

The Cat's Whiskers

Hand rearing kittens! How much trouble can that be? One person who is more qualified to answer that question is the remarkable lady I'm writing this article about.

Ruby Atcheson is employed at Cedarmount Veterinary Clinic and has been for a good few years. As well as the hours she puts in at work, she is well known for the time she spends fostering and mothering orphans and strays, who through no fault of their own have found themselves abandoned or unwanted.

Ruby has been hand rearing kittens for countless years and for the nine years I've known her I have never once seen her lose hope on a cat or kitten, no matter how dire the circumstances. Ruby gives 100% to every animal in her care and I know she would tell you herself that 100% commitment is the only way to be successful in what she does so well. Ruby, above anyone, knows the joy and fun as well as the trouble and heartache that comes wrapped up in these furry little packages.

Over the years I've lost count of the numbers of kittens Ruby has reared and successfully re-homed, but she remembers each one and is Granny to them all. I think to Ruby re-homing is more of a trauma than the rearing. Each new home is selected very carefully and I have heard people say 'It is easier to adopt a child than get a kitten from Ruby'. Well you can never be too careful!

Although Ruby takes tremendous pleasure from her rigorous rearing routine, it has its downsides. As well as the sheer exhaustion of the demanding feeding and cleaning, there is always the risk of illness and disease in tiny kittens that never received vital immunity from their mothers. Hand-rearing kittens is an incredible skill. It is demanding and tiresome as well as heartbreaking but Ruby welcomes the task and enjoys the experience – taking the good times with the bad.

Although Ruby's eyes light up at the sight of a squeaky and meowing cardboard box, she and the rest of Cedarmount's staff would much prefer people to take responsibility for having both male and female cats neutered and help to avoid this sad scenario of unwanted babies. One un-neutered female cat can be responsible for thousands of off-springs in her lifetime and remember there is only one Ruby and she only has one pair of hands – although a very talented pair.

Anyone who knows Ruby knows how dedicated she is to her cats. They are not just pets but members of the family (little furry people).

It's not only kittens Ruby takes under her wing as she also fosters pregnant and mothering cats and re-homes them to suitable families, when they are ready to leave the nest. She receives cats and kittens from all over the country, saved from all kinds of circumstances. Some have been saved from drowning, starved inside a caravan, being dropped from a crow's mouth and being used as a football. All are made welcome into her home and are also looked after by her own nine cats, who teach the kittens (the way their own mother would have). All are lucky enough to make it to Ruby, or as Ruby would say – '*She is lucky to have them*'

Jennifer Parker