

Care for people and animals

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Sophie de Heus (26) has been working as a neuropsychologist and member of the psychodiagnostic staff in a hospital since she graduated with a Master's in Neuropsychology. She also coordinates a team of volunteers for the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals' Animal Buddy project.

In addition to her work as a neuropsychologist and psychodiagnostic staff member, Sophie de Heus also volunteers with the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals.

So how did you end up choosing your degree programme? My grandfather developed Parkinson's at a fairly young age. As a result, I spent a lot of time in nursing homes for people with neuropsychological disorders. I thought it was really interesting and wanted to understand it better. For me, Neuropsychology was a logical choice.

Did you actively prepare for your career during your time at university? While I was a student, I also worked in the hospital the whole time. I started out changing beds and then worked in various departments. Besides that, I also worked as a receptionist and management assistant at a rehabilitation centre. All those part-time jobs taught me how hospitals and the medical world work — which is really coming in handy now.

What made you decide to volunteer with the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals? There was work for me at the hospital three days a week, so I had time left over. I always wanted to do something with animals, and happened across the position of coordinator for the Animal Buddy project by chance. Now I supervise around 50 volunteers who help people with limited social circles and budgets take good care of their pets.

Is there any overlap between your volunteer work and your job in the hospital? The people we help through the Animal Buddy project are often dealing with chronic illness or mental health issues. In the hospital, patients often say they don't want to go to a nursing home because they don't want to give up their pets. The well-being of people and animals is often closely intertwined.

What was the biggest challenge you faced in finding a job? I was offered a job at my internship organisation, but it meant I had to write my thesis and graduate in less than ten weeks. That was a fantastic opportunity, but also really stressful. My current challenge is finding a permanent position at the right level. Recent graduates like myself are often dependent on temporary positions at a university of applied sciences level.

What's next

Ideally, I'd enrol in the healthcare psychology programme in a few years and then go on to specialise in clinical neuropsychology. My ultimate dream is to have final responsibility for or head up a department in a hospital. ◀

A longer version of this interview will also be published on DUB, Utrecht University's independent news site. Visit dub.uu.nl for all the latest news and background information on our academic community.

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