Dream Jobs: Animal adoption agent
By Jill Insley, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.31.16
Word Count 867
Level 1000L

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

Most have either been forced by breeders to produce litter after litter of puppies until they are worn out, or kept until their owners became bored with them. In both cases they are usually abandoned on the street.

Over the years, the breed has developed a reputation for having an unpredictable temper and great strength. But Deborah Butcher, who has worked as a "rehomer" – she finds new homes for the animals – at Battersea since 2005, says this is usually not fair.

"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.

She's not just saying this. Like many of the people who work at Battersea, Butcher has given a home to two dogs, including one part staffie named Rocky.
Hundreds Of Staff And Animals

The charity has three shelters and combined, they employ 350 full-time staff, 400 volunteers, and at any one time house 200 cats and 600 dogs. Thanks to people such as Butcher, few of the animals stay there for more than 28 days, and none of the animals are put to sleep unless they are very sick or have a bad temperament.

The charity was founded 150 years ago. Although the place is pretty plain, Battersea has a happy buzz about it. Dogs and their walkers continuously weave in and out of the buildings on their way to nearby Battersea Park or to the exercise yard. And everywhere you hear a gentle background woofing.

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.

Cat Area Not As Lively

The cat area is much calmer. Each cat has a cozy basket, toys and a scrupulously clean litter tray. 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 at first, but is soon popping out of his basket to be stroked and purring like a train. Could my three cats at home cope with a new friend, I wonder?

Some rehomers don't work with cats – usually because they are allergic to them – but Butcher is happy to work with both cats and dogs. She starts by handing over Kuma, a Bichon Frise dog, to a mother and son she interviewed earlier in the week.

Bichon Frise Finds A New Home

The Newcomes had expressed a particular interest in finding a Bichon Frise, and through Battersea's computer system, Butcher has tracked down a 4-year-old dog who was at the shelter because his owners were moving.

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

Kuma will be moving in with doting owners – meals of steak and chicken were mentioned – and will have a 90-foot-long 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."

Huge Dog Wins Over Woman

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

Bear, a black German shepherd-mix, is brought in and lives up to his name. He is huge – I've seen smaller ponies – calm, sad-looking, elegant and affectionate. But he is also smart, and makes a beeline for Nicole, sitting almost immediately at her feet.

By the end, Nicole asks if she can think about it overnight, but you just know she will be back.
Sure enough, when I look on the website the next day, a "rehomed" sticker has been placed over Bear's description.

**Job Stats**

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

**Hours:** Full-timers work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., five days a week, including some weekends. Butcher works part time 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., three weekends out of five, but does lots of overtime during the week.

**Work/life balance:** "It can be very emotionally draining, and it's quite long hours and the salary isn't high for full-time staff. But no one does this for the money." An extra is that you can take your own dog to work with you.

**Best thing:** "Getting the dogs rehomed and seeing people so happy when they take their new pet home. We have email addresses now so new owners can keep in contact with us."

**Worst thing:** "When you get attached to an animal and it doesn't make it through the system because of ill health or temperament."