

The Exponential Effects of Success

National Kitten Coalition Partners with Shelters to Achieve Victories for the Tiniest Lives
By NACA Member Rebecca Jewell

Anyone who has worked or volunteered for an animal shelter knows that moments of success must be celebrated and appreciated, and they are often the result of hard work, commitment, persistence and dogged (pun intended) determination. I have spent almost 10 years working in open admission shelters in the greater Washington D.C. area, and I quickly learned that success, in any form, is almost never a one-person operation. Often, like-minded individuals come together behind an idea and will it into existence. That's what happened at my first job in animal welfare, when a partnership with the National Kitten Coalition resulted in a 97 percent survival rate for neonatal kittens.*

The National Kitten Coalition is a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing survival rates of rescued kittens. Started more than 10 years ago, the organization's co-founders were overwhelmed by the number of neonatal and sick kittens they were asked to foster from local shelters and rescues in the greater Washington, D.C. area. In response, they created a nonprofit organization to teach others. Attendees of these Washington, D.C. area workshops put the information to practical use and produced astonishing results. Organizations which traditionally lost young kittens to illness and euthanasia began saving almost every neonatal kitten brought to them. Word of these successes spread rapidly, leading other organizations to contact the Coalition to provide training to even more animal-welfare professionals and volunteers.



The strong educational underpinning provided by the National Kitten Coalition enabled me to build a solid foster program that produced the amazing 97 percent survival rate statistic for neonatal kittens. Just as importantly, this success inspired the confidence and commitment of staff and volunteers. We had proof that a strongly rooted foster program could save lives and extend a shelter's capacity beyond its four walls. Success builds upon success. If we could do this, then we could tackle other seemingly insurmountable challenges.

I eventually handed off the foster program to a colleague and moved on to a different shelter where I built another foster program which produced similar statistical results and immeasurable morale boosting and confidence building. Today, I volunteer with the National Kitten Coalition and witness the impact up-to-date, proven kitten-care training has on shelters across the country. I meet frontline animal heroes, including animal care and control staff, who have implemented our training at their facilities. The smiles and anecdotal stories speak to the successes they are experiencing in their communities.

The National Kitten Coalition offers workshops and programs that are tailored to the specific needs of the requestor because those on the frontline know their communities best. A catch-all, canned approach cannot address the unique challenges in each community or create the positive, systemic change an organization wishes to achieve. For example, we can create a workshop tailored to the specific role that animal control personnel has. If the concern is the influx of kittens into a shelter during summer months, we can create a curriculum that provides information on fostering in place until kittens are old enough for adoption. Instead of taking orphaned kittens to an animal shelter, individuals will often accept the opportunity to care for the kittens themselves - if they have access to basic supplies and the education needed to care successfully for these tiny lives.

Successes measured in percentages and live release rates only tell part of the story. The feeling of truly making a difference is beyond measure. A country where all at-risk kittens are given a chance to grow and thrive because of lifesaving education and positive partnerships among shelters, rescues, veterinarians and the public—now, that is something to celebrate, and what a party it'll be.

To learn more about the National Kitten Coalition, visit www.kittencoalition.org.

* The National Kitten Coalition defines a neonatal kitten as one who is unweaned and requires extensive, around-the-clock care, including bottle feeding.

Rebecca Jewell joined the National Kitten Coalition in 2015 and serves as director of Outreach and Development. In 2006, she moved from Ohio to the Washington, D.C. area and began working as a volunteer manager at an open admission shelter where her duties included creating and supervising a foster program - sending more than 1,500 animals to foster care over four years, including many neonatal and sick kittens. Rebecca has also worked at a reduced cost, high volume spay/neuter clinic as an operations coordinator and at a second open admission shelter as a customer service and outreach manager where she created another successful foster program. She can be reached at rebecca@kittencoalition.org. ••

