

Spicer Life

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Connecting with nature boosts workplace wellbeing

Connecting with nature has well known benefits to mental health and wellbeing. Mental health charities Mind and The Mental Health Foundation both advocate spending time in green space or bringing nature into your everyday life.

Research confirms that activities from growing vegetables and walking in green spaces to being around animals can improve mood, reduce stress and anger, improve confidence and self-esteem and aid relaxation.

Many colleagues around Spicerhaart enjoy outdoor activities which keep

them healthy in mind and body. Here are just a few examples.

An early morning walk with Murphy creates thinking time

Running a large business can be stressful at the best of times, let alone through a pandemic. One way that our CEO, Paul Smith, keeps fit and healthy is walking his dog Murphy (so named as he was a rescue dog from Ireland!).

A saluki lurcher cross breed, Murphy is now 13 and not as fast as he once was but he's been Paul's faithful friend through all the challenges and triumphs over the years.

Paul says: "Walking Murphy is extremely therapeutic and I use it as thinking time and have space to plan the day ahead. I usually go out at 6.30 in the morning, come rain or shine, and I find listening to the birds and the dawn chorus is very relaxing."

Paul's also lost three stone this year too, recognising the importance of staying fit and healthy, both mentally and physically.



Andrew teaches his grandson about beekeeping

Keeping bees helps to create a better environment

Andrew Lake, Divisional Sales Director for the London and Essex-based Metro division, lives in a small rural village on the border of Kent and Surrey.

He took up beekeeping eight years ago after a failed attempt to keep chickens, which destroyed his beloved garden.

Andrew explained: "I took a beekeeper's course and I've never looked back. Currently I have two hives in my garden and at the height of the season in July, each hive contains 50,000 bees."

"The main reason I decided to keep bees was environmental. I read about the decline of honey bees, how if you lose bees you could lose 70% of crop species."

"The offshoot is that we get pure honey. We jar it up and sell it on to friends and family and the shop in the village stocks some. In our best year we got 100 jars, although this year



Andrew starting his smoker before an inspection

has been damp and cold so we don't expect to get much.

"Bees are like us, if it's cold and raining outside, we stay inside and raid the fridge. The bees stay indoors and eat their stores."

Andrew admits it can be a scary and painful hobby and he has been stung numerous times. "I'm very respectful of the bees, if you don't respect them, they'll let you know by attacking and stinging you."

"It's definitely not therapeutic, it's frustrating, nerve-wracking and there's lots of pressure! I think that I manage them, but I don't, bees do what they want to do and if they swarm, which is a natural thing to extend the gene pool, you can lose your queen and half of your colony."

Despite the challenges, it's a hobby that has become a real passion. Andrew now gets called out if a swarm lands in the village, which he will use to build up his own apiary or give to another beekeeper looking to expand.

The environmental aspect is always foremost in his mind. "If your colony dies that's another nail in the coffin for the bee population." But keeping bees has also made Andrew and his wife much more aware of what is happening in nature.

"It has really alerted us to the flowers bees are interested in and what's good in gardens for pollination. I even converted part of the garden to a wildflower garden to encourage the bees – although if you try to plant for them, they just fly off elsewhere and ignore you."

"We're now much more aware of the seasons which is a positive feeling, we notice that the pear trees are out before the apples. It makes you think about other things than the pressures of life."

"Anything that gets you out of the house and enjoying the outdoors has got to be positive. With the bees, I'm helping to create a better environment all round."

Growing veg is a great way to escape - from work and home schooling

Sarah Fox, Administrator at haart Lincoln, briefly tried her hand at growing food when she built a small vegetable patch in the garden of her first house. But, with her husband in the forces, they moved house soon after.

Five years later, she decided to try again. "I felt I needed somewhere to escape to outside of work and home, so I popped down to the local allotments in Waddington, Lincoln, and put myself on the waiting list."

Six months later, in February last year, she was given the keys to her very own plot.

Sarah said: "Although daunting at first with being a relative beginner, I soon got stuck in at weekends clearing the ground ready for planting and roping in my husband and kids to help."

"When lockdown hit, the allotment proved a godsend! Not only did it give me a chance to escape the negativity on the news but it also helped having a break from the traditional home schooling and gave the kids practical experience of growing their own food, along with much needed fresh air and freedom."

"In our first year we had a go at growing everything and were surprised at how much we were able to harvest, from potatoes and carrots to cucumbers, cabbages and beetroot. There's a sense of pride when you're serving up salads and a variety of other dishes knowing you've grown the vegetables and I'm looking forward to seeing what this year will bring."

Find out how taking up weightlifting helped Rosie Hadley look after her mental health on Page 21.



Paul Smith and Murphy



Sarah Fox and her family on the allotment and with their produce



Tech Talk

By Matt Clarke, Head of IT



After nearly 20 years with the company, starting as an IT engineer, Matt Clarke is our new Head of IT. He heads up a team of enablers, using the latest and most innovative technologies to help Spicerhaart stay ahead of the game.

He's inspired by the Formula 1 team and how they cope so well under pressure and adapt to change. He'll be supporting the IT team as they work to support the rest of the business.

With wide-ranging knowledge of Spicerhaart, Matt is looking to drive change and help the team to work together more effectively.

"My main priority is firstly to support my team by being a good leader," explains Matt, "and secondly to keep ahead of competitors by using the latest technologies to ensure Spicerhaart continues to be innovative and evolve."

Investing in our communications

Two years ago, we launched 'Project Firefly' - the search for inspiration to enhance our telephony platform. We'd been using the same technology to connect and talk to people for many years and whilst it was solid and robust, it felt out-of-date and disjointed.

We knew we wanted the latest communications technology to be at the top of our game, so we explored the whole market and ended up connecting with the guys at Cisco. Their global success and our strong communication foundations combined

well with our aspirations and visions for the future and meant they could take us to the next level in terms of innovation, reliability, and security.

It's been an incredible £5 million investment, but now we are now halfway through our transition to the new Cisco solution which means we are going to be even better connected to our customers and their journeys and also to each other as a team.

We'll all be using the new Webex app which will deliver us a rich consistent experience no matter where we are or what device we use. It will be one place for all collaboration between client or colleague with functions such as calling, messaging, video meetings and much more.

To complement our branch network, our contact centres will be equipped for today's multi-channel world with the ability to handle any communication channel. This means our customers can contact us in any

way they choose, whether it's chat, phone, email or social media.

Ultimately this technology will enhance our customer experience, bringing together all our customer journeys and providing us with more opportunities for success.

Add to that our own internal communication benefits and we're confident this new system will enable us to reach the next level of collaboration and drive us firmly into the future.

Protecting our business

It's great to welcome new technology, but we must never lose sight of the basics, including IT security.

One risk is Ransomware. It's a form of malware - software designed to disrupt, damage or gain unauthorised access to a computer system - which encrypts the victim's files. The attacker then demands a ransom from the victim to restore access to the data.

Ransomware is one of the biggest security problems on the internet and a major cybercrime risk to organisations. It's no longer bedroom hackers that threaten us, it is now identified as organised crime with global enterprises run by criminals demanding huge sums.

With IT becoming even more crucial to support working from home, we've now invested further in the Sophos Security Suite.

Sophos now proactively monitor our devices and network. Their team of experts are continually analysing our estate for signs of malicious activity

24/7 and will take immediate remedial action any time of the day.

We're confident this has strengthened our IT security. However, we must all play our part in protecting our network by being aware and vigilant when using email or the internet.

All in all, this is an exciting time for our team and our role in strengthening the business; these latest investments are substantial steps to keep us thriving as the world is constantly changing.

We look forward to you all seeing the benefits and being a part of this journey with us.



SOPHOS

By Felix Parsons, Data Protection Officer

More than 80% of all data breaches are caused by human error. We've all done it - rushed to finish an email and realise that, entirely by accident, we've sent it to the wrong email address or with the wrong attachment!

It's so easy to do, but the key thing to remember is what to do next. First, don't panic. Take a deep breath and act professionally.

Everything regarding the data breach is important, so start by trying to recall the email. Unfortunately, this won't be possible if it's already left our network. Send a separate email to the recipient acknowledging that you've sent them something incorrectly and asking them to permanently remove the email and attachments. Also tell them you're reporting the incident to your Data Protection Officer who will probably be in touch with them about it.

Do then contact me, by phone or using DPO@spicerhaart.co.uk, so I can log it. I need a copy of all of the communication about the incident, both the breach email and any subsequent contact.

Every breach needs to be investigated, so I'll need to know what caused it, what is the impact (risk) to the person whose data has been shared or used inappropriately, how we reduce the impact of the risk and whether there's

Act fast to reduce risks of data breaches



any underlying cause to this incident happening?

Once I have these details, I will usually contact all involved, including those who have received the email and those whose data is involved, to notify them what has happened, and any potential impact to them. I'll also tell them if we are proposing to report the incident to the ICO.

A simple incident like this can damage the reputation of the company and

destroy the good work you've done with that customer and their contacts, so the sooner we react, the less of an impact it will make.

Don't forget this information can be seen as personally identifiable data or potentially even sensitive data, so please always take a few seconds before sending any email to double check all the email addresses are correct, and the attachments are appropriate.



Cutting our carbon emissions for the good of the planet

At Spicerhaart, we carried out our first analysis of company-wide carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions this year, which resulted in some interesting findings about our carbon footprint.

On average, our business produces 1,131 tonnes of CO2 emissions per year, with over half deriving from fossil fuels and natural gases.

Taking action to reduce our carbon footprint has become a core focus of the business, resulting in some exciting initiatives that our team members have taken up with enthusiasm.



Iain Sanderson, Head of Financial Planning & Analysis with his hybrid electric car

Driving towards a greener future

When a number of company car leases came to an end this year, we took the opportunity to revisit how our employees travel across the country and what can be done to reduce dependencies on fossil fuels.

The result has been an order for hybrid and electric BMW and Volkswagen cars, which over 50 senior managers are now able to drive as they visit various properties and branches in their day-to-day work.

Helen Chatton, Car Fleet Coordinator, said: "We have gone above and beyond to offer our drivers a greater choice as to how they run their fleet vehicle, so that drivers can really consider what is important to them in terms of the environment and running costs."

Some managers have installed self-funded electric charging ports in their homes too to get the most out of the new company vehicles, as well as benefit from significant tax breaks set by the government.

Mark Hurdle, Chief Financial Officer, said: "Our business is constantly looking towards the future to become more sustainable. Our ambition is to increase the number of fully electric and hybrid vehicles made available, as these become more viable in terms of range and cost, as well as the availability of public charging points."

We look forward to expanding the hybrid and electric car programme so both employees and the environment can continue benefit.

Giving back to the planet

As well as cutting carbon emissions, we want to give back to our planet with an ambition to eventually become carbon neutral.

Spicerhaart has purchased 9,500 trees to be planted in Nepal through the Eden Reforestation Projects to offset our annual CO2 emissions as part of a five-year commitment to planting and carbon offsetting.

Steve Lamb, Chief Information Officer, explained: "It takes 20 years for the trees to fully grow and produce large amounts of oxygen (O2). But if we keep planting at a rate of 9,500 per year, we will have planted enough trees by 2024 to become net-zero. By 2025, there will be enough for us to become carbon positive."

"Nepal faces a lot of deforestation from natural disasters such as earthquakes, so we're proud to be supporting the country through the Eden Reforestation Projects."

The idea came to Steve from a smaller initiative he spearheaded through Tree-Nation, which also coordinates reforestation efforts across the globe.

Spicerhaart will specifically be paying for Bombax Ceiba trees through the Eden Reforestation Projects, picked for their high O2 output, fast growth and a long lifespan.

Steve continued: "The type of tree you plant is just as important as the

number of trees, and your options vary depending on the climate of the country."

The amount of trees being planted will be reviewed every year against our annual CO2 emissions to ensure we are going above and beyond for the good of the planet.

"We are always looking for ways to take better care of our planet for the future."

"In 20 years, we could be returning ten times our current carbon usage, which is an exciting goal for the business to strive towards."



Eden Projects, Nepal



Bombax ceiba tree

AROUND THE COUNTRY

Amazing offices: haart, Bury St Edmunds

Area Partner Melanie Mills describes her haart branch in Bury St Edmunds' historic Cornhill as a "hub of activity" after her high-performing team moved from across the road to the prominent premises in 2014.

The building pre-dates, and is attached to, the Bury St Edmunds Corn Exchange, overlooking the original market. It is believed to be the old butcher's shambles, or slaughterhouse, dating back to 1761.

Adjoining buildings were demolished in the 1800s and the building where Melanie's team is now housed was retained and joined to the striking new Corn Exchange, which opened in 1862, when the town gained its reputation as a thriving hub for merchants.

While the Corn Exchange is now a Wetherspoons, the back building was converted to shop use around 50 years ago, housing a furniture shop, jewellery shop and an opticians before becoming haart's town centre branch.

The office's impressive and inviting window displays and its prominent



determination to achieve the best has helped it maintain a low turnover of staff and remain one of haart's top five performing branches since 2005.

location have, said Melanie, made a real difference to the number of customers walking through the door.

"It's so much bigger than our previous office, which has allowed my amazing hard-working team to grow and attract repeat business," Melanie said.

Melanie believes the office's family feel and the team's shared

She said: "I'm coming up to my 30th year at Spicerhaart, where I have worked alongside a lot of my team for over 15 years. This makes a huge difference as we all want the same thing and have such a great office culture. This team is full of high achievers, and I'm blessed to be a part of it."

Historic Homes

Chewton Rose has a new branch in Wiltshire which launched in January, adding to its branches which offer some of the most interesting homes around the country.

Within a month of opening, Chewton Rose has already listed a special house which dates back, in part, approximately 400 years.

Once a gatekeeper's cottage, with only one room upstairs and one room downstairs, this detached cottage has been extended over the years to now provide four bedrooms, an open-plan kitchen and breakfast room and a dining room.



Set in serene Wiltshire surroundings, with far-reaching views across the fields, the cottage at Hayes Knoll, about eight miles from Swindon, has become a magnificent family home which is on the market for a minimum asking price of £800,000.

The original owners would have gone out to the well in the field to draw their water and baked bread in the bread

oven. Now, hints of the cottage's past can be seen here and there, including in its beams.

Wiltshire has a population of over 700,000 and the area is home to some notable historic sites, such as the Stonehenge and Avebury stone circles, so there is no doubt that the new branch will add to Chewton Rose's interesting and historic portfolio.

Do you have any homes with an interesting history to share?



Long service award for dedicated Scout leader

Cheryl Russell, Administrator at Northampton haart, has been awarded the Chief Scout's Commendation for long service after a staggering 32 years as a Scout leader.

Cheryl joined the Venture Scouts in St Albans, aged 17, when Scouting – previously boys only – was just being opened up to girls. She had so much fun that when she became too old to be a Venture Scout, she started helping at a local Scout group.

"I was one of the first female leaders in my district," she explained. "It's a great way to meet new people and get involved with the community. Whenever I have moved house, I have always found myself a Scout group."

Now a leader at the 16th Duston Scouts in Northampton, Cheryl said: "I love supporting youngsters to learn new skills. We help our young people

to learn the old skills like map reading, cooking, camping and hiking. But we also do lots of modern skills like computer safety and digital photography.

"We also get involved in local projects like creating wildlife havens and litter picking in our local community. With so much pressure on young people from school and so many other activities available, it's great that Scouts still endures and has modernised over the years."

Cheryl's daughter has just finished Scouting after joining at five-years' old, she is now about to turn 18! Some of the Scouts she has



Cheryl with her Chief Scout's commendation

supported are now leaders themselves, with their own children and, in one case, grandchildren now part of the organisation.

Cheryl said: "I will never tire of being part of the worldwide family of Scouting; I have made friends for life."

Haybrook supports Shoebox Appeal

By Leah Dennall, Senior Residential Sales Consultant

Our Haybrook office in Crookes once again supported the Sheffield Shoebox Appeal to bring Christmas cheer to the homeless, those in temporary accommodation, women's refuges and the socially isolated in the community.

Each year we really look forward to collecting the Christmas boxes, because it's a great way to give back to those in need at the coldest time of the year. Our Crookes office serves as a drop-off point and we always have a fantastic response from the community.

This Christmas we received an amazing 112 boxes, including one from each member of our team. Most boxes included items such as

gloves, hats, scarves, toiletries and dried food, while those for mothers and babies also provided toys, nappies and wipes.

On average we collect 100 boxes a year for distribution to charities in the Sheffield area. However, the appeal started slowly and I was concerned the pandemic would affect the drop-offs.

Then, a week into December, the boxes started arriving and we were overwhelmed by the amount received. Because many schools weren't collecting this Christmas, a lot of pupils dropped boxes off with their parents, and the local netball team popped in with ten boxes.

One year, we had 30 boxes delivered after the final drop-off date and our then Sales Progressor, Lola Marsden, went out on Christmas Eve with her son to deliver them to a homeless charity in time for Christmas.



A local netball team popped into the Crookes office with 10 boxes

Creating a great place to work

A staff survey is always a good barometer of how people in a business are feeling at any given time. Here, we talk to Group Managing Director Antony Lark about the importance of Spicerhaart's 2021 Staff Engagement Survey and find out what happens next.

First of all, why did you decide to conduct a staff survey?

It's been many years since we've undertaken a formal survey of all our employees, and the Senior Leadership Team wanted to understand what people think about working for Spicerhaart, not least because of the impact the Covid pandemic has had on our workforce.

The last two years have been extremely challenging and many people have re-evaluated their lives and lifestyles, inevitably impacting on staffing levels and recruitment.

We wanted to understand how we can address this and find out what we're doing well – and where we can improve, and how best we can support our teams, moving forward.

What response have you had?

We've had an amazing response to the survey, with three quarters of our workforce taking part, and there was a huge amount of positivity which really heartened us. People went to great lengths to praise their line managers and this came through loud and clear.

As it was an anonymous survey, led by an independent HR consultancy, JourneyHR, it gave people the opportunity to be completely open and honest about their views and we're really grateful that so many

people were prepared to share their feedback with us.

What were the most positive findings?

We're really pleased to see that people value being part of the Spicerhaart family and there was a strong sense of pride. They say they would be willing to recommend us as an employer. They say they can be themselves at work and they go the extra mile for the business.

The vast majority also felt our ways of working encourage equality and diversity, which is really important to us, though there is a keen desire to see more women and people from different backgrounds in the more senior positions.

What more can be done?

It's clear that people are very interested to know how they can progress their careers and develop their skills and it's evident that people want greater transparency in how they can succeed. We recognise that staff who are happy, motivated and receive excellent training all contribute to an organisation's overall success. We've got lots of plans here so watch this space!

We also need to improve the way we communicate with people and how often. It's really preyed on my mind that people didn't feel we

communicated well enough during the pandemic, which was because we had a lot to deal with in a very short time.

Communication comes in many forms so we'll be using all our different channels of communication – and particularly the Spicer Life magazine which people say they really like – to share more information about what's happening within the company and what our strategy and vision is.

What happens next?

We've listened very carefully to what people have to say and are now considering what actions to take. We will then communicate openly and honestly about any decisions that are made.

We've seen there's a desire to move to a 5-day working week and, as we believe this will help us to attract and retain talent more effectively, we will soon be starting a consultation process with you on the proposed changes. At the same time, we'll review with local managers how this would work on a practical level.

It has been really rewarding to fully understand everyone's views and some people have made very important points that are personal to them, which we are taking on board. We would like to thank everyone that took part as we are really pleased to have everyone's feedback.

Nexus helps keep Spicerhaart ahead of the game

Our Group's dynamic contact centre and concierge service has a hand in nearly half of our company instructions.

Nexus is not only the engine room which keeps Spicerhaart running efficiently, but it also plays a vital role in keeping us one step ahead of our competitors.

Based at Spicerhaart HQ in Colchester, Nexus was one of the business operations which had to transform overnight when the first Covid-19 lockdown was announced in March 2020.

Long-serving Nexus Operations Manager Lesley Miller explained: "Before Covid-19, most of our team were working in Colchester. When we had to pick up everything and go home, it led to really changing the way we work.

"During Covid-19, we changed to an internet-based software phone system with a USB headset. Thanks to our fantastic IT team, we transformed the business completely. Team members can currently work from anywhere in the UK - we have people in Cambridge, Croydon, Norwich and south Essex and they log in and access everything we have at Head Office."

The role of Nexus, in essence, is to support all the Group's estate agency and lettings branches and home-based Partners to grow their market share.

The team of nearly 70 full and part-time employees answers all phone calls outside branch working hours - working seven days a week from 8am to 10pm. Plus, if a branch doesn't answer a call within a certain number of rings, it diverts to Nexus.

But Nexus is far more than a call centre, as Lesley explained: "Nearly 50 per cent of company instructions come via Nexus; we helped Estate Agency to bank more than £20 million last year.

In the first week of 2022, we booked nearly 900 estate agency valuations.

"Call volumes are really high, we recently dealt with more than 6,500 calls in two days. But we are still smashing our targets and answering more than 90% of calls."

Nexus' team of Personal Move Assistants deal with calls as though they were a branch member, ensuring callers are registered for property viewings, collecting comprehensive details and exploring every opportunity. If queries are too in-depth, they explain they are part of the concierge team and arrange for the branch to call back.

The team's proactive role creates business for our branches by developing market leads. This detective work includes identifying properties marketed with other agents and finding contact details to enable team members to call them with Spicerhaart's offer.

Aside from the team employed at Head Office, the new processes and upgraded telecoms system mean the Working from Home team now only come into the office once a month for training, coaching and networking.

Lesley explained: "We had a really strong last quarter of 2021. Our new dialling system works the data, delivering an inbound or outbound call direct to our Personal Move Assistants. They work at levels up to Level 4 for those with more experience and the system provides outbound calls at different levels.

"It is full-on, team members work an eight-hour shift and are provided with a new call within five seconds of hanging up the last one. It can be

tough, often our team gets the brunt of customers' anger if they feel things aren't moving quickly enough.

"We have a structured recruitment process to find the right people, including a trial day. It is really important to build rapport with people. Our team members need life experience, to be able to work under pressure, and it helps to know a bit about home selling and letting.

"In return, we have a career path for everyone which includes the opportunity to move into the branch network."

Lesley loves her role: "I like helping people achieve their potential, knowing we're doing our best for the company. We are a big positive for Spicerhaart."

She describes Nexus as the Group's not-so-secret weapon, providing a service other agencies try to copy. Her goal is to keep it ahead of the game: "We have a strong team of managers and we're very tech driven now.

"The technology is incredible, bringing up localised data so we know not only where someone is calling from but have information such as the proportion of properties achieving their asking price at our fingertips."



Lesley Miller

Helping the team to succeed

Spicer Life spoke to two team members about why they enjoy their roles.

Christopher Lumm, Assistant Business Development Manager

Christopher joined Nexus almost four years ago after serving in the Army for ten years.

He explained: "After leaving the Army, I needed a new challenge and this job looked perfect for me. I have progressed through every role: inbound, web agent, cold calling and now I have been promoted to Assistant Manager, where I am also training and trying to learn as much as I can to help me progress to the next level.

"I enjoy my role, it's busy and high energy and I love being part of a team and doing what I can to help the team succeed. I assist our managers and team members to hit their targets and offer 5-star service to customers, while carrying out my role as a multi-skilled agent answering and making calls.

"I look forward to coming into work to see what challenges there will be and how best to overcome them. I enjoy awards evenings and incentives, it's exciting to win myself but it's just as much fun seeing my team members succeeding."

Christopher said the team is always looking out for self-motivated people who enjoy a competitive team environment and are excited by the challenge of hitting targets.

Liane Walker, Operations Assistant

Liane joined Nexus from school as a 16-year-old apprentice and has worked with the team for 14 years.

She explained: "When I was at secondary school, my parents were in the process of buying and selling. I loved viewing properties with them and talking to the estate agents.

"I thought being an estate agent and showing people round houses was the best job ever! I knew I wanted to work in property, so I wrote to all the agents in town asking if they had any apprenticeships.

"I love the team I work with, we are one big family. My favourite part is organising the incentives and awards evenings. Seeing team members progress and win awards, it's just amazing!"

Liane has been promoted three times and completed five NVQs, covering business administration, team leading and customer service. She laughs: "All my roles have been working alongside Lesley, I know what she's thinking and I can finish her sentences too!"

Liane's responsibilities underpin the smooth running of Nexus, she describes herself as the central hub for rota planning and administration allocation, compiling weekly management information and actively queue managing.



Christopher Lumm



Liane Walker

If you know of anyone suitable for a role in Nexus, please email: recruitmentnexus@spicerhaart.co.uk

Spicerhaart opens its doors to the Armed Forces community

We're proud to have signed the Armed Forces Covenant, signalling our commitment to being a forces-friendly employer.



EMPLOYER
RECOGNITION
SCHEME

BRONZE AWARD

On top of this, we have joined the Ministry of Defence Career Transition Partnership (CTP) scheme, connecting us with a wide pool of highly trained and skilled ex-service and reservist personnel.

Emma Barber, Spicerhaart's Head of Training and Development, whose husband is a former soldier, said: "We are extremely proud and supportive of the dedication and commitment given by forces personnel to our country.

"We are therefore delighted to have signed the Armed Forces Covenant and have pledged to treat all service personnel fairly and with respect."

Emma, who is our Armed Forces Champion, added: "This is such an important initiative for us, as people retiring from the Army, Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and Royal Marines have so many transferable talents. They are disciplined, motivated and have excellent communication skills."

Trudy Reilly, Employer Relationship Manager for the CTP in the East of England, welcomed our decision to sign up to the recruitment scheme and said: "We are delighted that Spicerhaart has signed the Armed Forces Covenant and also engaged with us to encourage and attract service leavers, veterans and military families into their industry and business.

"Having such supportive employers makes the transition from the military to the civilian workplace a much easier process for our service leavers, especially knowing that employers such as Spicerhaart value their transferable skills and experience." In acknowledgement of our efforts in this area, we recently received the Bronze Award from the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.

Among those who've already put their talents to good use within the company is IT Infrastructure specialist David Skingley, 55, who joined Spicerhaart in 2017. David completed a 26-year military career, followed by 13 years in commercial and government roles.

He had risen through the ranks to become a Warrant Officer in the Royal Corps of Signals and is now a member of the IT Infrastructure team responsible for managing Spicerhaart's data centre servers, networking, computers and IT security.

He said: "As an ex-soldier, the Armed Forces Covenant is close to my heart, and therefore it is great to see the Spicerhaart group getting so involved.

Having such supportive employers makes the transition from the military to the civilian workplace a much easier process for our service leavers, especially knowing that employers such as Spicerhaart value their transferable skills and experience.

"When you first leave the forces, it can be extremely daunting, because you don't necessarily realise you have the skills that businesses are looking for.

"Having worked in IT during my service, it was more of a straightforward transition for me than others, but I'd encourage anyone else searching for a new role to take a look at what estate agency has to offer.

"People will be surprised at the variety of different roles that are available, with the key element of training to support the transition from the services. There are a number of other ex-service personnel who are already integrated into the Spicerhaart group and forging successful careers."

Philip Houlston was destined to join the Royal Air Force but had the wings of his flying career clipped prematurely due to a mystery illness.

Having been commissioned in 1967 at the tender age of 18, he was medically discharged within five years due to high blood pressure noticed during a routine medical check.

The bad news came shortly after Philip had completed his round-the-world training flight while based with 30 Squadron at RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire.

The 74-year-old former Flying Officer is still going strong in his role as Residential Valuation Surveyor at Valuation.



Above left: Philip Houlston the surveyor. Below: Philip Houlston the young flight officer.

"I come from a military family and my father, Arthur, was in the Air Force. That was always what I was going to do – I was going to fly," he said.

"I would have meetings with the career advisor at school and it would always go the same way – they would say: 'You know you are going into the Air Force, we know you are going to the Air Force, but do the Air Force know?'"

Philip thought he'd soar through the medical check which would eventually curtail his military career, until a concerned doctor began to quiz him.

"They were asking me how bad the headaches were and when was the last time I had blacked out," he said.

"I had no symptoms whatsoever, but my blood pressure was reading dangerously high."

After his medical discharge, Philip's blood pressure would return close to normal and he is still none the wiser about what was causing the problem.

Philip qualified as a chartered surveyor in 1975, after a varied career working for government departments and in private practice, but a change in direction led him to join Spicerhaart.

He backs our decision to formalise our support for service personnel.

He said: "My first thought when I came out was, 'What am I going to do now?' So I can imagine it is similar for everyone.

"When people are prepared to put their lives on the line in the service of their country, it is beholden on the country to support them when they return to Civvy Street.

"The best way is for companies to support and employ as many of us as possible.

"During my career, I have met many estate agents who were previously short service commission army officers and who found their people skills an invaluable tool.

"Since the war in Afghanistan, there seems to be more people coming out of the forces who have fallen on hard times and fall through the net.

"The government can't do everything and private firms must do more to help."



David Skingley then (above) and now (right)





Sky divers take the plunge

There cannot be a better adrenaline rush than throwing yourself out of a plane from thousands of feet above the earth's surface!

That's what a courageous group from Spicerhaart has done – raising over £11,600 for Magic Moments in the process.

The 17-strong group enjoyed a glorious summer's day at the end of August with the North London Skydiving team at Chatteris Airfield in Cambridgeshire, learning how to undertake a tandem jump safely before embarking on the intrepid feat. They could choose to jump from between 12,000 to 15,000 feet from the De Havilland Twin Otter plane.

Pippa Major, Operations Manager to Antony Lark and the event organiser, said: "It was the most amazing day. Falling through the air from 15,000 feet at 125mph is one of the most exhilarating experiences I have ever known. We were in freefall for 60 seconds before the chute was released and we floated down for another five minutes. It was so peaceful.

"There's also a real sense of relief when everyone has landed safely. There was so much excitement and anticipation throughout the day, but also a sense of teamwork. In fact, it was such a success

we will now be making the Magic Moments Skydive an annual event!"

Those who took part were:

Estate Agency: Krystle Ainsworth, Bethany Braun, Tony Hallett, Jay Inniss, Rio Maddix, Shelley Pattison

Lettings: Kateryna Chernyshova, Hamzah Hussain, Irfanali Shivji

Financial Services: Daniel Clow, Milan Mehta, Jessica Smit

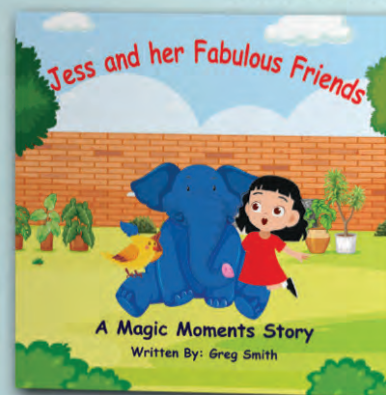
Land & New Homes: Courtney-Reigh Ganno

Group Services: Jodie Andrews, Matt Clarke, Ross Lilley, Pippa Major

Children's writer and colleague Greg Smith has penned a special book called 'Jess and her Fabulous Friends', to raise money for Magic Moments. He tells us more about the initiative:

"I'm a Senior Training Manager at Just Mortgages, but in my spare time, I like to write stories and poetry. I got into the habit of reading to my children, Henry and Eliza, before bed and eventually began making up my own tales for them.

For the last 12 years or so, I've been doing quite a lot for charity. The ones I've enjoyed helping most are those which help children. During the



Greg's on the write track

pandemic, I had a bit more time on my hands, and then it came together in my head – we've got a fantastic children's charity at Spicerhaart, I write children's stories ... so I'm going to write a story for Magic Moments.

I did some research into the characters, Bob, Jess and Frank, and built around that. It's an Early Years book, suitable for children aged up to about six.

I've sold nearly 100 books already, which is fantastic. Everyone I've spoken to after

they've bought one has given me a good review, so I am really happy. There may also be a sequel in the future.

You can order one from my Enthuse page on the Magic Moments website: www.magicmomentscharity.enthuse.com/pf/gregsbook or drop me an email: Greg.Smith@justmortgages.co.uk.

The books cost £6.99 plus postage, but if you'd like to donate a little more, it would mean so much to the charity.

If everybody at Spicerhaart bought one of these books for a little one in their life for Christmas, birthday or another special occasion, then we would be able to take at least three families to Disneyland Paris."



Our latest trip to Disneyland Paris in July

Making magic memories

Bereaved families were helped to create new magical memories on a dream holiday to Disneyland Paris.

Magic Moments took nearly 60 people to the French resort from 17-20 July, staying in the recently refurbished Cheyenne Hotel, which boasts a 'rootin' tootin' Wild West theme.

The trip was supported by John Mackenzie, Head of Digital Marketing, Jon Lay, Managing Director, Legal Services and Steven Kelly, Branch Partner in Rayleigh.

"What an amazing and moving trip – I was proud and honoured to help lead it," said John.

"The parents and siblings were blown away by the whole experience and it was humbling to hear and see their messages of enjoyment and gratitude.

"What a superb charity we have. I urge everyone to do their bit to support Magic Moments to take these kids and families on brilliant experiences. You won't get me back on Hyperspace Mountain in a hurry though..."

Meanwhile, Jon was the founder of the trip's Big Rollercoaster Club, but was almost forced to kick himself out. He said, "It attracted many members and had only two rules –

go on everything and be brave. But on the Tower of Terror, I nearly broke the second rule I'd made.

"The friendships which were formed are heart-warming and getting to know the families and their stories was humbling.

"The little touches like toys for the children and the smiles they create were a joy to see, as well as the big group dinner in The Rainforest Café, which is a fabulous social event for everyone on the trip."

Steven was so inspired by his time on the trip and so passionate about the charity that he recently ran another marathon to raise funds – read more about it on page 6.

One of the questions most frequently asked is how people can get nominated for a place on a trip. The following are considered:

- Has the individual raised money for the charity? This can be big or small, every donation helps.
- Does the individual work hard to raise awareness for the charity?
- Has the individual worked hard to raise awareness in the business area or community?

Stories like Olivia's our 'why'

From Emma Barber, Chair of Magic Moments

I understand it can be really difficult at times to think of new ways to raise money for our charity, or you may think your fundraising may not make a difference to the families or the trips. Well, think again as I introduce you to Olivia Rose Jones, who was born on 24 November 2007 with MELAS syndrome.

Read what her parents, Lianne and Geraint, had to say about Olivia and their Magic Moments experience.

"Olivia was a lovely, happy, bouncy baby. Whilst she had always been small and with weaker muscles, she grew and enjoyed life almost normally for many years. Sadly, in the last few years of her life, she became increasingly unwell with MELAS syndrome, a mitochondrial disorder.

"During her life she enjoyed so many things, especially family, animals and school. She was fearless and loved rides in parks or holding animals in zoos. She would love playing with her younger brother, Alex.

"We had wonderful family and professional support throughout her life. Magic Moments holds a huge place in our hearts, as you took us all to Disneyland Paris in 2016.

"We want other families to experience the same that we did with Magic Moments and so we are donating £2,500 in Olivia's memory. We hope this donation will go towards helping your charity and that other families get to enjoy the magic and memories we made."

Olivia's parents said that, of all the support they received as a family, it was the Magic Moments trip that



Olivia Rose Jones (front) and family

has stuck with them. The memories created will stay with them forever.

Please keep Olivia and other children and families in your mind when you are thinking about fundraising, big or small.

We have also created a memory section on our fundraising platform, Enthuse, where you can donate money in memory of a loved one. Please email me for more information.

Thank you all for your ongoing support.