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Kitten caregiver just the cat's whiskers

by VICKI WATERHOUSE



Kittens dumped on the side of the road by rubbish bins. Some that have been left to die after being hit by cars. Some that don't have a chance of making it at all, after exposure to the elements following their abandonment.

Jennifer Harrison looks after them all: the sick, the healthy, the unwanted and the abandoned.

And it's not because she wants to collect a massive brood of cats — she gives them all back to the SPCA.

She is merely a foster mother to these unfortunate animals, and just wants them to survive and find good homes.

Hers is one of about 25 foster families in Tauranga who care for animals which have been found or dropped off at the SPCA.

These families take in a range of kittens, puppies and other animals with varying ages and levels of health.

Jennifer indicates a ginger kitten she's been fostering: "He was found in a gutter with his mouth bleeding, he'd been hit by a car. How he survived is beyond me."

The other kittens she's looking after — three of a larger group of five — were dumped on the side of the road together, she says.

All of the kittens Jennifer has been looking after for the past few weeks have now been returned to the SPCA, with the last ones going back yesterday.

She says she finds fostering kittens incredibly rewarding.

"I'm absolutely an animal nut," she says.

"If there weren't foster mothers like me, where would they go?"

"To see them start to blossom and play and be normal little kittens, that's so rewarding."

She first fostered in Rotorua for that city's SPCA before moving to Papamoa several years ago, and has had up to 20 kittens in her care at one time.

"I've had hundreds through my hands," she says.

It doesn't always end happily, she says, with some kittens too sick to survive.

"These are the lucky ones," she says.

Jennifer's routine involves cleaning out the cage, feeding the kittens twice a day and tending to any who are sick.

She doesn't name the kittens for fear of attachment.

"I've learnt to put up an emotional barrier," she says.

"It gets too personal if you name them."

She says she has to think of the big picture — if she gets too attached and



HELPING HAND: Jennifer Harrison fosters young kittens for the SPCA so they can be rehomed. The kitten on the left was left for dead after being hit by a car on the side of the road.

keeps too many, she won't be able to look after the new ones because there will be no

room. She already has seven cats of her own, as well as a golden retriever.

In Papamoa she can only have seven or eight kittens at a time because of the size of her cage, she says.

Her voluntary work is a delight, she says, and she takes great pleasure from seeing the kittens nursed back to health.

"The one that's been hit [by a car] is the most active, he can really run," she says.

"I would encourage anybody who has a love of animals that would like to give back to the community . . . to contact the SPCA."

Tauranga SPCA operations manager Margaret Rawiri says they always needed more foster families, but particularly at this time of year.

"We were busy before Christmas but it's going to be really busy now," Margaret says.

She says they are getting a lot of kittens with mothers in at the moment which required up to eight weeks' stay at a foster home, but there were also older kittens which could be fostered for only a week or two.

Margaret says ideal foster families had an extra room or space where the kittens could run around a bit, and experience with owning a cat or kitten.

The SPCA supplies everything required to foster kittens — food, bedding, blankets, litter and trays.

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