

Make the purr-fect choice

by Linda Whitney

DO YOU love animals enough to make them the focus of your business? The UK's 17 million pet owners spend £1.5 billion on pet food alone, so there is a huge market and plenty of businesses want franchisees to join them.

But running a successful animal-focused business takes more than just a love of animals. Some involve handling pets yourself, while others are more about management.

'Many people come to us wanting hands-on work with pets. But while our franchisees must be pet lovers, the skills involved are more administrative,' says Monica Loosley of Pals4Pets.

Her franchisees work mainly with people, organising carers to provide pet boarding in private homes, house-sitting with pet care, animal feeding, cat-cuddling sessions for cats who need extra human attention, dog walking and dog daycare.

Franchisees recruit the carers, and sell the service. You get a large franchise area in which you recruit and train others to offer the service. Cost is £20,000.

You must be business-minded. 'Simply being a pet lover is not enough,' says Lee Southern of Barking Mad, whose franchisees pair up dog owners with host families to



'I BOND WELL WITH ALL PETS'

'I'VE ALWAYS loved animals,' says Lesley Lavlin from Cheadle Hume, Cheshire. So when she gave up work as a midwife to start a business, the Oscar petfood delivery franchise was a natural choice. Lesley, pictured left with children Carys, 15, Mike, 12, dogs Ben and Sandy and a recently-rescued baby rabbit, says: 'I take orders, pick up stock, make deliveries, and do the bookwork on Fridays. 'I've always kept dogs, and being a pet-lover makes a natural bond between me and my customers. I can understand how close they are to their pets and the issues they face.' She delivers dog, cat, small animal, bird and fish food and offers a range of other pet products and accessories to

her 300 customers. 'I can give advice about feeding and behaviour and, as a franchisee, I can call a veterinary advice line if I need help answering customer queries,' says Lesley. She also attends county and pet shows to market her service.

But it's not all about patting dogs and cuddling cats, she warns.

'You have to like talking to people — because you are dealing with customers all the time — and you have to put in the hours and be professional if you want to build up the business.'

Oscar is looking for more franchisees who are pet lovers but with a professional business approach. Cost is £11,995.

■ OSCAR 0800 068 1106.

care for pets while owners are away. 'It's easy to look on a pet-focused franchise as simply an extension of your home life, but you must provide a professional service.'

You vet host families, transport the dogs, and market your service through veterinary surgeries, dog-grooming parlours and word of mouth.

You must be a dog lover, but you do not look after them yourself. Setting up costs £11,500. If pets come before people for you, think

twice — you must enjoy meeting people because you will be marketing your service face-to-face.

Dog-grooming franchisees mean working directly with pets, so you must be fit and confident with dogs who might be frightened.

'Our franchisees offer washing, clipping, nail care, special treatments, and an overall check for problems, from a specially-equipped vehicle,' says Justin Bolter, of Mobile Dog Wash, part of the Omnikleen franchise group.

Cost is £17,000 including training to Ordinary National Certificate level in dog grooming.

Other grooming franchisees include Bugsie's Mobile Dog Wash, named after the founder's dog Bugsie, which is looking for more franchisees with £11,995 to invest, and new franchise Groomersforpets, a shop-based franchise, where investment starts at £16,950.

If you fancy yourself as a dog psychologist, consider a Bark Busters franchise — helping dog

owners with problems such as incessant barking or chewing furniture.

'The key to the dog is the owner, and you will be training owners to control their dogs,' says Carol Herlihy of Bark Busters. Cost is £20,000-£25,000 including six weeks' training.

■ PALS4PETS 020 8201 1606; Barking Mad 01524 276 476; Mobile Dog Wash 01443 233 583; Bugsie's 0870 042 4670; Groomersforpets 01902 843666; Bark Busters 0800 100 4071