

Community Partnership for Rabies Prevention—New Hanover County, NC

In these difficult economic times, public health officials are faced with the daunting challenge of having to do more with less. One of those tasks includes protecting the public from the threat of rabies exposure. The mission and the mantra of the World Rabies Day initiative gives us a hint at how to accomplish that—“Through the World Rabies Day initiative, partners will be...**Working Together to Make Rabies History!**”

Developing a community partnership is the key to leveraging limited resources and multiplying manpower. In New Hanover County, North Carolina, such a community partnership between the New Hanover County Health Department, its Animal Control Services, and the University of North Carolina Wilmington has effectively increased awareness of the threat of rabies, as well as improved mandatory rabies vaccination rates. The partnership is the quintessential win-win situation. One of the efforts of the students is to provide rabies awareness education and dog safety training in the elementary schools. Dr. Jean McNeil, ACS Division Director says, “This is something that Animal Control Services has wanted to do for a long time, but has lacked the manpower. The program teaches students about the importance of rabies vaccination and other means of preventing the disease. The information handed out by the students makes its way home to secondarily educate parents.” Additionally, the students, many of them on a pre-veterinary track, partner with ACS in an initiative to provide no-cost rabies vaccinations to dogs, cats, and ferrets belonging to members of the community six times yearly, including the flagship clinic (seen in the picture) on the UNCW campus in conjunction with World Rabies Day. This initiative is an outstanding example of community partnering, and is a showcase of university-community cooperation.



Not only does the community benefit, but the students get invaluable experience and volunteer hours that they can list on their applications to veterinary school, medical school, or other graduate programs to which they may be applying. Dave Rice, New Hanover County Health Director, has said, “We are proud to offer the students the opportunity to receive practical public health experience, but more importantly, without the university-community partnership, we would be hard-pressed to provide the level of service that we do.”

The partnership between New Hanover County Health Department and the University of North Carolina Wilmington is an outstanding example of a creative way to leverage limited resources to improve outcomes. It is truly an example of “**Working together to make rabies history.**”