zorro and adores Alison, they all get on so well and the effect on Mam is amazing!"**

For her part, Alison also loves her visits and she really loves Pauline. **"She's a great character, an amazing woman particularly for someone of her years. I get so much from the visits and Zorro just loves being with Pauline. We're really close friends now."**

Lovely to see! This just one of the many great examples of the difference Wag volunteers are making every day for people in our North East communities.

Never a one way street, our volunteers get so much from visiting new people and sharing their dogs, often making friends for life, like Alison, Zorro and Pauline.



A festival of fundraising...

Another successful Walk for Wag in September 2022 at the spectacular Kielder Waterside.

We held a two minute silence at the beginning of the walk in memory of our late Queen who had recently passed and in advance of her funeral the following week; we respectfully hoped that, as the most famous dog lover of all time, she would have approved of the way we managed our walk that day!

We're always delighted to host a number of our older friends for a change of scene and hundreds of lovely dogs to stroke; plus the odd owl! We raised almost £6,000 - supporting 15 Visiting Wag Teams for a whole year making hundreds of friends visits to older dog lovers in our region!

We launched Wag's OneLottery and within the year we were selling 90 tickets every week with everyone having the chance of a Wag prize as well as the big cash prize of £25,000. For every £1 ticket, 50p is coming to Wag!

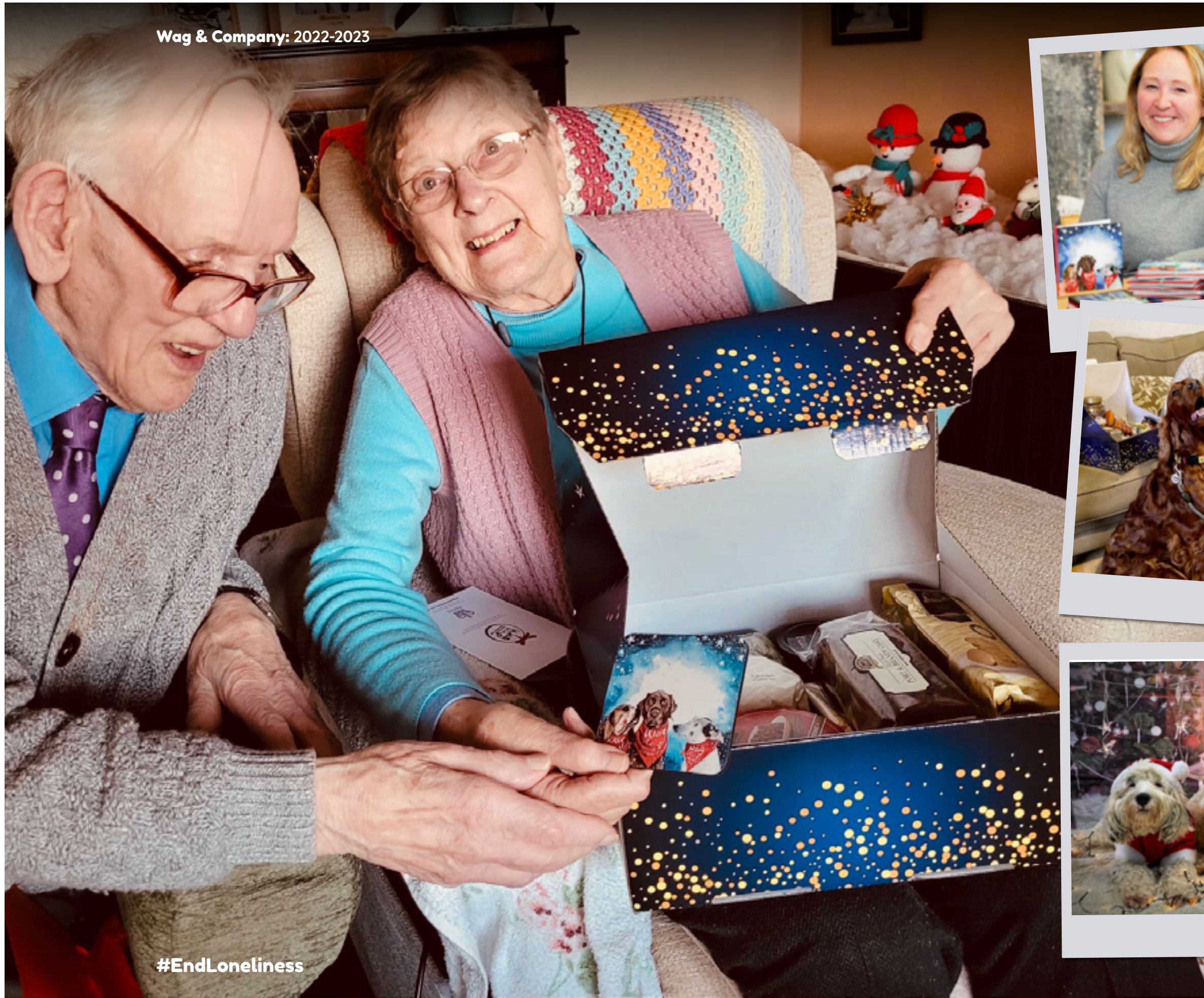
For the first time we ran a Coast2Coast, Workington to Tynemouth, cycle and a fantastic team of Wag supporters, cyclists and non cyclists too, who trained non stop for over a year to be able to take on a challenge of this scale!

On the longest, toughest day, it poured with rain and huge sidewinds almost knocked them off their bikes! They took it in their stride though and by the time they arrived in Tynemouth they were absolutely jubilant! They also raised an amazing £5,500!

We also sell cards, dog tags, cakes, raffle tickets, jump out of planes and run the Great North Run!

We are so grateful to everyone who supports us! We simply could not provide our special, often life changing, friendships free for older neighbours, with hundreds of volunteers and placements effectively managed and supported, without everyone's help!





#EndLoneliness



Spreading comfort and joy at Christmas...

The perfect Christmas gift.. a fabulous Ringtons Afternoon Tea with special Wag friendships!

Christmas came and we were so grateful to everyone at Primula Cheese who provided this year's Christmas gift!

The Luxury Ringtons Afternoon Tea Box - 161 in total - with a special Wag coaster designed by Alex Clark and handwritten Christmas cards designed by our own Audrey Miller, a Wag volunteer were perfect extras!



Visiting Wag Teams delivered the beautiful gifts during December. Sometimes they shared a biscuit with a cuppa - dogs too! Sometimes their friends preferred to keep them to have something to open on Christmas Day.



It's a simple but important thing to do every year. As widowed farmer Eddie told his Friendship Dog Dotty one year, the last time he'd had a Christmas gift was 40 years previously given to him by his wife before she died. He was moved to tears by the thought as much as the gift.

Paying tribute to our dear friend, Mrs Jean Purves...

We started the year having just lost our very special friend Mrs Jean Purves from Newcastle upon Tyne. Jean was the first ever recipient of a Wag home visit in April 2016 just before we launched officially in the May.

Jean was referred to Wag by Age UK Newcastle because she lived alone, she'd lost her husband some years earlier, she had more time on her hands than she liked and she was a massive dog lover!

She had always really loved dogs, they had Yorkshire Terriers, and despite support from her daughter, her mobility was deteriorating and she didn't feel she could manage one of her own any more.

Jan was delighted to be our first! She asked us for a small dog and we introduced new Friendship Dog Archie who met the brief perfectly. With his 'mum' Natalie, they became Jean's first Visiting Wag Team, and together they were our guineapigs for the development of our unique home visiting 'service'.

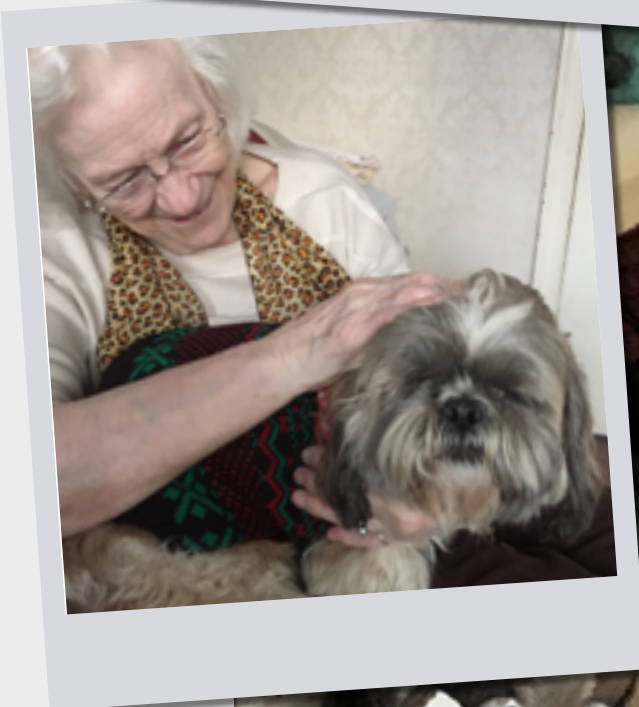
It was working with Jean that enabled us to start formulating our home visiting protocols and the basis for today's very detailed, safe visiting processes for home placements. Pioneers! We couldn't have done it without her!

Jean loved all our volunteers and their special dogs. Natalie and Archie passed the baton to Fiona and Geordie who were followed by Stephanie and Nala. When we told Jean that we would like to send big girl Nala whilst we found another 'small dog (!)', she laughed and said she'd give it a try!

Jean immediately adored Nala as we knew she would and she was soon cuddling and kissing a Rottweiler every week and she never looked back; who knew!

Jean loved being part of Wag. We described as 'our poster girl' and with her permission we used her pictures and quotes everywhere to show everyone the importance of having friends with two and with four legs! So we're blessed with lots of wonderful photos of this lovely and very special lady.

Jean was a great friend and part of the Wag family for ever, we miss her.



Wag & Company: 2022-2023

Hello to our new Friendship Dogs...

...a very warm welcome to all our amazing new dogs (and their humans)! We're very proud to have them all wearing the red Wag bandana out and about in our communities!



#EndLoneliness



Wag & Company: 2022-2023



Our fallen heroes...

...we bid a fond farewell to the beloved Friendship Dogs we've lost in 2022/23. We'll miss each and every one of them and thank them for their special service.



Millie (Anne Porter)



Cassie (Audrey Miller)



Oakley (Carol & Dave Twilby)



Sandie (Carolyn Raven)



Jack (Deb Garland)



Holly (Dorothy Robson)



Ruby (Dot Barron)



Apollo (Ellie & Tony Vernalls)



Ruby (Joanne Thornton)



Holly (Lesley Pearson)



Lucy (Lorraine Thomson)



Joe (Marion Cairns)



Bailey (Nic Burton)



Tilly Autumn (Phoebe Crabbe)



Dexter (Sara Murray)



Dolly (Sarah Laurie)



Millie (Simon Smales)



Stewie (Steve & Julie Jones)



Mr Mo (Virginia Noble)



Derek (Wendy Barrass)



Gary (Steve Jones)



Alfie (Susan Weidner)



Chester (Susanna Kennedy)



Dolly (Tinamaria Bombina)



Tweed (Pat Gales)



Jocie (Virginia Bunyan)



Introducing...

Chris Farman, Finance Director

We were absolutely delighted to welcome Chris Farman in January 2023 as our Finance Director and Trustee.

Chris is an old friend of Wag and, with his wife Ali, he has volunteered for Wag since the beginning with spaniels, Henry and Pippa at James Cook Hospital in Middlesbrough.

Chris' dad, Dick, was Wag's oldest ever volunteer, visiting with his dog Venus until at the grand age of 90 he decided to hang up his visiting spurs!

Chris is a Chartered Accountant with over 40 years in accounting, industry and consulting retiring as a Partner from IBM in 2013.

Chris lives in Stokesley and as well as volunteering for Wag & Company he is also the Finance Director of another unrelated, small charity in Hutton Rudby, supports his daughter in the running of her pub and is an avid supporter of Middlesbrough Football Club, he's been a season ticket holder for 25 years!

Together we really can end loneliness for older dog lovers in our region. We'd love you to join us on this journey!

Our mission is to end loneliness for older dog lovers - It's doable and we're doing it - but we need to be able to meet the huge demand and recruit volunteers in large enough numbers.

We can't do it alone, we're a relatively new charity, a tiny organisation with a huge reach and all we need is a little bit of support from everyone who believes in the value of our special friendships.

Most importantly, we need volunteers, people with special dogs that can give up an hour or two most weeks for a chat, a cuppa and a furry cuddle.

[Click here to find out more.](#)

We'd love you to be our Friend, whether you're an individual, a business or a care organisation, we need your support!

[Become a Friend of Wag today!](#)

[Click here to support us any way you can!](#)





And finally, if you'd like to get involved in any way, please get in touch, we'd love to hear from you...[just click here!](#)

wagandcompany.co.uk