

# The Link between Animal Abuse and Family Violence

## Fact Sheet

**When pets are abused, there's a strong likelihood that a person is being abused too.**

- A survey of domestic violence shelters found that 91% of victims report animal abuse; and 73% of their children also report pet abuse. However, only 18% of shelters ask about pets when victims seek help.
- There is an overwhelming and well-documented connection between animal abuse and family violence - against children and the elderly.
- A local study done by the Columbus City Attorney's Office showed that fear of retribution against a victim's pet kept women from leaving their abusive partner.
- A study in New Jersey found that animals were mistreated in 88% of families referred for child abuse treatment.
- A national study of animal abuse cases found that 21% also involved domestic violence.
- Since pets are present in more than half of American households and are disproportionately prevalent in homes with children, it is appropriate to include animal abuse as another form of family violence.
- Whenever one member of a family is abused, all of the others in the family - including pets - are at risk.
- Innovative programs demonstrate that pets can promote healing of children who have been physically, psychologically and sexually abused.

### **Who Abuses Animals?**

- 72% of animal abusers nationally are male. This corresponds to national figures that show that 85-95% of human abusers are also male.
- Abuse is about power and control. Abusers threaten and harm pets and children in order to exert power and control over their victims. Abusive parents injure and kill pets to control their children.

- Children who are abused or who have witnessed violence may hurt their pets as a way to deal with their own pain.
- Animal abuse and neglect can also occur in tandem with elder abuse.
- Abusers often begin hurting animals before it escalates into hurting humans.
- The FBI and the American Psychiatric Association have documented the link between animal and human abuse since the 1970s, finding that several modern day serial killers, including Jeffrey Dahmer, “Son of Sam” David Berkowitz and Ted Bundy all tortured and killed animals before they began killing people.

### **Victims Remain to Protect their Beloved Pets**

- Victims are reluctant to leave their abusive situations because of their pets, placing them at greater risk. National statistics show that 50% of victims are afraid to leave an abusive situation because of their pets.
- One in four victims stay in an abusive situation because of their pets.
- Animals left behind are often neglected and frequently become targets of abuse and further violence.

### **The Local Connection**

- A study of victims who sought help at the Columbus City Attorney’s Office reinforces the connection between animal abuse and family violence. The survey found:
  - Nearly 50% of victims have pets — 64% had dogs, 46% cats
  - 37% said their pets had been harmed or threatened to be harmed by an abusive partner
  - 23% said they would have been more inclined to leave their abuser if there was foster care for their pets
  - 9% said they are afraid to leave a current abusive situation because they had no safe place to take their pets

### **Collaborating to Help All Victims**

- To help address this issue and help all victims, humane society officers in Ohio are now legally required to report suspected cases of child abuse when they are investigating animal cruelty cases.
- Law enforcement, social workers, humane society investigators, prosecutors, veterinarians and citizens need to collaborate to increase public awareness of the connection between animal abuse and family violence.

### **How the New Legislation Addresses this Issue**

- Authorizes funding to put in place a person who will collaborate with community resources to develop and implement programs designed to address the linkage between animal and family abuse.

### **About the New Program**

- There are five areas of focus for the program: legal and enforcement; emergency shelter and foster program for family abuse victims; pets and children healing projects; victim safety initiatives; and legislative initiatives.
- Trains law enforcement, judges, EMT, animal control, FCCS about the relationship between animal and human abuse.
- Creates a pet foster-care program for family violence victims who need emergency housing for their pets, thus providing the support victims need to leave their abuser.
- Collaborates with existing community agencies to increase public awareness, coordinate resources and work toward a common goal of abuse identification in animals and children.
- Works with judges, prosecutors and law enforcement to address potential legislative changes to strengthen existing laws regarding animal and family abuse.
- Borrows from innovative programs, successful in other communities, that help abuse victims through the use of pet therapy – these healing programs are working in other communities and are particularly successful with children.
- Leverages the work of local non-profits who are working to end family and pet violence like, the Columbus Coalition Against Family Violence, CHOICES, local animal rescue and welfare groups and animal shelters.
- The Columbus Coalition Against Family Violence will assist this project under the umbrella of the Coalition's 501(c) 3 status.
- An independent Board will oversee the work of this program.