

# IN HARM'S WAY

## *Executive Summary: Domestic Violence Program Responses to Pets*

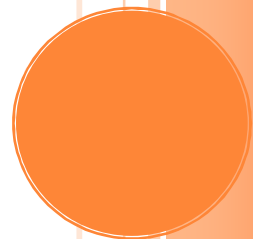
In the spring of 2010, members of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network's Steering Committee on Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse surveyed Ohio domestic violence programs to assess the needs and resources available to victims of domestic violence who are concerned about the safety and well-being of their pets. The results establish a strong connection between the safety of abuse victims and the safety of their animals, and the results show a sporadic response to these needs across Ohio.

**ODVN Steering Committee on DV and Animal Abuse**

**July 2010**

*The Ohio Domestic Violence Network, [www.odvn.org](http://www.odvn.org), 800.934.9840*

*For more information on the work of the DV and Animal Abuse Steering Committee, please contact Lesley Ashworth at 614.888.8886.*



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## *Executive Summary: Domestic Violence Program Responses to Pets*

In 2009, members of the Board of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (the federally recognized state domestic violence coalition) adopted a strategic plan that included several areas of focus. One area that was given renewed energy was a more thoughtful approach to addressing the intersection of Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse. Board members developed a Steering Committee and invited professionals with unique expertise to join the committee. Once convened, the committee determined that an assessment of the current need and state of services should be conducted. This report summarizes the results of a statewide phone survey taken in the spring of 2010. Eighty percent of Ohio's domestic violence programs participated (60 residential and 8 non-residential).

- More than 79% of interviewees felt pet support for DV victims is needed.
- Nearly half of responding programs reported being unable to provide any degree of pet support to domestic violence victims.
- One program offers on-site shelter for pets while fourteen utilize animal shelters; eleven assist with foster care and twenty others use veterinarians, local kennels or even shelter staff, volunteers and board members.
- Exactly half of responding programs screen for incidents of pet abuse with their clients.
- Domestic violence organizations were overwhelmingly (88%) interested in learning more about model programs to improve responses to victims needing pet support.

**Beyond the statistical data, a great number of needs and challenges were recorded through interviewee comments and surveyor observations.**

### **The threat to animals**

- Concern for safety of the pets is a true barrier to seeking safe shelter and a valid concern for victims of domestic violence. More than 40% of interviewees could recall cases where pets were killed, harmed or threatened with harm.
- Pets are frequently used as a batterer's control tactic over their victims. Reports from Ohio programs include pets being killed during assaults; pets being killed in front of small children; remains of killed pets being hung from trees, thrown in yards, kept in freezers to intimidate victim families; pets being starved, neglected or abandoned.

### **The threat to families**

- Pets are often used to lure or force victims back to their abuser.
- Victims frequently stay in unsafe situations in order to care for pets. Many animals such as large animals, farm animals and exotics are particularly difficult to make arrangements for emergency boarding or care.

- Most programs cannot accept animals at their shelter. Pets and families are often separated, thus many victims endure abuse to keep themselves, their children and their pets together.
- DV victims, while attempting to flee, have been subsequently re-victimized and reported for neglecting pets, even in cases where the abuser remains in the home with the pets.
- Victims and their children are traumatized by harm to pets, threats of harm and by having to abandon their pets.
- A history of using pets as an abusive tactic has been connected to increased risk of lethality for the victim, abuser and other family members.

### Challenges in responding

- DV programs are in financially precarious times with existing services being threatened or cut. Adding pet support services is perceived as especially difficult.
- Some programs report that they do not screen for presence of animals or abuse to pets, because once identified they feel they can offer little in terms of support, referrals or shelter.

### Opportunities for responding

- Interviewees expressed great interest in addressing the pet support needs of domestic violence victims. Likewise they show concern for the welfare and safety of animals.
- Even where formalized services do not exist, programs have cobbled together some support by tapping local resources including kennels, veterinarians, animal control/dog wardens, animal shelters and community members.
- Some programs report local interest and organizing taking place to address the needs.
- Several models exist such as PAWS and Safe Haven.
- Training on The LINK ® is available in Ohio.
- There are currently 19 states that address pets in orders of protection. HB55 which is currently pending before the Senate Judiciary Committee includes a provision to allow for pets to be addressed in Ohio's orders of protection.

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