National SAF-T Day

Overall, 22.8% of shelter residents reported that concern for their pets’ welfare had kept them from going to the domestic violence shelter sooner than they did. This obstacle to seeking safety should be addressed by domestic violence agencies.¹

Creating an onsite pet housing program within the domestic violence shelter will enable programs across the country to help a greater number of survivors in need. Helping survivors ensure the safety of their pets and their families also forwards the mission to end domestic violence in our communities and neighborhoods. Sponsored by the Sheltering Animals & Families Together (SAF-T)™ Program, and its supporting organizations, National SAF-T Day provides a way for domestic violence shelters to raise funds and community support to start an onsite pet housing program.

Held annually on the first Saturday in October, this national event allows shelters to raise funds to start or sustain an onsite pet housing program, increase awareness regarding the co-occurrence between animal abuse and domestic violence, and promote the need for safe housing for families fleeing abuse with pets. Each domestic violence shelter organizes their own dog walk and may charge a small fee ($25) for people to register for the walk. As the national host organization for this event, the SAF-T Program strongly encourages local programs to register their events through their website beginning in September each year.

Event Planning Details
Planning for this event is not extensive and expenses may not exceed $250-$500. Upon registration, the SAF-T Program provides guidelines on how to organize the dog walk and coordinate with city officials on finding a location. Other planning details include:

- Inviting the community to participate through newspaper ads, radio announcements, social media, flyers, etc.;
- Obtaining items for the event such as event t-shirts, doggie gift bags, dog snacks, water and water bowls, etc.;
- Inviting the local animal protection community to join in, and
- Finding volunteers to help with the dog walk.

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Once the event is over, organizers and volunteers should ensure that the meeting area for all dog walkers is cleaned up. Event organizers are encouraged to invite a survivor that has been helped by a program of this nature to speak at the event. Planning only takes about 1-6 weeks and can be done with the help of shelter staff, volunteers, students and other community partners (area pet stores, seminarians, pet supply retailers, animal shelters and rescue organizations, etc.). When fundraising goals are met, the SAF-T Program offers a Start-Up Guide, training and technical assistance to help domestic violence shelters set-up their onsite pet housing area; more details are available on the SAF-T website.

Each of the pictures below are from three different domestic violence shelter programs that provide onsite housing for pets that come into shelter with survivors. Two are located within the facility, in a room specifically designed for this purpose, and one is located outside on the property. Notice how each pet housing area is designed with the comfort of the animals and functionality of the space in mind.

**Variations to this Event:**

**The Wag & Swim**
Is there a swimming pool in your community? One way to increase use of this resource and to raise awareness is to host a *Wag & Swim* event at the end of the summer season once the pool is closed (usually in early September). Work with community leaders and complex management to organize a dog swim party. Before the pool is winterized for the season, they may allow licensed dogs to come to the pool and have a swim. Participants can receive information on the co-occurrence of domestic violence and animal abuse, details on where to go for help if needed, and a treat for their dog. Organizers may charge a small fee and donate proceeds to the local domestic violence shelter.

**Variations to this event from the 3rd Annual SAF-T Day, October 2012:**

**Dillingham, Alaska**
This shelter, Safe and Fear-Free Environment, used National SAF-T Day to raise awareness of the linkage between animal abuse and intimate partner violence. Thirty-five (35) attendees received information about this troubling issue and the local animal control unit provided free rabies vaccinations.
Brainerd, Minnesota
Advocates from the Women’s Shelter of Mid-Minnesota distributed dog leashes, bearing the SAF-T Program web address, to animal care facilities throughout their service area.

Kansas City, Missouri
A new Rose Brooks shelter in Kansas City held a pet parade for 30 dogs in conjunction with Halloween, and offered two pet safety classes (one for staff and one for residents) as part of their SAF-T Day activities. Their pet shelter advocate distributed dog leashes to residents in need.

Whiteville, North Carolina
At Families First, advocates were able to raise enough funds to sustain their pet housing program for one year. In addition to giving out dog leashes, Families First also gave out Blessing of the Animals bandanas, t-shirts, and purple ribbons. There were 45 participants at their SAF-T Day event.

Akron, Ohio
Over 100 participants joined the Battered Women’s Shelter/Medina County Domestic & Sexual Abuse Coalition for SAF-T Day. Funds raised at this event, which included a survivor speaker, dog costume contest and dog trick demonstration, will be used to house pets in need at an offsite SPCA Shelter.

Comfort, Texas
Little Grass Ranch raised enough funds to feed 3 horses for one month. Sixty (60) participants enjoyed a dog fashion show and pony rides at a Tractor Supply Store. They were given doggie bags and gift certificates for being a part of SAF-T Day. Media attended the event and reported on the activities, SAF-T and the program’s mission. The event was also covered by the San Antonio NBC affiliate.

Little Grass Ranch staff report, “Another benefit that came out of this is that we got a new board member with great connections to San Antonio and regional resources and government. He heads the bioterrorism unit for Bexar County and also handles the evacuations in Texas and Louisiana, and is an experienced nonprofit person. Thanks so much for putting this together, but most importantly, for doing the work you are doing. Yes!”

Contact Information
For more details about National SAF-T Day and about how to start the SAF-T Program at your domestic violence shelter, please contact Allie Phillips, Founder of Sheltering Animals & Families Together at allie@alliephillips.com or via the online contact form at: http://www.animalsandfamilies.org/aboutcontact.html.