Animal abuse and child abuse: Examining the link

An animal control officer who discovered dead and dying animals due to neglect noticed four children in the home and notified child protective services. CPS intervened and discovered that the children had been physically and sexually abused.

When police raided an establishment offering cock fighting, children are present. There are numerous examples of animal cruelty in addition to the cock fights, and children have been involved in watching or assisting with maiming and killing the animals.

At a shelter for battered women and their children, staff are horrified to hear how the abuser made the children watch as he tied their pet gerbil and then set the animal on fire. The abuser threatened the children that they could be next.

There is no excuse for animal abuse.

Animal abuse is a type of interpersonal violence. It often co-occurs with child abuse and other forms of family violence. Identifying and intervening in cases of animal abuse can be an important tool in protecting children from maltreatment. More than 82 million households in the United States (68% of homes) include one or more companion animals (2013 National Pet Owner’s Survey) and more than 70% of U.S. households with minor children have pets (Randour & Davidson, 2008).

Child protection efforts in the United States are linked in history to animal protection (Ashby, 1997; Williams, 1980). Henry Bergh founded the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) in 1866. When a child named Mary Ellen Wilson was being horribly abused by her caretakers, concerned neighbors learned there was no legislation protecting children from abuse. One individual approached Henry Bergh and asked him to bring her situation to the attention of the courts as a child is part of the animal kingdom. The case had widespread publicity, spurring the formation in 1874 of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children in New York. Many states followed suit and formed state protection associations. In 1877, the American Humane Association was formed. According to Randour & Davidson (2008), the human-animal bond can be traced to the start of human history. Many people feel a natural connection with animals. Animals, in turn, have positive effects on child growth and development. Studies reviewed in Randour & Davidson show that animals can improve children’s cognitive abilities, teach children the skill of empathy, can support children’s self-esteem, can offer
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opportunities to build interpersonal skills, and offer opportunities to confront loss and respond to grief. It is not the mere presence of an animal, however, that offers benefits to children. Rather, the bond that can form between children and pets is the mechanism for realizing the benefits.

In research reviewed by Randour & Davidson (2008) children with positive bonds to animals scored higher on measures of social competence and empathy, had higher self-esteem, were less aggressive, and were more oriented to social values than children without a pet. They note that animals can also facilitate social interactions, for example, children are more likely to interact with a child with a disability if an animal is present.

In contrast, children, and society, experience negative consequences for witnessing violence towards animals, similar to effects of witnessing violence towards people. According to studies reviewed by Randour & Davidson (2008), children who witness animal abuse are more likely to develop behavioral problems, struggle academically, engage in delinquent behaviors, and they are at higher risk for substance abuse. (For a review of effects on children who witness domestic violence, see VCPN, Volume 60).

How is animal abuse defined?

There appears to be no standardized definition for animal abuse or animal cruelty (Becker & French, 2004). Some definitions are vague and hard to quantify. For example, the NSPCC (of the United Kingdom) defines animal abuse as “the intentional harm of an animal. It includes but is not limited to willful neglect, inflicting injury, pain or distress, or malicious killing of animals” (2003). A definition offered by Ascione & Shapiro (2009) is “non-accidental socially unacceptable behavior that causes pain, suffering, or distress to and/or the death of an animal” (p. 570). Some definitions exclude killing animals for food. Others specify ‘companion animals’ when discussing animal abuse.

The NSPCC further specifies three categories of animal abuse:

- Physical abuse: includes kicking, punching, throwing, burning, micro-waving, drowning, asphyxiation, and the administration of drugs or poisons.
- Sexual abuse: any use of an animal for sexual gratification.
- Neglect: a failure to provide adequate food, water, shelter, companionship or veterinary attention.

What is the overlap between child abuse and animal abuse?

DeViney, Dickert, & Lockwood (1983) studied 53 families who met New Jersey’s criteria for child maltreatment and who also had companion animals. They found that 60% of families had at least one family member who met at least one of the criteria for animal abuse. While 88% of the families that were under state supervision for physical abuse of their children engaged in animal abuse, only 34% of families under supervision for other types of child maltreatment (such as neglect or sexual abuse) also abused animals, a significant difference.

Another early study (Walker, 1980, cited in Arkow, 1997) found a nine percent overlap in Bucks County, Pennsylvania families who were reported to animal protection and to child protection agencies. A study by Montminy-Danna (2007) surveyed 500 child welfare workers. Of these, 121 returned the survey. CPS workers reported that in 22.5% of cases, there was a disclosure of animal cruelty.

A 2008 retrospective study of college students with a sample of 860 students from three universities in the West and Midwest found that 22.9% had been exposed to animal cruelty and 34.6% had been victims of some form of child maltreatment. Exposure to both animal cruelty and child abuse was indicated by 12.4% (DeGue & DiLillo, 2009).

In their review of research, Becker and French (2004) found that animal abuse can be an indicator of child abuse. Animal abuse has come to be seen as part of a continuum of abuse within families. Animals may be used to coerce children into silence. Some abusers even kill animals in front of the child and threaten that the child or other family members will be next. Animal abuse and other forms of family violence tend to co-occur in the same families. Consequently, animal abuse and child abuse often occur together (McPhedran, 2009).

What is the overlap between domestic violence and animal abuse?

State and national surveys indicate that as many as 70% of battered women who have pets report that their partners had threatened to harm or had harmed or killed their pets and 32% of the women reported that their children had also committed acts of animal cruelty (Ascione, Weber, & Wood, 1997). In the context of domestic violence, acts of animal abuse are used to coerce, control, and intimidate women and children to remain in and to be silent about abusive situations (Becker & French, 2004).

What is the relationship between animal abuse, violence and other forms of antisocial behavior?

A study by Arluke, Levin, Luke & Ascione (1999) attests to a complex relationship between animal abuse and violence towards humans. The researchers note that there is a common idea that animal abuse precedes abuse of humans (as a sort of ‘practice’ or ‘rehearsal’ arena where individuals ‘graduate’ from abusing animals to abusing humans). They maintain that a deviance generalization hypothesis fits the data better than a ‘violence graduation’ hypothesis.

The findings of Arluke et al. support the idea that individuals who commit one form of deviance are more likely than matched controls to commit other deviant acts. Of those who abused animals, 70% also committed at least one other violent offense compared to 22% of controls. In other words, animal abusers were 3.2 times more likely to have a criminal record when compared to control participants. Animal abusers were four times more likely than controls to be arrested for property crimes, and 3.5 times more likely to be arrested for drug-related offenses and for disorderly conduct. Additionally, there is no particular pattern of time-order. Animal abuse might occur either before, after or concurrently with other forms of antisocial behaviors.

Given the findings of Arluke et al., animal abuse is one of many antisocial behaviors.

WHAT CPS WORKERS CAN DO

- Engage in cross-training with animal welfare and animal control staff.
- Have policies and procedures for reporting suspected animal abuse.
- Ask about the presence, welfare, dangerousness, and disappearance of pets in the home.
- Observe the living conditions of the pets.
- Observe the physical and health condition of the pets.
- Inquire about whether pets have ever been harmed.
- Take note of the interactions between those living in the home and pets.

(Girardi & Pozzulo, 2012)
committed by abusers, rather than being a predictor or a distinct developmental step. Thus, a child who has tortured his own puppy may have already been violent towards fellow children or towards adults.

Assessment

There are several assessment methods that can be useful in determining animal care. One is observation of the home environment. If parents and children are observed interacting with pets, much information can be gained. During office interactions, or at the home, family members can be asked about pets. Social workers should especially note if a breed of animal is associated with animal fighting or vicious dogs. Several instruments are available to help in assessing an animal’s condition. These are reviewed on the VCPN website. There are also instruments available to assist in assessing animal hoarding and these are reviewed on the VCPN website as well.

Cross-reporting of Animal Abuse and Child Abuse

Given the overlap between animal abuse and child abuse, a number of states have mandated cross-reporting of animal abuse and child abuse. Child protection agencies, animal health care providers, animal control agencies, and child health care providers are all affected. Enacting cross-reporting legislation is thought to be the most direct method to broaden protection for families, children and animals.

Of all 50 states, in 2009, there were 11 that had laws that allowed cross-reporting of animal abuse by CPS workers and six states had legislation that required CPS workers to report animal abuse (Animal Law Coalition, 2009, cited in Risley-Curtiss, Zilney & Hornung, 2010). By 2014, there were 13 states with legislation related to cross-reporting (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2014). The legislation is quite varied. Veterinarians, animal control and animal welfare workers are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse in nine states; child and adult protective service workers and veterinarians are mandated reporters of suspected animal abuse in 20 states, and are permitted to report in 11 additional states (National Link Coalition, 2014). In Virginia, an animal control officer is listed among persons required to report suspected child abuse.

There is limited literature about cross-reporting of child abuse and animal abuse. A study published in 2010 (Risley-Curtiss, et al.) surveyed the District of Columbia and 45 states using a 23-item survey. Researchers tried to reach individuals who were responsible for training of child protective services workers. Risley-Curtis et al. found that 12 of 46 states (slightly more than a quarter) provide training for CPS staff to inquire about whether or not the family has animals. About 20% (9 of the 46) included information on assessing the types of relationships family members have with the animals and 8 of the 46 trainers included information about recognizing and assessing animal abuse.

Considering cross-reporting, 26% of the respondents to the Risley-Curtis et al. (2010) survey reported that some cross-reporting of animal abuse and child abuse occurs. Only three states (6.5%) had a CPS policy for cross-reporting. Only six states (11%) included information about cross-reporting in their core training while 24% (11 of the 46) included some information on cross-reporting in advanced training. The authors note that only five states included questions about animal abuse on their safety and risk assessment protocols, suggesting that when CPS workers do discover animal abuse, they do so by chance.

Interventions

Because research shows that violence towards children frequently exists alongside other forms of family violence such as domestic abuse and also co-occurs with animal cruelty, it may no longer be wise to treat these different forms of violence as separate, unrelated problems (Randour & Davidson, 2008). Due to the links, networking and a multidisciplinary approach to reporting, investigation, and intervention may be more effective in ensuring safe homes for children. Animal protection and child protection staff working together can detect unsafe conditions for children and animals earlier.

Several key agencies and providers can be included in multidisciplinary efforts. Child protective services, child welfare workers, and human service providers should be aware of the issue of animal abuse and its link to child maltreatment. Domestic violence shelters serve many families with cherished pets that may be left in harm’s way when the mother and children seek shelter. Private providers, especially in-home service providers, are in a position to recognize animal cruelty. Humane societies, animal control officers, animal shelters, and animal rescue efforts need to be aware of the link between animal cruelty and child maltreatment. All participants in court systems need to grasp the links between various forms of violence. Participants in community efforts to prevent child abuse should become aware of the links between child maltreatment and other forms of violence. Public health officials, animal control officers, and law enforcement are in a position to detect both animal cruelty and child maltreatment.”

The National Link Coalition is a multidisciplinary, collaborative initiative to increase awareness, research, legislation and programs about the connections between animal abuse and human violence. Arkow is the coordinator of The Link. He reports that there are more than 30 coalitions around the United States, including one in Virginia (see the article on Virginia’s Picture, this issue).

The National Link Coalition began in 2008. Arkow explains the goals. The Link endeavors to obtain recognition for the connectedness between animal abuse and abuse of people. “Animal abuse is a human welfare issue,” he states. A second goal is to expand the research base and to help people connect with research. Third, the Link hopes to monitor and affect public policy. An interdisciplinary approach is endorsed.

Arkow remarks, “Marvelous progress has been made. For example, in 1995, only five states considered animal cruelty as a felony. Now all 50 states have statutes making animal cruelty a felony.” He adds that 900 women’s shelters nationally offer some sort of foster care program for pets. “It removes a huge barrier if women fleeing domestic violence can bring their pets to shelter also.”

Joining the National Link Coalition is free and members receive a newsletter. Interested readers can join the National Link at: http://nationallinkcoalition.org/ Phil Arkow can be reached at (856) 627-5118 or E-mail: arkowpets@snip.net

The National Link Coalition, 2014). In Virginia, an animal control officer is listed among persons required to report suspected child abuse.

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The most comprehensive study found by VCPN staff was from Canada (Girardi & Pozzulo, 2012). Unlike prior studies, researchers limited their inquiry to child protective service workers who were actively investigating cases. An invitation to 627 workers yielded a fairly small response with 78 useable replies. The authors note that there may be sampling bias as workers who resonated with the issue of animal cruelty may have been more likely to respond.

Girardi & Pozzulo found that 45% of the workers had directly observed children harming animals during investigative visits over the previous year and 28% had observed adult caretakers physically harming animals. Most indicated that such observed behaviors happened rarely. The majority of workers (94%) had seen evidence of animal neglect (for example, inadequate food or water or excessive confining) while conducting child protection investigations. Almost half (44%) had observed evidence that an animal had been physically abused (such as visible injuries). About two-thirds witnessed animals behaving in a physically aggressive manner towards people in the homes they were investigating.

Despite the high numbers who had witnessed or who suspected animal cruelty, only 23% indicated that they usually reported the animal cruelty to the appropriate authorities. Forty-eight percent of the responding workers had not reported any instance of animal cruelty. Further, most of the respondents did not routinely ask questions to determine whether or not children had engaged in or witnessed animal cruelty.

What CPS Workers Can Do

For states where there is no legislation mandating cross-reporting, agency policy or networking such as through multidisciplinary teams can be used to address the co-occurrence of child maltreatment and animal abuse. While CPS workers are not expected to become authorities on cruelty-to-animal laws, they can make a sufficient assessment to determine whether or not an animal protection agency should be notified. CPS workers can also have policies and procedures established for reporting concerning animal situations. CPS workers can engage in cross-training with animal welfare staff where each agency can instruct the other about reporting procedures and indicators of a need to report (Arkow, 1997).

Routinely asking questions about animals in the home, the welfare of animals, and animal cruelty can provide opportunities for children or non-abusing parents to report concerns. Children and their caretakers may be willing to talk about animal maltreatment if they are asked. Furthermore, CPS workers should routinely try to examine the living conditions of animals in the home and to note observations of interactions between those living in the home and the animals (Girardi & Pozzulo, 2012).

Prevention

A primary prevention effort that is increasingly available through animal welfare organizations and in schools is humane education. Several of the Virginia SPCA organizations featured in this issue are very involved in humane education. Colleges and universities are beginning to offer degrees in the multidisciplinary field of Human-Animal Studies. Some of these institutions are featured on VCPN’s website. There is also the emergence of the field of Animal Law. The ability to include pets in protective orders is just one example of recent legislative change that can prevent harm to animals.

Secondary prevention is aimed towards at-risk populations. These individuals would include those felt likely to abuse animals as well as those who have begun to abuse animals but are not known to abuse people (Ascione & Shapiro, 2009). Children who have witnessed abuse, those who live in violent environments, children with early signs of conduct disorder, those involved in bullying (either as a perpetrator or a victim) as well as those with isolated incidents of animal abuse or incidents of low severity might be included in an at-risk population (see separate article on Children Who Abuse Animals, this issue). Model programs for treatment of animal abuse are described on VCPN’s website.

Another secondary effort is allowing domestic violence victims to bring pets with them to shelters (see the article on Domestic Violence, this issue). Cross-reporting can be considered as a secondary prevention effort. Networking itself is a prevention effort. Interested readers can join the National Link Coalition which also has state chapters.

Tertiary efforts at intervention and treatment are described throughout this issue of VCPN and also are featured on our website. Effective violence prevention must begin with addressing perpetrators. Understandings of perpetrator behaviors and effective means to rehabilitate them will be crucial.

Future Directions

Research to date about links between child maltreatment and animal abuse has often lacked sophistication. Small samples and lack of control groups are common difficulties. Little multi-cultural research has been published. Studies have centered on convenience populations (such as shelter residents; incarcerated individuals; college students) which makes generalization difficult.

Summary

Phil Arkow, Coordinator of the National Link Coalition, commented in a recent interview with VCPN staff, “Animal abuse is a human welfare issue.” The phenomena of violence towards animals and violence towards humans are often linked. Those who labor for animal protection and professionals who work with child protection, domestic violence, and elder protection should become aware of the linkages between animal welfare and maltreatment of humans.

References Available on the Website

National Center for Prosecution of Animal Abuse (NCPAA)

99 Canal Center Plaza
Suite 330
Alexandria, VA 22314

Website: http://www.ndaa.org/animal_abuse_home.html

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The National Center for Prosecution of Animal Abuse (NCPAA) was created in 2011 by Allie Phillips in partnership with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF). Allie Phillips is a former Assistant Prosecuting Attorney and has been training prosecutors and allied professionals since 1997. NCPAA’s goal is to support and train prosecutors and other professionals in the handling of animal abuse cases and cases involving the co-occurrence of violence to animals and people. The overall mission of NCPAA is to act in the best interests of animals and to create communities where animal protection laws are fully enforced.
Pets can be important in families, filling both emotional and social needs for family members. Both adults and children can be deeply attached to pets. Approximately 68% of American households contained pets in 2013 and Americans spent approximately $50 billion on food, care, and other expenses for pets in 2012 (Humane Society of the U.S., 2014).

How Often do Women Coming to Shelters Own Pets?

There is limited data about how many women who are seeking shelter due to domestic violence have pets. In the general population, 68% of households contain pets. Pets are present in over two-thirds of homes with children under age six and in nearly three-fourths of homes with children over age six (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2007). Therefore, general population data suggest that many women who experience domestic violence and many women with children who are seeking shelter due to domestic violence are likely to also have pets. Ascione (2007) summarized older studies (from 1998 to 2004) of women in domestic violence situations. He found the numbers of women with pet ownership were comparable to the pet ownership in U. S. women with children. The nine studies that included this information found pet ownership ranged from 40.2% to 90.6%.

How Often Are Pets Abused in Homes with Domestic Violence?

In surveys of women who are living at domestic violence shelters, large percentages (46% to 86%) of those who have pets report that their abuser had threatened to harm their pets or had actually harmed or killed them (Ascione, 1998; Ascione, Weber & Wood, 1997; Flynn, 2000; studies cited in Hardesty, et al., 2013; Volant, Johnson, Gullone & Coleman, 2008). Abusive acts include hitting, punching, mutilating, and killing. Neglect can include deprivation of food, water, shelter, and veterinary care. Livestock can be affected as well as companion pets. Livestock may be affected by domestic violence compared to control homes without domestic violence (Ascione et al., 2007; Volant et al., 2008).

While a number of studies have shown an association between animal abuse and domestic violence, few studies have included control groups. A study by Walton-Moss, Manganello, Frye and Campbell (2005) analyzed a case-controlled study, conducted from 1994 to 2000 in 11 U. S. metropolitan cities. A total of 3,637 women who had experienced domestic violence and 845 control women participated. Four variables were identified as predictive of intimate partner violence. One of the four was pet abuse. The other three were not being a high school graduate, having a substance abuse problem, and being in fair or poor mental health.

Hardesty et al. (2013) interviewed 19 women in the Midwest who had sought shelter and who had pets. About half (9 women) reported that their abusers used the pet as a method of control. These abusers lacked emotional bonds to the pets while the women had strong emotional bonds to the pets and used the pets as a source of comfort. In some cases, the pets had protected the women during abusive episodes. The abusers made threats and/or physically harmed the pets. There were diverse decisions and outcomes, often traumatic, and women showed persistent worry about their pets. Their pets were seen as central to their recovery and the women planned to be reunited with the pets or planned to adopt new pets. In contrast, the 10 women whose abusers did not use pets as a control mechanism reported different characteristics. Some of the abusers were strongly bonded to the pets. The majority of these women left the pets with the abusers and they were comfortable with that decision. They had no plans to reunify with the pets and were ambivalent about owning pets in the future. They prioritized their children and themselves over the pets and had less emotional attachment to the pets.

Ascione (2000, reported in Becker & French, 2004) compared 100 women who were battered and had sought help from a shelter with a sample of non-battered women. All women in the study had pets. For the battered women, 55% reported that their partner had hurt or killed their pets while 5% of the controls reported this. The battered women reported that 62% of their children were exposed to the animal abuse. One in four of the battered women reported that they remained in the abusive relationship due to concern about their pet. This study was similar to others such as Ponder and Lockwood (2000) where 44% of battered women reported their partners had abused or killed family pets and where 43% reported that concern for their pet’s welfare kept them in the abusive relationship longer. Faver & Strand (2003) offer similar data. Almost half of their sample of 41 pet-owning battered women reported their partners had threatened or harmed their pets. Over a fourth reported that their concern about their pets had affected their decision about leaving or staying.

What Are the Psychological Dynamics of Pet Abuse in the Context of Domestic Violence?

Relatively little is known about the psychological dynamics at the intersection of domestic violence and pet abuse (Maiuro, Eberle, Rastaman & Snowflake, 2008). However, most perpetrators of domestic violence seek to exert control (Wilkinson, 2012). A myriad of control tactics have been postulated. Physical violence or threats of violence, control of financial resources, stalking, emotional abuse, isolation, and threats to harm children or abuse of children are some of the methods used by batterers in attempts to control their partner. In cases where the victim cares deeply about a pet, threats to kill or harm the pet, to give the pet away, to deprive the pet of food or care, and physical abuse of the pet can be additional ways to terrorize or control one’s partner and children (Arkow, 1997; Becker & French, 2004; Gilbreath, 2008; Zorza, 2008).

Abusers send a strong message warning women that they may be next when abusing or threatening to abuse a pet. The abuser is exerting domination and control while

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simultaneously threatening to eliminate their partner’s source of comfort. Women may be afraid to leave the abuser for fear of what harm will befall their pet(s).

Differences Between Batterers Who Abuse Pets and Those Who Don’t

Carlisle-Frank, Frank & Nielsen (2004) compared the reports of women whose partners had physically harmed their pets to responses of women whose partners had not harmed pets. According to the women’s reports, pet-abusing batterers were reported to show less affection towards pets. They communicated with pets through commands and threats. They were more likely to view animals as property. According to the women’s reports, men who abused pets were more likely to have unrealistic expectations and were more likely to scapegoat the pets. They were more likely to have punished pets and were, in addition, more sensitive to stressful life events. The authors concluded that violence directed towards animals appears to be embedded in a complex set of attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs.

Effects on Children

Children who observe violence towards animals can become desensitized to violence. These children can also begin to abuse animals themselves (Arkow, 1997). Children living with family violence are exposed to significantly higher instances of animal abuse (studies cited in Thompson & Gullone, 2006). For example, in one study, 29% of mothers in the family violence group reported that their children had witnessed their partner harm or kill a pet while no mothers in the community sample reported this. Further, while 19% of mothers in a family violence group reported that their children had harmed or killed a family pet, only one mother in the community group (1%) reported that her child had harmed or killed a pet (Gullone, Volant & Johnson, 2004). These findings are similar to a survey of over 800 college students (DeGue & DeLillo, 2009). For those students who had witnessed family violence, about 30% had also witnessed animal cruelty. Witnessing animal cruelty had a strong overlap with perpetrating animal cruelty as well, as children who had witnessed animal cruelty were eight times more likely to perpetrate animal cruelty.

Do Women Delay Seeking Help or Refuse to Seek Help due to Inability to Protect their Pet?

Pets may be a factor in a woman deciding whether or not to leave an abusive relationship. For example, in a study of 101 women (Ascione et al., 2007), over a third reported delaying leaving because of concern about pets (cited in Hardesty et al., 2013). An Australian study (Volant et al., 2008) also found that about a third of women reported they had delayed leaving the abusive relationship because of concern for their pets’ welfare. Ascione (2007) found data from nine studies that asked women if concern for a pet had delayed their help-seeking. The percentages of women who had delayed seeking shelter due to concern about pets ranged from 18.6% to 48%.

What Shelters Can Do

Since hotline staff members are often the first contact for women, it is important that they ask if any animals in the home also need protection. Women should be informed about options for protecting pets and pets need to be addressed in safety plans and risk assessments (Zorza, 2008).

Literature suggests that many domestic violence shelters are not able to accept pets and do not offer alternative housing for pets. Shelters may worry about practical problems for housing pets. Some residents or their children may be allergic to pets. Pets may be unvaccinated and carrying diseases. Pets may scratch or bite other residents or staff. Pets may require space and accommodations not easily available at a shelter. Pets can be expensive to care for. If a family brings pets and does not care for them properly, back up plans are needed, and possibly even require removal of the pet. Another challenge is re-housing women with pets. Since some landlords will not allow pets or will charge extra for pets, housing selections for women with pets can be more expensive and more limited than for women without pets. These concerns are addressed in Sheltering Animals & Families Together (SAF-T) Start-Up Manual (2012) which is reviewed in this issue of VCPN.

Some shelters for battered women have developed safe placements for pets (Arkow, 2008; Gilbreath, 2008). In a recent interview with VCPN staff, Phil Arkow, Coordinator of the National Link Coalition noted that considerable progress has been made. “We now have 900 women’s shelters that offer some sort of foster care program for animals, but there still is a tremendous need for pet-friendly shelters,” commented Arkow. According to Allie Phillips (www.animalsandfamilies.org) nationally there are 84 domestic violence shelters with kennels on-site and 17 more in process.

In some households, companion animals are co-owned by the household’s adults. This means a batterer may be entitled to retrieve the animal from a safe haven program or have a claim for the theft of his property (Gilbreath, 2008). Women can bring any purchase records, adoption records, or veterinary records that are in her name to demonstrate ownership. If courts have included pets in protective orders or in a divorce or separation agreement, that action can alleviate concerns about the custody of the pet. Arkow related that in 2006 a woman testified in Maine and obtained a pet protection order. “Today,” he added, “twenty-seven states recognize pet protection orders.” A list of states that have made provisions for pets in protective orders is available on the website for The National Resource Center on the Link Between Animal Abuse and Human Violence (http://nationallinkcoaltion.org/)

Summary

Both the presence of pets and the abuse of pets in the lives of battered women are realities that shelters, police, the court system, therapists, and child protective services workers need to be prepared to address. Prosecution should hold the batterer accountable for the abuse of all victims in the household. Police and shelter staff need to be aware of potential dangers to companion animals in the home. In addition to inquiring about pets and having arrangements to care for pets, counseling should include support for the complicated feelings of loss, guilt, and worry that battered women with pets may feel. Effects on children witnessing animal abuse can be long-lasting (see separate article, this issue). Since child witnesses of both domestic violence and animal abuse are considered at higher risk for poor outcomes (such as conduct disorders; bullying; violence towards others and violence towards animals), these children may need additional support and therapy over what is typically offered.

References Are Available on the Website or by Request

Special Thanks To.....

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CHILDREN WITNESSING ANIMAL ABUSE

Effects of Witnessing Animal Cruelty

Research has linked witnessing animal abuse to significantly higher levels of animal cruelty (Thompson & Gullone, 2006; studies cited in Carlisle-Frank et al., 2004). Interestingly, witnessing a friend, a relative, a parent or a sibling abuse an animal is linked to significantly higher levels of cruelty towards animals, while witnessing strangers abusing animals is linked to significantly lower levels of later animal cruelty. Frequently witnessing animal abuse was linked to significantly higher levels of animal cruelty.

Flynn (2000a; 2000b) surveyed undergraduate students about their histories of witnessing animal abuse and perpetrating animal abuse. Overall, 17.6% had perpetrated animal abuse with males being four times more likely than females to engage in animal cruelty. The majority of those engaging in animal abuse had witnessed others abusing animals. DeGue and DeLillo (2009) had similar findings in a survey of 800 college students. Witnessing animal cruelty strongly overlapped with perpetuating animal cruelty.

There is no doubt that witnessing abuse and violence is detrimental to children. Child witnesses of domestic abuse experience a wide range of behavioral and emotional difficulties, although aggressiveness and conduct disorder are the problems most frequently linked to angry home environments. Attachment can be disrupted, as well as sleeping and eating patterns. High levels of somatic complaints and poor health have been documented. Increased arousal, avoidance reactions, and emotional numbing can result from exposure to domestic violence. School performance, social competence, and emotional development can be compromised. For a comprehensive review of the effects of children witnessing domestic violence, see VCPN, volume 60.

Young children’s experience with animals, especially family pets, can be seen as a microcosm for how children learn to relate to others. What children observe and experience regarding how the adults in their lives treat pets and people presents lifelong lessons to the child (Lewchanin & Randour, 2008). The systematic desensitization of children to violence is felt to be a major factor in later manifestation of social deviance (Gibson, 2005).

Children Living With Domestic Violence

Children living in situations of domestic violence are more likely to witness animal abuse where pets are harmed or killed (Gullone, Volant & Johnson, 2004). Children living in situations of domestic violence are 20 times more likely to have witnessed a pet being abused than children from a control group (Ascione, Thompson & Black, 1997).

Children who witness pet abuse are both traumatized and desensitized to violence with effects evident both in childhood and as adults (Zorza, 2008). Witnessing a combination of domestic violence towards a parent and witnessing the abuse of a pet is thought to compromise children’s psychological adjustment and also to increase the propensity for interpersonal violence through modeling or observational learning. Violence may be normalized if it is a usual occurrence in the child’s home (Carlisle-Frank, Frank & Nielsen, 2004).

Barbara Boat, Ph. D. has argued that childhood exposure to animal abuse should be considered an ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) that has the potential to contribute to “toxic stress” and the subsequent risks to the child’s brain development, impaired potential, and negative health outcomes. (For an article about the ACE study, see VCPN, volume 87).

Intervention

When working with children who may have witnessed violence, there are a number of areas of inquiry that may be fruitful. More detail is available in A Common Bond: Maltreated Children and Animals in the Home by American Humane (see review, this issue).

Relationships can be important, both the relationship between the child and the abuser and the relationship between the child and the animal. If workers learn about what happened to the animal and how frequently the abuse occurred, patterns of abuse in the home may be more evident. Children may not realize what constitutes animal abuse and may simply describe conditions that they feel are usual. Workers should be prepared for children to have a variety of responses to the conditions and treatment that they have witnessed and ask if the events bothered the child.

It may be helpful to know the role of the child. Was he or she passive and just observing? Was the child a participant? Was the child encouraged to abuse the animal as well? Did the child witness events that adults were hiding from the child or was the abuse done openly? Knowing the child’s immediate and long-term response would be helpful. Does the child show anxiety, depression, or trauma responses? Does the child feel shame or guilt or remorse? Is the child indifferent or excusing the adult’s behaviors?

Was the abuse of the animal part of a larger series of events? For example, was the child threatened that the animal would be hurt unless the child did certain things? Or was the animal punished because the child failed to do something?

If the child reported what was witnessed, who did they tell and what was the person’s response? How does the child explain or make sense of the animal cruelty?

VCPN was not able to find specific interventions for child witnesses of animal cruelty. It is likely, however, that evidence-based treatments for trauma (reviewed in VCPN, volume 95) would be helpful with child witnesses of animal cruelty. Combining effective trauma treatments with humane education and with animal-assisted therapy could potentially enhance the intervention and make it more specific to the trauma of seeing animal cruelty.

Witnessing animal cruelty is likely to have a number of outcomes. Some children may become advocates of preventing cruelty and may become protective of animals and other living things. Unfortunately, others may have heightened risk to model the cruelty they have witnessed and to abuse animals and people (see the article, this issue, on Children Who Abuse Animals).

If service providers (counselors; medical staff; veterinarians; CPS workers; animal protection staff) become more aware of the potentially detrimental effects of witnessing animal abuse, children are more likely to be referred for support, evaluation, and treatment.

References Available on the Website or by Request
**Domestic Violence Shelters and Pets**

As discussed in the article, this issue, about domestic violence and animal abuse, many women are reluctant to leave an abusive mate and seek shelter because they fear for the safety of their pets. In 2011, Kathy Pierce, staff person at the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance, surveyed 41 of the 47 Virginia shelters for domestic violence concerning their ability to accommodate pets.

Pierce talked to staff at each shelter about the ability to assist women and children with pets. Of the 41 shelters, only one shelter, Doorways for Women and Families Shelter in Arlington, had housing on site for pets. However, 26 of the shelters contacted had arrangements for housing pets off site. The arrangements varied and included relationships with SPCA shelters, with vets, with animal welfare groups, and with private families. The time frame was 10 days to 30 days or was not specified. Of the contacted shelters, 14 (about a third) reported no reliable arrangements for pets.

VCPN staff talked with several shelters to learn more about some of the arrangements they have been able to offer women and children for the care of their pets.

**Arrangement with a Boarding Kennel**

The Shelter for Help in Emergency is a large facility in Charlottesville. They typically serve 250 women and children in a year and can house up to 26 individuals. The facility has been in operation for 35 years. Robin Goldstein, Volunteer Coordinator, talked to VCPN staff about the Pet Safe program. She said the program began in 2002, two years prior to her arrival. She described their Pet Safe program as unique in the Commonwealth.

The Shelter for Help in Emergency has an agreement with a boarding and grooming establishment to house pets of shelter clients. The establishment is a family-run business. They provide care, and if necessary, food for the animals for free. They do not require that the animals have shots or be spayed, but house them separately from other boarders if there are no immunizations. Women can stay at the Shelter for Help in Emergency for up to six weeks and the boarding facility will keep their animals until women leave the Shelter.

The boarding facility is within walking distance of Shelter for Help in Emergency. Families are welcome to visit their pets and play with them or exercise them. Goldstein says that some women are devoted to their pets and visit daily but many are overwhelmed by being uprooted, and needing to find a job and housing and visit their pets infrequently (although they are grateful that their pet has a good place to stay).

Goldstein reports that the pet care service is used infrequently. She estimates that over the 7.5 years she has worked, about 20 women have brought pets to the Shelter. Goldstein notes that the telephone intake form that they use was created by the Alliance for all 60 shelters in Virginia to gather standardized data. It does not contain any questions about pets. Goldstein hypothesizes that many women don’t know that the Shelter offers pet care and therefore make other arrangements for their animals.

“Our model is extremely low maintenance,” said Goldstein. “I know other shelters that use volunteers to house pets in homes and that process is more time-consuming.” If a woman cannot continue to care for her pet when she leaves the shelter, Goldstein will first attempt to place the animal in a home or as a last resort, the animal will be transported to the local SPCA. She said that only twice has she had to take animals to the SPCA. Goldstein said they have sheltered only cats and dogs. No one has asked about small animals such as gerbils. The Shelter can’t accommodate large animals. One woman asked about care for her horses and another wanted shelter for sheep.

Goldstein says the Pet Safe program works well, although they remain dependent upon the good will of one establishment. They do not plan any changes in their Pet Safe program in the immediate future.

Persons wanting more information can contact Robin Goldstein at: Shelter for Help in Emergency, PO Box 1013, Charlottesville, VA 22902, (434) 963-4676 or by E-mail: rgoldstein@shelterforhelpinemergency.org

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**Use of a Local Animal Welfare Program**

VCPN staff talked to three animal welfare organizations that partner with domestic violence shelters. Both are located in metropolitan areas.

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**On-site Housing**

Doorways for Women and Families is located in Northern Virginia. It is the only domestic violence shelter in Virginia that has housing for pets at the shelter facility. VCPN staff talked with Claudia Zaborsky, MA, Domestic Violence Program Director, about their pet accommodations.

The kennel was built in 2007 and sits in a fenced backyard at the shelter. It has an outdoor run built into the kennel and women can also take their dog on a walk or allow their pet to run and play in the fenced backyard. The kennel is further protected by cameras that monitor the outside of the building. The shelter has equipment such as feeding bowls and they have money budgeted or donations to provide needed food. They can also help with spay and neuter services or vet services.

Doorways is an 11-bed facility. Last year they housed 41 women and 29 children. The shelter has a separate intake process for animals. Zaborsky says that pets housed need to be safe, healthy and not an immediate threat to the survivor or other clients at the shelter. She stresses the need for a protocol for pets. Often the pet intake process will enable the shelter staff to assist the survivor in locating services such as a local veterinarian who can provide a check-up and immunizations. The shelter staff also has a good relationship with the SPCA and local humane associations so that a pet that is unsafe (perhaps due to being abused as well) can be housed off-site if necessary.

Zaborsky says, “For families that we have served, having a safe place for their pets has been critical in their healing process.” However, the kennel has been used only once in the three years that Zaborsky has been working at Doorways. During her tenure, they have housed a goldfish and a hamster as well as the one dog. One reason for low utilization may be the weather. Currently, Doorways is weatherizing the kennel and soon it will have air conditioning and heating.

Persons wanting more information can contact Claudia Zaborsky at (703) 237-0881 or by E-mail: CZborsky@doorwaysva.org
Robin Starr

The Richmond SPCA is a large animal welfare organization that not only shelters animals, but offers Humane Education to thousands of children each year through its school programs, camps, and after-school education programs. The Richmond SPCA has offered SAAF (Sheltering Animals of Abused Families) for over 10 years. CEO Robin Starr explained that a move to a larger facility in 2002 allowed the Richmond SPCA the capacity to develop the program. SAAF partners with three area shelters - The YWCA of Richmond, Hanover Safe Place, and Safe Harbor. If a woman has need for shelter for pets, an SPCA member will meet the family along with staff from the domestic violence shelter and will take the pets into safekeeping.

Starr explained that SAAF will generally shelter pets from situations of domestic violence in foster homes or at a private kennel. This practice prevents the abuser from coming to the SPCA animal shelter and locating the pets, and provides an additional layer of safety. The Richmond SPCA has full veterinary care and a staff of three veterinarians. The SAAF program does require that pets be spayed and neutered and that service is provided with the woman’s permission and at no charge. Vaccinations are also provided for free. Starr says that the pets in the SAAF program frequently have unaddressed medical needs and these animals can require expensive care. Fortunately, the Richmond SPCA is able to provide needed veterinarian care.

The women may leave pets with the Richmond SPCA as long as they reside in the domestic violence shelter. They must retrieve their pets within 48 hours of leaving the domestic violence facility. Starr notes that the SPCA staff remains in close contact with the women and most visit their pet frequently. The SAAF program services about a dozen pets a year. Starr comments, “SAAF is greatly needed and tremendously successful. Most women are able to reclaim their pets.” The Richmond SPCA publishes a Pet-Friendly Housing Guide and keeps it updated. This resource helps women locate housing where their pets will be welcomed.

The Richmond SPCA received an award for their SAAF program several years ago. Starr summarizes, “SAAF is a crucial service that we provide for the community. It not only helps the women, but it also helps the animals, which is our focus.”

More information is available from: CEO Robin Starr at: rstarr@richmondspca.org

WHAT SHELTER STAFF CAN DO TO SUPPORT WOMEN WITH COMPANION ANIMALS

- Have hotline staff ask callers whether they have pets and if pets have been harmed or threatened. Workers should ascertain whether or not family or friends are available to house pets.
- Inform women seeking shelter about safe haven programs and emergency services for pets or build kennels at the shelter.
- Provide opportunities for women and children to discuss their pets. Add questions about the presence of pets and their welfare to intake questionnaires.
- Allow women to be concerned about pets.
- Incorporate pets into safety planning and post pet safety planning brochures on the shelter’s website.
- Include animals in domestic violence protection orders.
- Assist women in proving ownership of pets. Veterinary records and adoption or purchase records can help establish ownership.
- Train staff to realize that women may have different bonds to pets.
- Collaborate with community partners such as animal shelters, rescue organizations, veterinarians and boarding facilities for pet care and services needed by pets.
- Help women find pet-friendly transitional or permanent housing. Create a list of pet-friendly transitional housing and apartments.
- Have pet adoption agencies as an option if women are unable to maintain pets.


The Animal Welfare League of Arlington offers a Safekeeping program that is available not only to shelters for battered women but also to other individuals in crisis. Kerry McKeel, Communications Manager, explains the program. “Unfortunately circumstances can deplete savings or upset stability so severely that many people find providing for their pets becomes impossible,” she comments. “The goal of the Safekeeping program at Arlington is to keep pets and their people together through a crisis by offering sanctuary to the pets, not only in situations of domestic violence, but also in situations due to catastrophic illness, a death in the family, flood, or fire.”

VCPN staff talked with Jennifer Pickar, Director of Community Programs. She explained that the Safekeeping program has been offered more than 15 years. The Animal Welfare League of Arlington will keep the pets for up to two weeks. If needed, the time can be expanded. Pet owners receive free care and their animals will receive basic vaccinations if they are not up-to-date on immunizations. There are free spay and neuter services available if the owner desires.

The Safekeeping program is part of the League’s services. The Arlington facility shelters approximately 3,000 animals each year. They accept dogs, cats, and other small animals such as chinchillas, birds, gerbils, and bunnies. They also accept sick, injured or orphaned wildlife which are later transferred to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Pickar described a plethora of programs: summer camps for children; humane education; a vet assistance crisis service that grants interest-free loans to pet owners in the DC metro area whose pets need immediate care; animal control services; general educational programs. The shelter’s contract with Arlington County covers 50 to 60% of their expense and they have a separate contract for sheltering stray animals from the city of Falls Church.

The Safekeeping program varies in referrals. Last year there were only two referrals for the program. Pickar was not certain if either or both were due to domestic violence.

More information is available at www.awla.org, from Jenifer Pickar (703) 931-9241 x 213 or E-mail: pickar@awla.org, or from Kerry McKeel, E-mail: kmckeel@awla.org

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Shelter staff of these seven shelters reported that less than five pets a year were housed, even when the service was made known to women. Pets that received housing were generally cats and dogs but one facility also reported housing birds and snakes. Most women made other arrangements for their pets prior to coming to the shelter. Some respondents indicated that women would not come into the shelter because they would have to board their pets rather than have them living with the family in the shelter. One shelter mentioned that it was possible that victims in the community are unaware of their ability to care for their pets.

Virginia Makes Legal Change to Allow Pets to be Included in Protective Orders

Each year, many bills are considered in the Virginia House of Delegates and the Virginia Senate. Only a few are passed and approved and become law. House Bill 972 which became effective July 1, 2014 grants judges in Virginia the authority to award pet possession as part of a protective order.

A person who has been the victim of violence, force or threat that has resulted in bodily injury or places them in reasonable apprehension of bodily injury can seek a protective order. These orders can be sought through a court petition or a magistrate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year on an emergency basis. After an initial emergency protective order is entered, it can be extended into a preliminary protective order, and eventual-

Virginia’s Picture

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The Loudoun Abused Women’s Shelter (LAWS) uses a local animal shelter for pets of domestic violence victims. The Loudoun County Animal Shelter will keep pets for 30 days. The stay can be extended if needed or a foster family can be found.

Nicole Acosta, LCSW, Executive Director, explained that the women’s shelter is one part of their large program. The 12-bed shelter houses approximately 30 women and 40 children each year. Because of the low numbers, there is only an occasional request for a pet to be housed. Acosta explained that most women served by LAWS remain in their homes. LAWS employs two full-time attorneys. One works just with protective orders and the other with family law (divorce; child custody). LAWS serves about 1,000 victims a year. The organization is successful in keeping most in their homes and the abusive partner is ordered to leave.

More information is available from: Nicole Acosta, LCSW, (703) 777-6552 or E-mail: laws@lcsj.org

Survey of Domestic Violence Shelters

In addition to the programs above, seven Virginia domestic violence shelters responded by e-mail to a request for information about their shelter’s arrangement for pets. All had some sort of arrangements to assist women and children with pets. Three mentioned that they accept service dogs in their facility and had an occasional request (less than once a year) for accommodation for a service dog.

Shelters worked with local veterinarians, foster families, or SPCA agencies. Women and children were able to visit their pets while they were sheltered. In some cases, animals from domestic violence victims were taken by the partner agency only if there was room. Most reported time limits for care of pets that ranged from two weeks to a month, after which the women must make other arrangements or allow their pet to be adopted. One shelter reported care was available for as long as the woman was at the domestic violence shelter. Most shelters did not supply pet food (but the agency housing the animals often did provide food). Most shelters reported they did not have funds for vaccinations or spay/neuter services. Sometimes spay and neuter services were available for free in the community.

Central Virginia Link Coalition was started several years ago by Julie Palais, a scientist with a passion for animals. She learned of the National Link Coalition and discovered there was no Link group in Virginia. After attending a workshop in 2009 by Allie Phillips and others, she was inspired to begin the effort.

Link Coalitions seek to forge links between child protective service workers, domestic violence agencies, adult protective services and animal control workers so that mutual cross-reporting of suspected cases of abuse will occur. In Virginia, animal control officers are required to report suspected child maltreatment and Virginia is one of only a few states where animal control officers receive mandated training on how to report suspected child maltreatment. However, Virginia CPS workers are not required to report animal abuse. The Coalition also seeks to bring together people from different fields and disciplines to share research and literature on the links between animal abuse, child abuse, elder abuse and domestic violence.

To date, the Central Virginia Link Coalition has sponsored some trainings and workshops and has held some meetings. Palais has been unable to maintain the website due to technical problems, but there is a Facebook page devoted to the initiative. Palais seeks like-minded people who can help her develop the Central Virginia Link Coalition and work towards the goal of making Virginia a safer place for people and pets.

If you would like to join forces, contact Julie Palais by e-mail at: juliepalais@hotmail.com

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Virginia Beach SPCA sponsors a comprehensive humane animal education program for youth. The numbers and types of programs are truly spectacular! The SPCA shelters 4,000 to 6,000 animals a year. Their youth programs serve about 28,000 youth. Three programs specific to this issue of VCPN will be described first.

The HOPE Program
HOPE stands for Helping Out Pets Everywhere. This program originated over 20 years ago. The program assists 75 to 125 animals a year by providing temporary care when owners cannot. The intended length of stay is 28 days, but the usual length of stay is six weeks. In some extreme cases, pets have been housed as long as seven to eight months. Many crises may precipitate a request for care, including domestic violence, a pet owner who is in the hospital, economic downturn and loss of jobs and housing, relocations due to disasters such as flooding, or for persons who are trauma victims. The HOPE program has established liaisons with local domestic violence shelters, such as Samaritan House. If an owner is unable to resume care of their pet, the HOPE program staff will seek an adoptive family.

The HOPE program utilizes a robust volunteer program where pets are housed in the volunteer’s home. A group of about 150 volunteers provides the service. The SPCA has orientation each month for those interested in fostering pets. “Shelters can be stressful,” explains Amanda Pauline Dunlap, Community Outreach Director and Director of Adult Volunteers. “We can arrange ‘meet and greet’ visitation sessions between the family and their pet. The family does not have routine access to their pet, but they have the relief of knowing their pet is receiving excellent and individualized care in a home setting.”

The HOPE program has dealt mainly with dogs and a fewer number of cats. There is an occasional bird. “We can accommodate any smaller animal,” says Dunlap. “We haven’t been asked about large animals to date.”

Indigent Veterinarian Care
With a $10,000 grant from the Banfield Charitable Trust (through PET SMART), the Virginia Beach SPCA offers low-income families the opportunity to apply for funds for veterinary care for their pets that is above and beyond routine and preventative care (the funds do not cover spay and neuter or vaccinations). These funds are particularly helpful for women who are victims of domestic violence. In order for pets to be served in the HOPE program, they must be up-to-date with vaccinations and they must be spayed or neutered. The grant allows funding for those applying to HOPE whose animals do not meet the health criteria. The SPCA also operates a Food Pantry for pets and distributes free pet food.

Animals Cultivating Empathy (ACE)
Over the past two years, the Virginia Beach SPCA has developed a program in cooperation with licensed counselors and a psychiatrist to intervene with children who are abusive towards animals. They have based their offering on the AniCare Model (described elsewhere in this issue). The program aims to teach empathy, boundaries, and attachment skills, by providing youth with safe outlets to express their motivations and to develop meaningful connections with animals. Starting the process early is felt to lead to more empathy for humans as well.

The 6-week program is designed to help curb future violent behaviors. “We are hoping to intervene early with children who are cruel to animals. This is an empathy-building program,” explains Sharon Adams, MPA, Chair of the Virginia Alliance for Animal Shelters. Adams formerly worked at the Virginia Beach SPCA and she was the developer of both the HOPE program and the ACE program.

Thus far, parents have not been willing to enroll their children in the ACE program, perhaps because of the stigma attached to animal abuse. Adams says that many service providers are unaware of the importance of animal cruelty and intervening early. Adams says there is little research literature on how to teach kindness. Part of the ACE program pairs the child with a dog and an obedience trainer. The trainer helps the child learn methods to teach animals manners and to exert control based on rewards. The child is taught clicker techniques, pet management skills, and how to understand pet behavior and communication. “We know that children do what they see,” says Adams, “and we want to offer alternative models.” The program also utilizes games, activities, perspective exercises, and teaches proper pet care, animal socialization, and accepting pet loss.

Youth Programs
Jessie Comba, Youth Programs Director, relates that 28,000 youth a year participate in the Virginia Beach SPCA Youth Programs. The majority of outreach is to schools through Humane Education, an emerging field. Their program, Compassion Classroom, is in 45 schools. The curriculum-based program teaches second grade students about animals. Over 3,500 students a month participate. Adams adds, “Our mission is to create a community with increased capacity for compassion and decrease the likelihood of cruelty.”

Another effort is Listening Ears. In this program, children who are struggling with reading can read a book to a dog. Since the dog is accepting of the child, the child is willing to practice reading skills and develops greater self-confidence.

A Pet Therapy effort serves homeless shelters in Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Suffolk, and Portsmouth. The therapists also visit the Naval Hospital twice a week to cheer veterans. Adams explains that being able to interact with a pet is calming and reduces stress as well as alleviates isolation. Nursing homes benefit from the service as well as children with Autism and intellectual disabilities. A special program Pets and Pals is held once a month for children of military parents.

Summer camps offer children ages 5 through 12 a chance to learn in depth about animals. Three days a week are spent at the Virginia Beach SPCA and two days are field trips. Eight summer camps accommodate 13 children each. Dunlap describes the Junior Volunteer Program for youth from ages 13 to 18. Each year between 150 and 300 youth participate. They start by helping with cleaning and then progress to animal handling and assisting in off-site events. They help with birthday parties (as a way to raise funds, a parent can arrange for their child to have a birthday party at the SPCA).

Persons wanting more information can contact:
Sharon Q. Adams: sharonadams980@gmail.com
Jessie Comba: (757) 689-1933 or youthprograms@vbspca.com
Amanda Pauline Dunlap: volunteer@vbspca.com or (757) 689-1934
Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) should be differentiated from Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA) and Animal-Assisted Education (AAE). AAT is administered by academically trained and certified professionals while AAA and AAE can be offered by volunteers and lay individuals with training. While AAA and AAE have therapeutic goals, they are not professional counseling.

In AAT, each animal has a professionally-trained handler. The animals are not simply pets being used in a therapeutic setting. Rather, animals are evaluated and selected to be therapy animals based on specific criteria (Dietz et al., 2012; Parish-Plass, 2008). AAT is not a “stand-alone” therapy, according to Dietz et al. (2012). Rather, AAT should augment existing therapies. In AAT, the relationships are central to the therapeutic process. There is a relationship between the therapist and the child. The therapist and the animal have a relationship also, that can model important concepts of trust and acceptance. The child and the animal will develop a relationship as well that is mediated by the therapist. The format allows progress on cognitive, social, behavioral and emotional issues.

VCPN reports in this issue about Virginia programs using AAT, AAA or AAE. Although the featured programs target different populations, the approaches described may also be suitable for children who have been a victim of maltreatment or who have witnessed animal cruelty and for those who have, themselves, already engaged in animal cruelty.

References Available on the Website or by Request

American Humane: Therapy Animals Supporting Kids (TASK) Program Manual

Created by: Allie Phillips, J.D., and Diana McQuarrie in cooperation with Delta Society®; 40 pages.

American Humane Association
1400 16th Street NW, Suite 360
Washington, DC 20036

Phone: (800) 227-4645
Email: info@americanhumane.org


The American Humane: Therapy Animals Supporting Kids (TASK) Program Manual addresses animal therapy intervention techniques and attempts to define the bond between animals and children. The manual assesses when a therapy animal can help children and in what situations they are most effective. The authors also describe the preliminary groundwork that must occur before animal therapy interventions can be implemented. They end the manual by discussing various legal issues associated with animal therapy and provide examples of children’s advocacy centers that incorporate animal therapy.
The Center for Human-Animal Interaction is a non-profit organization dedicated to improved health and well-being through interaction with companion animals. Sandra B. Barker, Ph.D., Professor of Psychiatry and Director of the Center, spoke with VCPN staff recently and described the Center’s work. The Center has three main areas of emphasis. They offer service programs, educational efforts, and research initiatives.

Service—Dr. Barker described some of the many service activities. Dogs on Call operates throughout the VCU Medical Center. “We are just about everywhere except the cafeteria, the surgery suites, obstetrics, or if a patient is on contact precautions,” explains Dr. Barker. The program recruits volunteers who have completed a therapy dog registration. The qualified volunteers are then trained and oriented to the VCU program. “Our 40 active therapy dog teams interact with 7,000 patients and their families a year,” says Dr. Barker. Most of the volunteers are dog owners from the community and some are employees or students. There is even a medical students’ chapter that participates. A part-time staff person coordinates the dog therapy teams in collaboration with Volunteer Services.

Dr. Barker shares poignant stories about the power of the Dogs on Call service. She relates how a dog can comfort a child who has just lost a parent. A child may be undergoing painful procedures and be at risk for depression. However, the reaction is “all smiles for the dogs,” in spite of the pain. Dr. Barker says that doctors, nurses, and other staff often request visits for specific patients. Occasionally, the Center helps facilitate visits between a patient and their own pet.

A second service program is a Pet Loss Support Group. The Center collaborates with local veterinarians. They provide modest financial support and can refer as many clients as they wish. “Many people don’t have supports in their social lives and the loss of a pet can be devastating,” related Dr. Barker.

Paws for Stress is a program offered at midterm and final exam time. This program is coordinated with University Counseling Services and supported by the VCU Student Government Association. The Center takes therapy dogs to the Commons area and to the medical library.

Dr. Barker says that the Center is heavily involved in assisting children who have experienced trauma. They maintain a facility dog at the Virginia Treatment Center for Children, located on VCU’s medical campus. Tess Searles, a nurse-practitioner on the VTCC staff owns the specially trained dog and brings it to work with her. “Dogs can help children regulate and de-escalate,” notes Dr. Barker.

Education—The Center educates health professionals about Animal-Assisted Therapy. Dr. Barker offers an elective course for medical students and other health professionals. The Center also offers an unpaid internship. The Center staff participate in a Summer Institute in Psychiatry and Dr. Barker lectures and does presentations locally and globally. Some of the places she has presented are China, Ireland, Spain, Monte Carlo, and the United Kingdom.

Research—Dr. Barker notes that the research program predates the Center. Their website contains abstracts of many published articles, authored by Center-affiliated researchers who have investigated the benefits of therapy dogs for hospitalized persons and the physiological effects of interacting with dogs. One study published in 2012 concerned the benefits to employees who brought their pet dogs to work. “The study went ‘viral’ and the research was featured on National Public Radio, the British Broadcasting Corporation, CBS Morning News, and other venues,” said Dr. Barker.

A recent research effort explored how to best integrate therapy dogs into treatment for children with Autism. A dog handler and an Autism specialist work together and individualize the treatment for each child. “We observed increased positive spontaneous behavior and sustained interest while the therapy dog was present during instruction,” relates Dr. Barker. Dr. Barker comments that animal-assisted therapy compliments traditional therapy. It reduces fear and stress at a physiological level and has no negative side effects.

The Center for Human-Animal Interaction is the only Center of its type in the United States that is located within a medical school. Readers desiring more information can contact Sandra Barker, Ph.D. at (804) 628-8528 or E-mail: sbarker@mcvh-vcu.edu
Housed within the College of Veterinary Medicine at Blacksburg, Virginia, the Center for Animal Human Relationships offers animal-assisted activities, pairs with therapists to offer animal-assisted therapy, performs research, and contributes to the education of veterinary and undergraduate students. Bess Pierce, DVM, DABVP, DACVIM, DACVSMR is the Center’s Director. CENTAUR was founded in 2004. Dr. Pierce became the Director in November, 2011. The Center has a growing team of core faculty members and research partners supporting its mission.

A very successful program has been Virginia Tech Helping PAWS (Pet Assisted Wellness Service). The PAWS program provides certified teams of a handler and a certified therapy dog or cat. There are 18 certified teams with dogs and one team with a therapy cat. They engage in several outreach programs. “We are, of course, committed to Virginia Tech as a priority,” says Dr. Pierce. Teams go to the main library the fourth Thursday of each month so Virginia Tech students can relate to the dogs. “Students have to leave their pets at home,” remarks Dr. Pierce, “and having a substitute available can reduce stress.”

Teams also partner with the Women’s Center and the Cook Counseling Center. “Students will actually ask to schedule their therapy session during a time that the therapy dogs will be at the Counseling Center,” remarks Dr. Pierce. The therapy dog teams can also be used during a crisis, such as visiting a dormitory during a de-briefing session with counselors after a student’s suicide.

There is also outreach to the community. Therapy dog teams visit Heritage Hall, a nursing home and participate in PAWS to Read, a literacy program at the Blacksburg Public Library aimed at encouraging elementary students to participate in reading. The Center operates a Pet Loss Hotline which takes calls nationally and offers support to individuals who have experienced the loss of a pet.

Dr. Pierce explained that the research focus concerns the well-being of the animals. They are tackling the question of how long a therapy animal should work in a therapy setting. They are measuring cortisol levels in the dog’s saliva as the dog works in the therapy setting. They also have software that can analyze the animal’s nonverbal cues. “We choose dogs for their excellent temperament,” explains Dr. Pierce, “but even for the best animals, the work environment can be stressful. They deal with people who may show high levels of emotional arousal or are taken into crowds and they are expected to tolerate petting and handling by strangers. Therapy dogs are tired at the end of the day.” Due to fatigue factors, PAWS teams are limited to hour-long sessions or visits.

The therapy dog teams serve at least twice during the semester and two student administrators coordinate the schedule of requests with the team availability. Dog teams routinely attend “welcome” events for new students and educational fairs both on campus and off campus. The Center has started sponsoring a one-day symposium every other year where nationally-recognized speakers offer workshops about the human-animal bond and the interface between humans, animals, and the environment. The symposium is offered for a fee and is part of Virginia Tech’s Continuing Education Programs. About 100 professionals and lay individuals attended the first symposium.

For more information about future Symposia and about CENTAUR, visit the website at: www.vetmed.vt.edu/centaur or contact Bess J. Pierce at (540) 231-4621 E-mail: centaur@vt.edu
Spotlight on Child Advocacy Centers

Children’s Hospital of The King’s Daughters

King’s Daughters
Child Advocacy Center

The Child Abuse Program at the Children’s Hospital of the King’s Daughters is a Child Advocacy Center with a full complement of services. They have a forensic medical clinic and offer forensic interviews, case management services, medical services, consultation to investigators, inpatient consultative services, mental health services and pediatric forensic nurse examinations. Readers who are interested in a general description of Virginia’s Child Advocacy Centers can refer to VCPN, volume 88.

While the Child Abuse Program dates to December, 1998, the Facility Dog Program began in 2011. Michelle Thames, M. Ed., Forensic Interview Supervisor, spoke recently to VCPN staff about the Facility Dog Program. Thames related that the hospital, like many across the country, has a pet-assisted program. Dogs are available in waiting rooms to help children cope with anxiety. She noted that considerable research has demonstrated that visits with dogs can lower blood pressure and pulse rates.

Thames noticed that children often wanted the dog to accompany them to their medical appointment. This observation caused her to contact Canine Companions for Independence. This organization trains service dogs for individuals and facilities. Their training takes two years and the facility handlers must undergo two weeks of training. The dogs and handlers are recertified each year. (See the VCPN website for more information about Canine Companions for Independence.)

Through Canine Companions for Independence, the Child Advocacy Center acquired Pecos. Pecos works an 8-hour day and is available to the approximately 1,000 children who are seen at the Child Advocacy Center each year. Pecos helps specifically in four areas: forensic interviews; therapy sessions; medical evaluations; and accompanying children to court. Thames comments, “I believe that children coming here may not know what to expect and they typically are here because of a trauma. Pecos is a low-key, big, friendly Labrador/Golden retriever mix. He changes how children perceive the process.”

Thames notes that evaluators must be neutral. They are not allowed to reassure children, hug the child, or tell the child that everything will be fine. Pecos, however, can distribute comfort. Children rub his soft, furry ears. They can hold his paw or lay their head on him. “Pecos helps children feel safe.” Thames says that parents even appear more comfortable with a dog present. “Staff morale is better,” adds Thames. “A law enforcement officer or a social worker can take a break and take Pecos for a walk or throw a ball to him. He is never wanting for attention!” Thames sums her experience with the Facility Dog Program, “This is a wonderful program!”

For facilities and other Child Advocacy Centers interested in starting a facility dog program, Thames has some advice. She suggests doing research on established programs. She thinks that all of the multidisciplinary team members need to be in favor of using the dogs. For example, a dog cannot accompany a child to court unless all parties are in agreement. Also, the facility dog’s needs must be a priority. Pecos has toys, food, walks, a bed for resting, and breaks.

Readers interested in further information can contact Michele Thames at (757) 668-6100 or by E-mail: Michele.Thames@chkd.org

Bristol Child Advocacy Center

The Child Advocacy Center in Bristol, Virginia served over 170 new cases of child abuse last year. Donna Callis, LCSW, relates that they acquired a facility dog, NoMad, in May, 2014. Like the King’s Daughters CAC, Bristol obtained their dog from Canine Companions for Independence (CCI).

The impetus to have a facility dog came both at the request of a local juvenile judge who had been to a national conference and attended a presentation about the use of dogs in Child Advocacy Centers and almost two years of research by CAC staff regarding the efficacy of this victim support model. Callis was accepted by CCI to attend the two-week handler training and have NoMad live with her. She comments on NoMad’s training. “There is $50,000 to $60,000 invested in training a dog for this work,” she states. “Dogs are trained starting from birth.” She notes that the CAC had to demonstrate a significant commitment to using a facility dog in a way that is consistent with CCI’s regulations for safety and health of both the clients and the dog.

NoMad lives with Callis. He works an 8-hour day with some breaks. Callis remarks, “About 90% of the children request that NoMad be with them during forensic interviews. He helps them regulate and gives the children confidence.” NoMad also helps therapists build rapport with the children.

Callis recalls a situation where a child was barricading herself in a waiting room play house and would not come out for her forensic interview. She was able to compose herself and talk with interviewers after NoMad entered the room. NoMad has accompanied children to court during sentencing hearings when the child is able to give their victim impact statement regarding their abuse.

Bristol CAC is very pleased with NoMad. “The response to him is just wonderful,” exclaims Callis. “Everyone wants to be with NoMad. He is even a support and comfort to enforcement officer or a social worker can take a break and take Pecos for a walk or throw a ball to him. He is never wanting for attention!” Thames sums her experience with the Facility Dog Program, “This is a wonderful program!”

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Readers wanting more information can contact Donna Callis at (276) 645-5867 or by E-mail at: dcallis@cachwcv.org
Virginia’s Picture
continued from page 10

Children Witnessing Animal Fights

All 50 states now have laws prohibiting dog fighting (Gibson, 2005). Further, the Federal Animal Fighting Prohibition Enforcement Act of 2005 prohibits the interstate transportation of dogs for fighting purposes or use of the U.S. mail to transport dogs for fighting purposes.

In Virginia, it is a Class 1 misdemeanor to promote, prepare for, engage in, or be employed in the fighting of animals for amusement, sport, or gain. The offense becomes a class 6 felony if: a dog is one of the animals; when any devise or substance is used to enhance the animal’s ability to fight; when money or items of value are wagered on the result of fighting; if money or anything of value is paid or received for admission to a place of animal fighting; and if an animal is possessed, owned, trained, transported, or sold with the intent that the animal engage in an exhibition of fighting with another animal. If an adult permits or causes a minor to attend an exhibition of fighting animals, it is a Class 6 felony (VA Statue 3.2-6571). This legislation recognizes the serious negative effects not only to the animals but also to youth who witness the crime.