

NICOLA
RSPCA WORKER

Nicola Hawkins, 23, has one of the hardest and most rewarding jobs around – she’s an animal attendant at the RSPCA.

How did you start? “I started as a volunteer, then I got casual work and finally full-time work as an animal attendant. As a volunteer, I was doing similar sorts of things to what I’m doing now, like walking dogs and cleaning kennels.”

“I’m now in charge of my own section and it’s up to me to look after animals in my care, like taking the dogs out to exercise, feeding them, giving them medication and cleaning their kennels.”

What’s the hardest part? “The fact that it’s the same thing here all the time – I’ve been here for four years and nothing has improved. It’s always full and people still come and dump their animals. It seems a bit futile at times. In the area where I work, in animal welfare, we get the cruelty cases which are really sad. Sometimes we have them here for a long time while their case is going to court, and

then sometimes they either go back to their owner, or the owner doesn’t even get fined for what they did to the animal – the court doesn’t seem to care much about the animals. I cope by thinking, ‘No matter how hard it is, I love caring for these animals’ – they give you the energy and the inspiration to keep going.”

“The animals are so amazing. Some animals, you can’t break their spirit no matter what has happened to them; they’re so full of energy and life. Even just a pat brings them so much joy – that’s the reason I work here. No matter what they’ve been through, they just love you unconditionally.”

What sort of person is suitable to work at the RSPCA? “You have to have a strong love for animals and a strong belief in animal rights and animal welfare. You have to be prepared – it’s not a pretty job. It’s hard, dirty work, cleaning out kennels and poo. It’s not just playing with cute puppies. It can be frustrating work, so you have to be very committed to what you’re doing to be able to deal with that.”

Love dogs but can’t have one of your own? Do what Marisa Mourelle, 24, does – she walks other people’s dogs for them.

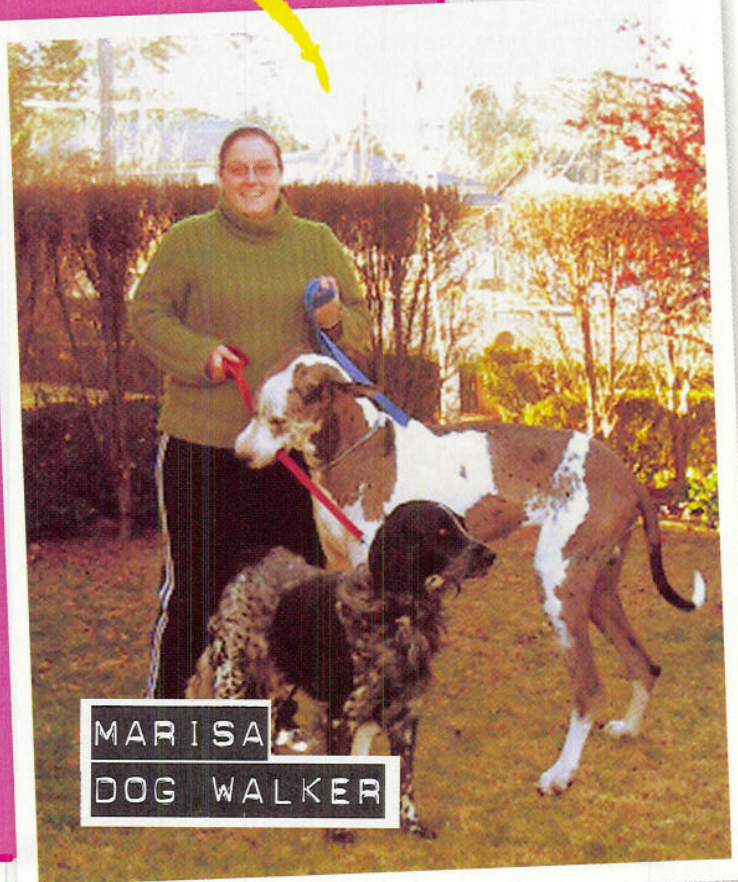
What service do you offer pet owners? “I walk their dogs and feed them. I’ve done an Associate Diploma of Animal science at TAFE, so I can administer medication if it’s needed as well. Sometimes, when owners are away, I’ll also stay over at their house and dog-sit if it’s needed.”

How did you get into it? “While I was studying, it was good way to get out of my house and go somewhere else to do some study. I actually dog-sat for my boss for a month and really loved it, so then I checked out dog-sitting and dog-walking on the Internet. I registered myself on the website www.petsitters.com.au and it’s all continued from there.”

Is it a full-time job? “I have a full-time job, so I do this on the side. At the moment I have one dog that I feed and walk – I did it for four days last week, and I’m doing it for three days next week. The jobs come up every now and then. I get a lot of emails through the site, but I do have to reject some because they’re not at times that are good for me – such as people wanting me to walk their dog during the day, which I can’t do as that’s when I’m at work.”

Is it hard to juggle the two jobs? “Not really – I do have to put it down in my diary to remind myself to do it, though. Generally I leave work at 5pm and go to wherever I’m going to have to look after the pet. Then I either stay the night if I’m sitting, or go home afterwards if I’m just walking and feeding.”

By Christine Knight – who recently adopted some goldfish.



MARISA
DOG WALKER