

People of all abilities are inspired to achieve a career

Andy, 50, works for 21 hours a week as Wildlife Release Manager for Secret World in Somerset. Secret World is a charity that rescues and rehabilitates injured and orphaned wild animals for re-release back in to their natural environment.

Secret World employs 25 staff and has a further 700 volunteers.

It is run entirely from donations.

Andy has been employed at Secret World since March 2010.

Andy has always had a great interest in wildlife and whilebadger-watching in 1994, he fell 25 feet on to a railway line. He was admitted to hospital with a suspected broken neck, severely damaging his back and neck.

Over the years Andy's condition became more difficult to manage. His condition took a turn for the worse after another fall in 2003 which caused further damage to his neck and head. This also led to him suffering with severe migraines.

Andy's words

"My job is to find suitable release sites mainly for badgers but also larger mammals such as foxes, deer and otters. My work involves surveying sites, liaising with landowners. I can go anywhere in the country.

I previously worked with adults with learning disabilities but have been involved with badgers for 20 years on a voluntary basis. After my accident I did manage to do reduced hours but I was travelling a long way to work. Sitting in a car was no good. My employers were accommodating but the nature of my work was very physical and aggravated the pain all the time. In 2005 I found I couldn't carry on.



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Basically I went on to incapacity benefit up until I started at Secret World in 2010.

When I was on benefits, initially it allowed me to get my pain under management but then it got to a point where I felt I have got more to give than this. I didn't know if this was the end of the road and I wondered if I was going to spend from now until I died doing nothing. I was becoming more and more frustrated not working.

I thought 'who would want to employ me?' because of the nature of my disability – some days I am really good and other days very bad.

I came here to do some voluntary work initially and I was pleased to do it. Last year I helped release 41 badgers and then Simon approached me to see if I was interested in doing the job on a permanent basis.

I was very concerned about coming off benefits. I heard about Pluss and they came in and had a chat with me and Simon about adjustments to help me manage my condition.

The beauty about my job is the flexibility that Secret World gives me with my hours, they are good with adjustments and I can work flexibly so if one week I am not good I do more hours another week – this way I don't go sick. They also understand that if I struggle with something it is not a problem.

Pluss also helped me to get a lot of equipment such as a new workstation, desk and chair, also an inflatable support cushion for when I am in the car. These little things really help as sitting down really aggravates me, I seize up. I also have a support for my laptop to elevate it.

Since I have been at Secret World, I have done a machine driving course to use diggers (part of my job includes building artificial badger sets), I did an otter course, including otter ecology and conservation which means I can now survey sites for otters. I have also done a water vole course, dormouse course and a badger development course.

I love it. Who wouldn't enjoy coming to work here? In my first week I was bathing an otter, going out on rescues, dealing with badger cubs and handling and dealing with wildlife.

I gained back a huge amount of self esteem. I started doing a course at University, and when I went on courses before I always used to say 'I am long term sick', now I can very proudly say I am a 'Wildlife Release Manager'.

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It's good, it gives you purpose and it feels like you are achieving something. I feel a lot more content and I know that Pluss are there with a watchful eye and listening ear."

**Andy's employer, Simon Kidner,
Charity and Operations Manager**

"Andy has a natural interest and hobby in wildlife, which makes him ideal for this position. It's quite specialised so good to bring someone in who has these skills already.

The quality of our care in a holistic way is very important here. When Andy came in to do voluntary work I realised I needed to pay this position to have control over the quality.

He's great. Very enthusiastic and he gets on well with all the staff and volunteers.

Pluss have been really professional in the way they manage people's individual needs in work.

Working with them has helped me to understand how to deal with disability and to manage my staff to get the most out of them.

I am more open minded to employing disabled people now, not so uncertain. Pluss can help assess individual need and the job role, so that I can provide the support that is needed.

The benefits mean I have happy employees that enjoy their work and appreciate the help they receive. It also reflects well on our charity to be all inclusive."