

Dream Jobs: Animal adoption agent

By Jill Insley, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.31.16

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An animal adoption agent with a puppy who will soon be ready for adoption. Fiona Goodall/ Getty Images

You have to like Staffordshire bull terriers to work at Battersea Dogs & Cats Home. Most of the dogs at the animal shelter are staffies.

Many have been forced by breeders to give birth to litter after litter of puppies. Others have been kept until their owners became bored with them. In both cases they were usually abandoned on the street.

People tend to see the breed as having a bad temper with great strength. Deborah Butcher says that in most cases this is not fair. She has worked as a "rehomer," finding new homes for dogs and cats at Battersea, in south London, England, since 2005.

"Staffies are muscular dogs with strong jaws, but they are the most loving, people-orientated breed. They make great family dogs," she says. They used to be known as nanny dogs because they are so good with children.

Sound Of Woofing All Around

She's not just saying this. Like many of the people who work at Battersea, Butcher has adopted two dogs, including one part staffie named Rocky

Battersea has three centers with about 350 full-time staff and 400 volunteers. At any one time they have 200 cats and 600 dogs. Thanks to people such as Butcher, few stay in there for more than four weeks. None of the animals are put to sleep unless they are very sick or have a bad temperament.

The shelter was started almost exactly 150 years ago. Battersea has a happy buzz about it, and everywhere you hear the sound of woofing in the background.

Nevertheless, I have a lump in my throat when Butcher shows me around the kennels. The dogs come up to their gates to be fussed over, and some cry as you walk past.

Less Activity In Cat Area

The cats are calmer. Each cat has a cozy basket, toys and a clean litter box. Some meow for attention, but most are content to sit and watch.

I fall for Emile, a stunning ginger who is about 10 months old. He's a bit shy, but is soon popping out of his basket to be stroked and purring like a train. Could my three cats at home handle a new friend, I wonder?

Butcher hands over a Bichon Frise to a visiting mother and son.

The Newcomes had expressed a particular interest in finding a Bichon Frise. Through Battersea's computer system, Butcher has tracked down Kuma, a 4-year-old dog whose owners were moving.

"Ah, There You Are"

When Butcher brings in Kuma, the mother breaks into a huge smile. "Ah, there you are," she says, as if greeting someone she has known all her life.

Kuma's new owners plan to feed him steak and chicken, and he will have a big backyard to run around in. Lucky dog.

So what qualifications do you need to be a rehomer? "I had my first dog when I was about 8, and have always had a dog since then," Butcher says. "But Battersea trained me completely. A lot of this job is dealing with people. You have to have good communication skills and must stay calm."

Lucky Day For "Bear"

Next, Butcher interviews Nicole, a woman with two cats who would like a dog.

Bear, a black German shepherd, lives up to his name. He is huge, calm, sad-looking and affectionate. He is also smart, making a beeline for Nicole, sitting almost immediately at her feet.

Nicole asks if she can think about it overnight, but you just know she will be back.

The next day, sure enough, a "rehomed" sticker has been placed over Bear's picture.

Job Stats

Salary: A full-time rehomer makes about £16,645 to £20,806 (\$20,300 to \$25,400).

Hours: Full-timers work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., five days a week, including some weekends. Butcher works 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., three weekends out of five. She also works some hours during the week.

Work/life balance: It can be very hard emotionally. Rehomers work long hours and the salary is not high, but no one does this for the money. An extra is that you can take your dog to work with you.

Best thing: "Getting the dogs rehomed and seeing people so happy when they take their new pet home."

Worst thing: "When you get attached to an animal" and it is put to sleep.

Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the article best reflects one of Deborah Butcher's MAIN goals?
 - (A) Like many of the people who work at Battersea, Butcher has adopted two dogs, including one part staffie named Rocky
 - (B) Nevertheless, I have a lump in my throat when Butcher shows me around the kennels.
 - (C) "I had my first dog when I was about 8, and have always had a dog since then," Butcher says.
 - (D) "Getting the dogs rehomed and seeing people so happy when they take their new pet home."

- 2 Which option is the BEST summary of the main idea in the section "Lucky Day For Bear"?
 - (A) Butcher helps Nicole find the right dog for her and her cats.
 - (B) Butcher is sad about finding a new home for a German shepherd.
 - (C) Bear is a black German shepherd who is huge and sad-looking.
 - (D) Bear is affectionate and smart but Nicole thinks she does not like him.

- 3 According to the article, why are there so many Staffordshire bull terriers at Battersea?
 - (A) because they are good for families with children
 - (B) because they are loving and people-oriented
 - (C) because they are muscular and have strong jaws
 - (D) because they were abandoned by breeders and owners

- 4 Based on the article, why does being a rehomer make Butcher sad sometimes?
 - (A) because animals are put to sleep if they are sick or have bad temperaments
 - (B) because she gets attached to animals that are adopted by new owners
 - (C) because she has to adopt some of the staffies that do not have new homes
 - (D) because full-time staff do not get paid enough for the long hours they work