

TEXT Joanna (joanna@englishstreet.com)

PHOTO Alice Chau-Ginguene (ACG)

DESIGN Wendy

# Getting a feel for those feline feelings

## Cat behaviour therapist

### (Part 1)

ALICE Chau-Ginguene, who originally hails from Hong Kong, recently set up her own business in cat-sitting and cat behaviour solutions in Ireland. Resigning from a stable job as a personal assistant with a prestigious bank, she ventured on a drastic career change by becoming a cat behaviour therapist. Sharing some key aspects of her chosen vocation, Alice gives ES readers an insight into her fascinating new field of endeavour, writes **Joanna Ho**.



▲ The feline client has a fun playtime with the animal's 'minder'.  
— ACG photo



▲ This cat enjoys a comfortable brush with Alice Chau-Ginguene as the cat behaviour therapist employs her special soothing and grooming technique.  
— ACG photo



► Alice Chau-Ginguene refers to herself as the 'Cat Lady'.  
— ACG photo

**English Street:** Could you tell us more about your job?

**Alice Chau-Ginguene:** As a cat behaviour therapist, my job is to help people handle their animal's personality traits and quirks. I solve all kinds of cat problems, including common ones like furniture scratching, **aggressive** behaviour such as biting, or even urinating outside the litter box, to name just three.

I also provide cat-sitting services for people who need someone to take care of their pet(s) whether they are away on business, on holiday, in hospital, or caught up in a family emergency.

During my hour-long, in-home visit, I carry out a full schedule, including feeding the cat, as well as playing, petting and 'chatting' with her; I will also groom and brush the animal, cut her nails if necessary, and clean up the litter box.

To keep the owner informed about the cat's condition, I maintain a daily

journal of the animal's activities and compile a detailed daily report which I send to the owner by text or email. In addition, I also play **therapeutic** and relaxing music especially designed for cats. Upon request, I will give the cat her prescribed medication as instructed.

**ES:** Wow! You surely do have a busy timetable for each home visit. Could you describe what a typical workday is like for you?

**ACG:** It **varies** so much. My day might consist of doing actual cat-sitting, providing cat behavioural **consultation**, having sales meetings with potential customers, doing my accounting, updating my business website, blog and Facebook accounts, and reading more articles and books related to cats.

**ES:** I know that you previously had a stable job as a personal assistant in a famous multinational bank. So why did you make such a radical switch to become a cat behaviour therapist?

**ACG:** Well, I have always wanted to work for myself. I was 29 last year and so I decided to achieve what I wanted to **accomplish** before I turned 30. Life is too short, so I made plans to change my career and finally quit my job last year.

**ES:** What motivated you to start a business of your own in the first place?

**ACG:** I have always been a stubborn person, believing that my way of doing things is the best. This made it difficult to progress in a multinational organisation, so I began to realise

that the only way to get ahead was to work for myself.

**ES:** Could you tell us how you train cats?

**ACG:** Feline behaviour is a complex subject. Cats and their behaviour patterns have not been as widely studied and subject to research as you might think. In fact, the notion that animals have emotions is a relatively new concept.

Cats are different from dogs in the sense that you can never train a cat to do something that she doesn't want to do! So part of the training process is understanding how the animals learn and how they view the world. It is important to think from their point of view and not from a human angle.

Say, if you try to use a 'treat' to entice a cat to you, you might think you are training the animal to do your bidding, the result of which is her acceptance of your treat. But from the cat's point of view, she believes that by approaching you, it is you who are being trained to provide a treat! It is crucial to bear this concept in mind when trying to modify certain undesirable behaviours in a cat.

For example, there is an **old wives' tale** that you can stop a cat from peeing at a certain spot by rubbing her nose in/on that spot. This is wrong and misleading. Cats do not understand the correlation between the action (peeing at a certain spot) and the result (the owner rubbing her nose in/on that spot). To solve the problem, it is important to consult

a cat behaviour therapist who will identify the underlying cause. This could be something caused by stress, anxiety, or some other psychological reason. If a cat shows unusual behaviour patterns, she is basically asking for help!

**ES:** What courses did you take before becoming a cat behaviour therapist?

**ACG:** I took a distance learning course on feline behaviour offered by the Centre of Applied Pet Ethology (COAPE) in the UK.

**ES:** What institutions offer training for people who wish to do as you have done?

**ACG:** The field of animal behaviour is relatively new, so there aren't that many institutes which offer training at the moment. I know the University of Southampton in the UK runs a masters degree programme in animal behaviour.

You can discover more about Alice Chau-Ginguene's work at: <http://maowcare.com>

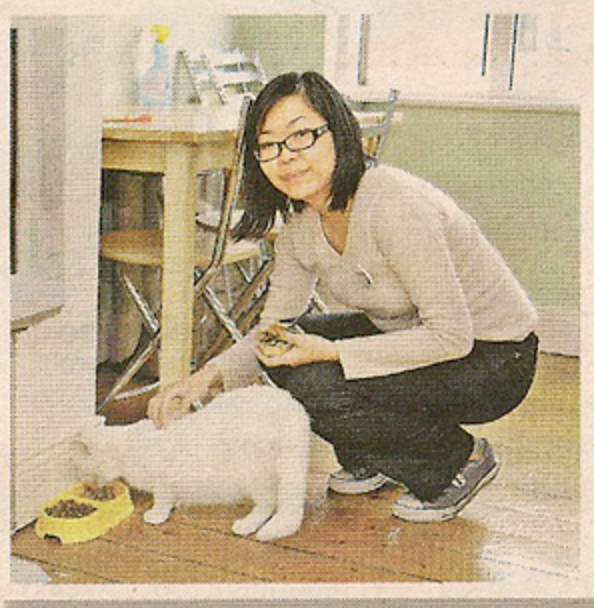
In the next *World of Work* column, to be published on November 29, we will focus on the challenges, satisfaction, and essential qualities you'll need to become a successful cat behaviour therapist.

## GLOSSARY

1. aggressive (adj. 侵犯的)
2. therapeutic (adj. 有助於放鬆精神的)
3. vary (v. 變更)
4. consultation (n. 諮詢會)
5. accomplish (v. 實現)
6. old wives' tale (phr. 無稽之談)

ES16

\*Big words and Amazing phrase(s) are published on ES16.



▲ Chau-Ginguene puts out food for a feline 'client'.  
— ACG photo