

Survivor story: 50 miracle foals saved each year

Washington horse rescue teams up with local youth to save orphan foals.

There are few bonds stronger than the relationship between a newborn foal and a mare. Their first moments together set the stage for long-term growth and performance. Unfortunately, not all foals are lucky enough to experience this connection. In the case of an emergency, foal care becomes the responsibility of the owner.

Raising orphan foals takes a special touch. Kidznhorses Outreach (KnH), a non-profit horse rescue in Selah, Wash., specializes in just that, taking in about 50 orphan foals a year.

Kerrie Regimbal, founder of the program, says KnH is near the Yakima region, a 1.2-million-acre area in southcentral Washington that is home to a large population of wild horses. Foals are rescued from the region after losing their mothers.

"These foals are full of promise and just need a little love," Regimbal says. "Our team of volunteers gives them the care they need for a fair chance at a healthy future and, ultimately, a forever home."

The team at KnH is different than many other horse rescues. Children overcoming anxiety, bullying, depression, suicidal thoughts and other mental health issues can visit the rescue and work with the foals and other rescued horses. Visitors take part in a 90-minute session which starts with chores, like feeding foals or grooming horses, and wraps up with riding lessons.

"We started our program with the goal of saving horses in need. Soon after, we invited area youth to join in. We create pairings of a child, a horse and a mentor and the three work together," says Regimbal. "We can see a difference in both the children and the horses very quickly."

Regimbal says that many of the children especially connect with the orphan foals, providing care from the day the foals arrive. The kids learn the importance of animal care and see their impact through growing foals each day. Each year, the group proudly raises approximately 50 orphan foals



and then connects the foals with a forever home through adoption.

Here's a look at KnH's orphan foal management program:

1. Create a comfortable environment.

"When a foal loses its mother, he or she may feel stressed," Regimbal says. "Our first goal is to minimize that stress by helping foals feel comfortable."

To ensure comfort, the team sorts orphan foals into groups based on age and size. Regimbal has found that orphan foals do best when they are in pairs or even-numbered groups so they can find friendship.

Foals are also placed in dry, clean and draft-free areas to prevent bacterial exposure.

"These foals are fragile, so we do everything we can to keep the area clean and comfortable," she says.

2. Provide quality nutrition.

"The most important tool for our orphan foals is quality nutrition," Regimbal says, explaining that foals should receive 25 percent of their bodyweight in liquid nutrition.

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“Since these foals cannot receive the nutrition from their mothers, we start by feeding them milk replacer four times per day.”

When selecting a milk replacer, the team looked for one that most closely mimics mare’s milk. Mare’s milk is different from other species’ milk, with 24 percent protein and 16 percent fat.

“We looked for a milk replacer that most closely matched the nutrition profile of mare’s milk,” Regimbal says. “We found LAND O LAKES® Mare’s Match® foal milk replacer and liked that the key nutrients were the same as mare’s milk.”

Today, each of the rescue’s orphan foals is raised on Mare’s Match® foal milk replacer. The team provides round-the-clock care to foals until they are two months old, feeding them every three hours, a total of 4-8 quarts of milk replacer daily.

“With Mare’s Match® foal milk replacer our success rate has just been incredible,” Regimbal smiles. “We haven’t lost foals, even if they are two days old and we have to hand feed them until we can get them on



a bottle and then on a bucket. It is amazing that these babies have had no troubles and are so healthy.”

“My recommendation is to start feeding Mare’s Match® foal milk replacer as early as you can,” she adds. “It is amazing, you would never know they were raised on anything other than their mother’s milk.”

3. Transition to a bucket.

The next step at KnH is to transition foals from bottles to buckets. This is not only easier on the foals, but it also makes managing feedings more efficient.

“We start the foals on bottles and then start dipping each foal’s mouth in the bucket of Mare’s Match® foal milk replacer,” Regimbal explains.

Once foals are drinking from a bucket, Mare’s Match® foal milk replacer is fed every three hours for the first month. Gradually, the time in-between feedings is extended to every five hours until about three months of age.

4. Start the weaning transition around week 8.

At week eight, the team starts the weaning transition, gradually transitioning from a liquid to a solid diet.

“We decrease the number of milk replacer feedings to two times per day for a total of 4-8 quarts of milk replacer daily and start offering LAND O LAKES® Mare’s Match® foal milk transition pellets,” Regimbal says.

At three months, the foals are weaned off liquid milk replacer and offered starter grain along with the transition pellets. By six months, the foals are completely weaned and ready for adoption. Regimbal says that at times foals can be adopted at an earlier age on a case-by-case basis.

To date, Kidznhorses Outreach has helped give hundreds of orphan foals a second lease on life and find forever homes. It’s clear that the team at KnH is making a difference in the lives of horses each year. But, if you ask the team, it’s the horses who are making the difference.

“We are not counselors, but the horses are,” says Regimbal. “We are so happy to provide a place for children and horses to feel comfortable together and to give these orphan foals a second chance at life.”

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