Want to be a
veterinary technician

when you grow up?

We spoke to Nicole McClelland, a veterinary technician and BC SPCA volunteer, all about her career helping sick and injured animals.

When did you decide you wanted to be a veterinary technician?

I had always wanted to work with animals. But it wasn't until a local veterinary technician program opened up at Douglas College that I decided it was what I wanted to do. Before that, there was no such program in the Lower Mainland – just in Kamloops.

Can you tell us about one memory that sticks out for you of the pets you had growing up?

My first dog, George, was as unique as they come. She taught me so much about dog behaviour and made me truly realize the value of senior animals.

Can you share with us a little bit about your professional background?

I'd been a volunteer at SAINTS, a sanctuary for senior and special needs animals, for two years before starting the veterinary technician program

at Douglas. I also spent some time volunteering in a veterinary clinic once a week.

I've been a registered veterinary technician for over nine years now. I've been lucky enough to work in a 24-hour emergency clinic and a general practice clinic that sees a wide variety of animals like cats, dogs, turtles, rats, rabbits, guinea pigs and birds.

You volunteer for the BC SPCA. How do you help out?

I volunteer with Charlie's Pet Food Bank. We provide basic veterinary care to pets whose guardians are homeless or need extra help caring for them. I help the vets with exams, nail trims and vaccines.

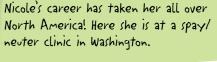As a veterinary technician, Nicole monitors animals during surgery.

Nicole's career has taken her all over North America! Here she is at a spay/neuter clinic in Washington.

Veterinary technicians like Nicole work with a variety of animals.

What's your favourite part of your job?

I love that my skills as a veterinary technician can be used in all sorts of settings. I volunteer with the Canadian Animal Assistance Team and Rural Area Veterinary Services. These organizations help provide spay and neuter services to guardians and their animals in low-income or underserved areas of the world. I've traveled around British Columbia, the United States and even the Dominican Republic!

Is there one case that sticks out in your mind?

There are so many, it's hard to choose! I've assisted with surgery on a mouse, cared for diabetic cats, helped remove ribbon from a kitten's stomach, treated a baby raccoon who fell out of a tree and looked after dogs hit by cars. Being a veterinary technician means getting to work with lots of different animals.

What's the most unusual animal you've helped?

We have a regular chicken patient – not the most unusual animal but rare for a veterinary clinic! She's a valued member of her family and I love seeing how devoted they are to her.

What keeps you excited to do your job every day?

I love that there is always something new to learn in veterinary medicine. We are constantly improving our standards of care and how we interact with animals.

What's one piece of advice you would give kids who want to make a difference for animals?

You're never too young! You might not be old enough to volunteer yet, but you can start small – walking your neighbour's dog or just caring for your own pets the best you can. It all makes a difference and helps you build the skills and confidence you'll need to work with animals someday.

Your career path... to becoming a veterinary technician

✓ Graduate high school

✓ Volunteer experience with a variety of animals in different settings (for example, veterinary clinic, animal shelter, farm, wildlife rehabilitation centre)

✓ Good communication and organizational skills

✓ Two-year veterinary technician (also called animal health technologist) diploma

✓ Pass Veterinary Technician National Exam (VTNE)