

Working with dogs

Comedian WC Fields made famous the line, “Never work with children or animals.” If you’re in the world of showbiz, where time and tempers are short, that’s probably a good piece of advice, but if you’re not, and you’d like to work with dogs, there is a whole host of canine careers to choose from, to suit everyone’s talents.

Veterinary nursing

You might not have paid much attention to the vet nurse standing quietly in the background as your vet talks you through the surgery your dog is about to undergo, but he or she is a central part of your pet’s care. Veterinary nurses are often asked if they’re training to become vets, but Catherine Ball, vet nurse at Donald Kingsnorth and Associates in Surrey, is keen to point out that nursing is a profession in its own right, and one that is incredibly rewarding.

“You’ve got to be prepared to work long hours and as part of a team; to be prepared for anything and to be on call in emergencies,” she says. “You have to have a real love of animals to do this job: if you’re tired at the end of a long shift pattern and you don’t love what you do, you’re not going to provide the very best care.”

As well as setting up theatre for surgical procedures, administering anaesthetists, taking bloods and carrying out other tests, vet nurses are responsible for providing a high standard of care for the animals in their charge. It’s physically demanding work.

“It’s important to do little things to make a patient’s stay feel like a home from home, like asking the owner if their dog has a particular toy or favourite bowl he’d like to be fed from. Each pet needs human contact time, so I will bath and brush and exercise them, if appropriate,” says Catherine.

“You must be empathetic,



but take care not to let your emotions show with pet owners in the room, especially if someone’s beloved pet is being put to sleep. I am quiet and there to offer support and to answer any questions if needed, and then I go home and cry.”

As well as working within vet practices, VNs are employed by referral centres, in academia, in research, and by charities and wildlife parks. Opportunities are available in teaching or management, too.

Routes into veterinary nursing are through a level 3 diploma, foundation, or BSc honours degree, all approved by the Royal College of

Veterinary Surgeons, to which all VNs must register and swear an oath. Hours dedicated to on-the-job training and classroom learning vary, so contact the British Veterinary Nursing Association to see which would best suit you and what funding is available. A change of career later in life is not a barrier into vet nursing, and there is a wealth of opportunities open to new jobbers to progress and specialise throughout their working lives.

To find out more, get in touch with the British Veterinary Nursing Association: 01279 408644, www.bvna.org.uk

Charities and non-profits

Britain is supposedly a nation of dog lovers, but the number of dogs in rescue is at an all-time high and welfare standards are consistently not met by everyone with a pet. Ensuring the very best care for the country’s pets requires a multi-faceted approach, requiring finding good homes for homeless dogs, but community outreach to ensure those in homes are happy, too.

Mel Safir is a rehoming and welfare assistant at Battersea Dogs and Cats Home. Her role involves assessing the temperaments of dogs coming into the home and noting any behavioural issues that need addressing before rehoming, and matching dogs with suitable families.

“It’s great to see the dogs change as they become more relaxed once they’re in and settled. Rehoming is bittersweet because you are glad to see them going to a good home, but sad to see them leave, too.”

Mel studied zoology at university, but points out that while an interest in and understanding of animal welfare and behaviour is crucial, a degree is not a necessary entry requirement, and on-the-job training is provided.

A major plus, Mel says, is that no two days are ever the same. A love of dogs is obviously key, as is teamwork.

“You need patience, to be able to keep your cool, and to see the bigger picture. You need to be confident in assessing and in what you are working towards. People skills are important, as is the ability to communicate.”

If you think a job that sometimes involves playing with puppies is the perfect role for you, Mel advises, “Get as much practical experience as you can, even if it’s just dog sitting or walking friends’ dogs. You have to live and breathe dogs.”

Career change

For over a decade Carole Justice Gray pursued what she thought was her dream career as an agent for fashion photographers and hair and make-up artists, but the stressful lifestyle and a battle against ME left her exhausted.

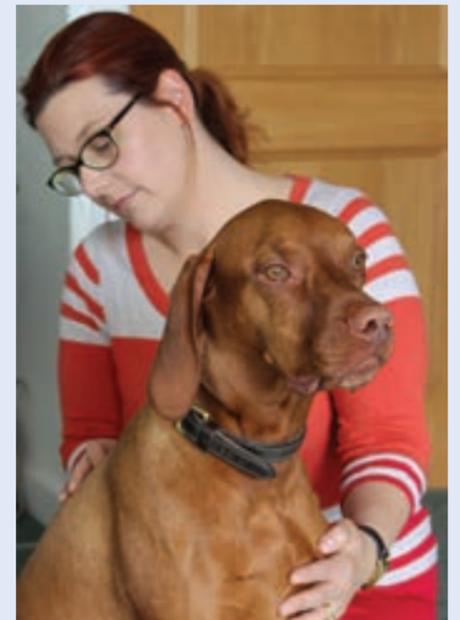
Just when she needed it most, two animals with issues, Bill the Hungarian Vizsla and Agnus the horse, entered her life.

Carole says, “I began following a holistic path in 2005; as part of our mutual journey we worked with a variety of therapies. I began using a combination of Buteyko (a breathing technique) and Bowen. I recovered. Bill and Agnus didn’t know ‘placebo’; they loved Bowen, and changes in behaviour and physically were so positive I had to explore the method further. I qualified as a Canine Bowen Technique (CBT) therapist in March 2010, and was authorised to teach CBT this year.”

CBT is a soft-tissue remedial therapy. It is a gentle, non-invasive, light-touch holistic therapy, working over muscle, ligament, tendon and fascia in the body.

“The study and developing a client base has been hard work, but the feeling of ‘hard work’ falls away as you experience the wonder of the technique and you become addicted, wanting increased understanding and knowledge,” says Carole. “My new career will not make me rich, isn’t involved in the aspirational world I once was, but I am more fulfilled than I have ever been and tomorrow will be even brighter.”

• Contact Carole on 07535 980007 or at www.caninebowentherapist.co.uk
European Guild of Canine Bowen Therapists www.caninebowentechnique.com



Voluntary positions

If you have a bit of spare time left over after your day job and want to make a positive contribution, why not volunteer? Stuart Parslow, volunteer press officer at Greyhound Rescue West of England, points out that your local rescue is probably desperate for your help.

He says, “We have a range of interesting and rewarding voluntary roles, from the hands-on aspect of transport, home-checking, dog walking and rehabilitation, to raising awareness through events or publicity roles. For example, we are currently looking for volunteers to support our national fundraising and communications work, roles which could see you working on supporter newsletters, promoting our sponsor dogs or managing our website. All of these jobs have a direct impact on how many hounds we can help!”

Fancy working for a living or volunteering your time with a non-profit? Charities have roles for those with fundraising, admin, legal, policy, campaigning, communications, maintenance, financial, marketing, HR, retail, and IT experience. Give your local rescue branch a call or have a look online under their ‘jobs’ section for opportunities.

Education, education, education

Rescues need those who are less hands-on with animals, too. Lance Williamson works as a community engagement officer at Battersea. It’s his job to go into schools and youth centres, prisons, and London’s boroughs and estates to deliver the message of responsible pet ownership. It’s a role that’s emerged in the last couple of years in reaction to how dogs are used and abused by some members of the community who could benefit from education.

Lance’s job is varied. He says, “I’ve just finished writing, scripting and shooting a video that’s more hard-hitting than we’ve done before, designed to reach young people who use dogs for protection.

“Keeping politicians informed and aware of how dog issues can be eased is also crucial to avoid knee-jerk legislation.”

This isn’t a role for the first jobber, and would suit someone who has community outreach experience.

Lance says, “You need a tough skin, and to be able to practise handholding without being patronising. A good sense of humour helps! And you must like people as well as dogs.”



Learning journey

The British College of Canine Studies provides specialised canine-related courses for those interested in pursuing a career working with dogs. Courses are written and assessed by professionals currently working within the canine behaviour and training field and prove popular with everyone from vet nurses to kennel managers, dog walkers and dog behaviour practitioners.

Course content will equip students with real world knowledge, which can be put to use immediately upon completion. All diploma courses are available for purchase via commitment-free and interest-free instalment options, and funding is even available for those eligible via Job Centre Plus.

BCCS courses are done online in home-study, with the option of trying out your newly acquired skills in the practical unit offered in many cases. Students have a full two years to complete their studies, so can learn at their own pace, with full support from professional tutors.

- For full details, course unit breakdowns and descriptions, and information on how to enrol, visit www.britishcollegeofcaninestudies.com

Please make your own thorough checks before committing to a course. Inclusion in this feature is not an endorsement.

Franchises

Career changers

Dogknows is a franchise business built by career changers; all employees started off elsewhere before deciding their passion was working with dogs. The franchise opportunity is tailored to the career changer's level of experience and interests. You may be a dog enthusiast working in a different industry or already be working in the animal sector but now want to set up in business for yourself.

Founder Bobs Broadbent explains, "It is an opportunity to combine transferable people skills and organisation skills with a desire for learning more about how dogs really tick, as well as how to run a successful Dogknows business."

The Dogknows 10-day initial training course combines classroom and practical training, including on-the-job learning, and provides trainees with almost everything they need to get started. Continued support is provided to guide franchisees through the first year and beyond.

Bobs says she wants Dogknows services to reach more dogs because they have been specially developed to give both the physical and mental nourishment a dog needs and are tailored to each dog's temperament and age. They incorporate kind, force-free training techniques so every dog enjoys the care given.

- If Dogknows could be the opportunity for job satisfaction you've been looking for, get in touch with Bobs at www.dogknows.biz/heart



Photo © James Newell Photography

Home boarding

Lisa Suswain set up award-winning home-boarding company Wagging Tails to offer dogs a home from home as an alternative to traditional kennels. As a dog owner, Lisa understood it was important to allow owners to meet their dog's carer and not charge extra for bank holidays.

Lisa says, "At Wagging Tails, dogs get an exclusive holiday home with an experienced dog carer and all the home comforts, love and attention they are used to."

Due to huge demand, Lisa turned to franchising and now thousands of dog owners are benefiting from a local Wagging Tails branch with fantastic carers, all of whom are highly experienced former dog owners. Many no longer have a dog but are at home all day and miss the company of a canine companion.

This is a wonderful opportunity for dog

owners to run their own business from home, giving them the opportunity to meet like-minded people and spend time with their own dog while making a good income. The benefit of a franchise is that all the procedures are in place; from an award-winning website and marketing material to optimised website with booking and payments facilities. This means you can begin trading and running your own business with constant support and guidance.

The franchise cost is £12,995 for a large, exclusive territory. Typically, franchisees turn over around £50,000 within 18 months to two years.

- If you want to run your own business, are passionate about dogs, and believe in first-class customer service, contact Wagging Tails on 0844 800 8480 or visit www.waggingtailsfranchise.co.uk

Franchises (continued)

Puppy training

Susan McKeon turned her ambitions to become a dog trainer into reality by becoming a Puppy School tutor.

Operated as a franchise, Puppy School is a national network of puppy training and socialisation classes established by Gwen Bailey. As Susan explains, "I was looking to start dog training classes that I could fit around my job, and a friend recommended Puppy School."

"The course was fantastic and I learned a lot. It consisted of several residential weekends with Gwen and her team, plus a series of practical exercises with puppies and dogs that are then written up. It also provides a very thorough background on learning theory and reward-based training methods, which



are the mainstay of Puppy School classes."

Puppy School tutors are provided with detailed lesson plans, plus a range of pre-

national advertising and even advice on writing press releases. Practising Puppy School tutors also receive on-going support. Tutors have access to an email forum, the annual Puppy School conference and a range of free behaviour courses, run by Gwen and her team. These courses ensure that tutors remain up to date with the latest developments in training and behaviour.

Susan has been running Puppy School North Lincolnshire for just under two years and has just trained her 100th puppy. She has also just launched other classes for adult dogs and Greyhounds under her brand of Happy Hounds Dog Training.

• Visit www.puppyschool.co.uk for further information on becoming a Puppy School tutor.

written hand-outs to give clients after class. Help in setting up classes is also provided with a Puppy School uniform for tutors, branded promotional materials,

Mobile groomers

Many newly qualified dog groomers are attracted to the opportunity to take their business mobile. As a new business set-up the advantages are obvious: no premises to secure, no long-term lease (and rent) commitments, lower overheads, and greater location flexibility.

From a customer's perspective, there is the convenience of having a groomer attend their home, which is less stressful for many dogs, and invaluable for owners with mobility difficulties.

The mobile dog grooming business has been around for a long time, but has seen a noticeable increase in popularity in recent years, as our lifestyles have changed.



Mike Wishart from K9 Mobile Grooming Supplies says many owners enjoy the convenience of home grooming, and now is the time to take advantage. He explains, "There are still many towns that don't have sufficient coverage from good-quality mobile dog groomers and you should research your market and potential operating area thoroughly when formulating your plans. A mobile dog grooming business has a good future in the UK market, either as a stand-alone business or as a profitable add-on for an existing pet grooming business."

"Besides a lucrative business income, working from your mobile grooming van or trailer can offer comparatively low start-up costs, lower overheads than a shop-based salon and a stress-free working environment."

K9 Mobile Grooming Supplies offers the opportunity to have all the business set-up work done for you by taking one of its franchises.

• Talk to Mike to find out more on 01323 743666 or visit www.k9dogbaths.co.uk



Entrepreneurial spirit



Doggielicious was founded when Alex Kennedy realised she couldn't pronounce over half the names on the back of the pack of treats she was about to buy her dog. She was astounded that although beef treats were labelled as such, there was very little meat in them. Alex's moment of realisation coincided with her wanting to change career.

She says, "I had been in the banking and finance world all my working life and had held some very senior positions. However, over the years I had become more and more disillusioned and wanted a change. Therefore, when I saw the ingredients on the packet my mind thought wouldn't be better if we could come up with good quality treats made from ingredients grown or produced in the Isle of Man where I live?"

Eighteen months ago, Doggielicious was born. The first event Alex attended was a farmers' market, where her products went down a treat, and Doggielicious was subsequently recommended to an Isle of Man supermarket chain, which was very supportive and helped to promote the treats through the local media.

The next stage of development was to build a website. Alex says, "Whilst the residents of the Isle of Man were very supportive I wanted to grow the business, so the internet seemed the perfect solution for promoting our business to the wider world. In addition to our everyday dog treats I expanded the range to include dog birthday cakes and decorated treats".

The next page of the Doggielicious story was written quite by chance. Alex bought her dog, and chief taster, Amber, a beautiful handmade collar and had a lightbulb moment.

"It suddenly dawned on me that I could expand the website to include like-minded artisans who specialised in hand crafting products for dogs," Alex explains.

With this in mind, and with the help of Alex's good friend Fiona Shimmin, who had since joined Doggielicious, they set about creating a website which would not only showcase the bakery products, but lots of other dog-inspired products, too, the majority of which are handmade in the UK.

Alex says, "One product in particular we wanted to develop was our own brand of dog coat using the fantastic tweeds and totally unique tartans hand-woven here on the Isle of Man by Laxey Woollen Mills, which has been in existence since 1881. We can offer two ranges of coats, one off-the-peg and the other is totally bespoke. Both ranges involve a very high level of tailoring, very stylish, weather durable and come in really gorgeous colours".

• Contact Alex and Fiona, and receive 10 per cent off your first order, at www.doggielicioustreats.com



Want to teach puppy classes?

Puppy School is expanding its successful puppy training network and recruiting new tutors around the UK

- Do you have a passion for puppies and all things dog?
- Do you enjoy the company of people?
- Do you have practical experience with all types of dog personality?

If you would like to be part of a network of experienced puppy trainers, with all the help and support you need to run successful classes and your own business, please visit the Puppy School website and click on 'Tutor Vacancies'



www.puppyschool.co.uk



Follow your heart

build a new career doing something you love

Find out more at www.dogknows.biz/heart

