



SPCA Animal Care Attendant

The role of an SPCA Animal Care Attendant is extremely varied. At SPCA, there are dogs, cats, small animals, and farmed animals that need care each day – no day is the same!

Animal Care Attendants are in charge of providing animals with everything they need to be happy and healthy. They provide the animals with food, water, exercise, enrichment, training, love, and understanding. Not only do they care for the animals, but a large part of their day involves cleaning enclosures, socializing the animals, monitoring animals' health and behaviour, administering medication, assisting with incoming animals, and carrying out adoptions.

Staff Interview:

We interviewed Alison Hall about her experience as an SPCA Animal Care Attendant and here's what she had to say:

1 Why did you want to become an SPCA Animal Care Attendant?

I became an animal care attendant after an opportunity arose whilst I was volunteering at the SPCA. Luckily, volunteering gave me practical experience, an insight into animal careers, and allowed me to talk to people already in the jobs.

2 What are the main responsibilities or tasks as an SPCA Animal Care Attendant?

My main duties include looking after the daily requirements of all animals in my care, i.e. food, water, enrichment and socialisation – and yes, you do have to clean a lot... including poop!





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3 What do you enjoy most about being an SPCA Animal Care Attendant?

I enjoy being able to make a difference in peoples' lives. When someone adopts, they make a companion for life and in return that animal only asks for love.

4 What did you have to do to become an SPCA Animal Care Attendant?

My advice is to complete the animal care/management course run by ARA Christchurch, also available online through Otago Polytechnic. .



5 What skills do you think you need to be an SPCA Animal Care Attendant?

To be an animal care attendant, you need to be physically fit, have good time management skills, be able to communicate with others, have an eye for detail, be able to assess behaviour (i.e. normal vs abnormal animal behaviour), and be a team player.

6 What advice would you give to someone who wants to become an SPCA Animal Care Attendant?

If you are considering a career as an Animal Care Attendant, I would recommend that you start by volunteering. This is a great way to see if this is the right path for you.





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Staff Interview:

We also interviewed Meihana Jolliffe about his experience as an SPCA Canine Attendant and here's what he had to say:

1 Why did you want to become an SPCA Canine Attendant?

I've always known that I wanted to work with animals; regardless of how big or small, feathers or fur, four legs or more. After doing some volunteer hours with the canine team at SPCA Auckland, I found myself being drawn more and more to working with dogs, as well as working towards the bigger cause of animal welfare. When a job opportunity opened up in the canine team (and when one of the existing canine attendants gave me a nudge into the right direction) I had to apply for it.

2 What are the main responsibilities or tasks as an SPCA Canine Attendant?

To put it simply, I attend to the needs of the dogs. Day-to-day tasks include; feeding, cleaning, medicating, exercising, confidence building, socialising, assisting with routine vet checks, training, post-operation care and general handling.

Extra tasks that are dependent on the canine area we work in include; talking with owners who are looking at surrendering their dogs into our care and assisting them through the process, helping reunite stray dogs with their owners, assisting veterinary and inspectorate staff with dogs that are being difficult to manage, keeping up with the day-to-day care of mother dogs and any new-born pups, assisting with the weaning process (getting pups eating by themselves and off mum), talking to new owners and trying to find them the best match for their family and finding forever homes for our dogs.





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3 What do you enjoy most about being an SPCA Canine Attendant?

The end of the journey. Getting to see dogs go home makes all the ups and downs of working for an animal shelter worth it. We see dogs as well as their owners at their lowest, and after all the hard work we put in; whether it be getting a dog back to an ideal healthy weight, bringing a shutdown dog out of their shell, or helping a dog re-adjust to walking without a leg; seeing them go to the perfect forever home makes all the difference.



4 What did you have to do to become an SPCA Canine Attendant?

My journey to becoming a canine attendant was a bit of a short one to be honest. I was volunteering at SPCA Auckland for the canine team for roughly 5 months before I eagerly applied for and accepted a part-time role as a canine attendant. After awhile, I was fortunate to secure a full-time position!

Leading up to volunteering at SPCA Auckland, I chose my tertiary studies carefully to reflect my desires to work with animals. I went to Unitec for 4 years in total; first studying for 3 years to obtain a bachelor's degree in applied science majoring in animal welfare and management, and then for an additional year completing a certificate in captive wild animal management.

Many of my colleagues within the canine team also went to Unitec and have a variety of qualifications ranging from specific dog handling and training courses, to certificates in animal care, to vet nursing qualifications, to the same degree I did, to a degree in zoology from Massey University.

Myself and most of my colleagues do share one similarity between all of us despite our educational differences, and that was that at one point or another we volunteered for the SPCA or have had some hands-on experience working with dogs and other animals. Having this hands-on experience has made all the difference when starting a job as a canine attendant as we are always looking for new techniques and new experiences to bring and grow the team, while also allowing a smooth transition from one animal care profession to another.





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5 What skills do you think you need to be an SPCA Canine Attendant?

Dog behavioural knowledge - one thing we ask all of our staff and volunteers is to have some knowledge of canine behaviour. Being able to read warning signals and knowing what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour is integral in making sure that both our staff AND our animals are safe.

Being level-headed - being cool, calm and collected under pressure is integral to any job where you work with animals.

Good communication skills - one thing that people don't often realise when working with animals is that you end up working with a lot more people than you do animals. From rehoming a dog, to aiding someone with a surrender, to writing up handover notes from one shift to another - being able to clearly communicate your ideas or message across is key to working as a canine attendant.

Compassion - having compassion for the dogs we care for is at the core of what it means to be a canine attendant. While it is easy to show compassion towards the dogs, we do ask that it also be shown towards the owners of the dogs, who under whatever circumstance it may be, have found that surrendering their dog to the SPCA is their only option.

Initiative - while we do have several safety measures in place to ensure that no staff member is left alone onsite with the dogs, in many cases, while other staff may be onsite, a canine attendant will be left in charge of one of our three canine areas. Having a good sense of initiative is key to being able to manage an area by yourself.

Adaptability and willingness to learn - many of the canine specific skills (low stress handling, principles of training, etc.) are taught on the job, as we have our own training concepts that are in line with the SPCA's stance on welfare regarding training and husbandry of dogs. However, animal welfare is an ever-changing field and so it is expected that some of our training methods will change; being adaptable to that change and eager to learn new techniques is vital to prevent fatigue in the workplace.





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6 What advice would you give to someone who wants to become an SPCA Canine Attendant?

Start by volunteering. Our canine volunteer programme is the easiest way to figure out if working and caring for animals is something you see yourself doing. Our volunteers that have been with us for a long service continue to do many of the jobs we do as canine attendants, with key differences being health and safety related (not dealing with difficult situations with members of the public, not dealing with aggressive or unpredictable dogs, etc.). Having the experience of how SPCA works and how to work with dogs in SPCA's spaces, is a valuable step toward being employed as a canine attendant.

Next would be to study. We do ask that all of our staff have qualifications that are related to animal care or management. This does not necessarily need to be canine specific study. Having theoretical and practical knowledge of animal management and care is often seen as a minimum requirement for working as a canine attendant. Many qualifications can range from 1-year long certificates to 3-year long bachelor's degrees; and most tertiary institutes will provide the option for part-time study if you are considering volunteering, as well as studying, on top of your day-to-day routine.

Lastly, apply for the job. It's all well and good having the merits and the experience to work as a canine attendant, but unless you take that leap of faith and apply, it's never going to happen. Often, we do encourage the volunteers that we know have intentions to work for the SPCA to apply for job vacancies when they pop up, if we feel they would make a good member of the team. This does not mean that we "hand out" jobs to deserving/long serving volunteers, we are simply pointing them in the right direction.

Fun SPCA Animal Care Attendant Fact:

At SPCA, we have Feline Attendants, Canine Attendants, Small Animal Attendants, and Farm Attendants.





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How to become an SPCA Animal Care Attendant:



First, it's helpful to study science subjects like maths and biology, as well as English, in order to become an SPCA animal care attendant.

Though it's not a requirement, it is helpful and preferable to complete a tertiary qualification in animal care and welfare. Many animal care attendants at SPCA have chosen this pathway. These qualifications can include:

- New Zealand Certificate in Animal Care (Level 3 or 4)
- New Zealand Certificate in Animal Technology – Veterinary Nursing Assistant (Level 5)
- New Zealand Diploma in Veterinary Nursing (Level 6).

Additionally, below are some qualifications and experience needed to be successful in obtaining an animal care attendant position:

- Have excellent communication and customer service skills, with the ability to handle conflict situations and a friendly and positive attitude.
- Be a self-motivated team player, who is enthusiastic and passionate about animal welfare.
- Be a quick thinker who is skilled at multi-tasking
- Have practical animal-handling experience and knowledge.
- Have a flexible approach to the hours of work, and be able to prioritise and effectively manage workloads.
- Have excellent computer skills.
- Demonstrate empathy and resilience
- Have the ability to work in a fast paced environment and must have a love for working with both people and animals.

