

APPRENTICESHIP

Preserving Institutional Knowledge While Growing the Next Generation of Talent

“Dogged” Partnership Launches First Apprenticeship in Veterinary Assisting



Risa Khamsi (right), an apprentice in the Veterinary Assistant Apprenticeship Program, holds a homeless kitten as she is coached on proper animal handling techniques from Chris Thompson (left), a project manager and lead curriculum developer at the San Francisco SPCA.

Determined to solve a staffing crisis, create new career pathways, and increase exposure to veterinary medicine, the San Francisco Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SF SPCA), Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) and Foothill Community College joined together in 2015 to build the first ever Apprenticeship in Veterinary Assisting. With support from the Division of Apprenticeship Standards, the program was designated a State Registered

Apprenticeship in February 2018 and launched the first cohort of apprentices in April.

The full-time, paid apprenticeship combines on-the-job-training with college credit courses taught at the SF SPCA. Apprentices rotate through the SF SPCA's medical practices including routine care, emergency services, high-volume spay neuter surgery, and shelter medicine. New apprentices learn about animal welfare by following the lifecycles of homeless dogs and cats from intake, through rehabilitation, to adoption and ongoing veterinary care.

At the end of the two-year program, apprentices will have accrued 36 college credits; 3,000+ hours of OJT; and mastered 125 veterinary assisting skills. Successful apprentices are uniquely positioned to continue their career as a Veterinary Assistant at the SF SPCA and, if they choose, their education at Foothill College. After completing prerequisites they can enter the second year of the two-year Veterinary Technology Program and potentially graduate with an AS degree.

The new apprentices' excitement is palpable: "I grew up saying I was going to become a veterinarian, but life took me down a different path. When I heard about this program I knew it was life doing a full circle, bringing me back to where I was meant to be," said participant Kimara Montgomery. The wider impact of the program will be a model that can be replicated within the nonprofit sector, the veterinary industry and beyond.

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Visit the JVC website for more information about the [veterinary assistant program](#).



Apprentices Leah Anne Whitson (left) and Katherine Marden (right) learn about canine skeletal structure. Katherine was an incumbent worker with SPCA who joined the program to access the Foothill curriculum and earn credits while continuing to work at SPCA.

Credit: Alice Jordan, Senior Vice President of People Development and Education at SF SPCA