

P A R I T Y



RSPCA
for all creatures great & small

Wintringham



Homelessness and Pets

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Write for *Parity*!

Contributions to *Parity* are welcome. Each issue of *Parity* has a central focus or theme. However, prospective contributors should not feel restricted by this as *Parity* seeks to discuss the whole range of issues connected with homelessness and the provision of housing and services to people who are homeless. If possible, the length of contributions should be no greater than 1000 words. Please consult the *Parity* editor if this is insufficient. Where necessary, contributions will be edited. Where possible this will be done in consultation with the contributor.

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Contributions can be sent by e-mail to parity@chp.org.au or sent on disk in a Microsoft Word or rtf format to:

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2011 *Parity*

Publications Schedule

NB: Please note that this may be subject to change.

June: **Preventing Elderly Homelessness**
 July: **Centrelink and Homelessness**
 August: **Evaluating Homelessness Programs**
 September: **Responding to the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Families**
 October: **Homelessness Research**
 November: **Responding to Homelessness in Tasmania**

Artwork

The cover artwork for this edition was kindly provided by *Pets of the Homeless* in the United States, www.petsofthehomeless.org

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The views and opinions expressed in *Parity* are not necessarily those of CHP.

Contents

Editorial	3
Homelessness Australia – May 2011 Update	4
By Nicole Lawder, Chief Executive Officer	
How You Can Help the RSPCA	4
Introduction	
Pets and Companion Animals: Why This is an Important Issue	5
Dr Rose Searby	
Chapter 1: What Works?	
Much More than Cats and Dogs	7
By Michael Linke, CEO, RSPCA ACT	
People, Pets and Public Housing	9
By Jennie Churchill	
The Unique Bond	10
By Jennifer Davis, Executive Manager Marketing, RSPCA Victoria.	
The Importance of Pets in Times of Hardship	11
By Debra Boland, Marketing and Communications, Animal Aid	
Lort Smith Animal Hospital's Emergency Welfare Assistance Program	12
By Melissa Hughes, Marketing and Fundraising Assistant, Lort Smith Animal Hospital	
Pets Out West: Housing Rough Sleeping Pets in Western Sydney	13
By Stephanie Brennan, Manager, Community Services, Wentworth Community Housing	
Ferretting Out a Solution: Jane's Story One Department of Human Services – Achieving Great Client Outcomes	15
By Kirsty Carter, Manager, Service Integration and Sarah Acreman and Rebekah Woods, Service Integration Officers, Service Integration, Client Outcomes, North and West Metropolitan Region, Department of Human Services, Victoria	
Pets of the Homeless: USA	17
By Genevieve Frederick, Executive Director/Founder, Pets of the Homeless	
Chapter 2:	
Pets, Women, Families and Domestic Violence	
Pets in Peril: Making the Connection Between Domestic Violence and Animal Cruelty	18
By Judy Johnson OAM, Former Manager, Eastern Domestic Violence Service	
Safe Beds for Pets: The Forgotten Fallout from Domestic Violence	20
By Karen Thorne, RSPCA NSW and Jennie Churchill, Australian Common Ground Alliance (and veterinarian)	
We Made it Home	22
The betrayed, traumatised look in their eyes is finally gone	
By Aileen Solowiej, Communications Officer, Homelessness Australia	
Family Violence: What About Pets?	24
By Lisa Sandy, Support Worker, Family Violence Outreach Program, Salvation Army Crisis Services	
Sheltering Animals and Families Together (SAF-T) Program	25
By Allie Phillips, J.D.	
Chapter 3:	
Older People, Homelessness and Pets	
Tails of Friendship: Companion Animals and Wintringham	27
By Daniel Gray, Recreation Manager, Wintringham	
Chapter 4: Interview(s)	
Faithful Friends Are Family	30
Interviews by Allan Martin, Peer Education Support Program Graduate	
Opinion	
Felicity Reynolds	32
CEO Mercy Foundation	

Editorial

Over the last few months, the ABS review of *Counting the Homeless* (CTH) has been a constant reminder of how important 'the numbers' are. Data on homelessness provides evidence, proves solutions and guides policy makers.

But what happens if you don't have faith in the data? Well then you don't believe in the evidence, the solutions or the policy decisions. This has serious implications for how Governments invest in ending homelessness.

For these reasons, there was an outcry from the sector when the ABS released a new methodology for measuring homelessness in their discussion paper. It outlined pages of technical revisions that left us with a slew of questions and feeling deeply concerned about the new 'headline' figure that significantly revised homeless numbers down.

In essence, the sector lost faith in the data. As a result we came together around a common goal — to get an accurate count of homelessness. Not to support one methodology over another methodology but to provide input into the process and to try to regain confidence in the numbers.

CHP acknowledges the various challenges in measuring homelessness. The Census is an inherently difficult tool to use because it does not ask a direct question about 'homelessness'. Therefore estimates are derived from assumptions made about the other data in the Census. The very nature of the homelessness experience can also lead to undercounting, particularly among people sleeping outside or on a friend's couch, or among families fleeing violence.

Despite these difficulties, the Census is one of the few tools we have and Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie delivered new and innovative ways to use the Census to measure homelessness in CTH.

CHP has remained committed to working on the issues in relation to this matter. On May 24th we participated in a workshop hosted by the ABS to provide input into the review. The session provided a further opportunity to express concerns and seek clarification on the proposed methodology.

The group discussed challenges in using the Census data, as well as solutions to undercounts among specific groups, including young people and Indigenous people. Overall the workshop was very productive. The ABS shared many of our concerns and agreed to consider:

- Developing a homelessness reference group to impact future

data collections;

- Undertaking a quality study to better count young people, and
- Extending the review to provide further consultation with all key stakeholders.

This is a large step forward toward achieving a good result.

In conclusion, we would like to encourage you all to participate in this review. You can do so by sending comments to us or writing your own submission.

CHP is also aware of the diverse range of views our members hold in relation to this issue and that some services are feeling discouraged from participating in the August Census count. We will host a forum on June 6th so that our members can inform our final position. **Irrespective of our final advice to the sector, we are encouraging agencies to prepare to participate in the August Census count as time is running short.**



This edition of *Parity* is devoted to an issue that unfortunately does not rate much attention in the discussion of homelessness or the response to homelessness. That issue is the rights of people experiencing homelessness and their companion animals, or more simply, their pets.

Every year people who are homeless and who have pets, mainly but not always dogs, are refused access to housing and support by services who do not allow pets on their premises.

Many of these people refuse to leave their pets and thus forego their right to access assistance. Even worse, some are forced to abandon their pets or have them put down in order to gain access to housing and support.

Similarly, many women fleeing domestic violence often refuse to leave a violent relationship because of their fears for the fate of the family pet or when they leave



their much-loved animals behind, they are consumed with fear and anxiety about the fate of their pet.

Their pets are often considered "part of the family". These pets are then left with the perpetrator and women and their children are forced to suffer, worrying about their abandoned pets on top of everything else that they are forced to cope with to live safely.

For many people, and not just people experiencing homelessness, their pet is one of their main sources of love, constancy, support and sometimes protection. For some the choice between their pet and accommodation is no choice at all. They would rather sleep outside with their pet than abandon it.

None of the above is necessary or inevitable.

This edition of *Parity* is devoted to an examination of the above issues and some of the responses to them. In particular, it looks at some of the great responses to the situation of women and their families (including their pets) escaping family violence and also the support and assistance given to older people experiencing homelessness to maintain their pets.

Hopefully this edition will encourage services to examine and reassess their policies regarding the rights of people experiencing homelessness to keep their pets.

Acknowledgements

This edition was made possible thanks to the sponsorship support of the national RSPCA and Wintringham. Assistance was also provided by Artifishal Studios and Tekprint.

Several people deserve special thanks for their work on this edition, in particular, Guest Editor Dr Rose Searby and Jennie Churchill who have supported this project from its inception.

Sarah Kahn,
Manager CHP Policy and
Communications Unit



Homelessness Australia — May 2011 Update

**By Nicole Lawder,
Chief Executive Officer**

In the past month we have continued a focus on the upcoming Census and proposed changes to the methodology to analyse the figures for homelessness. The ABS released a lengthy discussion paper (the review) on March 31st that outlined their changes to the 2006 Census figures.

Homelessness Australia has requested another discussion forum for with the ABS on May 24th to enable representatives from the homelessness sector to respond to the ABS methodological review of *Counting the Homeless 2006*. A number of Homelessness Australia staff, Board and Council members, along with members who have raised concerns with us and participated in teleconferences to discuss the implications of the review for both the sector and people who are experiencing homelessness, are attending the forum. We hope that the consultation will provide an opportunity for people to raise concerns that they may not have had the opportunity to raise during the discussion forums that have been held so far.

Homelessness Australia has been liaising closely with the ABS in preparation for this discussion forum and we feel confident that the forum will give participants the time and information to make valuable input and decisions about the way forward.

Homelessness Australia is currently completing its submission to FaHCSIA on the Options Paper for the National Quality Framework. FaHCSIA completed a comprehensive round of consultations, with over 500 people attending in 16 different locations, as well as some telephone interviews for those in harder to reach or remote services, or those who may have been unable to attend the face to face consultations. FaHCSIA have, I believe, genuinely consulted during this process and have taken on board the feedback provided. Written submissions will still be accepted up to the end of May 2011 and Homelessness Australia is currently finalising its submission based on feedback from members. Homelessness Australia's submission will include:

- The value in a national homelessness charter to set out client rights and

responsibilities, as an educational tool and as a means for leveraging greater mainstream investment in reducing homelessness;

- The need for culturally appropriate standards which are sufficiently flexible to work for different types and sizes of services, and
- That national homelessness standards must be mapped against existing standards and systems prior to their implementation to reduce unnecessary burden and remove the potential for duplication.

I am a member of FaHCSIA's Sector Reference Group which will spend two days in June discussing next steps forward with the NQF.

It is not long now until Homeless Persons' Week, 1–7 August 2011. This year's theme is *MY address — diversity in homelessness*. You can find out more at www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au go to Media and Publications and click on the link to Campaign and National Homeless Persons' Week 2011. ■

How You Can Help the RSPCA



for all creatures **great & small**

The RSPCA is a community-based charity that works to prevent cruelty to animals by actively promoting their care and protection.

Each year in Australia, the RSPCA receives over 150,000 stray, injured and surrendered animals and investigates more than 50,000 complaints of animal cruelty and neglect.

The RSPCA relies on the generous support of individuals and organisations to carry out its vital work in the community.

There are many ways to help the RSPCA and the animals we care for each year.

Donate

Donations from the community make up nearly all of our national funding. Making a donation to the RSPCA is the quickest and easiest way to help us care for animals.

Support our Campaigns

We need strong community participation to ensure the success of our campaigns and fundraising activities.

Events

Participate in our events. From Millions Paws Walk to RSPCA Cupcake Day, events are a fun way to support the work of RSPCA.

Volunteering at the RSPCA

Our volunteers are vital members of the RSPCA team, far outnumbering our paid

staff. To find out more about volunteering and to join our network of dedicated volunteers contact your local RSPCA.

Become a Member

Receive regular news and updates throughout the year, as well as special offers and discounts. The benefits of being a member of the RSPCA vary between different states and territories so check with your local branch of the RSPCA.

Bequests

By leaving a bequest to the RSPCA in your will, you are ensuring that the RSPCA can continue to care for all creatures well into the future.

Pet Insurance

RSPCA Pet Insurance is the most caring, cost effective way to protect your pet's welfare. In doing so, up to 20% of your premium will be paid to support the RSPCA for as long as you continue to insure your pet.

Stay Informed

Subscribe to the RSPCA eNews to keep updated on the latest animal welfare news. Visit www.rspca.org.au to sign up.

Shop RSPCA

Shop at your nearest shelter or at the RSPCA Online Shop for a great range of pet accessories and supplies as well as official RSPCA merchandise and great gift

ideas. Shop RSPCA and every cent you spend contributes to our important work. Visit the RSPCA Online Shop at www.rspca.org.au/shop or your local RSPCA shelter shop.

Be Social

Join our growing network of online supporters on *Twitter* and *Facebook*.

<http://twitter.com/RSPCA>

<http://www.facebook.com/RSPCAAustralia>

Be a Responsible Pet Owner

Care for your pet and look out for animals in your community. De-sex, microchip and register your dog or cat. If you've got a question check out the RSPCA Knowledge Base. <http://kb.rspca.org.au/>

Buy Humanely Produced Rspca Approved Food Products

Next time you're shopping remember to purchase RSPCA Approved food. Eggs and meat approved under the RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme have been produced humanely and by choosing RSPCA Approved products you will be helping the RSPCA improve the lives of Australia's farm animals. RSPCA Approved products are available at supermarkets and butchers. For more information or for a stockist near you visit www.rspca.org.au/shophumane. ■

Introduction

Pets and Companion Animals: Why This is an Important Issue

Dr Rose Searby*

As this edition of *Parity* goes to print, there is a furore in Australia about the export of live animals and the horrific experiences and conditions the animals are subject to in this process. As a direct result of a graphic television exposé, the websites of the RSPCA, Animals Australia, and GetUp! crashed after receiving over 2,000 visitors per minute in a tide of anger by Australians appealing to the government to cease the export of live cattle to Indonesia. Within five hours, 35,000 Australians signed a petition against live exports and when the petition was presented at Parliament House four days later, it was over 3,000 pages long and had 200,000 signatures.¹

Imagine if this unprecedented and very public reaction to animals was to be the tipping point for a changed vision of the meaning and place animals have in our lives. Imagine if the groundswell created by this public furore led to new ways of thinking about animals as an integral and

interconnected part of life; a life in which we worked to create an ethically responsible living situation for both humans and animals.

Compelling events such as the live animal export exposé dictate a need for humans to think differently about our relationships with all types of animals, of which companion animals play a significant part. The need to address the challenges and issues associated with homelessness and animals is no different: it is a present, confronting, and very real need that requires systematic solutions in order to create change on a local, state and national level. This change is needed to bring about real transformation in the lives, and improve the physical and emotional health, welfare and rights of people and animals displaced and disadvantaged by homelessness.

Thank you to the Council of Homeless Persons for publishing this important special edition of *Parity*. As this edition shows, there is a clear need for a shift in attitudes towards the relationship between animals and

humans in the context of homelessness, and the issues associated with such a shift pose many challenges.

Through this edition, the Council of Homeless Persons have made a bold move in raising such issues in the homelessness sector, an area of policy and practice that is traditionally focused on a human-centred approach. By bringing together contributors from a range of both the human and animal welfare sectors from interstate and overseas, this edition is concerned not only with the welfare of people, nor solely with the welfare of animals, but rather for a new ethics of care in the homelessness sector that recognises the justice and rights of both humans and animals to stay and live together as a single responsible unit. I hope that this edition helps to facilitate that change and further bring together existing networks of human and animal NGOs, government agencies and not-for-profit organisations to address the current situation for the homeless and their animal companions.



Research in both the USA and UK has shown that many people who are homeless own pets in spite of personal circumstances and environmental conditions; people experiencing homelessness have a higher degree of attachment to their pets than those who are securely housed; and that there is a clear need for research on homelessness and animals that can feed into policy change and development.² Although research in Australia has shown the importance of pets in the lives of humans³ and the link between domestic violence and maltreatment of pets,⁴ there remains little research that examines the relationship between companion animals and people experiencing homelessness. Importantly, this evidence shows that relationships between those who are homeless and their pets are hugely significant, very real, and often irreplaceable.

Over the past twenty years there has been a fundamental shift in many of the attitudes and values we place on pets, bringing animals and humans closer together. Pet ownership in Australia is one of the highest in the world with over 6.6 million households owning a pet, and as contributors to this edition outline, many see the relationship with their pets as reliable and secure; they consider their pets as a family member or substitute for children; pets offer emotional benefits; and pets counter loneliness and isolation.⁵

Those without a home, the aged, those with a mental illness, those sleeping rough, victims of domestic violence or natural disasters, often have a higher degree of attachment to their pets than the securely housed, and severing this bond can be traumatic for not only their own physical and mental health but also that of their pet(s).

As this edition of *Parity* reveals, the development of programs to help the homeless and their pets also reflects this increasing trend towards closeness between humans and animals. Many of these programs have evolved from a recognised and urgent need yet many receive no government funding, operate on very low margins, rely on volunteers and are in need of on-going funding in order to continue.

Animals also have an ambiguous role in our lives. They are our companions that we treat as kin and they provide us with emotional support. Yet they are at the same time a source of clothing and food as well as substitutes for us in medical experiments. That is, we love them but also treat them with relative impunity. In our attempts to reconcile these competing and opposing perspectives, humans have generated extraordinary inconsistencies in attitudes, behaviour and policies towards animals.

These inconsistencies pose major challenges to human psychology, ethics and morality and confront us with fundamental questions about what it means to be human. On the negative side, answering these questions can reveal human prejudices about the superiority of humans over and above all species and perpetuate the notion that human

relationships with animals are somehow not real or serious.⁶ On the positive side, addressing the challenges inherent in overcoming these inconsistencies can reveal deeper understandings of human social and moral life, inform social justice issues and lead to an increase in human and animal welfare and health.

These ambiguities and inconsistencies in human attitudes to animals are relevant in the context of homelessness and go some way to explaining why Australia lacks a systematic solution for the homeless and their animals. They are difficult issues that are often contentious and challenging and addressing them requires the dissolution of binary attitudes that see animals as mere additions to the lives of the disadvantaged.

As you will read in this edition, there are some wonderful services and much needed programs for people and animals made homeless. Yet as some contributors point out, much more is needed in terms of acknowledgement and understanding of the depth and complexities of the current situation and finding practical and policy solutions to deal with the issues. All of the programs outlined in this edition are beacons that can — and should — be used as springboards and models for future solutions.

This edition of *Parity* is important because it also reveals the many silent beings whose voices are *not* represented in this discussion. The majority of residential facilities for the homeless in Australia do not accept pets. Yet in this edition we have only a couple of the voices of people experiencing homelessness, that is those who are continuously denied help and housing simply because they have a pet. We do not hear from those sleeping in their cars with their pets, those forced to give up their pet or those who go without food in order to feed their pet. We do not hear of the pain, trauma and loss. Those who are already displaced have to suffer in making decisions about their animal companions. And we do not hear from accommodation service providers themselves who frequently deal with these issues but cannot transparently do so for fear of loss of funding amongst other concerns.

Importantly also, in this edition we do *not* hear from animals themselves, about the stress they suffer being caught in cycles of homelessness and the adverse effect on their health. Although animals cannot talk, they are not silent, passive recipients of human affect and nurture. The relationship between people and pets is not one-way, for pets are capable of creating shared definitions and engaging in symbolic interaction such as protecting domestic violence victims from perpetrators, or guarding those sleeping rough on the street.⁷ It is important we consider their voices in this discussion.

The International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organisation's 2007 Tokyo Declaration states that: 'It is a universal, natural and basic human right to benefit from the presence of animals'.

Unfortunately this right is denied to many people experiencing homelessness throughout Australia. This edition of *Parity* calls for a shift in attitudes towards the relationship between humans and their animal companions. It illustrates that there is a need for research that examines the relationship between people experiencing homelessness and their pets, research that can lead to a systematic attempt to address the limitations of systems and evolve into practical solutions that will feed into policy and affect change for people and animals disadvantaged by homelessness. ■

* Dr Rose Searby is a consultant historian who specialises in human-animal studies and homelessness. She is the founder of HELPP which aims to help homeless people keep ownership of, maintain the health of, and keep living with their companion animals. Rose can be contacted at rosesearby@optusnet.com.au or 0421 052 471. Rose would like to acknowledge the support for HELPP of the Culture and Animals Foundation (USA).

Footnotes

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Chapter 1: What Works?

Much More than Cats and Dogs

**By Michael Linke,
CEO, RSPCA ACT**

When people think about the RSPCA they think of abandoned pets living in cages. Primarily they think about cats and dogs. They think about high death rates, or death row. They accept that the role the RSPCA plays is to take off the streets unwanted animals and in the most part put them to sleep.

However, today in 2011 at the RSPCA in Canberra, nothing could be further from the truth. We strongly believe we are in the business of saving lives.

The RSPCA ACT manages more than 8,500 animals annually across more than 110 species. Of these almost 5,500¹ are homed, returned to owners or released back to the wild. We have in place policies that allow animals to stay with us for as long as is needed before they are rehomed or released. We also do not falsely create space by simply putting healthy animals to sleep.

The RSPCA ACT boasts a staggeringly high homing rate for dogs; some 96 per cent of all dogs go to a home. This is unprecedented in animal welfare circles and is the cornerstone of a number of successful programs, including programs targeted at helping vulnerable members of our community. Our homing rate for cats, while not as high, is considered among the best in the country at almost 70 per cent.

In addition to taking in and caring for injured, abandoned and lost animals, an emerging trend in our work is supporting the most vulnerable members of the community; victims of domestic violence, sufferers of drug and alcohol abuse, those experiencing homelessness, those living in poverty and squalor and juveniles living in difficult family circumstances. Of course this work requires increased attention, increased funding and outside the square thinking

Research has shown that 63 per cent² of the households in Australia own a pet. Research has also revealed, and common sense dictates, that similar numbers of victims of domestic violence, people experiencing homelessness, drug and alcohol sufferers, dysfunctional families and people with mental illness own a pet.

This emerging issue has not gone unnoticed and we have put in place a number of programs, resources and facilities to better equip us to manage this trend. Sadly this service is unfunded by government or any allied health services and as such is offered on a limited needs basis. We would love to do more, we want to do more and we believe we can if we continue to develop ties and relationships with people and organisations supporting this vulnerable community.

What we need now is greater community support to ensure long term success in this field. Some suggestions as to what the community can do are contained at the conclusion of this article.



Our focus has been on prevention, early intervention and corrective action to allow animals to remain with their owners.

An example of this was our support of a young woman, Mary. Mary became homeless as a result of some tough life circumstances and we were able to help her by providing emergency care for her two dogs. This care extended for almost a 12-month period while Mary was waiting for government housing. We kept Mary's dogs at our shelter at no cost. During this time Mary came and walked her dogs on an almost daily basis. They were provided with veterinary care, food, water and shelter. When Mary was provided with housing we assisted her with settling in her dogs and to this day they are living a happy life.

Many of our cases see animals utilising our facilities for a shorter period of time than in the case above while their owner recovers from some life changing event. Whether they are a victim of domestic violence, a drug and alcohol sufferer, are remanded in prison for a period of time, require extended health care support or just need the help of one of the myriad allied health services available in our region, the RSPCA is there.

A young man, Bruce, became homeless, was sleeping rough and finally, in desperation, contacted the RSPCA, believing he had no choice but to surrender his two dogs. He did not have the money to feed himself let alone his dogs. Sadly we

were left with no choice but to re-home one of his dogs, but, Bruce has with our help, been able to provide veterinary attention and food for his remaining dog. Bruce believes that without that companionship he could not have coped and he is eternally thankful for the support offered by RSPCA during this dire time in his life.

As we did with Bruce, our focus is on sustaining the relationship between people and their pets, sustaining animals already in loving homes, and sustaining the population who already love their pet.

It would seem ludicrous on two fronts to force someone to surrender a loved pet because of difficult living circumstances. Now in some cases, this may be the wish of the owner, but in the greater majority of cases the last thing an owner wants to do is surrender a pet. In many cases, as with Bruce, the pet is the last semblance of reality, the last ray of hope of putting their life back together.

The second reason this is not optimal is because it takes a place in an animal shelter of another animal and means the shelter needs to find another new family for another pet. If in the long run we can keep these pets out of the shelter and focus on short term foster care, we create an opportunity to make real long term savings.

Our focus is on maintaining the linkage, maintaining the relationship rather than surrendering animals and the RSPCA working to find them a new home. If we can maintain homes in the first place, the truly needy animals have a greater chance of

finding a home. Our costs are minimised, our workload and flows are managed and our efforts are rewarded.

Take for instance a family experiencing domestic violence. Research has shown that 25 to 33 per cent^{3,4} of women will stay in a difficult relationship for fear of what will happen to the family pet if they left. Now if the RSPCA could say to the family, or the police, or whoever attends, that the pet will be safe, we can quickly remove the pet and allow the victim and family to work with allied support staff. Once the situation is settled, then the pet can be returned.

In terms of animal management, the RSPCA will know that this pet will be going to a home at some point and staff can devote greater energy into finding homes for other animals. In terms of animal welfare, the pet won't need to adjust to a new family and its stay at the shelter, or in foster care, will always be positive as its outcome is known.

Our program also supports people who are experiencing homelessness. Our pet support staff regularly visit and liaise with people experiencing homelessness and check on their pets to make sure they are sufficiently fed, receiving veterinary care and that their overall welfare is being managed. At no time does the RSPCA work to seize these pets, unless of course their welfare is being compromised. Our strategy is focused on working with people experiencing homeless and providing them with the support and tools they need to ensure they can maintain their relationship with their pet.

Our support services also assist those living in poverty and people who are trapped in a world of drugs and or alcohol. In these

cases we offer in-home support to ensure that the pet's welfare is managed.

Recently we attended a block of flats in the southern part of Canberra and arranged vaccination, worming and vet checks of all of the pets living in this complex. We could have opted to seize these animals, but instead we worked cooperatively with the community and provided support where it was needed and assured ourselves that all animal welfare needs were being met. Our staff will visit regularly to ensure the ongoing welfare needs of the pets. We are confident that residents truly love their pets and that the best outcome has been achieved for all concerned. Although it did carry with it significant cost, we provided this service completely free of charge.

Often when you are dealing with issues like poverty, squalor and domestic violence, you are also regularly dealing with mental health issues. A great many number of our cases involve varying degrees of mental health intervention and support. We have provided our staff with some training in this regard, but mostly we work with allied health providers. In many of the cases we are involved with, people have case workers in place and support programs already developed. Our role is to ensure animal welfare is looked after and avoid the need to seize or have an animal surrendered.

A key factor in these cases is to ensure the pet is de-sexed. This functions to guard against future unwanted pregnancies that would add to the overall animal welfare problem in Canberra. Sufferers of mental health issues are less inclined to have a pet de-sexed, which is the law in Canberra. To this end we arrange free and

In 2010 the RSPCA ACT supported 193 families in crisis. Support ranged from emergency foster and shelter care of a pet, food, veterinary care, veterinary transport, ongoing walking of a family pet and in house feeding and cleaning.

The service we offer is called *Pet Support*. It is unfunded by any government or external agency and delivery of the service at the time of need is dependent on the RSPCA's resources. The service is offered for free in most cases, but some cost recovery charges may apply depending on the circumstances.

much discounted de-sexing services. The owner is relieved that they will keep their pet, and we have managed the issue of animal welfare as new litters of puppies and kittens will not be growing up in difficult circumstances.

The issue of pet ownership and abandonment is critical one and an issue that has not had enough emphasis, research or work done to clearly define solutions; solutions to what are very complex and concerning problems, not only for RSPCA, but for the broader community as a whole. The RSPCA welcomes any opportunity to discuss, explore and exchange ideas on these issues and we remain committed to offering support and assistance where needed.

In a number of cases, our approach of early intervention and putting in place strategies to try and avoid the surrender of an animal does work. Where this strategy falls down is when there is a lack of space or nowhere for the animal to be temporarily held. We need to work closer with other support services and put in place kennels and cat runs and other facilities in half way houses, refuges, jails, remand centres and hospitals. We need to ensure that we create pet friendly environments. Only then can we truly say that we live in a society that truly cherishes pets. ■

What needs to be Done . . .

Managing mental health, homelessness and domestic violence, while at the same time looking after both the human welfare aspect and animal welfare aspect are multifaceted and complex time consuming issues. As stated in the adjacent article, early intervention and collaboration are key contributing factors to ongoing success.

In addition to this there is real action that we could take now to address some of these issues.

For example, installing cat cages and dog kennels/runs in refuge centres, half way houses, jails, community centres, hospitals and remand centres will allow displaced community members the opportunity to maintain their bond and relationship with animals.

This action may also assist with speedier recovery⁵ time, increased socialisation and the reduction of anti-social behaviours. For other people experiencing difficulties, access to pets can also assist with allied health issues such as reducing blood pressure and stress levels.⁶

Ensuring secure back yards in all community and government houses so no delays are experienced when pet owners require these houses is another measure that can be employed quickly. We have worked with a number of cases where delays of some weeks are experienced by owners taking up residence in a new home as the yard is not secure or safe for their dog.

At a more philosophical level, we need to work on adjusting attitudes and educating not only the broader community, but also those employed in the support industry to understand more about the needs of pets, the risks involved and to dispel some of the myths about disease transfer and other associated animal welfare issues. The RSPCA stands ready to work with any organisation or group towards this goal.

Finally, by tapping into the RSPCA and checking on what support we can offer. We can supply food and veterinary support or temporary accommodation to remove an animal into foster care while the family resettles.

Footnotes

1. The 3,000 animals not homed or released are either transferred to another agency (local dog pound for reuniting with owners), dead on arrival (mostly native animals hit by a car), put to sleep as a result of incurable illness, untreatable injuries, aggressive behaviour or are defined feral.
2. Refer: http://kb.rspca.org.au/How-many-people-own-pets-in-Australia_58.html and <http://www.acac.org.au/>.
3. *Animal Welfare and Domestic Violence*, by Frank R. Ascione, Ph.D, Claudia V. Weber, M.S., and David S. Wood, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. Originally submitted to The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation 25 April 1997.
4. *Cruelty towards the family pet: a survey of women experiencing domestic violence on the Central Coast*, New South Wales, Cheryl Travers, Andrew Dixon, Karen Thorne, Kaye Spicer, 20 July 2009.
5. <http://consensus.nih.gov/1987/1987HealthBenefitsPetsta003html.htm>
6. <http://consensus.nih.gov/1987/1987HealthBenefitsPetsta003html.htm>

People, Pets and Public Housing

By Jennie Churchill

Pets at Northcott is a community event that brings together inner Sydney public housing tenants, the local community, their respective companion animals, and volunteers — vets, vet students and people who just want to be involved.

The event recognises and celebrates the central role pets often play in the lives of public housing tenants.

Built in 1961, Northcott is one of several large public housing estates in the City of Sydney. In 2006 it became the first public housing estate in the world to receive WHO Safe Community accreditation. The 2006 documentary *900 Neighbours*, a hit of the Sydney Film Festival (<http://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/900-neighbours/>), outlined the estate's battles to achieve safety and stability for its residents through art-based community programs. However, Northcott continues to experience social problems.

A joint project of the City of Sydney, Surry Hills Public Tenants Association (SHPTA), Crookwell Veterinary Hospital and the Faculty of Veterinary Science student association at Sydney University, *Pets at Northcott* is held annually in Ward Park, next door to the Northcott Estate.

Now in its fourth year, the one day event grew from a park bench conversation in Ward Park between the late Sandy Henderson, the then Chair of the Surry Hills Public Tenants Association, and Jennie Churchill, co-owner of Crookwell Veterinary Hospital and at the time, policy advisor for the NSW Minister for Community Services.

Sandy's dog Pixie, in need of veterinary attention on a tight budget, was the catalyst.

It's a simple concept: provide free vet health checks for the pets of people often unable to afford veterinary services, invite the whole community, put on a BBQ and have fun.

From small beginnings in 2008, with 50 dogs and cats receiving free pet health checks, by 2010 almost 30 volunteer vet students and three supervising vets gave health checks to around 140 dogs and 35 cats. Thirty-eight pets were micro-chipped free of charge by the City of Sydney. Every pet was wormed, and each owner received free pet food and nutritional advice, and a giveaway bag with flea and other pet products.

Twenty dog gift bags were taken to the City of Sydney homelessness outreach team for those people unable to attend who live on the streets with their pets.

Surry Hills Public Tenants Association Chair Charmaine Jones is one of the event volunteers. She says apart from pets often being the closest thing to family some people have, the Northcott Pet Day is one of the rare opportunities for public housing tenants and the wider community to come together in a united way.

"It's an invaluable occasion for building better relationships and aiding in de-stigmatising public housing ... (that's) the power of our loyal, loving four-legged friends!"

There's another bonus — the hands-on experience gained by the volunteer vet students. Some have volunteered every year, taking the opportunity to practise consulting, communication and animal handling skills and sharing their love of animals with a very diverse and sometimes challenging group of people and pets.

The City of Sydney is a key supporter of the event. The City's Public Housing Liaison Officer and Companion Animals Liaison Officer, Dom Grenot and Tara Mai Honeyman, work with Crookwell Veterinary Hospital and SHPTA to organise the event. Corporate, government and NGO sponsors and partners include Housing NSW, Advance Pet Foods, Merial Australia, Bayer Animal Health, Provet, Australian Veterinary Association, RSPCA NSW and the Cat Protection Society.

The day also features dog agility and obedience demonstrations, the chance to interact with the native birds, reptiles and animals of Australian Wildlife Displays and, in 2010, a surprise visit by Bondi Vet Dr Chris Brown.

The organisers of the 2011 Northcott Pet Day aim to expand its reach by providing transport to and from Ward Park for people sleeping rough who own pets, and pet owners living in other public housing estates within the City of Sydney. ■

For more information, contact Jennie Churchill on jlchurchill@bigpond.com



Northcott Pet Day is held in Ward Park, next to Northcott Estate.



People and pets get to socialise in the line for pet health checks and free micro-chipping.



In 2010, volunteer vet students gave free pet health checks to around 140 dogs and 35 cats.



It's a great day for kids and animals to get to know one another.



Sydney University vet faculty Wildlife Centre provided free micro-chipping for Pierre's parrot, Cleopatra, as a pro bono contribution after the day.



The native animals of Australian Wildlife Displays are always popular.

The Unique Bond

**By Jennifer Davis,
Executive Manager Marketing,
RSPCA Victoria.**

"He is your friend, your partner, your defender. You are his life, his love, his leader. He will be yours, faithful and true, to the last beat of his heart. You owe it to him to be worthy of such devotion." ~ Unknown

At the RSPCA Victoria, we often see the worst of human behaviour towards animals. However, we are also very privileged to witness the incredible bond that many people share with their pets. Humans share this unique bond with animals because of the unwavering loyalty our animals give us. Pets don't judge or criticise, they just give. They give unconditional love — and are often our best friends and valued members of our family.

For many of us, we believe the only time we will need to part with our pets is when they escape from our backyard or pass away with age. We don't imagine situations where we might be faced with difficult life choices because governments, businesses and other stakeholders don't understand that special bond. Making a choice between life's basic necessities and parting with our best friend is no choice at all. This was another valuable insight reinforced during the devastating Black Saturday bushfires.

The bushfires on February 7th 2009 will sadly be forever etched in all of our minds. The loss of human life was devastating and tragically it is estimated that the loss of animal life was well over one million. The bushfires impacted the entire community — people who provided support to those communities but especially to those residing in the affected regions in Victoria. One important insight from this tragedy was the heightened importance of surviving animals for those impacted. For many people who had lost so much, their animals were one of the few remaining reminders of their life before the bushfires and they took on even greater importance in their owners' lives.

Over 2,000 houses were destroyed during the bushfires which resulted in more than 7,500 people having nowhere to call home. These people could never have imagined that they might find themselves homeless. Whilst suffering incredible grief, many of those who were displaced were faced with difficult choices when trying to re-establish their lives. In addition to the trauma they were experiencing, they were confronted with many of the issues that other homeless people face: rental property owners and agents who wouldn't consider their applications because they had pets; emergency accommodation and relief centres that wouldn't allow pets; and comments from well-meaning people who suggested that they just give up their animals.

The experience of the RSPCA Victoria team was that for many of these people, there was no choice. They would not give up their animals despite the additional challenges faced in keeping them. People still arrived at relief centres with their animals and insisted they be allowed to stay. In many cases people who could not find temporary accommodation instead chose to stay on their burnt out properties living in tents, caravans and in some cases shipping containers so they could keep their pets with them. Local councils were encouraging people not to go back onto their properties as they had no access to basic services such as power, sewerage or water. But what choice did those impacted really have?

Agencies involved in the initial emergency relief and ongoing recovery efforts quickly gained insights into how much value people placed on their animals. It was clear that policies needed to be adapted and new thinking was required.

The Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Authority developed plans to build three temporary accommodation villages for those displaced in the bushfires. Initially consideration had not been given to housing pets in these temporary villages. However, the authority changed their plans after consulting with key stakeholders including RSPCA Victoria. Due to the higher pet ownership of those displaced by the bushfires, there were serious concerns that people would not consider the temporary village accommodation if their pets were not allowed to be with them. The RSPCA provided advice and equipment free of charge to ensure the needs of animals could be met in these temporary villages, including supplying dog and cat runs, enrichment toys, behavioural advice, micro-chipping and de-sexing.

The people who did not want to live in these temporary villages faced the decisions of staying with family or friends, attempting to rent accommodation or remaining at their burnt out properties. In the end, many made the decision to stay on their properties in tents or caravans including over the winters of 2009 and 2010 whilst they rebuilt.

Many who were severely traumatised by the events felt they needed to get away from the areas impacted by the bushfires. Some chose to rent properties in other areas and others decided to move out of the bushfire impacted areas permanently. Too often these people also faced the choice of gaining accommodation with the compromise of giving up their beloved pets. Understanding the bond between humans and animals, RSPCA Victoria and other animal welfare agencies provided advice, support and temporary boarding for these animals whilst their owners found places to live. These people found that we understood what their pets meant to them and that we were committed to advocating on their behalf.



Margaret and Koolie 2009

"Rebuilding my life will be difficult but with Koolie by my side, anything is possible."

After losing her home, her other beloved canine companions and all of her material possessions in the Kinglake fires, the companionship of Koolie has been invaluable to Margaret.

Koolie is still traumatised by his fire experience and finding him a new companion is Margaret's main priority. Once the rebuilding of her home is complete, Margaret will work closely with the RSPCA to find a new companion for her trusty friend.

Other state governments tried to learn the lessons from the Black Saturday bushfire disaster experienced in Victoria. During the recent Queensland floods there was acknowledgement that their emergency management plan was updated due to learnings from Victoria. However, the value that people place on their pets was perhaps again overlooked. When the Queensland and local governments asked residents to evacuate due to the floods and cyclone, many people refused when told they could not take their pets to relief centres. This civil disobedience resulted in a quick change of policy and people were permitted to bring their animals. The relief centres established separate areas to accommodate pets and volunteers from organisations such as RSPCA helped to care for those animals.

The Black Saturday bushfires and Queensland floods are often referred to as "once in a lifetime" disasters. Many of these lessons apply equally to an everyday crisis that can result in a person being homeless. Most pet lovers when asked to choose between their animals and accommodation will find this no choice at all — they will remain by the side of their beloved pets.

What can be done?

- Federal, state and local governments must include pets in their emergency planning;
- Resources need to be provided to people with pets to assist them with securing rental properties www.rspcavic.org/animal_care/renting_with_pets.htm;
- There needs to be increased awareness of the availability of emergency animal boarding, and
- The concerned community needs to advocate to governments and other agencies the importance of animals in people's lives and the need to reflect this in their public housing policies. ■

The Importance of Pets in Times of Hardship

**By Debra Boland,
Marketing and
Communications,
Animal Aid**

Animal Aid is a not for profit, companion animal shelter and resource centre that has branches in Coldstream, Bairnsdale and Sale. We are in one of the best positions to witness the full spectrum of how animals are treated in our society. We have direct evidence of the important role that pets play in the lives of so many people, regardless of their socioeconomic or societal status.

For many years now Animal Aid has worked tirelessly to try to keep people and their pets together to avoid those animals becoming statistics. We take an innovative and proactive approach to our role and provide a comprehensive range of programs and services that support people in all aspects of pet ownership. As a result we are regularly approached to assist when things go wrong, particularly for emergency accommodation for pets in times of crisis.

Unfortunately we are regularly being told that no-one else will help and the last thing people want to do is relinquish their pets. The demand for this type of outreach service is on the rise, we simply must be there to meet it.

Whether the crisis is financial or emotional in nature, a health or drug related issue, sanctuary from domestic violence or even a natural disaster, the common theme is that the pets that belong to people in crisis have increased value. The mere thought of having to be separated temporarily can be painful enough, having to consider the

possibility of losing them permanently is often too much to bear.

I was the supervisor of Animal Aid's *Pets in Peril* Domestic Violence service and co-ordinated our related emergency accommodation programs from 2006 to 2010. In that time I have ridden many a roller coaster with case workers and clients alike and today I continue to play a supportive role to the current supervisor. In every case we desperately try to find an outcome that meets the needs of all parties, which believe me, is rarely easy.

At Animal Aid we believe that our *Pets in Peril* program is a great model of how outreach services and animal shelters can work together to provide refuge for the 'whole' family. Currently this program is run as a collaborative partnership between Animal Aid and Eastern Domestic Violence Service, which services a large area of Eastern suburbs. We use a network of vet clinics that act as pick up and drop off points and even have the support of some municipal councils and police stations.

Due to the need for discretion in matters of domestic violence, it is difficult to talk specifically about how this program runs as we don't want perpetrators to know the whereabouts of the animal/s in question. Suffice to say, where the animal is ultimately housed depends on a few key factors such as species, temperament, level of socialisation and whether they are de-sexed or not.

Animal holding space in a shelter always comes at a premium and our priorities are divided between all the animals that need

a second chance. Unfortunately Animal Aid cannot always provide accommodation. What we can provide is advice on options and access to connections and resources that the general public may not otherwise be aware of.

We are limited in the service we can provide, we charge a nominal fee per animal per day and while we understand that in most cases it may not be adequate, we must limit an animal's stay to 28 days.

An added and popular service we have attached to all our emergency accommodation cases is low cost de-sexing. Due to financial reasons, de-sexing may not always be a priority. Given the implications that not de-sexing can present an owner, and the shelter for that matter, this offer is readily taken up. When you are ready to collect your pet, you take home a fully recovered de-sexed, micro-chipped pet. It couldn't be easier.

Disappointingly Animal Aid has been unable to secure any funding for our Emergency Accommodation program and bares the significant financial burden that comes from providing this vitally important service. It is often thought of as an animal related service but in truth it is equally a human one. Ultimately our ability to ensure that it continues may be influenced by financial considerations. However, when you know that you are really helping someone, it is hard to say no.

While I have dealt with many clients over the years, some not so grateful due to time constraints, I don't dwell on their frustration. Many are experiencing challenges that I cannot imagine. For others I know how much they appreciated what we were doing for them and their driving force, working towards being reunited with their pet, was all the incentive they needed to get things back on track. There truly are people who live through and for their pets. Their pets are the reason they get up in the morning.

The human/animal bond is a powerful force and the therapeutic, personal security, physical warmth and companionship values can never be underestimated. Our pets can be the glimmer of hope even when all else seems lost. Their unconditional love and devotion is an admirable quality, worthy of reciprocal dedication and commitment. We should never downplay the importance of pets in times of hardship. ■

For more information or to make a donations towards Animal Aid's *Pets in Peril* Program and related emergency accommodation services for pets please visit www.animalaid.org.au or call 03 9739 0300.



Lort Smith Animal Hospital's Emergency Welfare Assistance Program

By **Melissa Hughes,**
Marketing and Fundraising
Assistant,
Lort Smith Animal Hospital



Lort Smith Animal Hospital (LSAH) is a Melbourne institution, having been founded nearly 80 years ago by Mrs Louisa Lort Smith after the closure of the Melbourne University free veterinary clinic. Mrs Lort Smith saw there was a drastic need for an affordable veterinary care that could treat all animals of people with limited financial means.

Nearly 80 years later, the Lort Smith Animal Hospital (or Lort Smith as it's commonly referred) continues to provide exceptional veterinary and shelter care to the animals of Melbourne. With over 30 vets and 60 nurses, LSAH is the largest not-for-profit animal hospital in Australia, providing care and support to many thousands of animals who pass through our doors each year.

As well as our veterinary services, LSAH also provides a number of community focussed programs to assist pets of people who are disadvantaged or in need of some extra support. These include:

- **Lort Smith's PALS Program (Pets Are Loving Support):** Volunteers and their dogs visit the sick, frail and elderly in nursing homes and hospitals throughout Melbourne and Geelong. By enabling the patient/resident with the opportunity to pat and cuddle a dog, enormous therapeutic benefit is provided. This service is provided free of charge.
- **LEAD (Learning and Education for Adopted Dogs):** The Lort Smith LEAD training program has been specifically created to help a shelter dog settle in to their new home, but is also a great way to provide some good basic training for any dog.
- **Community Outreach:** LSAH has a very successful partnership program with the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre, which works as part of our foster program. Prisoners at the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre care for foster animals from Lort Smith until they are ready for adoption. The partnership, as with any good partnership, is extremely beneficial to parties, building self-esteem among prisoners as they transition back into the community as well as providing foster animals with a good environment with lots of human contact.

- **Lort Smith Ambulance:** Providing a door-to-door pick up service for pets of those people who do not have transport.
- **LSAH Emergency Welfare Assistance Program:** Enabling those in dire situations to place their animal(s) with us while they get back on their feet. This service is available for pets of people in a variety of situations, such as being ill and requiring hospital care, those who are homeless and need a night or two in a boarding facility, or pets of people in a family crisis (i.e. domestic violence, sick kids etc.).

LASH Emergency Welfare Assistance Program: A Case Study

During the 2009 financial crisis Mr O'Sullivan lost his job and soon found he was out of a place to live. A proud man with a good work ethic, he was somewhat in shock having gone from a relatively 'normal' existence to one where he was effectively homeless and on the street. After a few weeks of camping on friends' sofas, he was falling deeper and deeper into a depression whilst becoming disillusioned with the constant job knockbacks. He was a man that was down on his luck, but who continued to love and care for his poodle Molly a great deal.

Unfortunately due to his precarious financial position, Mr O'Sullivan found himself unable to provide quality care for Molly. In desperation, and at a loss of what to do, he came to Lort Smith with the intention of surrendering Molly; after all, in his mind he had no other option. The stars were on Mr O'Sullivan's side that day as thankfully he had chosen to bring his dog to the Lort. Upon hearing his story, the staff immediately qualified Molly to take part in our Emergency

Welfare Assistance Program which provided Mr O'Sullivan with the option of leaving Molly with us for a short while whilst he managed to get back on his feet.

The wonderful shelter staff continued to care for Molly until Mr O'Sullivan had found a new home and was financially able to properly care for his dog again. As part of our service, we provided Molly with a thorough vet check, ensuring her vaccinations were up to date, as well as providing daily interaction and stimulation to ensure she was at ease in the shelter surroundings.

Mr O'Sullivan had gone from a position where he thought he'd have to give up his loved companion, to one where he could take the time to get the help and assistance he needed whilst knowing Molly would be looked after. This is a true measure of how the Lort Smith Emergency Welfare Assistance Program makes a real impact — both for the person and the animal.

Lort Smith sees many cases where people who are homeless, need temporary care or require a place where they can leave their cat or dog whilst they get outside support for their own situation. Often, we are their last option with our staff understanding and respecting an owner's devotion and bond with their pet. In line with our vision; 'a world in which animals are respected and the human/animal bond is understood and valued', Lort Smith's Emergency Welfare Assistance Program is a perfect example of how we are working toward achieving this. ■

For further information on our services and programs please visit www.lortsmith.com or call **03 9328 3021**.

As a not-for-profit charity that receives no Government funding, we rely on the support of the community in order to continue providing our services.



Pets Out West: Housing Rough Sleeping Pets in Western Sydney

**By Stephanie Brennan,
Manager,
Community Services,
Wentworth Community
Housing**

Project 40

Project 40 is a supportive housing service targeting people experiencing chronic homelessness. It is a unique collaboration of more than 80 services working to end homelessness in the outer western suburbs of Sydney. Partners include youth and adult homeless services, churches and charities, government departments, support services (family, women, disability, Aboriginal), councils, and housing and employment agencies. Project 40 is funded by the NSW and Commonwealth Governments and delivered by Wentworth Community Housing.

Together these services will deliver 60 permanent supported houses for people experiencing chronic homelessness by 2013.

The Model

At the heart of Project 40 lies the Housing First philosophy, an innovative way to end chronic homelessness that provides a home first, then practical support to build a new life. The Project 40 model is inspired by Dr Sam Tsemberis' *Pathways to Housing* and is based on the principles of psychiatric rehabilitation, consumer empowerment and harm minimisation.

Rough Sleeping Pets

The inaugural 2009 Street Count of rough sleepers undertaken in the Nepean/Blacktown region of western Sydney connected for the first time, the homelessness service system to people sleeping rough in the four LGAs of the region — Penrith, Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Blacktown. There are absolutely no homelessness services or hostels for rough sleepers in the region and people sleeping rough have been largely invisible and hidden. A few dedicated charities and churches had been running meal vans but these were dispersed and infrequent.

Through the joint efforts of the four local Councils, homelessness services, business and the community, connections were made with the rough sleeping community. It was found that many rough sleepers had made camps in the semi-rural areas of the Hawkesbury, in caves and reserves in the

Blue Mountains, and in isolated streets, parks and squats in the urban fringes of Blacktown and Penrith. There were many people sleeping rough by the river bank which winds throughout the area and they were accompanied by their pets.

These pets were usually dogs, although there have been cats (on leads), birds, goats and other animals sleeping rough with their owners on the river bank. These pets were well cared for and lavished with affection and attention. Although this occurs less frequently, women and families sleeping in their cars are also sometimes accompanied by their pets.

These pets would sometimes become impounded and their owners told that if they did not pay the fine, their pet would be sold. In the early months of Project 40 many calls were received from P40's Consumer Advocates to ask for help in paying these fines so that distressed rough sleepers could have their pets returned. Outwardly tough rough sleeping men were in tears and desperate at the prospect of losing their pet who was an integral part of their 'street family'. These pets may have been the only source of affection or love that some of these men received for years on end.



Making Housing Accessible for Pets of Rough Sleepers

Wentworth Community Housing started receiving referrals for Project 40 or from P40 workers and Consumer Advocates doing outreach. Many of these were from people sleeping rough who would not be parted from their pets.

In the case of one elderly Aboriginal man who had terminal cancer and had been sleeping on the river bank for many years, he declined offers of housing that were unable to accommodate his dog. Although he was very ill he said that unless his dog could come he would rather sleep rough than be housed. His dog was a cherished member of his family and therefore should be given the same amount of respect and rights to shelter and a home as anyone else.

Housing Services staff implemented the utmost flexibility and listened with respect to the experiences of rough sleeping pet owners. Allocation policies maintained as much flexibility as was possible and efforts were made to find properties with a yard and spaces for pets. These properties were then matched to the owners as far as was possible given the crisis of housing supply being experienced in western Sydney.

Providing Support to Pets

Project 40 is funded to deliver support to the most vulnerable people. This is provided through a multi-disciplinary team. Each tenant has a support plan developed which looks at their total needs — physical,

emotional, vocational, financial, cultural — and which aims to empower tenants to sustain their housing and actively participate in the community in ways that are meaningful and inclusive.

Pets also have support plans developed for them. Case workers aim to ensure that pets are given an initial health check and through a partnership with the Animal Welfare League of NSW pets are micro-chipped, given their inoculations, de-sexed and registered.

One of Project 40's Consumer Advocates, Kim Ballard, has set up the Cranky Creatures Association which aims to connect rough sleepers with these services for their pets.

The key to maintaining support to pets who have been housed is to review their progress and assist their owners to care for them. This may involve developing an exercise plan for the pet, provision of behaviour training and education about healthy and positive discipline techniques. Project 40 will do whatever it takes to maintain the health and positive participation of pets in the tenant's household.

Failure and Lessons Learned

There have been failures from which we have learnt difficult lessons. The most recent (and most harrowing) to date has been the case of Jeff* who was housed successfully following extended periods of rough sleeping and problematic drug use. Jeff is a young man who has achieved sobriety and stability through great personal effort and courage. Jeff now maintains a part-time job and assists many other people experiencing homelessness.

Jeff's dog was young and had never been trained or provided with consistent discipline. Subsequently because of his age and breed his behaviour was difficult for Jeff to manage and the chaos that was created in the house was hard for Jeff to bear. The dog's support plan involved paying a dog trainer to provide private lessons to Jeff as well as an exercise regime. Things went well for a number of months.

However, Jeff eventually decided to put the dog down because of what he perceived as its dangerous behaviour. This was undertaken impulsively and without the knowledge of the service.

A number of factors contributed to this terrible situation. Should we have been more assertive and proactive and better observed the warning signs? We now realise that providing support and care to a pet and its owner should be seen as similar to providing support and care to a child in a household. At Project 40 we have learned a bitter lesson and we are determined incidents like this should never occur again.

The vulnerability factors demonstrated by the target group for Project 40 need to be fully taken into account when ensuring that pets, as valued members of a household, are treated with the same care and attention as other members of that household.

Pets have been shown to have therapeutic benefits to people who are isolated, traumatised or ill and we believe they can be a pivotal part of a person's recovery. They have an important part to play in the provision of supportive housing and in the inclusion and participation of the most vulnerable in our society. ■

* Not his real name.



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Ferreting Out a Solution: Jane's Story

One Department of Human Services — Achieving Great Client Outcomes

By Kirsty Carter, Manager, Service Integration and Sarah Acreman and Rebekah Woods, Service Integration Officers, Service Integration, Client Outcomes, North and West Metropolitan Region, Department of Human Services, Victoria

Jane's Situation

Ferrets chewing through electrical wiring is not a problem that staff from the Victorian Department of Human Services (the department) deal with every day. But it did become an issue for Jane, a middle aged woman who has an intellectual disability.

Jane lives on her own but is kept in good company by her rabbits, a dog and up to 18 beloved ferrets, which keep making a meal of her wiring.

Jane came to the attention of the department's Service Integration team after her public housing tenancy was placed at risk in late 2010.

Jane is one of the tens of thousands of Victorians living in public housing properties which are managed and supported by the department's housing officers. Like Jane, many of these clients have significant intellectual, physical or mental health disabilities and often have other complex needs. Providing these clients with successful and effective support is extremely challenging without a sound foundation of service integration initiatives.

Jane lived with her parents until they passed away some years ago. She has a brother, but they have limited contact. Jane had lived in independent accommodation for several years but when the department's housing staff visited they found that her ferrets had entered a wall cavity in her unit and chewed through the wiring. This created a fire risk for both Jane and her neighbours. There were also no specific toilet or eating areas for her animals, resulting in Jane's home becoming extremely unhygienic.

During regular visits, the local Council Ranger provided invaluable guidance in helping Jane to manage the number of pets and their health. The Ranger helped to find homes for some of the animals, gave Jane tips on caring for her pets and helped her find a vet to have them de-sexed. Jane was also receiving regular support from the Office of the Public Trustee, which administered her father's estate. In addition to its traditional role of managing funds and arranging periodic cleaning of the property, Jane found a compassionate and patient ear when she needed it.

Despite the assistance from Office of Housing, the local Council and the Office of the Public Trustee, Jane's disability and circumstances limited her ability to make the linkages she needed between each of her supports. For Jane's long-term health and wellbeing, an integrated web of care options was necessary to sustain her.

How Service Integration Helped Jane Get Her Needs Met

By the time the department's Service Integration team had become involved, Jane faced the possibility of eviction and was withdrawing from the supports available to her. Her attachment to her pets was an important factor in her wellbeing and the Service Integration team recognised this and made it a priority when working with her to avoid homelessness through eviction.

The Service Integration team considered Jane's individual needs as a client and targeted their intervention to assist her in three ways.

First, they built a realistic, trusting relationship with Jane. This began with a lengthy phone conversation which covered Jane's concerns about the role of Service Integration team, her safety and the involvement of another service provider in the department. Jane agreed to allow two of the department's Service Integration team





members, Rebekah and Sarah, to visit her. The next morning over coffee and cake at a local café which was a relaxed environment for Jane, Rebekah and Sarah discussed Jane's issues with her. Her anxieties about new service providers abated and she invited Rebekah and Sarah into her home and introduced them to her pets. Jane shared her strong views about the supports she needs, and Rebekah and Sarah placed heavy emphasis on listening to her and developing interventions which addressed her concerns.

Next, the team sought to address some of Jane's immediate issues including her social disconnectedness and general health and hygiene. They purchased a mobile phone

as a temporary replacement for Jane's landline that had become inoperative due to ferrets chewing through the wiring. There was a cold snap, and as Jane did not have a pair of warm shoes and her feet were becoming swollen and painful. So staff encouraged her to attend her general practitioner, and made specific recommendations about podiatry care and purchase of footwear in referrals.

A 'Ferret Kingdom' cage, complete with hammocks, was purchased, so Jane was able to confine her pets comfortably. As a result of her efforts to provide better care, the local council became more flexible about how many ferrets she could keep.

Rebekah and Sarah then began building

connections between Jane's various service providers. She was very eager to have a case manager with whom she could speak to help her achieve her goals. Rebekah and Sarah referred her to the department's Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program (SHASP), Disability Services and external case managers Advocacy Options, for additional support.

Assistance was also provided to help Jane with daily living skills, health appointments, relationship building and community connectedness. Sensitivity to Jane's relationships with her pets was a key factor in finding the right services and individuals, and Jane is now supported by a case manager who has experience as a ferret handler.

Over a six-month period, the Service Integration team has coordinated Jane's supports. While progress has necessarily been slow and careful, there have been some great outcomes for Jane as a result of keeping her, the client, at the centre of all interventions. Action to evict is no longer proceeding, Jane has begun to develop her living skills, cleaning of her home is now a priority, her health has improved and she has improved links with her community ... all with her furry friends remaining in her home.

One DHS and Service Integration

The improvements in Jane's life are a tangible example of how the department's renewed focus can assist clients achieve great outcomes with better relationships between services.

The Service Integration team's work to assist Jane demonstrates how the department's One DHS approach can, for example, help prevent homelessness. With time and tailored interventions which make the person their wishes and their needs the first priority, quality long-term outcomes can be achieved. For Jane, this has meant being able to stay in her home while continuing to love and care for her pets which is so important for her wellbeing.

The department's One DHS strategy focuses on achieving successful client outcomes through an integrated service delivery model which place the client at the centre of all of its activities. The Service Integration team has been formed to develop and implement better ways of working together to improve client outcomes. It aims to meet the needs of the department's most complex clients, building on the work of the Support for High Risk Tenancies Program and the Multiple and Complex Needs Program. This recognises the need to improve coordination between services as service providers have struggled to assist individuals and families with needs arising from multiple and complex social, family, cultural and health needs. ■

Contact:

Kirsty Carter 0421 053 830
 Sarah Acreman 0413 029 041
 Rebekah Woods 0428 344 338

Pets of the Homeless: USA



By Genevieve Frederick,
Executive Director/Founder,
Pets of the Homeless

Feeding Pets of the Homeless is a national nonprofit volunteer/member organisation that provides pet food and veterinary care to the homeless and less fortunate in local communities.

Mission Statement

Through the "Pets of the Homeless" program, we will do our part in helping to reduce hunger in pets belonging to the homeless and the less fortunate and provide veterinary care for those pets in communities across the country.

We believe in the healing power of companion pets and of the human/animal bond which is very important to life.

Our actions will include the following:

- *Promote to veterinarians and pet related businesses the importance of joining the program as a collection site;*
- *Speak out on the issue of pets of homeless and the disadvantaged;*
- *Campaign to food distributing organisations the importance of distributing pet food to the less fortunate;*
- *Provide grants to licensed veterinarians and other nonprofit organisations that meet our objective to administer veterinary care to pets of the homeless, and*
- *Provide pet sleeping crates to homeless shelters.*

This is a sample of the dozens of emails that we reply to each week.

From John in California:

Although I am not homeless, I am jobless and also have five cats. I am finding it very difficult to feed them with no income.

Do you or anyone else have any programs available for people like me? I have contacted the humane society, Bestfriends.org, ASPCA and they all say they can't help and I should ask a supermarket for dented cans. I don't think so. I have supported every one of these organisations for many years and now that my own pets need help suddenly it is my own problem. Any ideas? I do not want to have to give my cats up.

From Melissa:

I have a friend who is close to losing her home. I have been trying to help her keep her lights on but she has applied for disability and we do not know how long this will take. Her son is supposed to be helping her pay her rent but has not kept up with it. A few of her friends as well as myself have been helping her with pet food so she can keep her three dogs but I truly don't know how much more we can do. Times are hard and my work is not always steady. If there is any way she could get some help with this I will donate when mine and my husband's work picks back up.

From Jenna in New York:

Hello! Found an article on the organisation in a pet magazine. I am a veterinarian with time to spare and want to help out in any way I can! I live in the heart of NYC (Manhattan, Upper East Side) and am willing to volunteer my time and services. Please call or email me with any info!

From Carrie in Indiana:

Hi there. I would love to help donate food. I live near an area that has many homeless people and some of them have pets. I also work for a Vet clinic in NW Indiana. I would like to donate what food I can and I would also like to hand it out to those in need. Let me know what I can do for you. I am motivated.

From Cherie:

I have a Girl Scout troop of about eight or nine 5th graders that are working on a Service project and since their passion is animals I would like to see if there was anything they could do to assist you in your program. I thought that through our Council we could get food and baggie donations and then perhaps spend the time packaging the dog food and delivering it to a collection site. If this is something that they could do could you please let me know so that we can further discuss it with them or perhaps even have someone come and speak to them about the organisation. Thanks so much.

From Jessica in Texas:

Hi, my name is Jessica I was wondering if there are any homeless shelters in Houston, Texas that allow pets? Thanks

From Vickie in Missouri:

I am interested in receiving information about the elementary school packet. Our school does projects for the homeless in our community. I would love to possibly add the pets to our service learning projects. Thank you for your love and devotion for these beautiful souls.

From Heather in Georgia:

We are a local pet food bank here in Georgia. We would love to be added to your list for Cherokee and Cobb counties in Georgia. We want people to know there is help here for them! Thank you for all you do!

From Lauren in North Carolina:

I am a veterinarian. I am interested in your organisation and finding out how I can help and become involved. If you would send me some information and a contact person in my area I could contact. Thanks for your efforts.

From Camille:

I am very interested in becoming a volunteer to help the homeless people with their pets. I am a true dog lover, activist for rescues and my passion is helping dogs. My dogs are rescues. Are there any sites in Milwaukee Wisconsin that I could contact to volunteer my services to distribute food or dog supplies to?

From a woman in North Idaho:

Hello, here is my story and why I want to help! I had to leave home at age 15 due to extreme abuse at home. Life for me was better being homeless and on the streets than it was being constantly abused by my dysfunctional family. I struggled for many years afterwards and made a lot of really "bad" life choices because of what I went through.

Now I am a 51 year old woman and I've been in a difficult relationship for last 25 years with man who suffered brain damage for the past 13 years. He is angry, abusive and irrational, but I made a promise I would be there for him so I must stick to my promise! Anyway, I adopted an abused dog from a local shelter last year and he has brought me so much love and joy; all that has always been missing from my life from people.

We currently live in North Idaho near Bonners Ferry, in a house, so I'm not homeless anymore. But because of my life experiences, I sure know what it's like to be homeless, hungry, hopeless, and mentally ill and abused too! I can really feel and respect all these "homeless" folks who have elected to not give up their pets! If I had had a dog when I was homeless, maybe I would have at least felt some love and had more hope in my life as a kid. Anyway, I do not have a business and we live on a very low, (way below poverty level), income. I know I can't actually start a dog food distribution site at my home because it's way out in the boonies and because I don't have a place of business.

But, I would like to know how I can get something going up in the Bonners Ferry area to help the homeless folks here feed their animals. Up this way, also see a lot of homeless folks passing through town on to other areas, especially in the summer. Also, we have a lot of poor folks who have lost their jobs because of the poor economy and lumber mill closures in this area. A lot of animals are showing up as strays because folks have lost their homes and just end up leaving their animals behind. Others are homeless and trying to live in abandoned buildings, vehicles and tents with their animals. I don't know of any place here a homeless person can pick up some pet food. Maybe you can either direct me to someone who is already doing this type of thing in this area so I can help; or maybe you can suggest how I can get something started here myself? I don't have much money, (we live on \$600 a month), but I have some time and could donate a bag or two of dog food a month. Thank you. ■

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Chapter 2: Pets, Women, Families and Domestic Violence

Pets in Peril: Making the Connection Between Domestic Violence and Animal Cruelty

**By Judy Johnson OAM,
Former Manager,
Eastern Domestic Violence
Service**

In the past, the issue of family pets belonging to women and children escaping domestic violence was a major concern for the women and a problem for support agencies. Women living with violence are often inhibited in their decision-making because of threats to the safety of their pet animals. In other words, perpetrators of violence use threats or inflict actual physical harm to the pets in order to coerce and control their partners to remain within a violent relationship.

In Victoria, women's refuges were mainly communal models and were not designed to house the animals belonging to their residents. Women have been afraid to leave their animals behind when they seek shelter for their family. As we know, pets are a much-loved part of the family. There simply was not a coordinated response to overcome this barrier preventing women from leaving.

In 1998, the Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Service (now Eastern Domestic Violence Service, known as EDVOS) attempted to establish a foster care program for pets, but unfortunately it had a disastrous start, when the first pet to be sheltered died from injuries previously inflicted by the perpetrator. We were not aware that the animal had been hurt because the injury was not obvious. Because of this experience we then decided that the animals needed to be housed with a professional animal welfare organisation rather than in a volunteer fostering program. In order to attract support for this idea we had to demonstrate that there was a need for a Pet's Program.

In 2001 EDVOS had the opportunity to establish a different approach to domestic violence. The Department of Human Services in the Eastern Region announced a funding opportunity for new initiatives in responding to domestic violence. The service system, for the previous 25 years, had been based on the fact that women and children would leave the home. The effects of this forced dislocation from home were immediate poverty and loss of all that is familiar. The criminal behaviour of the violent father was ignored and remained unchallenged — he continued to live in the family home whilst his family was on the streets.

At the same time we were also trying to work out what to do about the pets. We realised that as well as trying to find housing for women and their children who were leaving home, we were now committed to house their animals as well. Then the penny dropped! What on earth were we doing! Why not remove the perpetrator instead? EDVOS successfully wrote a submission detailing this new direction and, with funding from DHS, started to pursue the presumption that some women could safely remain in the home if the perpetrator was removed. Many women have chosen this option. It has been a most successful initiative and has become part of social policy.

In 2001, I also decided to do a pilot study over one month of women living in refuges in Victoria. Of the 28 respondents 84 per cent reported currently having a pet. Forty-four per cent stated that their partner had killed or hurt their pets, a further 66 per cent confirmed that there had been threats and 48 per cent of women said that concern for their animals' welfare was a major factor in their delay in seeking safety in a refuge. These results mirrored the findings of the Canadian Society for the

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) who had surveyed a group of women staying in shelters in Ontario.

This study led to a partnership with Associate Professor Eleonora Gullone at Monash University. Anne Volant conducted this research as part of her graduate studies in psychology at Monash University. Professor Grahame Coleman later joined the study in exploring the relationship between domestic violence and animal abuse.

Two groups of participants were recruited, a domestic violence group and a non-domestic violence control group. Inclusion criteria for participants in the domestic violence group of 102 women required that participants access a domestic violence support agency (refuge or outreach service) and that they currently had a pet, or had had a pet during their most recent abusive relationship. The second group, the community sample also of 102 women, required participants to have had at least one pet during their current or most recent relationship, which did not include domestic violence.

Anne conducted the telephone interviews and compiled the data detailing the stories of violence. The women had been assured that their stories were confidential to this particular research project and therefore would not be made available to other researchers. The data-set was held by Anne for the required period and has now been destroyed. Our promise to the women who told their stories and to their domestic violence workers who trusted us are assured that the promise has been kept.

In brief, the study found that 53 per cent of the women in violent relationships had pets hurt or killed compared with 0 per cent in the community sample. In answer

to the question 'Has your partner ever threatened to hurt or kill one of your pets?', 46 per cent of the women in the domestic violence group said that their pets had been threatened compared with six per cent in the community sample.

As with North American and Canadian studies, the Australian data demonstrate a significant and strong link between domestic violence and animal abuse. Only 33 women, living in crisis accommodation at the time of interview were asked if they had delayed leaving because of concern for their pet's welfare. Eleven women said that they had delayed seeking safety and in most instances had waited for more than eight weeks.

This research has now been published ('The Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse: An Australian Study' by Volant, A.M., Johnson, J.A., Gullone, E., and Coleman, G.J. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (Vol 23 No 9 pp 1277-95, <http://online.sagepub.com>) and it is the first Australian research to examine this connection.

Prior to and during the research with Monash, EDVOS continued to liaise with Animal Aid to look after the pets. It was an informal relationship based on the goodwill between the two managers. Although it worked well it was decided to formalise the partnership by developing some necessary paperwork and expanding the program across the Eastern region. Our earlier liaisons subsequently grew into the Pets in Peril Program.

In August 2006, Frank Ascione who was then Professor of Psychology at Utah State University in the US and a world authority on animal abuse, joined us in launching the *Pets in Peril* (PIP) Program. EDVOS, together with Animal Aid, now provide a coordinated sheltering program for the pets of women who have to leave their homes. Any woman in the Eastern region who is escaping domestic violence can contact EDVOS on 9259 4200 and use this resource.

There is a wonderful undercover network of veterinary clinics that will accept and house a pet for 24 hours, free of charge, when contacted by EDVOS. When a woman is *en route* to a domestic violence service she may decide, on the advice of EDVOS, to leave her pet with one of the participating veterinary clinics rather than drive to the shelter. Animal Aid will then be notified of the whereabouts of the pet and will collect the animal for boarding at their shelter.

As to the practicalities, the women are charged only a minimal fee of \$2.00 per day, cost price of a vaccination if necessary and a veterinary check to ensure that the animal is healthy. The length of stay is up to 28 days but this has to be flexible given the difficulty the women have in finding accommodation.

Over the years a wonderful menagerie of animals has enjoyed the safety and hospitality of Animal Aid — the dogs wear pyjamas on cold and frosty nights! There are no visits by the family whilst the pets



are at the shelter because of security concerns and it would be very unsettling for the animals. The family can telephone at anytime. Sometimes the family will be given a photograph of their pet so that the women and kids no longer have to fret about their pets and can look forward to the day when they are reunited.

Given the increasing awareness and recognition of the connection between domestic violence and animal cruelty pet abuse is now included as an indicator of violence in the Risk Assessment Framework. The results of the Monash study were also given to the Victorian Law Reform Commission when it was planning changes to the Crimes (Family Violence) Act 1987, so it was very heartening to see the inclusion of animal abuse in the New Family Violence Protection Act 2008.

Family violence now includes the following behaviour: 'causing or threatening to cause the death of, or injury to, an animal, whether

or not the animal belongs to the family member to whom the behaviour is directed so as to control, dominate or coerce the family member'. It follows on that it is a condition included in a family violence intervention order — 'prohibiting the respondent from damaging the protected person's property, including an animal'.

The connection between domestic violence and animal cruelty is now firmly established following research here in Australia and overseas and it is now understood that the safety of pets is a major obstacle for women leaving a violent relationship. The *Pets in Peril* Program is a most valued resource for the women since it addresses, in a most practical way, violence against women and the protection of children and their animals from harm. Why then is the *Pets in Peril* Program still very much a volunteer program? The need has been demonstrated and it is now up to the Victorian Government to fund similar programs across the State. ■

Safe Beds for Pets: The Forgotten Fallout from Domestic Violence

By Karen Thorne,
RSPCA NSW
and Jennie Churchill,
Australian Common Ground
Alliance (and veterinarian)

RSPCA
New South Wales

We lived a tortuous three years of constant physical, verbal and financial abuse. When you finally leave a domestic violence situation you leave with nothing. I lost my job ... everything was in his name, the cars, the house, the money, even our beloved dogs. After yet another court appearance we were given two days to remove ourselves from the family home or be prosecuted with squatting. ... I was given no choice but to agree to him having the dogs. I consoled myself that all three would remain together and at least be looked after.

All three did not remain together, and were not looked after. He returned once to collect Elmo, and Gemma and Zoe were left in the backyard of an empty house for two weeks in 35 degree heat. I returned every day twice a day to feed and water them but was petrified he would come when I was there.

I was emotionally, physically, mentally and financially exhausted. I was severely distressed about the dogs and repeated requests to him to look after them were ignored. I ... rang every animal rescue, shelter, adopt a pet and kennel within a 100 miles; no-one would take them. Then I rang the RSPCA shelter at Rutherford.

That is when I was given the number of an angel, in the form of Kelly, the Safe Beds for Pets coordinator. The truly amazing thing (is) that someone you have never met can work so tirelessly for the welfare of yourself, your children and your dogs.

Safe Beds saved our sanity, and it saved our lives. What they did for us, we will never be able to repay the debt.

Excerpts from a speech delivered by a Safe Beds for Pets client to 300 people at an RSPCA function. The whereabouts of Elmo, the third dog, are still unknown.

As family members, companion animals, like women and children, are vulnerable to abuse. When one in three women across Australia suffer domestic violence, when it is the primary reported issue in child protection reports in NSW and domestic homicides account for 34 per cent of all murders in NSW, it is not surprising that organisations such as the RSPCA in NSW have developed programs focused on caring for vulnerable companion animals.

The links between human abuse and animal abuse are well documented, as is the predilection for domestic violence perpetrators to focus on the most vulnerable – and that can mean the family pet. In 2000 in the US, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals surveyed a group of women in Ontario women’s shelters:

- 44 per cent had pets abused or killed by their partners;
- 42 per cent had pets threatened by their partners, and
- 43 per cent said concerns over their pet’s safety prevented them leaving sooner.

Professor Frank Ascione was the first to examine the pet abuse in the lives of battered women. In a 1998 study of clients at a battered women’s shelter in Utah, 71 per cent of the women with companion animals reported that their pets had been threatened, abused, or killed by a male partner. One woman in five delayed seeking shelter due to her concern for her pet’s safety.

In Australia, almost one in three women experiencing domestic violence (DV) delay leaving an abusive relationship because of fear for their pets. Refuges are communal, crisis-driven, and rarely have facilities for housing pets.

Safe Beds for Pets

In 2004, the RSPCA NSW launched *Safe Beds for Pets* with the aim of arranging secure and affordable emergency accommodation and veterinary care for pets under threat. *Safe Beds for Pets* helps empower women and their children to escape domestic violence. The service is available to anyone who is a victim of intimate partner domestic violence, including men and victims of same sex DV.

Victims mostly contact the RSPCA directly or are referred through the RSPCA’s partnerships with state-wide domestic violence support services and, on average, 10 to 15 companion animals, mainly dogs



and cats, are housed each week across NSW. A small number of private veterinarians have committed to providing short term crisis accommodation and veterinary services.

In the 2009/2010 financial year the program assisted 122 companion animals, with up to 54 animals in the program at any one time. This year, 76 animals have been helped in the first four months.

RSPCA NSW Programs Development Manager, Karen Thorne says, “*Safe Beds for Pets is different to other programs. The program’s dedicated staff are often the first point of contact for women experiencing DV. They are trained to respond to victims with empathy and understanding and to help them access help from the appropriate human welfare service. They also provide practical assistance for problems related to domestic violence such as mental health and homelessness.*”



Partnerships have been formed with DV victim support agencies such as the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service and women's refuges. This creates awareness of the program and acts as a two-way referral pathway. DV agencies can refer clients to the RSPCA, and RSPCA staff can help clients to access the right services.

Thorne notes that one of the challenges for the RSPCA is convincing senior human services staff in government departments that managing the issue of vulnerable companion animals is worth their time.

RSPCA staff attend conferences, workshops and DV agency meetings to emphasise the importance of the relationship between people and their pets and why it can be difficult to assist a human client without also acknowledging their pets also need care.

"We tell them it's a relationship that can't be ignored, that we have clients who have told us their pet is the only thing they have to live for and that they contemplate suicide because they can't be with their pets," says Thorne.

Clifton Flynn, a US researcher, agrees. He maintains clinicians need to respect the relationship women have with their companion animals, and that counsellors need to understand another family member has been left behind, one who may be at risk for abuse and/or neglect, and that both woman and animal are likely to be suffering as a result of their separation.

Another challenge, when women are leaving a refuge, is to secure housing where pets are welcome. This is frequently problematic, adds to the stress and delays the reunion of the family and their pets.

How the Program Works

All pets entering the program are given a full veterinary examination, de-sexing is offered at a discounted fee, and other veterinary care provided as required. Clients sign a contract and must commit to weekly contact with the RSPCA. They are offered a minimum of two weeks emergency care for their pets and then the ongoing need is assessed, often in consultation with case workers, and the client's safety and mental health, as well as that of their children, is always the primary consideration. Each case is individually assessed and arrangements made to extend a pet's stay in the program if required.

The RSPCA's goal is to always reunite owners with their pets as quickly as possible. While the pet is in the care of the RSPCA, every effort is made to ensure owners maintain a bond with their pet through phone call updates and emailed photos. Children are given soft toy animals that resemble their pets while they are separated.

The People Involved

The RSPCA is aware that dealing with DV can also place other people at risk. The organisation has developed a strict set of protocols governing the involvement of their staff. Safety and confidentiality are paramount for all parties, and a risk assessment is done for each animal (with a focus on the perpetrator).

For *Safe Beds for Pets* staff, as with human welfare workers, the issue of maintaining professional boundaries and avoiding compassion fatigue is a real one. Staff can access debriefing with a mentor within the organisation, and have monthly clinical supervision. ■

More Information

For more information about *Safe Beds for Pets*, contact Karen Thorne, RSPCA NSW, on **(02) 9782 4488** or email ktthorne@rspcansw.org.au.

The RSPCA NSW also provides emergency facilities for the pets of people affected by poverty, social isolation, mental health problems and homelessness.

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We Made it Home

The betrayed, traumatised look in their eyes is finally gone. The relationship between domestic and family violence and pet maltreatment: do we need more pet friendly options for women and children experiencing homelessness?

By Aileen Solowiej, Communications Officer, Homelessness Australia

"Sometimes there's not enough for the both of us that day," he said. "But I make sure she always eats. She has to. She's what keeps me sane out here."

"Having her has basically given us a reason not give up," he said. "Hopefully in the next few weeks, both of us will be into housing, and this whole horrible thing will be over for us."

From <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/LIVING/05/10/homeless.pet.care/index.html>

The father of a 4-year-old girl bludgeoned the family's kitten in front of his daughter and his wife. He then put his daughter in her bedroom with the remains of the kitten, unscrewed the light bulb from the ceiling, and locked his daughter in the darkened room for the night. The next morning, he forced his daughter to clean up the remains of the kitten.

(Ascione, 2005a, p. 131)

Many Australian families enjoy their family pets. However in the situation of interpersonal violence within a family a pet can also be a target of abuse. Experiencing domestic violence causes multiple layers of physical, emotional, financial and psychological effects.¹ Add maltreatment and sometimes death of a companion animal to the experience and the complexity of the issues sometimes determines decisions for women and children to remain or delay leaving an abusive environment.

If this is the case: why? Is it because shelters, temporary housing, friends and family cannot provide for the family pet in a crisis situation? Or perhaps the trauma of leaving the pet is too great for the already traumatised women and children? Perhaps the woman simply does not want to leave. The latter was the situation in this author's experience (see personal story). This article delivers no simple answers as any violence towards woman and children requires holistic support for varying circumstances including provision for the much loved pet.

Domestic and Family Violence and Pet Abuse

What is important to point out at this stage is that pet abuse is quite often intended as a form of psychological violence on children and women. The pet abuse can therefore happen before, during or post interpersonal violence. It is also crucial to mention that to date the statistics are slim on the co-occurrence of pet maltreatment and domestic violence as women do not always report domestic abuse to police or communicate it to others,² nor if they do report the subject of pet abuse, it is usually verbal and not documented.

In an Australian study in 2008 of the 102 participants who had experienced domestic violence, 53 per cent reported pet abuse.³ In an international study 61 per cent of surveyed Ontario women who had left their abusive partner stated that their partners had brutalised or killed a pet.⁴ It is highly likely therefore that by 2011 — with a steady increase over the years of domestic and family violence⁵ and an increase in pet ownership — 'In developed nations, approximately half of household environments contain pets',⁶ some pet maltreatment occurs with violence in the home.

The Effects of Witnessing Domestic Violence and Pet Abuse

Pet ownership has touted enormous benefits for better physical and psychological wellbeing.⁷ So what happens when a child witnesses socially unacceptable treatment of their companion animal? Many studies in western countries have proven a correlation between human abuses leading to animal abuses and intergenerational adoption of the behaviour. For example, a child witnessing the animal abuse may go on to commit abuse on people and animals.

Ascione et al (1997)⁸ says that:

'...witnessing parent and pet abuse may compromise children's psychological adjustment, increase their propensity for interpersonal violence (via observational learning and/or identification with the

aggressor), and make children's cruelty to animals more likely to emerge as a symptom of their distress.'

Ercoline (2004) says that the link between violence toward animals and violence toward humans is well-established. Individuals who start out abusing animals go on to abusing humans nearly 100 per cent of the time.⁹ In a Japanese study (2010) of maltreated children who witnessed animal abuse in the home, found there was a male gender propensity towards committing animal abuse later in life.¹⁰

Leaving the Home and Family Pet

"Those who can't understand why someone would stay in an abusive situation for the sake of an animal fail to understand what an important role animals can play in people's lives", says Katherine McGowan, executive director of the Animal Protective Association of Missouri, 'The animal may be a victim's only source of comfort and unconditional love'.¹¹

Domestic and family violence sends extreme negative messages and feelings, frequently negating healthy feelings of love and nurturing. A family pet is often the antithesis of the violence experience hence in the middle of the chaos the pet can create salvation, serenity, normality. So to leave a living innocent animal with the perpetrator and to venture away from familiarity sometimes seems morally wrong.

This may be a difficult concept for people who have not experienced domestic violence, for those who do not have pets or who have not watched animal maltreatment especially while children are present. Throughout research for this article there were references to children making sounds mothers have never heard before, when witnessing their pet being brutalised. The situation is piled with complexities.

Leaving with the Pet and Homelessness

The best case scenarios for leaving violence are to have the abuser taken away or the person being abused to be

removed from the situation. Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness. Technically the moment a woman is forced from her own doorstep through abuse or threatening abuse she no longer is home. Sometimes the situation is such that women and children have an opportunity to jump into their car and drive to the nearest police station or motel or family or friend's house. Does the pet come too?

While a friend may be accommodating at a moment's notice women's crisis support services routinely do not accept pets. And this is with good reason — crisis accommodation is for humans and there is little room for materials as people stay short term. While a few temporary accommodation services do take small pets the best course of action in Australia is for the pet to be placed in boarding kennels or foster care. RSPCA Australia has a policy (5.3) that states:

The RSPCA, where resources allow, aims to protect the welfare of animals at risk through domestic violence by providing appropriate emergency care and support.

Some animal hospitals such as the Lort Smith in North Melbourne provide emergency boarding for pets of women worried for the safety of their pets and needing to escape a violent situation, and for the pets of people experiencing or facing homelessness (which includes temporary accommodation or hospitalisation).¹² RSPCA UK has PetRetreat, which is a program in specific locations around England, that temporarily foster animals when there is domestic violence abuse.¹³ The situation is much the same in the United States with several programs and animal shelters assisting with temporary pet accommodation. What is notably different throughout the US is the slight increase in women's shelters accepting pets.

If a woman leaves her home to negotiate a myriad of homelessness terrains: primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness,¹⁴ it seems that if a pet was involved that cross reporting systems could assist. Fawcett and Gullone (2002) specify the importance of cooperative efforts among domestic violence specialists, child welfare agencies, law enforcement agencies and animal welfare organisations. These cooperative efforts can be used to develop cross-training, cross-reporting, and multidisciplinary response teams.¹⁵

Most researchers on the topic of domestic violence and animal cruelty advocate for cross-reporting. Finding an animal abused can sometimes lead to layers of human abuse within the home and vice-versa. Bear in mind though that cross reporting requires crucial adherence to privacy and protection. Temporary pet foster care and subsidised kennel fees should be a given. However, in a situation of domestic and family violence and homelessness, as women and children do not need any additional trauma in their lives. And so I leave you with my true story. ■

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* Article title "We made it home...gone." from: Ontario Veterinary Medical Association's SafePet program: http://www.ovma.org/pet_owners/safepet.html

Personal Story

I think my pet dogs knew when violence was about to occur in the house before I did. They ran to their favourite far-away spot in the back yard. In the '70s and '80s, from 7 to 16 years of age, I experienced living with a father who at least once a month created chaos: screaming, throwing dishes then chairs, threatening verbally then physically, then the punches, dragging, throwing against the wall and finally kicking all on my mum, then dog one and dog two. I never received the physical side but I saw and felt it all. The dog (photo) was in his far away spot and once I made my way through the maze of debris without being noticed I joined my hairy companion to hug for our mutual nurturing. Sometimes Dad would come out of the house and launch his tirade on the dog. As a minor this seemed unforgivable because my mother could run away, the dog couldn't. And the yelps and yowls and then me asking Dad to stop over and over. Well you get the picture.

Mum was a business owner and the house held our business so she refused to leave the home. It made no sense to her when our whole livelihood was at this



address. Back in the '70s and '80s the police response to domestic violence was slow and unproductive. So we stayed with the perpetrator.

Now as an adult I can look back at the mother and child and envisage more options and alternatives to this situation. I know for certain if we had to hurriedly leave the home in the '70s and '80s the dog would've stayed behind. What is different today are the mobile phone calls I can make to have the violence removed from the home or once we are out of the house have the dog placed in foster care till the situation is resolved. Only then can the traumatised look in our eyes dissolve back into happiness.

Family Violence: What About Pets?

**By Lisa Sandy,
Support Worker,
Family Violence Outreach
Program,
Salvation Army Crisis Services**

Australia is a pet loving nation, 63 per cent of the 7.5 million households in Australia own pets — one of the highest incidence of pet ownership in the world (RSPCA Knowledge base, updated 2010). When fleeing family violence, concern for pets is understandably a high priority for many women.

During psychologically traumatic times, companion animals provide emotional comfort to both women and children, their role within the family is an important one, 91 per cent of pet owners report feeling 'very close' to their pets, further reinforcing pets as an integral member of the family (Travers et al, 2009). As such, women will often remain in violent and dangerous situations rather than leave their pet behind with an abuser (Allchin, 2008).

Women may already feel 'guilty' about the prospect of taking their children away from the family home and their father. To then be faced with the prospect of leaving behind a much loved family pet exacerbates this guilt and, potentially, the trauma for the children and the woman.

For many women in violent relationships animal directed violence is being used as an additional form of psychological abuse, with the intention of intimidating, controlling, frightening and/or distressing women and children (Degue, Dilillo and Interpers, 2009). This is recognised in the family violence sector and acknowledged in the state-wide Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF), a Victorian Government initiative.

Research in the USA, Canada and Australia has shown that between 20 and 48 per cent of women delayed leaving a family violence situation because of fear for their pet's safety. An Australian study found that 44 per cent of those abused women

reported that their partner had killed or hurt pets and 52 per cent of abusive partners had threatened to harm a pet (Hole, 2005).

In a perfect world women would be able to flee family violence *with* their pets. However, current shelter, crisis and transitional housing policy prevent this.

Projects addressing the link between violence to humans and violence to animals within Australian include the RSPCA NSW *Safe Beds for Pets* program and Queensland's RSPCA *Breaking the Cycle of Abuse* project. More locally, in Victoria, the *Pets in Peril* domestic violence service is an alliance between Animal Aid and the Eastern Domestic Violence Service to provide emergency boarding for the pets of families fleeing family violence. Whilst the organisation is open 9am–5pm, a number of vet clinics associated with the project act as a drop off point to enable a 24 hour service (Allchin, 2008). A similar service is offered by Lort Smith Animal Hospital.

This particular service offers emergency boarding, not only for pets of women fleeing family violence, but also for pets of people experiencing or facing homelessness (Lort Smith, 2008).

What is apparent is the need for the development of a nationwide strategy allowing the simultaneous relocation of a woman, her children and their pet(s) from a violent home (Volant et al, 2008). ■

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Sheltering Animals and Families Together (SAF-T) Program™.

Animals, the Forgotten Victims in the Crossfire of Domestic Violence

By Allie Phillips, J.D.¹

It was March 2011 and Barbara² was safely at a family violence shelter in California along with her three children and two dogs. Barbara choked back soft sobs as she described how her husband frequently beat two of her sons with a belt or paddle. He would then turn on Barbara and slap her face so hard that she saw stars. Over the years, the attacks became more brutal and her husband progressed to abusing the three family dogs. He had sexual intercourse with one of the dogs in front of Barbara; she was paralysed in fear and unable to help the dog. Although he kicked the dogs frequently, one day he went too far. Riley strayed out of the yard and her husband "lost it". With her lip quivering in an attempt to hold back the tears and rage, Barbara explained how her husband grabbed one of his guns, took Riley to the back yard, and shot her dead in front of Barbara and the children. When the children wailed out in agony, he slapped the oldest son so hard that he himself began to cry. When her husband took off in their truck, she packed up the kids and the two remaining dogs and headed for safety. Lucky for Barbara, she found her way to one of a small number of U.S. family violence shelters that allow pets on site.

It is stories like Barbara that prompted me to create a national initiative and written guidelines for family violence shelters to house pets on-site. While working as a prosecuting attorney in Michigan in the mid-1990s, one particular case opened my eyes to animals caught in the crossfire of family violence. Unable to help one victim who returned to her abuser to protect her two dogs, and watching her walk hand-in-hand out of the courtroom with her abuser, I was plagued with the belief that housing pets with their families at domestic violence shelters was an easy concept and one that was long overdue.

When I became employed with the National District Attorneys Association (NDAA) just outside of Washington D.C. in 2003, I began to thoroughly study the linkage between animal abuse and violence to people and conducted trainings nationally to human

protection and prosecution professionals on the need to recognise and take animal abuse seriously. After all, if someone intentionally harms an animal, who will be next?

It quickly became clear to me that criminal justice professionals were not addressing animals caught in family violence situations and did not have the tools or resources to help. Learning that shelters were not recognising that pets need to evacuate abusive homes with their human family members, and over a decade after that fateful court case in Michigan, I took action in hopes of showing the simplicity of on-site pet housing to shelters across the United States.

While employed as the Vice President of Public Policy at American Humane Association, I launched the Pets and Women's Shelters (PAWS) Program[®] in February 2008 along with the PAWS Program Start-Up Guide that outlined how to implement the program. At the time, there were only four known family violence shelters in the U.S. allowing pets on-site and there was no common network or online portal listing shelters that allowed pets on-site. With approximately 2,500 shelters in the U.S., this situation was unacceptable. The foundation of the program recognised the human-animal bond and that many people refuse to be separated from their pets during



a time of crisis. This program celebrated that bond and understood that when a family has lost everything, having the family pet within arms reach can provide immediate comfort and healing when life may seem grim and uncertain.

In the first two-and-one-half years, the program grew to over sixty shelters allowing pets on-site with more wishing to come on board. A webpage listing the shelters served its purpose by showing families what shelters would accept their beloved pet(s). Donations began to flow in which were turned in to small start-up grants to help shelters pay for the supplies and construction costs to provide on-site housing. American celebrity Paula Abdul signed on as the spokesperson for PAWS and *The Today Show*, America's top-rated morning news show, featured the program. And in October 2010, the first National PAWS Day kicked off with 17 shelters participating simultaneously in a dog-walk fundraiser to raise awareness and funds to support their on-site pet housing program.

While PAWS was gaining notoriety, even garnering interest from shelters in other counties, American Humane discontinued the program in September 2010 and I subsequently departed and have since returned to NDAA. However, I could not allow this program to die a premature death when so much progress had been made in a short time period. Knowing that shelters needed guidance in implementing an on-site pet housing program, and that families needed access to the listing of pet-friendly shelters, I decided to continue this life-saving work under the new name of Sheltering Animals and Families Together (SAF-T) Program.

In collaboration with the National Resource Centre on Domestic Violence, that organisation has pledged its support for the SAF-T Program. The initial goal is to give the SAF-T Program a home base, while my long-term goal is to grow the program to become its own non-profit organisation. The first task was to re-list the participating shelters online for families to access. The listing of shelters allowing on-site pet housing can now be found at http://alliephillips.com/?page_id=526.

To my surprise, I immediately noticed that hundreds of users were finding their way to that page every month. I also continue to provide guidance and resources to shelters interested in implementing the SAF-T Program, even assisting those shelters still implementing under a former-PAWS grant to make sure that the process is smooth. And women in need are still finding their way to me in hopes of getting to safety with their pet(s).

The concept for the SAF-T Program is this: if you keep it simple, you will implement in a short amount of time with limited expenses; whereas if you complicate the process with extravagant designs, construction processes, and burdensome policies, it will take many months, sometimes years, and excessive expenditures of money before your on-site program is ready to take its

first client. If you are in a heavily populated metropolitan area, you may require a more complicated set up. However, most shelters are smaller operations and would do best to follow the simple approach. Of the several dozen shelters that I have consulted through the process, most opted to keep it simple and were able to implement within a few months with only a few thousand dollars.

There are three housing systems in the SAF-T Program:

1. Place the pets directly in the residential rooms with their families;
2. Locate a room within the shelter that can transform into an indoor kennel. Within that room, place large animal crates to house the pets, or
3. Build an outdoor kennel in the backyard of the shelter.

The backyard kennels are often a small building or shed that contains crates for the pets, proper heating/cooling, and an area where dogs can run and play with their family.

Three of the primary concerns about housing pets on-site have been addressed in the SAF-T Program:

Allergies to Pets

For shelters that have non-carpeted floors and non-centralised heating/cooling, it can be easier to place pets directly in the residential rooms without worrying about pet dander invading other parts of the shelter. For shelters that have a separate room as an indoor kennel that can be equipped with its own air filtration system that can also alleviate allergy concerns. However, the backyard kennel completely eliminates allergy concerns because the pets are not allowed inside the shelter.

Fear of Pets

For residents or shelter staff that are afraid of certain pets or worried about being bitten or scratched, the SAF-T Program policies clear up those concerns. For shelter staff that are resistant to the idea of pets being on-site, that is a good opportunity to discover why and you may find out that the staff person had a negative experience with an animal that can be resolved. With staff or residents who are fearful of pets, the SAF-T Program promotes that only the family has interaction with the pet. The family is responsible for walking the dog, cleaning the litter box, and providing food, water and TLC while the pet is on-site. Although a SAF-T Program manager should be in place to coordinate the program, no shelter resident, and only approved shelter staff, should interact with the pets. This will avoid any issue with stressed pets biting or scratching someone that they view as a stranger. For pets that are inside the resident's room, those pets should not be allowed to roam free in the shelter and should remain in the room at all times unless being taken outside for a walk.

Funding to Maintain the Program

People who love animals can be generous donors and are likely an untapped resource for a family violence shelter. Shelters are encouraged to advertise that they accept

family pets on-site, to create a wish list on their website of pet-related items needed, and to feature stories of families and pets that benefitted from the program. Pairing up with the local animal shelter for joint fundraiser is also beneficial because the animal shelters want to avoid taking in pets of domestic violence and are generally supportive of the SAF-T Program. By publicising your pet-friendly shelter, people in the community who love animals will begin to donate to the program, which will help to purchase supplies, food, and even provide veterinary care for animals needing medical attention.

The PAWS Start-Up Guide, and the newly updated SAF-T Manual (which is anticipated to be released in summer 2011), addresses these issues to give shelters the information, tools and resources needed to successfully implement and maintain an on-site housing program. The Guide also addresses legal issues, zoning issues, partnering with an animal shelter and veterinarian, fundraising, and even includes sample forms.

While those people who love animals may find it difficult to understand why family violence shelters are only recently recognising that pets are part of the family and can be targets of domestic violence, we are now at a tipping point in the United States where a small number of shelters are pushing the movement to make on-site housing of pets mainstream. For people like Barbara who had children and pets to protect, the SAF-T Program is available as a resource to provide step-by-step guidance on how to legally and simply allow families to safely escape abusive homes with their pets. To learn more about this program, please visit http://alliephillips.com/?page_id=526. ■

Footnotes

1. Allie Phillips is an author, attorney and advocate for protecting vulnerable victims and promoting human-animal interactions. She is the founder of the Sheltering Animals and Families Together (SAF-T) Program™ (formerly known as the Pets and Women's Shelters (PAWS) Program®). She is a former prosecuting attorney who works for the National District Attorneys Association specialising on the linkage of animal abuse to violence against people. She was the Vice President of Public Policy and Vice President of Human-Animal Strategic Initiatives for American Humane Association. She has over 17 years' experience working with child abuse and domestic violence victims, over 10 years helping abused and abandoned animals, and is a nationally-recognised author and trainer on animal abuse and its linkage to human violence. Ms Phillips is licensed to practice law in Michigan and Maryland. She has conducted over 150 trainings nationally and has authored over 45 publications on these topics, including two recent book publications on animal protection issues. She is on the steering committee of the National Link Coalition, Vice President of No Paws Left Behind (an organisation to help foreclosure animals), a council board member of the State Bar of Michigan's Animal Law Section, and cat shelter volunteer. To read more about Allie's work, please visit www.alliephillips.com.
2. Barbara's name and the names of her dogs have been changed to protect her privacy.

Chapter 3: Older People, Homelessness and Pets

Tails of Friendship: Companion Animals and Wintringham

**By Daniel Gray,
Recreation Manager,
Wintringham**

Within Wintringham aged care services we appreciate the large number of issues that accompany the owning and caring for a pet in residential aged care or social housing programs. Whether it's a new resident moving into one of our residential facilities or an existing client wishing to buy or adopt a pet, the issues are varied and can demand a great deal of staff time and company resources to simply maintain or house the animal.

There are often barriers or perceived risks associated with allowing an animal into a facility or home, particularly with regard to hygiene, occupational health and safety and animal welfare. However, it is our experience that most of these can be solved through the involvement of community support agencies and the adoption of simple assessment and monitoring processes.

We cannot ignore the immeasurable benefits that owning or being around companion animals can bring to the lives of aged residents and clients. These benefits are seen on a daily basis within our facilities and in client's homes.

These benefits in particular include a reduction in levels of anxiety. Quite often an instant and obvious visual response can be observed. Research outcomes have produced substantial evidence to prove that this is true.

Pet care and ownership reinforces a role of responsibility, which for many is an important value. It gives a sense of belonging and sense of purpose. This can include something as simple as being involved with organising trips to the vet. It also often encourages or results in increased independence with the need for regular dog walks through the local community and a shared affinity with fellow pet lovers.

Owning a companion animal or simply feeding a pet can build a sense of pride. We regularly hear comments like, "It's my job to walk Bonnie" or "feed Goldie". Identification with these roles can promote socialisation amongst residential care staff and residents and clients in the broader community by breaking down barriers that may exist. It creates a common link or interest that can be shared. It gives the opportunity to gain membership into a particular culture or social group — that of having a companion animal.

By far the most understated benefit of sharing time with a companion animal is that it gives a person the opportunity to love and to be loved in return. It also increases the opportunity for a large range of recreational pursuits. Owning or being around animals can be an excellent hobby and can be integrated into numerous activities. This can involve training the animal, grooming, taking the animal on outings to the park, walks, agility classes and social get-togethers. Lastly, pets are not judgmental; they are loyal and express warmth and affection unconditionally.

For many, to move into residential care or a new dwelling without their dog or cat is simply not an option. They have spent all or most of their lives with companion animals, and many feel that the animal constitutes the only family that they have.

"I love Silky, I would be lost without him"

— Ruth,
Eunice Seddon Home,
Dandenong.

In some instances when new residents move into a facility there is also the option of purchasing an animal to provide companionship provided that person has been assessed as having the capacity to look after it and the environment within the facility is suitable for the animal.

For various reasons there are times when

it is not safe or viable for a companion animal to be admitted with their owner who, for example, can no longer care for their companion in the new facility or home. Before the mutual decision is made to re-house the animal, it is important that all potential avenues are investigated and exhausted in the attempt to house the companions together.

When a client passes away, our priority is to quickly establish the best ongoing care option for the animal which may involve finding an alternative owner or home. The loss of an owner for an animal can have a significant impact leading to changed behaviour patterns and increased anxiety. The preferable solution would be to maintain a familiar environment within the same facility with familiar people. In the past, an alternative solution has been for the facility, with the support of facility and recreation staff who assume responsibility for its care, to collectively take on ownership of the animal. This way, the companion animal can continue to benefit from the company of other residents who have grown close to them. These methods have proven to work successfully.

In our residential care facilities the client is responsible for caring for the companion animal and Wintringham staff will oversee and monitor this care to ensure the animal's welfare. All animals have their own resident file and care plan which includes regular monitoring to ensure that they are healthy and happy. Animals living in residential facilities are regularly discussed as part of shift handovers and staff meetings to ensure that all animals within our programs are safe, happy, healthy and cared for appropriately.

For many residents, while the desire for animal companionship may be there, the capacity to take on the responsibility of ownership may not. For these clients we organise a variety of animal related activities and animal therapy programs. These

programs are tailored to the individual. They involve bringing animals to the facility, taking a resident out to visit animals and being involved with volunteering or participating in other animal programs.

Facility-owned companion animals provide residents with the opportunity to assist with feeding, exercising and playtime. The recreation coordinator will have a care plan in place for the animal which ensures it is being fed and walked at the appropriate times. Ensuring the animal's safety and well-being is a priority within our service. The annual recreation budget will then factor in and pay for all expenses associated with the animal. The facility will budget around \$550 each year for the animal's food, grooming and other basic living costs. It is worth mentioning that this pricing varies greatly.

One of our much loved dogs, Goldie has been with us for around 14 years. When her owner passed away, the facility adopted her. She now spends half her day at the office reception and the other half running around the facility getting her daily dose of attention from the residents. Goldie is now somewhat of an ambassador for companion animals and Pet Therapy. She is happy, healthy and spreads her love to everyone who requires it on a daily basis. The site would not be the same without her.



Goldie

The following are stories written of the experience of companion pets at Wintringham.

Bev and Bob

It's Bev Howlett. I would like to tell you about my cat Ralph — and Bob Chudleigh (Bev's fiancé) would like to tell you about his red canary 'Twee Pie'.

When I was living at Bronte Court, before I came here I had a female cat but she was stolen. My carer from Wintringham Seddon branch took me to the North Melbourne dog's home for another cat. I had a little Jack Russell dog, but I wanted an adult cat too. I didn't want a kitten I wanted an adult cat as I could not cope with an active playful kitten. So we went there at the home where there were two adult cats. I had a good look but I wanted the white one he was three years old so

that's how I came to get Ralph, I think I got a bargain as he is a white Persian. Ralph is nine years old now so I pray he will live a long life because I don't know what I would do without him. He takes up all my money in vet bills and special food I have from the vet. But I love him so much he is such good company even though he sleeps 20 hours out of 24 hours a day but he is so beautiful I think when it is his time to go I will die too.

Bob had Aviaries of birds in South Australia and he longed for a bird here so Danny let him buy one. We got a red canary. I believe they come from England and you have to put red colouring drop in their water to keep them red otherwise they go back to yellow. Bob and I share the bird and he brings us great pleasure. He has a beautiful whistle but he lost it suddenly. We took him to the vet but the bird specialist vet didn't know why. It could be seasonal and we are waiting anxiously to see if he gets it back. Neither Bob nor I would do without him. He is fun to watch. He has a bad temper and when he doesn't get his own way he bangs the mirror against the cage and shakes the life out of the bell.

There are two other ladies here who have little dogs. I think it is very important that we are allowed to keep our pets. They keep you alive. I'd be dead without Ralph. I am really dreading when his time is up.

Written by Bev Howlett, resident.



Bev and Ralph

Neil Smith, Animal Therapy and Planet K9

Animal-assisted therapy is designed to improve the physical, social, emotional and cognitive functioning of a resident.

The recreation team at Ron Conn nursing home has been working closely with Planet K9 in the provision of pet therapy. It all started when a resident of Ron Conn nursing home wanted a dog to live with him at the facility.

Neil lived at Ron Conn Nursing Home about four years ago before he passed away. He expressed his desire for having a companion animal as he had always

had them throughout his life. When Neil moved to Ron Conn he was often aggressive and displayed other behaviours of concern. These behaviours were at times difficult to manage and were often time consuming for staff.

The recreation team liaised with The Lost Dogs home and Planet K9 to find and assess a dog that would be suitable for both Neil and the facility. We received a call and were told there was a Cocker Spaniel called Bonnie that would be ideal. So staff and Neil went to meet her and adopted her straight away. Bonnie would sleep in Neil's room beside his bed. Neil began spending all of his time with Bonnie, talking to her, stroking her beautiful brown fur and taking Bonnie for walks.

Bonnie had a great deal of toileting and behavioural issues so the Lost Dogs Home referred us to Nicole Beasley the founder of Planet K9. Planet K9 provides professional support to train dogs. Nicole and her volunteers assisted us in how to deal with the issues we had at Ron Conn. This support and training went on for several months, seven days a week.

Within only a few weeks of benefitting from Bonnie's companionship, Neil's behaviours of concern diminished. He became a new person. Staff began to see another side to Neil Smith, that of a charming and gentle man. Neil began smiling more often, chatting with staff and his interactions with everyone became much more positive. Staff began to ask 'Is this the same Neil'? Bonnie played a significant role in Neil's life and had such a huge positive impact on him. Some of Neil's regular quotes were "Beautiful Bonnie" and "You are daddy's girl".

Whenever Neil Smith went out on the hostel bus, he insisted that Bonnie came along. They became one. Bonnie would never leave Neil's side and the two formed a unique friendship.

As time went on, Nicole (Planet K9) and I began discussing how we could implement pet therapy to benefit other residents at Wintringham or to at least create opportunities to further engage residents in pet therapy. We came up with the idea of running pet therapy at The Lost Dogs Home. This also became an incentive for residents to participate in bus outings, meeting and greeting the dogs and taking part in what was a socially engaging event.

Residents would regularly attend The Lost Dogs home once a month and watch the dogs perform their agility classes. The dogs would jump through hoops, play quoits and face a number of challenging obstacles. Residents really enjoy watching the dogs completing their agility classes. Residents would then also have the opportunity to meet the dogs, hold and pat them or reminisce about their own experiences with dogs. The dogs also benefit from this program as many of them had been mistreated by previous owners, so residents would give

these dogs lots of TLC which also assisted the dogs in developing better behaviours. Residents would also have a cup of coffee together and socialise with one another whilst at The Lost Dogs Home. This event occurs once a month continues to provide a true sense of pet therapy and engages people in a social environment.

Written by Peter Demetriou,
Wintringham Recreation Coordinator



Neil and Bonnie



Kevin with horse

Annie and her dog Molly – a seven year old Pomeranian x shitsu.

Nancy has been living at Wintringham since September 2010. She has always lived with pets surrounding her, from a parrot to cats and dogs. Nancy was very excited to be able to move to Wintringham as she was able to bring her dog Molly with her to live at the facility. Nancy says that she is a self-confessed loner and that having Molly is important to her as she always has someone to talk to.

Nancy has a large and supportive family; her son regularly comes over and takes Molly home to be washed once a fortnight. Nancy told me that she is happy with this arrangement as Molly then only has the good times to experience with her. Nancy loves brushing Molly out on the patio and walks her three times a day. This allows both Nancy and Molly to exercise and meet others along the way. Nancy says she loves Molly and that she is very happy that she lives with her in the hostel as she gives her unconditional love.

Written by Sarah Davidson,
Wintringham Recreation Coordinator



Annie and Molly

Margaret and her dog called Mister

Margaret said that if she had not been able to take her dog with her she would not have come to Wintringham. She felt that she could not give her dog away. She was happy to see that there were other dogs living in the hostel. She enjoys walking with Mister on the property and meeting and talking to the other residents with dogs.

Margaret had two dogs before Mister who lived to the ripe old ages of 16 and 14 years when they died within a week of each other. At that time she felt lonely and depressed at her loss, so her family assisted in obtaining Mister from the Lost Dogs Home. At first Margaret did not want Mister but when the staff brought him out of the cage she said she had to have him. Margaret said that Mister is a big part of her life that she would never want to part from him. Margaret enjoys the interaction that Mister has with the staff, other residents and other dogs at the hostel. She said that if Mister leaves she would miss him dearly and that her home would again feel empty.

Mister is part of her world. He has his own bed in the lounge room, his food bowl in the bathroom, his kennel on the patio and his spirit in her heart.

Written by Sarah Davidson,
Wintringham Recreation Coordinator



Margaret and Mister

Ron and his Greyhounds

Greyhounds are my life and I owe the world to them. When I was in hospital 16 months ago the only thing that kept me going was knowing I had family, friends and greyhounds. Because when you know something is waiting for you at the other end, it helps you to a quicker recovery and makes you want to get better. When you know greyhounds like I do and you know what they can do, it brings great joy and puts a smile on my face.

Greyhounds for me all started at my family home in Hawthorn. I was walking up the passage way when I saw a man walking four large dogs. I ran to the curtains pulled them back for a better look and then ran outside. I said to the man what sort of dogs are they, he replied "Greyhounds, I then ran back inside all puffed out and excited to Mum who was in the kitchen. She said "what's wrong Ronald why are you so excited?" I replied "Mum I've just found what I love in life" she asked "What?" I said with a smile on my face "Greyhounds Mum they will be my life. They are beautiful, ". And how right I was. They have been and still are my life.

In my life I have owned five greyhounds myself and trained six. With great success I might add. I received my first one for my 26th birthday as a gift from Vincent, a greyhound owner whose dogs I was training.

There are two things that I love most of all above everything else about Greyhounds; seeing them in the mounting yards or at full stretch running along. I can tell you there is no better sight in history – it is just perfect.

I enjoy going to Essendon four times a week to train my dogs and am just as happy doing that as I would be to have my very own greyhound here with me at Wintringham. I love it because I am able to travel which is something else I enjoy doing and most of all I love greyhounds. They are my passion and my life.

Written by Ronald Wolter



Ron and one of his greyhounds

Chapter 4: Interview(s)

Faithful Friends Are Family

Allan Martin, Peer Education Support Program Graduate, undertook the accompanying two interviews that are a part of an ongoing Parity project with the Council to Homeless Persons.



Michelle and Gary Junior

Interview with Michelle.

Michelle is 37 years old and has been homeless for the past two years due to illness and domestic violence.

When you were homeless did you have a pet and what type of pet was it?

I've got a little Jack Russell-Blue Healer.

What is your dog's name?

Gary Junior, after my ex, ex, ex partner.

How long has he been with you?

Four and a half years. He's my baby.

Were you in housing when you got him?

Yes, in private rental but that was when I was working.

Was it illness that stopped you working and that lost you your house?

Lost everything but my dog.

When you went to homelessness services did having a pet make it difficult for you to get assistance?

Absolutely! Every time I've needed emergency accommodation or anything I can't get in because I have a pet. There are no services that will allow pets on the property. Housing is trying to help me at

the moment and I got a call from them two weeks ago. But the worker asked if I've still got the pet, so I said no because they wouldn't let my pet in. But they know I've got Gary Junior and will do nothing without him.

It is said that a dog is a man's best friend. Do you consider Gary Junior to be your best friend?

If it wasn't for my dog I would've killed myself two years ago. I know that he will never leave me, he is always with me, looks after me, keeps me safe. He loves me to death and I love him to death.

So if anyone approaches you he starts barking and snapping?

At night times yes. At night times if I am by myself. But he's never bitten anyone.

He licks a lot. He likes kissing ears and noses. He's a big licker. I've had him since he was a pup. I got him at six months old from the North Melbourne Lost Dogs Home. He's had all his shots and gets a check every year. He's got the microchip.

What are you using as a letter drop for yourself and what happens if Gary gets lost?

My mail is sent to the Ozanam Community Centre, but my health care card says, *No fixed Address*. But I can't register a dog there so I've just asked Ronnie (a friend) because he's in North Melbourne.

How are you able to feed and care for Gary Junior when you are homeless?

With my Centrelink I make sure that I buy his food first then I go to Ozanam for lunch. I don't care if I don't eat, as long he's got his food and I've got my cigs and alcohol. He's my bro.

Have there been times that you have nobody to communicate with but your dog?

Many a time. Many many a time. Especially since I've been homeless over the past two years.

What do you think are the challenges of having pets with you when you are homeless? For example, when you go to the community centre or Centrelink do they let you bring Gary in?

No, I have to leave him tied up out the front. When I had to come here today I couldn't take him on the train, so I left him

at John's house after I took him out for his run and a piddle. He is with me all day every day.

Do you have anybody you can leave Gary Junior safely with, if you couldn't take care of him?

I will always make sure that I can take care of him. There is one place I could leave him, but I can't go without him for more than two days. I've been in de-tox for seven days at a time and it's hard enough to leave my dog then.

Have there been periods when you have been housed over the past two years?

With my ex-partner, yes. But he was very violent and I had to leave him. So now I sleep at John's on his couch or on the floor at Henry's. Gary Junior's toilet trained so he's clean. He just leaves a lot of fur around. That's all they complain about, "I've got Gary on me".

Would you consider giving up your pet if it meant you could access secure and affordable housing?

No! Absolutely not! The services should know the value of pets to people and there should be more housing to provide a place for both of them. At the end of the day there are so many people like me. I've got a mental illness. Pets are very special. Like my dog — he is so important to me. If he died I'd die.

(Michelle becomes tearful and we take a short break)

When you went to the homelessness services were you given any information or options where you and Gary Junior could be accommodated together or if need be separately?

Separately, yes. But that was no good to me. I had to keep him at a friend's house and I could have emergency services. I've only just found out Lort Smith's could have looked after him of a night if I pick him up of a day.

If you were given the chance of housing, say in a rooming house would you put him in Lort Smith's of a night and on weekends?

No! No! No! I can't do that. The thing is, how would you like to give up something that you had had with you for nearly five years? Imagine putting a child into something like that. That's how I think about

it. He sleeps under my feet every night. He's my baby and you can't give your child away. And that is what he is to me. I had a miscarriage and if it wasn't for him I would've killed myself. Wherever I go, he goes.

What do you think are the benefits of having pets with you when you are homeless?

It keeps your mind actually thinking, that yes, there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and because he is young he needs me, so I have to look after him. I need him mentally and being a female I can't live on the streets by myself. I'm either gonna get raped or murdered, or whatever, and if it wasn't for my dog looking after me every night, I'd be dead, I swear to God.

Interview with Linda.

Linda is 54 years old and lost her employment and housing due to illness.

When you experienced homelessness did you have a pet with you?

Yes I had a cat, Harvey, as in Brent Harvey. I'm a North Melbourne supporter and when the cat came to me he was very destitute himself. He was about six months old and looked very unkempt and smelt but I felt I could fix him up. I thought if he could take on the characteristics of Brent Harvey he'd lead a long life.

Were you homeless at the time you adopted him?

No, I was at Mum's at the time and he's about three years old now and I only became homeless at the end of last year.

What type of accommodation were you living in beforehand?

I was in private accommodation for two years. I lost my job and then my house. That was the start of it. Everyone wanted money and I had to use up all I had before I could go onto Centrelink.

It is said that a dog is a man's best friend. Do you consider Harvey to be your best friend?

Absolutely. I get home and he is there to greet me. I've got his bed under the desk. He sits there and if anyone is at the window he looks at me, communicates with his eyes trying to tell me, 'Someone is out there, someone is out there', or if somebody is at the door; looking back and forth at me communicating in that way. If I open the door he is craning over my shoulder to see

who it is. If they don't pass his test then I kind of figure that there might be something about them that maybe I don't want to know. If he won't go within a foot of them I know he is picking up something. He communicates very well, just lies on his stomach and looks into my eyes.

What type of accommodation are you living in now?

I was going to say a halfway house but it's not that, it's a rooming house.

Do you have permission to have Harvey with you?

That is still going through. Originally I got breached even though I told them before I moved in I had a cat and asked them what I had to do to keep my pet. They didn't get back to me and were just high and mighty, "No pets, no pets". So I said to them I was just going to treat it as a bit of paper pushed under the door until they got back to me personally to tell me what I had to. But Cassandra (Homelessness Advocate) got involved and said if I could get a letter from the doctor saying that Harvey was helping me with my medical treatment, then it should be okay. So I've done that and it came through yesterday. But that doesn't necessarily mean I will be given permission.

Do you have any family or friends you could safely leave Harvey with if you don't get permission?

No. I had a stroke back in 1996. Since then I've become very estranged from my family. I lost all of my friends at the time because I was no longer the party animal they wanted me to be. There's obvious reasons for this, but they didn't see it that way and my family were looking for some mental illness all of the time and just wanted to make fun of it. I decided that I didn't need such a toxic environment and just walked away from it.

Were you diagnosed with a mental illness?

Because I had the stroke and because it's a brain injury, caused by a blood condition, people talk louder to you and treat you differently. I continued working for quite a while because I had to, but after the last incident it became too stressful. I have to be careful as I suffer from thrombosis and if I have too much stress I will have a stroke. All of my left hand side was disabled at the time. I was in a wheelchair for six months and I went through intensive rehab. I have a limp and

a little bit of a speech impediment that some people make fun of by asking me to repeat myself. I lost the use of my writing hand, which is my left hand and have to use my right hand instead and it is not as always as legible as I would like it to be. From day one in hospital you start cleaning your teeth with the other hand, all the things you do with your dominant hand suddenly have to change to your other hand.

When you were homeless were you ever turned away from a service because you had Harvey with you?

I went to HomeGround services and they were very good. I think they knew I had a problem finding a place that would take a cat. I just always smuggled the cat around when I lived in private rental and when I had an inspection I would remove him.

Would you consider giving up Harvey if it meant you could access safe and affordable housing?

No, he's part of me. I couldn't give him up. They become your family. He knows that and is always there for me and at night he is security, lying there next to me. It's just reassuring. You need that companionship. As much as safe and secure housing is a wonderful idea and a dream, I also recognise that I've got a cat and he is part of my life.

How were able to feed and care for Harvey when you were homeless?

I had a form of transitional housing. It was a friend of a friend who from day one said I could stay there for as long as I wanted. The cat was no problem. She'd provided this nice secure feeling then one day out of the blue asked, "So who's moving you on the weekend?". HomeGround moved me into a motel for a week and I had been in contact with a women's housing group and this place came up. It's a nice facility but you don't get to meet many residents. I have met a few and they can be very convivial but I don't think they screen very well. They brought in this group of women who were all alcoholics and drug users who all got together and took over the women's part of the building. They were up all night drinking and playing loud music, causing havoc, and a couple of women were put under threat. So over the Easter period we were pretty much locked away in our rooms. I didn't know which way to turn.

What would you suggest the services could do to improve their response to people with pets experiencing homelessness?

I think that they need to be a little bit more proactive in that area when there are obvious avenues when you have pets. But I think there is always that underlying question — should you have an animal? I won't be taking it lying down.

As you are living in a rooming house and are therefore still considered to be homeless because you have to share facilities with other people, what do you think are the benefits of having pets when you are homeless?

They are comforting. They are a huge comfort to the spirit. ■

Harvey





Opinion

Felicity Reynolds, CEO Mercy Foundation (and very proud companion to a 13-year-old Jack Russell Terrier)

Congratulations to the Council to Homeless Persons for publishing this special edition on pets and homelessness. This too often overlooked issue needs to be highlighted and this edition has articles that explore the many facets of homelessness and housing in relation to pets.

This edition is the result of conversations over the past couple of years between a number of people who were concerned that the issue of pets and homelessness was not on the policy, program or service agenda. It is exciting to see this edition come to fruition and contain such a diverse range of interesting and informative articles about this topic.

From abused women, afraid to leave loved family pets in the care of a violent partner, to single homeless adults who's only connection with a loving relationship is a pet — this issue needs discussion and improved responses. Australia's tradition of barring pets in accommodation services as well as many rental housing units has meant that poor people with pets have

few options. I certainly know a number of rough sleepers who choose to stay with their pet rather than be separated and enter crisis services.

I personally understand the value of a caring and nurturing relationship with a pet. If I were made homeless tomorrow, I also would choose to stay with my dog, rather than go to an accommodation service that doesn't permit pets. I would certainly also never leave my dog in a place where I had left an abusive partner.

In other countries, rules around pets and accommodation and public services are different. For example, in many hotels and shopping centres in the USA dogs are very welcome. I still recall my initial shock in San Francisco on seeing dogs on leads going shopping with their owners. Not tied up out the front, but walking with them through shops. It was a perfectly acceptable practice.

In some places in the US I understand there is also a system for registering pets as 'assistance pets' on the basis of 'psychiatric assistance'. If people have the right

registration papers for their pets, in many instances they and their pets cannot be excluded from shelters and other services. In Europe, there are also more shops and services that welcome pets. It is time that Australia began to better understand that pets are part of people's families — and in some instances, perhaps their only family.

This edition describes initiatives that help to keep pets with their human companions as well as covering other projects that help people living in poverty to access needed veterinary and other services. The issue of pets and domestic violence is a troubling one. The welfare of pets can add increased anxiety and concern to already very difficult situations.

There remain few options for people experiencing homelessness and disadvantaged people with pets in Australia. Understanding some of the current programs, both here and overseas, as well as other initiatives that relate to pets as part of a loving family is a good start to changing our practice and policies. ■

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