

## Local PR firm to lend expertise to befriending service

A charity working to combat loneliness has gained a new corporate partner to help it improve the lives of even more people.

Wag & Company North East Friendship Dogs aims to almost quadruple its volunteer numbers over the next three years, and has enlisted the help of Darlington-based public relations, social media, and content marketing agency Harvey & Hugo Ltd, with Managing Director Charlotte Nichols joining the board as PR and marketing director.

More than 51,000 pensioners in our region describe themselves as lonely, and it's an issue being taken seriously by Government following the appointment of new Minister for Loneliness Tracey Crouch. The issue, which was high on the agenda of murdered MP Jo Cox, has been described by Prime Minister Theresa May as, "something that can have truly devastating consequences on individuals of all ages and from all backgrounds."

As part of the new arrangement, Harvey & Hugo Ltd will provide free PR and marketing support to help Wag & Company reach its ambitious targets.

The organisation, whose professionally assessed volunteers visit those in care, in medical settings, and at home with their dogs, to provide animal companionship, aims to have 500 volunteers by 2021. This will enable more than 100,000 additional visits, bringing joy to around 2,000 elderly individuals.

Positive interaction with dogs can improve both psychological and physical health because it boosts the production of the *feelgood* hormone, oxytocin, which helps reduce stress.

Charlotte, whose company is named after her own dogs, one of whom passed away recently, said: "My border terriers are a huge part of the personality of the company - we even call ourselves *The Pack* - and coming on board at Wag & Company allows me to combine my professional skills and love of dogs to help a cause close to my heart.

"We've always supported lots of small charities, and having almost doubled the business in size and turnover in the last 18 months, this is the first year we've been able to give more to a particular charity. I'm really proud it's Wag & Company, and hope we're able to make a real impact on its work.

“My Gran, who had dementia and lived in a home, recently passed away, but having always lived with dogs, I could really see the joy it gave her when I was able to bring Harvey and Hugo to see her. It breaks my heart to think of lonely older people missing the love and company of dogs, so I’m delighted to be able to help raise awareness of this wonderful charity.”

Harvey & Hugo’s day to day support will include social media marketing, print collateral design, the creation of infographics, case studies, blogs and press releases. But the firm, which was founded in 2009, will also be the headline sponsor of Wag & Company’s flagship conference in May – *We are Wag*. And one of the first initiatives the company will be involved in is the launch of *Walk for Wag, The Kielder Dog Walk*, a sponsored stroll hosted by Northumbrian Water, to be held on September 23rd this year.

The 10km walk, or 3km wheelchair accessible option along Lakeside Way, is free to enter and it is hoped corporate teams will take part to enjoy the spectacular scenery, while raising money, enabling Wag & Company to make more canine visits to elderly clients.

Diane Morton is the Chair and Charity Director of Wag & Company. She said: “My husband Doug and I volunteered for many years as part of Northumbrian Water’s *Just an Hour* volunteering scheme with our first collie, Bob. We saw first hand the benefits that visiting dog teams bring to people who are no longer able to have their own dogs.

“Charlotte understands from personal experience the difference that Wag & Company volunteers make to older people and we are absolutely delighted that she is bringing both her passion and her professional skills to the Wag organisation. It’s also clear that dogs are a very important part of the wider Harvey & Hugo family, so we feel this new partnership is a great fit.”

To find out more about Wag & Company, visit [wagandcompany.co.uk](http://wagandcompany.co.uk), and to sign up to Walk for Wag, visit [wagandcompany.co.uk/fundraise/walk-for-wag](http://wagandcompany.co.uk/fundraise/walk-for-wag).