

**REPORT TO LOTTERIES COMMISSION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**ON THE**

**LINKS BETWEEN FAMILY VIOLENCE AND PET ABUSE**

**FOR THE**

**PATRICIA GILES CENTRE**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The landscape of terror in which many women, children and their pets reside is examined within the boundaries of this report vis-a-vis the confluence of family and domestic violence and animal/pet maltreatment. The link between animal/pet abuse and violence against humans is recognised and empirically documented worldwide. An increasing awareness of the connection, coupled with a subsequent increase in both quantitative and qualitative empirical evidence has facilitated an increase in both animal abuse reporting and the ability to shelter the injured or at risk animals/pets. This paper aims to offer the reader an insight into the current worldwide literature relating to the link between family and domestic violence and animal/pet abuse alongside the increasing and urgent need to establish a safe haven, a safe shelter, for pets who along with their surviving human companions need accommodation when escaping from their abusive partner.

Arkow (1999) advocates service providers for women and their children escaping domestic violence require an awareness of *the many* dynamics of abuse, keeping in line with the growing number of studies revealing the significant critical link between animal abuses within the broader context of family abuse. Jorgensen & Maloney (1999) state that the effects of domestic violence are amplified when animals are being abused (p.143).

Internationally, domestic violence and animal welfare professionals have collaborated in developing programs to shelter pets for women who are abused. Some programs are informal, more ad hoc, addressing needs on a case by case basis. Other programs are more formalised, having written policies and procedures with an independent budget and evaluation procedures. However, as Ascione (2000) demonstrates in his seminal paper, Safe Havens for Pets, there “ has not been a method for distilling and disseminating the collective wisdom and experience of programs sheltering pets for women who are battered ”(p.2). Issues of safety, confidentiality, pet ownership, locating pet sheltering, financial, veterinary, pet transportation, women’s post refuge housing, publicity, staff training, animal abuse and ethical considerations are part of the challenge in developing a companion pet safe housing program.

Overseas developments and research recognises the importance of a coordinated response. Women and children who are subjected to domestic violence are often inhibited in their decision-making by the threat of safety to their family pet. Most West Australian refuges are not designed to house animals belonging to their residents: with women themselves having to find individual solutions to their pets housing. Australia wide the recognition of the link between animal abuse and domestic violence is only now starting to emerge. Canada, the United States and Great Britain (to mention a few) have established assistance programs facilitating women and children to secure safe accommodation away from the perpetrator, and with the reassurance that their companion pet is also safe from the tyranny of its abuser. The author acknowledges that we as

women, children and companion pet advocates have no estimate of the number of women who are abused who share this concern but never show up at a women's refuge or advocacy centre.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The reader will be presented with evidence gathered by the writer in several sub-sections, primarily to accommodate for the vast knowledge that abounds regarding the topic at hand.

Section 3 will encompass an International and Australian literature review relating to the connection between pet/animal abuse and domestic and family violence, providing a background to the questionnaires rationale.

Section 4 will offer the reader the process and the results of a questionnaire inquiring to companion pet abuse amongst women and children seeking accommodation and or assistance from women's refuges within Western Australia.

Section 5 will detail recommendations for developing and operating a companion pet shelter. A summary of the paper concludes this report.

## **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **3.1 FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:**

In general, family and domestic violence is defined as behaviour that results in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage, forced social isolation, economic deprivation, or behaviour that causes the victim to live in fear (cited in DVPU, 2001). Domestic violence is an abuse of power perpetrated both in relationships and after separation. It occurs when one partner attempts physically or psychologically to dominate and control the other, and takes on a number of forms, with the most commonly acknowledged being physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional and social abuse and economic deprivation.

ABS data shows 23% of women who have ever been married or in a defacto relationship have experienced violence by a partner at some time during the relationship (ABS, 1996). In 1994 in Western Australia, females were victims in 91.4% of DV cases while males were 8.6% of the DV cases. Young women aged between 18 and 24 years are at more risk of DV than women from any other age group and indigenous Aboriginal Australians are approximately 45 times more likely to be a victim of DV than non-indigenous people (DVPU, 2001).

New research on perpetrators suggests there are several typologies of abusers. The 'power and control' perpetrator, the most common, is the batterer who uses violence against his (or her) partner, children or pets, in order to get the victim to do what he (or she) wants without regard for her rights. The second most common typology is the mentally ill abuser, who may have distorted power and

control issues, however; the mental illness interacts with the aggressive behaviour. There may be coexisting paranoid and schizophrenic disorders, affective disorders, borderline personality traits, and those with substance abuse disorders may have a coexisting abuse disorder. A third typology is the antisocial personality disordered abuser where the perpetrator may commit other criminal acts including violence against other people (Walker, 2000). Therefore understanding the motivation of the abuser is quite complex.

### 3.2 FAMILY/ DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND COMPANION PET ABUSE

Kellert and Felthous (1985), eloquently state “ Perhaps the greatest distortion of the human / animal relationship is a deliberate act of cruelty toward animals. While the perception of animal cruelty is somewhat dependant on subjective judgement, it will be defined here as the wilful infliction of harm, injury, and intended pain on a nonhuman animal ” (p.1114). Ascione (1999) defines cruel treatment or abuse of animals as socially unacceptable behaviour that intentionally causes unnecessary pain, suffering, or distress to and/or death of an animal, (p.51).

Animal abuse is often a tool used by perpetrators of domestic/family violence to emotionally control or coerce their victims. Animal abuse exposes the deliberateness of battering rather than the loss of control. The threats, injuring or killing of animals may indicate the potential for increased violence or lethality within the household. Fawcett, Gullone & Johnson (2002), state animals may be physically and/or sexually abused, may be seriously neglected and may be psychologically abused. One must *not* over look the parallels between the forms of abuse to animals and to the forms of domestic / family violence. The link between both animal / pet violence and interpersonal violence (encompassing domestic violence, child abuse and other violent crimes) is evident in their shared characteristics - both victims are living creatures, both have a capacity for experiencing pain and distress, both can display physical signs of their pain and distress and both may die as a result of inflicted injuries.

Dutton (1992) writes of the important meaning to the abusive history often lying in the violence directed towards the pet(s). The perpetrator may very carefully select particular objects to destroy that have significant value to the woman, indicating the behaviour is intentional and not random. He writes further explaining that the torture or destruction of a loved pet may be an even more powerful abuse than the abuse inflicted towards a human being. The adult female victims' attempts to protect her pet(s) are sometimes met with an increased violence towards her. Dutton (1992, p.27) tells the anecdotal narrative of a woman who was sexually and physically abused over an extended period of time who shot her perpetrator at the time he was attempting to steal her exotic and prized pet bird. This act of psychological abuse by the perpetrator, aimed at his victim and acted out through the abuse of her pet, went absolutely beyond her point of tolerability.

Numerous researchers and authors have categorised animal abuse, to mention but a few: Adams, (1994); Ascione (2000); Barnard, (1999); Flynn, (2000); HSUS (2002); Johnson, (2004); Jorgensen & Maloney, (1999); Lacroix, (1999); Munro,

(1999); Quinlisk, (1999); and Rowan, (1999). Succinctly, direct animal abuse may include, but is not exclusive to:

- Kicking, suffocating, scalding or burning the pet
- Throwing the pet across the room or into objects
- Shooting the animal
- Shooting the animal in front of the human victims
- Breaking the animal's legs, neck, or wings
- Hanging the family pet
- Cutting the pet's ears, burning the pet's tail
- Tying weights to the pet and/or drowning
- Beating, torturing or mutilating the pet
- Animal fighting

Indirect animal abuse may be less obvious as there is no bodily contact. However, this behaviour still has the capability of controlling and intimidating *all* victims involved, with profound impact upon all. Such behaviours may include:

- Abandonment of the family pet
- Neglecting to feed and water the pet/farm animals
- Threatening to take the family pet away if the victim does not comply
- Taking pets to be euthanized to retaliate against the human victim
- Threatening to kill/cook the pet
- Mysterious disappearances of the pet
- Intentionally overfeeding the pet
- Making a severely asthmatic victim live in a house with allergy creating pet(s).

The Western Australian Animal Welfare Act (2002) clearly defines cruelty to animals (see appendix 1, page 27). However, as Johnson (2004) asserts, it is still a relatively new concept in Australia that violence towards pet animals should be considered when addressing family violence. There is very strong empirical and anecdotal evidence in the USA, Canada, the UK and Australia that animal cruelty co-exists with family violence, as testified by Adams (1994); Anonymous, (1999); Ascione, (1998); Ascione, (1999); Boat, (1999); Johnson (2004); Jorgensen & Maloney, (1999); Lacroix, (1999); Munro, (1999); Quinlisk, (1999). One needs to be mindful that there is not more animal abuse occurring today; rather, there is an increasing public awareness and concern for animals.

### 3.3 EMPIRICAL AND ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE:

#### 3.3.1 THE IMPACT OF THE ABUSIVE FAMILY ON CHILDREN:

Ascione (1993) reviewed existing research on childhood cruelty to animals in relation to various forms of family and community violence. Case examples from early psychoanalytic literature were reviewed in conjunction with retrospective research from forensic psychiatry and sociology linking childhood histories of animal abuse with contemporary patterns of criminal violence. Ascione (1993, p.2) notes the association of the victimization of children and youth and the victimization of nonhuman animals can take many forms. Young abused people may act out by abusing animals; other young people are exposed to animal abuse perpetrated by parents, siblings or other parental figures; young

people may witness animals abused by peers; and adults may use animals as a weapon to abuse family members.

To date the available information on the effects of exposure to domestic violence on children's relations with pets and other animals is limited, however the evidence continues to gather that when animals are abused, people are abused and vice versa (cited in Boat, 1999). Much of the information we have about the relation between the maltreatment of animals and family / domestic violence is derivable from anecdotal reports. Slavkin (2001) confers that the comorbidity of cruelty to animals and others, the occurrence of enuresis, and fire setting among juveniles is verified in a number of studies. Slavkins' extensive US study of over 800 firesetters from the ages of three to 18 concluded that those juveniles identified as cruel to animals were more likely than those who were not cruel to animals to engage in recidivistic firesetting. Behaviours such as fire-setting, enuresis and animal abuse may be early indicators of later serious criminal activity in adulthood (Johnson, 2004). The author proposes here that cruelty to animals is most likely an externalising behaviour that correlates highly with delinquency and with exposure to DV, as a learned behaviour, both discussed further in this paper.

Herera and McCloskey's (2001) research identified family violence, especially child abuse, as a major risk factor for delinquency and violent crime. They traced gender differences in response to different forms of abuse in the family of origin, with the criminal trajectories compounded with the higher co-occurring risk factors found in families with family violence. Escalated forms of abuse are the key to predicting violent behaviour in girls, while boys with histories of abuse may also engage in domestic violent offending yet their violence is not limited to the family but extends to the community. Kellert and Felthous (1985) discuss the dominant factor in the rising concern for animal cruelty being the presumption that abusive treatment of animals would tend to brutalise the human perpetrator and increase the likelihood of similar behaviour to human beings (p. 1114).

Abused children may exhibit numerous and wide ranging characteristics such as low self esteem, unresponsiveness, negativism, depression, fear, apathy, physical aggression and self destructive behaviour. They may also demonstrate deficits in a number and variety of ego controls, such as reality testing, body image, impulse control and overall ego competency (George, 1999). Remembering that a part of building ones self esteem, learning discipline and responsibility are paramount. Abused children may display an absence of the defences that enable the non-abused child to cope with stress and conflict. An abnormal preoccupation with external danger is possibly accountable due to the child's sense of vulnerability, his sense of being unable to control his life and a sense of helplessness skew the young person's perception of self and of the experience, which may or may not be an accurate perception. Fantuzzo et al. (1991) studied over a hundred three to six year old US children who were at the time either residing with their mothers in a shelter for battered women or at home and exposed to verbal violence. Results were consistent with prior research that found children exposed to interparental violence displayed significant externalising and internalising behaviour problems, and a low level of social functioning. Other studies by Main & George (1985) and Hinchley and Gavalek



(1982), cited in Fantuzzo et al (1991) have found that preschool children exposed to parental violence display limited empathy and respond maladaptively to the distress of others, suggesting a disruption of the development of empathic and pro-social competencies

Abusing an animal may be an early symptom of conduct disorder in children. Physical cruelty to animals is one of 15 separate diagnostic symptoms listed under the Conduct Disorder (CD) classification in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1994). CD represents a pattern of antisocial behaviour prior to the age of 15, and is a prerequisite for the adult personality disorder antisocial personality disorder. The inclusion of “cruelty to animals” among the symptoms of CD has been hailed as one of the watershed events for research into the area of companion pet abuse and domestic/family violence (Ascione, Weber & Wood, 1997b).

Here in Western Australia, on December 1, 2004, the proclamation of the Acts Amendment (Domestic Violence) Bill extended the grounds for obtaining a Violence Restraining Order in family and domestic violence situations. An ‘act of family and domestic violence’ now includes damage to property, including the injury or death of a pet.

One cannot over look the fact that animals play a central role in the lives of children, both in reality and in fantasy. They are central to their dreams, their fantasies, their play, and their daily lives (Lockwood, nd). The way that we treat and look after our animals is mirrored in the way that we treat our fellow humans. Childhood animal cruelty may be a sign of a family environment that is violent or abusive, yet few studies have actually examined this link. Currie (2005) suggests from her study that exposure to domestic violence *is* correlated with animal cruelty by children. She advocates for further research, larger samples with more detailed information. Kellert and Felthous (1985, p. 1115) assert “ until credible and repeated scientific documentation occurs, most societal decision-makers will regard cruelty as a relatively minor issue ”.

Children who are cruel to animals have learned disturbing lessons about power and control (DeViney, Dickert & Lockwood, 1983). It is widely recognised that children learn social roles by modelling what they see and hear (Bandura, 1977), and animal cruelty by children is strongly argued to be a learned behaviour. Children learn that aggression is a powerful and appropriate tool for interpersonal relations when their family of origin is aggressive. Some children may find aggression against animals providing them with an outlet to model adult behaviour that is more easily concealed or less likely to be punished than aggression against humans. Children who find a modelled activity self-satisfying will be more likely to repeat it and research has found that those children from violent homes have lower levels of empathy, and are therefore able to generate outlooks that justify their own use of violence (Jaffe, Wolfe & Wilson, 1999; Ascione, 1999; Currie, 2005). Children in violent homes may be able to relish in feelings of power and control over the animals they hurt, a self-satisfying tool in what is otherwise an uncontrollable situation. By exerting control over another, the frightened and demoralised child may be able to restore a sense of self-efficacy

### 3.3.2 THE NEED FOR COMPANION PET SAFE SHELTERS:

Regardless of the number of legs or age of the potential victim, the same behaviours put them at risk. Intervention needs to address the potential for neglect or danger resulting from the limitations of the person in charge and not to forfeit a sense of urgency just because of the category of the victim (be it animal, child, person with a disability, an elder). Loar (1999) demonstrates the physical, behavioural and emotional indicators of abuse tend to be the same for people and animals. By removing a victim from the perpetrator, the target may rotate and thus increase the risk for other potential victims in the family or area. A 1998 study by the Ontario SPCA surveyed women leaving abusive relationships found 61% had had pets abused or killed by their partners (Lavoie, 2005)

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), (2002), has launched its *First Strike Campaign Kit* on the links between animal abuse and human violence, which is available freely to all countries and nationalities to those interested. The HSUS surveyed pet owning households with substantiated child abuse and neglect, finding that animals were abused in 88% of the homes (cited in the American Humane fact sheets). Ascione & Weber (1995) reported their findings after interviewing 38 women who sought refuge accommodation after family abuse. Seventy-one percent reported their partner had either threatened to harm or kill, or had actually killed one or more of their pets. Fifty eight percent of these women had children and 32% of these women reported one or more of their children had hurt or killed pet animals.

Flynn (2000) found similar findings in his 1998 study of a South Carolina shelter for battered women. His study of 43 women who had entered a domestic violence refuge with pet ownership, found 46% reported threats to or harm of their pets. Flynn found women whose pets were abused indicated stronger emotional attachment to their pets than women who did not report pet abuse. Forty percent of these women were worried about their pets' safety while they were at the refuge. Eight women reported they had delayed seeking shelter due to their concerns for their pet's safety. Women who reported their pets were harmed or threatened were more likely to report that their children had been abused as well, supporting the notion that different forms of violence often coexist in families. Arkow (1996) postulates the presence of pet abuse may signify child abuse, just as the presence of domestic violence may also be a marker of animal maltreatment.

In July 2001, Johnson surveyed women who were currently staying in women refuges in Victoria, Australia. Twenty-eight women were interviewed, with 44% claiming their partner had killed or hurt their pets; 66% confirmed there had been threats and 48% expressed concern for their companion pet's safety was a major factor in their delay in seeking refuge. These results" mirrored Canadian findings almost exactly " (Johnson, 2004; p.5), and collaborate confirmations regarding the significant link between family violence and animal abuse. Women's refuges commonly find that women are reluctant to leave violent relationships, as they are not permitted to take pets to the refuge, but simultaneously fear for their pets' safety if they are left behind. Family pets provide positive relationships for women and children by helping to improve their

physical and emotional well-being. Pets assist humans in dealing with stress and adjusting to changes within their lives (Fawcett, Gullone & Johnson, 2002).

In 2000, Frank Ascione published a book called “Safe Havens for Pets” (SHP) which sets out guidelines and protocols for the establishment of pet shelters for women escaping DV. A growing number of organisations concerned with the safety of women and their children, and their companion pets, coupled with their desire to offer safe accommodation to animals prompted this leading authority to access existing US safe shelters for pets and develop a SHP programme. At the time of writing his paper, Ascione states just over 50% of respondents operated their SHP with policies, procedures and forms (p.16). Over 88% of these had either enlisted the assistance of the legal profession or solicited their advice on developing these forms.

### 3.3.3 EXISTING SAFE PET PROGRAMS:

Ascione (2004) demonstrates the implications for domestic violence programs, especially those for women concerning companion pet abuse, and notes several factors advocates and policy makers need to be aware of. Issues such as violence to pets being a possible indicator of human abuse escalation; crisis line and victim advocate training in the links between pet abuse and human abuse; subsequent safety planning involving all living creatures and children’s exposure to pet abuse as psychological abuse all must be re-evaluated for the long term good of the programs participants. Women’s grief over issues of loss and abandonment; sexual assault of women involving animals and the dissemination of information regarding the women’s decision about staying or leaving must also be reconsidered when a safe pet program is established. Children’s welfare and services, Ascione (2004) notes, also have several implications concerning companion pet abuse – some of these involving the intervention for childhood animal abuse; models of abuse or neglectful animal caretaking; separation/loss and grief issues; animal phobias and sexualised behaviour with animals. Animal Welfare organizations need to consider the boarding of animals; confidentiality; safety; economics; visitation policies; the screening of adopters and fosterers; rural concerns and veterinary training in conjunction with reporting issues (Ascione, 2004). As to how these important and critical considerations integrate, it appears from reviewing existing safe shelters for pets to be extremely varying and diverse.

The Rancho Coastal Humane Society in San Diego created one of the first animal safe house programmes in the United States, under the auspices of the First Strike Campaign. They report between 80 and 90 per cent of women who have participated in their safe house programme claim that their animals’ had been abused (cited in First Strike, 2004). Many states in the USA now provide emergency shelter for companion pets belonging to a woman or family in crisis as the result of DV. The New Zealand First Strike working group meetings began in late 2002, advocating on behalf of at risk companion pets and implementing police training about animal abuse, social work education around animal abuse, the development of a research project linking violence between people and animals, and the dissemination of information about companion pet abuse to primary and secondary school students. After Scotland’s 1997 launch of the First

Strike Campaign, an agreement was reached between the Scottish Women's Aid and Pet Fostering Service Scotland (PFSS), whereby PFSS would foster pets belonging to women entering a refuge in 2003

In 1997, Kimball Lewis established the *Domestic Violence Assistance Program* in Colorado, USA, after witnessing, as a veterinarian, an increasingly obvious pattern of animal violence and crimes against people becoming more and more entwined (cited in Johnson, 2004). Immediate emergency shelter for animals belonging to a woman or family in crisis (because of family violence) was implemented.

The Domestic Violence Enhanced Response Team (DVERT) is an initiative of 39 different community agencies within the Colorado Springs (US) area providing a multidisciplinary collaborative approach to different forms of violence. Family and domestic violence is addressed by enhancing the safety of high-risk-for-lethality victims, including children and animals; increasing accountability for DV offenders; providing specialised training and facilitating local community policing initiatives (Walker et al, nd). The Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region joined the DVERT collaboration in 1996, and here an officer acts as a consultant for animal abuse cases. An animal welfare officer worked for 20 hours per week until recently where reports of animal abuse were investigated, reviewed all referrals for indicators of animal abuse and neglect, created safety plans for victims with pets, assisted with pet placements when necessary and coordinated emergency transportation, supplies and housing of companion pets.

The *Pet's Project* was established in Cheltenham, England, by the domestic violence crisis unit offering safety and shelter to animals belonging to women who contacted the unit. Volunteer foster families were engaged for the animals while the women were in shelters.

**The Safe beds for Pets NSW Program**, 2004, an agreement between the St George Hospital and the RSPCA NSW highlights a commitment to both human and animal welfare. Women and children when referred to the St George Domestic Violence Counselling Service are supported in leaving DV situations by providing a secure and affordable boarding service for their pet(s). The *Safe Beds for Pets* program in NSW states 'victim safety is at the core of this initiative' (Davidson, 2004). This programme uses the expertise of specialist agencies in both DV and animal welfare to enable women and their pets to be safe. When animal abuse is disclosed to the woman's counsellor, a report must be made to the RSPCA NSW. This is prepared in consultation with the woman and her children without breaching confidentiality, with a plan and goal for the safety of all. They have found the service has also helped women who are already in refuges and women referred from Aboriginal Health Services. RSPCA NSW undertakes the assessment of suitability of the animal(s) for boarding, and where appropriate the boarding is offered in accordance with the terms set out in the boarding agreement drawn up for the *Safe Beds for Pets Program*. RSPCA NSW discusses with the woman client any further details on their pet's requirements.

In seven months from implementation of the program, September 2004, to March 2005 six women attending the service have used the *Safe Beds for Pets* programme. Outcomes reveal that women who have left pets at home have been able to collect them when threats have been made and thus circumvent the tactic of being lured back into an unsafe situation. Other women's choices to relocate or to go to a refuge have been made quicker and easier by the programme.

The Tasmanian Pet Protection Project, launched by Survivors (a Feminist service providing support to women who are or have been in an abusive relationship) aims to enable women experiencing DV to gain protection for a pet. This organization, again operated from a different *modus operandi*, has its referring agencies initially access the care for the pet, who then fax the referral to Survivors. An intake form is sent to the kennels or vet indicating that Survivors will pay the account and the referring agency will deal with all queries. The objectives include for the service to offer a prompt and practical response to pet safety, and to provide support for those in a violent relationship, with the goal of offering a co-ordinated community response to DV. The project, still in its early days plans to widen the scope of the services offered.

The innovative partnership between RSPCA Qld and dvconnect Domestic and Family Violence Service of Qld have combined to help human and animal victims of DV, with the programme *Pets in Crisis Domestic Violence Program*. Trained foster carers temporarily care for pets of women and children who are staying at a DV refuge. The RSPCA Qld provides immediate care and assessment of the pets offering vaccines and basic assistance. The foster carers care for the animal(s) for 28 days, or until the family leaves the refuge. The RSPCA Qld and dvconnect trains foster carers who can nominate which type of animal they would prefer care for and have access to 24-hour emergency support. All volunteer and client information remains confidential, with neither party having contact with the other. Pets are not fostered in homes within close proximity to the owners (both the woman escaping the DV and the perpetrating abuser) home, workplace or refuge.

Research available on existing safe shelters for pets indicates the collective wisdom of such has not been readily disseminated and distilled. Each separate program has gone about their implementation and procedure separately, with little shared experiences. Ascione (2000) notes most eloquently that " DV and animal welfare professionals familiar with these programs know that their establishment and operation are not simple matters of finding temporary, loving homes for pets in need " Safety, confidentiality, pet ownership, locating pet sheltering, financial, veterinary, pet transportation, women's post refuge housing, publicity, staff training, animal abuse and ethical issues challenge the establishment of a program offering safe shelter for companion pets.

### 3.3.4 ISSUES WITH EXISTING PET SHELTERS

Current available literature restricts the author to comment mostly upon the experiences noted by Ascione (2000) in his survey of existing US safe animal shelters. It is recommended that safe shelters for pets should operate with policies and procedures developed cooperatively by all collaborating agencies, and formalised in writing. To protect the interests of *all* parties Ascione recommends legal advisors review these.

Opinions on how to publicise the availability of safe pet shelters is divided, as some programs wanted to disseminate information about their program as widely as possible while others wanted to keep the program a low profile due to an inundation of requests, and concerns for safety. Publicity may heighten the possibility of perpetrators approaching the refuge to retrieve their pet and as a means to locate their partner and children. In reality, in the US most women probably learn of the safe pet shelter during a crisis call or with other direct contact with a DV agency. Outreach to women in the community who have not yet contacted a DV program may take the form(s) of: press releases; making personal contacts and providing flyers with doctors, hospitals, veterinarians', pet groomers, crisis centres, court houses, clinics; presentations to community groups and schools, and providing police with 'cards' describing the safe pet program.

The actual sheltering of the companion pets in the US study by Ascione (2000) were divided into four groups. The majority were housed at animal welfare facilities, followed by fosterer carers, veterinary clinics and private kennels. Placement with fosterers' in the US is preferred unless the pet need be sheltered only overnight, or if the pet were aggressive. Fosterers' are typically private citizens wanting to assist in the temporary housing of pets and are the "popular choice' (Ascione, 2000, p.20). Individual attention and the reduced likelihood of the pet contracting diseases from other animals favour the foster program. The screening of potential foster carers is extensive, which may involve an orientation meeting, a home visit, the checking of records for animal and child abuse, a criminal record check, an unannounced visit to the fosterers' home, the checking of references including those from the applicant's veterinarian, a personal assessment by the program manager and possibly requiring the potential fosterers' to volunteer at a animal welfare facility before placing animals with them.

The training of potential fosterers' in the US has mostly been undertaken by the collaborating animal welfare agency, informing the fosterers about DV, safety and confidentiality. It should be noted that during initial consultations with the RSPCA in Malaga, Perth, the writer was informed that they *would and could* train such volunteers. Volunteers assisting in the safe animal shelter program should be offered basic information on DV, on the difficulty a woman experiences in leaving her partner and how leaving may escalate the danger presented to the woman and children. The financial obligations of fosterers' again varied in Ascione's (2000) report, noting however the majority of programs expected of their fosterers' to contribute for some items, with the program manager granting assistance with reasonable requests from the fosterer for caring for the pet(s). It is anticipated for the program to be established by the Patricia Giles Centre to

offer fosterers' initial food requirements, any veterinary assistance, transportation costs, leads, collars and identification tags, and any reasonable unforeseen costs.

Fosterers' should not know the identity of the companion pet(s) owner, offering safety and confidentiality. A policy of no contact for the DV victim and fosterers ensures confidentiality. A temporary identification tag, not including the owner's identification needs to be issued to every companion pet on the program. This tag may instead identify the phone number of the refuge coordinating the program.

In terms of eligibility for accessing the safe shelter for pets program, the US data informs us that women in need of a safe place for their companion pet must contact a DV agency (or a related social service agency, such as crisis care) before trying to safely shelter their pet(s). Ascione notes that a private location in which to interview women seeking the program, such as the refuge itself, be designated. The Patricia Giles Centre anticipates this to be fulfilled at its centre either during intake procedures while the woman and her children enter the refuge or during contact with the family prior to leaving the abusive relationship and as a part of her safety planning during counselling. Ascione (2000) notes it is rare for a woman to be denied access to the existing US safe pet programs just because she is not currently residing at a DV refuge. One needs to be mindful that it is, and would be useful, to explore with the woman any alternative placements for her pet(s) other than at a safe shelter for pets program. The program may not be able to meet the needs of everyone, hence assistance may need to be prompted from family and friends, or if financially capable, using a private boarding kennel. Women whose lives have been impacted by domestic violence, considering their given stresses and concerns, may not have considered alternatives to a safe program for their pets, and may not have considered the restriction to visitation and/or where their pet may be more comfortable.

In terms of opening discussion about a woman's possible needs related to her pets and their safety, during a crisis call or when with a counsellor, advocates should routinely and consistently ask screening questions as to 'do you have pets', and if yes, 'are you concerned for their safety?' This could lead to discussion about possible needs for her pet(s) and whether this is an obstacle to leaving her abusive partner, if she should want to. During a crisis, some women may not think to express their concerns about their pets, or misjudge the significance on pet welfare.

The hours of operation of the safe shelter for pets is again divided in the United States, with the majority however offering their service 24 hours per day. Those services operating for a limited period during the day or night (possibly during business hours, or at times when animal welfare is not available) stated in Ascione's research (2000) that they either were available in an emergency, or that the refuge provides pet carriers for temporary housing of the pet(s) until more suitable accommodation can be arranged. By structuring the safe pet program incorporating specific animal welfare agency contacts that may be contacted after hours for accepting pets (either via emergency telephone

numbers or pager systems) the continuity of service is ensured and women, children and their pets' safety is facilitated.

The safe shelter for pets program needs to have established guidelines and protocols in reference to the transportation of the pets. The safety of all agencies involved needs to be ensured in the writing of these guidelines, alongside the considerations for liability issues related to the loss or injury of the pet(s) during transportation. Ascione (2000) found within most US programs women were not required to transport their pets. The Pat Giles Centre anticipates women will be required, if possible, to transport their pet to the refuge if they are leaving the abusive household and entering the refuge. DV advocates at the refuge will then transport the pet(s) to a veterinary centre for health checks, followed by women's refuge advocates transporting the pet(s) to its foster carer.

The attachment formed between many women and their pets suggests that there be some mechanism written into the policy and procedure documents for the women to have the opportunity to check in on their pet's wellbeing. Due to confidentiality and safety issues, it is recommended that the DV program advocates who are coordinating the pets' safe shelter program make the calls and informs both the pet owner and the foster carer of any concerns or changes to circumstances. Policies on how these periodic contacts should occur need to be formalised between all collaborating agencies (including the women's DV refuge, veterinarians', foster carers, the pet owner and others involved.) Ascione (2000) notes it is desirable for women and their children to have visitation with their pets in the safe shelter program because of their attachments. However, the logistical and safety issues, as well as the concerns for the pet welfare make such visitation problematic. Ascione (2000) is cautious in making any form of recommendation until further information regarding the benefits of pet visitation for both the pet and the owner, can be weighted against the potential dangers inherent during such a visitation. The Pat Giles Centre anticipates there will be no contact between pet owner and foster carer until formal handover. This will enable a more pragmatic and realistic program for advocates to manage.

However, there may be occasions when the pet owner does need to be contacted regarding the fostering of their pet, and these emergencies require consideration to the fact of whether or not the pet owner has previously, at intake, signed a release form for medical care while the pet is in the program. United States experience indicates a phone call from the fosterer to the DV agency is the preferred method of contacting the woman regarding medical emergencies involving their pets. One ought to note that it still may be appropriate, and respectful to ask the woman during the initial intake and enrolment of her pet(s) to the program whether she would like to be informed of medical emergencies involving her pet(s).

Ascione (2000) found in his US research on safe shelters' for pets most pets were housed for up to three months, but were flexible depending on the woman's needs. Some placed no limit on the length of pet sheltering, while others ensured fostering corresponded with their length of stay at the DV refuge. Some cited a limit of 14 days to one month. Ideally, the program should offer to shelter pets for at least as long as the woman resides at the DV refuge, and possibly



during residence in transitional housing. It appears to be possible for longer, and more stable temporary shelter for pets if they are accommodated by a foster carer rather than within the auspices of an animal welfare agency. Once again, at the time of intake and registration of the pet(s) to the program it is essential for clear statements regarding possible lengths of stays for the pet(s), which are agreed upon by all collaborating services and the pet owner, incorporating contingency plans for when limits are exceeded.

United States experience indicates a woman's failure to collect her pet(s) at the end of the agreed upon fostering/sheltering period occurs in a minority of cases (Ascione, 2000). Probable problems with unclaimed pets necessitates a written and signed (by all parties) document stating the programs policy, prior to the pet leaving its' owner and being fostered. Most US programs inform the women they may lose unclaimed pets. Experience in the US reinforces the notion that written agreements must be formalised to avoid confusion. It is useful to be mindful that some women's circumstances may alter dramatically after leaving the refuge, and a degree of flexibility in accommodating pets after the contract expires would be useful.

In terms of pet ownership issues, the recommendations put forward by Ascione (2000) after consultations with many existing safe pet shelters in the US, is for the program to discuss legal issues with legal advisers and to develop policies and procedures appropriate to their specific program. Of primary concern in these policies is the safety of women and children and their pets, yet being respectful to pet ownership issues. When a woman is the sole legal owner of the pet, her decision to enrol the pet(s) in the program, and to possibly relinquish the pet for adoption or euthanasia is clear. Yet proving ownership of a pet appears to be complicated and requiring legal clarification. In cases where the pet ownership is unclear, or when the perpetrator is the sole or joint owner of the pet(s), problems arise in respect to their safe shelter away from the perpetrator. It is evident that the program must have extremely clear and precise and legally correct documents to not only protect themselves as an agency, but also to protect the woman and her pet(s).

Confidentiality and safety issues for the pets and the women enrolled in the safe shelter for pets program needs be paramount. The possibility that the perpetrator might try to retrieve the pet(s) that his partner has enrolled in a safe shelter for pets program must not be negated and policies must incorporate this possibility. Various methods used by US programs include:

- Paperwork relating to the program is filed under a pseudonym
- Pets listed as 'already adopted' in program records and no information about the pets ever released to the public
- Pets not exercised in public areas (rural safe pet programs)
- Pets are registered/re-licensed in the name of the DV refuge or the animal welfare agency and information about these pets is only accessible to staff, with no public record associating the woman who enrolled them to the program
- Fosterers are to be located in a different community/suburb to the woman's place of residence to minimise accidental contacts with the perpetrator

- Confidentiality agreements signed between animal welfare agencies and the DV agency
- Pets are considered to be relinquished 'on paper' and are then placed with fosterers.
- Fosterers are told of the pets domestic violence history and the need for confidentiality is stressed
- Only one animal welfare refuge worker, and or DV women's refuge worker is designated to care for the pets and others do not have access to the information about the pets
- Addresses and phone numbers for the program pets are those of the DV agency, with no information released on these pets
- All paperwork (intake forms, signed liability and agreement forms for example) are filed in a secure location, with pets renamed (on paper) and ages altered
- Fosterers' are trained about the need for confidentiality and sign documents to this effect

Ascione (2000) found there had been no reported danger from perpetrators at animal shelters, veterinarians, or foster residences. In anticipation, a number of programs indicated procedures for dealing with threats or violence were in place.

Factors that have facilitated women's ability to reclaim their pets after the safe house for pets' program termination have included:

- Finding affordable and pet friendly housing
- Securing employment
- The woman's life has become less chaotic and more stable
- The woman is better able to care for herself and loved ones
- Increase in the pet's significance since leaving the perpetrator
- The need for pet companionship
- Knowing the pet would most likely be euthanized if she did not collect it
- Flexibility on time limits for pet sheltering
- Knowing that the pet has been well cared for in her absence
- Feeling safer and more competent

Ascione (2000) inquired about the number of women utilising a safe shelter for pets program, with estimates ranging from one to 22 women and her pets assisted each year. Most women requested assistance for one to two pets, with dogs, cats, goats, birds, livestock, rabbits, horses and some exotic animals cared for. Space, the location of the pet sheltering and the availability of veterinary medical services were reported to affect the number of pets accepted per client. Aggressive pets, or pets who were ill or elderly also were considered for some programs, however characteristic restrictions included:

- Aggressive pets never placed with foster carers
- Pets must have their appropriate vaccinations (which could be provided by the service when the pet is undergoing its intake veterinary consultation)
- A number of programs in the US have enlisted the aid of farmers to shelter livestock and large animals
- One program in the US has a policy of never confiscating, from a woman escaping DV, a pet that was illegal to own, in case this in turn drove her away from her decision to leave her perpetrator

Therefore, all policy statements must clearly state any restrictions on the number, types, and characteristics of pets accepted for fostering. Alternative agencies need to be provided to those women whose pet(s) have been declined.

#### **4. QUESTIONNAIRE**

##### **4.1 Introduction:**

Anecdotal reports of cruelty to companion pets in families where domestic or partner or family violence occurs are common, but to date there is little empirical data on this issue. The writer's experience of quantitative or qualitative research within Australia is particularly limited and there appears to be no published data relating to such cruelty in Western Australia, to date. The abuse of pets may be a method the abuser uses to control their partner, may be related to the abusers lethality, and may result in children in such families being exposed to multiple forms of violence that is recognised now as a significant risk for mental health problems. Employees at the Patricia Giles Centre working within the various services revolving around domestic violence regularly 'hear' anecdotal references to the abuse of animals: as would all other services available to women and their children escaping family violence. These narratives of abuse to animals are also documented in the literature on domestic violence. A small-scale descriptive (quasi-experimental) study of the prevalence of animal cruelty experiences was distributed amongst nine West Australian women's refuges. The questionnaire was offered to both residential clients and to those women accessing services provided by the centre. These services include counselling, outreach support and group work.

Anecdotally we are aware that animals have been abused by perpetrators to frighten their partners, as a threat of potential interpersonal attacks, as a form of retaliation or punishment, and abuse has been implicated in forced bestiality. That children are often witnesses to such cruel behaviour has unfortunately received little research. Externalized behaviour in children is frequently associated with those living in families experiencing violence and other forms of aggression. Ascione, Weber & Wood (1997b, p.4) assert:

“ Witnessing parent and pet abuse may compromise children's psychological adjustment, increase their propensity for interpersonal violence (via observational learning and/or identification with the aggressor), and make children's cruelty to animals more likely to emerge as a symptom of their distress ”.

##### **4.2 Objectives:**

The research undertaken in the questionnaire (see appendix 2, page 29, for a copy of the simple document women were invited to complete) had several objectives. Firstly, the prevalence of pet ownership was determined. Secondly, the prevalence of threatened and/or actual harm to pets by the woman's partner was sourced. Thirdly, had the abusers behaviour delayed or prevented the woman (and her children, and her pets) from seeking safe shelter away from the perpetrator; and finally does the woman have children and if so, have they witnessed and/or harmed their companion pets? One question asked would she

require help in finding temporary housing for her pet(s) if she were to go to a refuge or alternative safe place.

#### 4.3 Method:

As mentioned previously, surveys were mailed to nine metropolitan Perth refuges and one country refuge. A cover note to refuge staff explained the philosophy and rationale for such research (appendix 3, page 31). Phone calls were made to each agency one month after mailing date to remind staff to complete and return the questionnaires within the next two weeks.

#### 4.4 Sample:

Forty-one (41) completed questionnaires were returned, with 78% responding to currently having a pet (N=32). Those women completing the questionnaire were divided into two sub groups: residential and non-residential. Fifty three percent of pet owners, (N=17), were at the time of completing the questionnaire residents at a West Australian women's refuge, escaping domestic and family violence.

- 47% had left their pet(s) with friends or family (N=8)
- 29% had left their pet(s) at home (presumably with the abuser) (N=5)
- 6% had given their pet(s) away (N=1)
- 6% wrote the ranger had taken the pet(s) away (N=1)
- 12% did not respond to this question (N=2)

Of the non-residential respondents, 47% of the women completing the questionnaire who were pet owners (N=15) had their pet(s) with them or with relatives. All but one (1) reported the pet was currently with the abuser, and one could assume this woman despite not being housed in a refuge, was in fact away from the family home.

#### 4.5 Procedure:

Ten questionnaires (consisting of two pages) were mailed to eight (8) refuges within the Perth metropolitan area, and one country refuge (see appendix 4, page 32). Refuge staff were asked to distribute these to their residents at the shelter, and to those women who were accessing services affiliated with the refuge (for example, counselling, outreach etc.). Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured firstly by respondents not requiring to identify their name on the paper work, and secondly by there being no identifying refuge name where the women was sheltering on the reply paid return envelope. Women were able to agree or refuse participation, which would not affect their shelter services. The questionnaire used is a version of the Battered Partner Shelter Survey [BPSS - Pet Maltreatment Assessment], (Ascione & Weber, 1995). Questions were kept to a minimum, acknowledging the stress associated with entering a women's refuge and the content material in the questionnaire.

The BPSS included the following questions:

- Do you have a pet(s), and if yes, what kinds and how many?
- Have you had a pet animal(s) in the last 12 months?
- Has your partner ever threatened to hurt one of your pets?
- Has your partner ever hurt or killed one of your pets?

- How frequently did the abuse to your pet occur?
- Responding with a 'yes' or 'no' to specific pet mistreatment
- Has fear that your partner will harm your pet(s) ever caused you to delay leaving to a safe place away from the partner?
- Has fear that your partner will harm your pet(s) ever caused you to refuse to make official police charges against him?
- Would you require help in finding temporary housing and care for your pet(s) if you were to go to a safe place away from the perpetrator?
- Do you have child(ren)?
- Have any of your child(ren) ever hurt or killed one of your pet(s)?
- Have any of your child(ren) witnessed the threats or harm to one of your pet(s)?

The 41 completed questionnaires were coded and analysed by the author. Refuge staff noted on each completed questionnaire if the respondent was a resident of their refuge, or a non-residential client accessing services.

#### 4.6 Results:

Seventy eight percent of the women reported current pet ownership (N=32) with ten percent (N=4) reporting to pet ownership in the last 12 months. Therefore, 88% of the 41 respondents were considered pet owners. Of these women, 78% owned between 1 – 3 pets. The extreme was where one woman reported to have 18 companion pets. Dogs and cats were the most common (93%), with fish, birds, crazy crabs and a rabbit mentioned.

Nearly three quarters (72%) of the respondents owning pets stated their partner had threatened to hurt their pets (N=23): and 66% reported the perpetrator had hurt or killed one of their pets (N=21). Some women respondents wrote on the questionnaire how this abuse occurred: for example “beat the dog and leave (sic) it outside”; “throw the cat”; “drowned our dog”; “yells and screams at the dog”; “punch and kick the dog”, and “letting the kids kick pets around”.

The respondents reported pet maltreatment in the following ways:

Hitting, kicking, striking, punching or throwing	72% (N=23)
Leaving the pet(s) in extreme heat or cold	50% (N=16)
Refusing the pet(s) veterinary care	44% (N=14)
Sexual abuse of the pet(s)	6% (N=2)
Giving pet(s) illegal drugs/alcohol	28% (N=9)

These results indicate the comorbidity of abuse styles inflicted upon companion pets.

Thirty eight percent of the respondents stated their pet required veterinary treatment (N=12). One woman wrote that her pet needed veterinary treatment “but died in the back yard”.

When asked to respond to the question “If your partner/the abuser mistreated your pet, how often did this happen?” Twelve respondents did not answer (37%). Nineteen percent (N=6) reported “regularly” or “often” or “lots”. Thirteen percent (N=4) stated the perpetrator abused their companion pet “when in a bad mood” Nine percent reported “daily” abuse occurred (N=3). Seven percent (N=2) were unsure as to the frequency. A further 12% (N=one for each separate response)

wrote “every other day”; or “when he wanted to control me”; or “when he was drunk”; or “when I left him”. One other respondent commented that her cat “was terrified of my partner and would not go near him”.

Seventy eight percent of the women who completed the questionnaire reported they have children (N=25). Children in their care ranged from three months to adult children, with the majority of women having more than one child in her care. The respondents cared for 24 girls and 30 boys in total. One respondent wrote, “My pet is my child”. Forty-seven percent (N=15) reported the perpetrator had threatened, or harmed the pet(s) in front of the children. One woman wrote “ he drowned the dog in front of the children ” Four respondents did not answer this question. Of those with children who have witnessed companion pet abuse 31% of the respondents stated that the child had threatened, injured or killed their pet (N=10). One of these was reported to be a four-year-old boy who killed a pet; another respondent wrote “my son”. Forty seven percent of the respondents did not answer this question (N=15). Twenty five percent of respondents with pets claimed other household members have hurt or killed one of their pets (N=8).

Sixty percent (N=19) of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated that fear of the abuser harming their pet(s) had caused delay in going to a women’s refuge or safe place. Three women did not respond to this question, two women commented they made sure their pets were safe prior to leaving the perpetrator, and one respondent wrote “constantly” alongside this question. Another respondent, whose dog was being cared for by family members wrote, “ he won’t give him back at the moment she is very lost for being at the place she is at now maltreated (sic) help me ”

Forty seven percent (N=15) reported they delayed calling the police for help, fearful that the perpetrator may harm their pets; while the same percentage (47) indicated fear of the abuser harming their pet(s) had caused them to refuse to make an official police charge against the perpetrator.

Seventy-five percent (N=24) of women reported they would require assistance in finding temporary housing and care for their pet(s) if they were to go to a women’s refuge or safe place. One respondent wrote:” I want him with me”.

#### 4.7 Discussion:

A few caveats need to be stated prior to exploring the results of this study. One must be mindful that only nine domestic violence refuges for women and their children in Western Australia were contacted to invite their residential and non-residential clients to complete the questionnaire. One ought to exercise caution in generalizing the results to all West Australian refuges, especially those within the rural sector of our state. However, extrapolation of this study’s findings may assist estimating the extent of the problem statewide. This study did not include comparison samples of women and children who have pets and live in a non domestic/family violent household. It is unknown as to how many of the refuges involved in this study believe that domestic violence and pet abuse coexist, nor how many refuges specifically assess this issue during their intake interview.

Possibly, the uncertainty about how to deal with animal welfare issues that may arise, and/or the limited time refuge staff have for intake processes may account for the apparent discrepancy between the empirical and anecdotal awareness of the link between companion pet abuse and domestic violence, and the slow uptake of DV refuge advocates to explore this with their clients.

There is evidence that the results obtained in this local study are not unique to this particular population of women and children. Ascione (1998), one of the leading authorities on the connection between domestic violence and animal maltreatment, found 71% of the women surveyed in a Utah (US) shelter for battered women indicated their abusive partner had either harmed or killed one or more of their pets. This current study found 72% of West Australian women experienced companion pet abuse by the perpetrator threatening to hurt their pet(s) and 66% of the respondents reporting pet(s) were hurt or killed. Similar results were found in the study conducted by Ascione, Weber & Wood (1997a) in Utah (US) where 54% of women at the domestic violence shelter said that their abusive partner had actually hurt or killed a companion pet. Flynn's (2000) study of a South Carolina women's shelter for domestic violence found 46.5% of the women reported their male abuser had threatened to harm and/or actually harmed their pets. Johnson's (2004) study of women living in refuges in Victoria, Australia ('The Monash Study') found 44% of the abusive partners had killed or hurt their companion pets.

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) First Strike Campaign's 2002 Report of Animal Cruelty found companion animals were the most common victims of animal cruelty in 2002, with numbers similar to those reported in 2000 and 2001. Approximately 12% of the intentional animal cruelty cases also involved some forms of family violence, including domestic violence, child abuse, spouse/child witnessing animal cruelty, or elder abuse (p.6). Together, this evidence suggests the mistreatment of companion pets can be an indicator of many other forms of family violence, and ongoing abuse and neglect (Fawcett, Gullone & Johnson, 2002, p.5). This evidence demonstrates that abused women are frequently victimised through the abuse of their companion pets or threats of such abuse.

The current study in Western Australia found 47% of women respondents reported the perpetrator threatened, or harmed the pet(s) in front of the children; and 31% of those child witnesses have threatened or hurt their pet(s). One of these was reported to be a four-year-old boy. Ascione (1998) found 32% of women with children who had escaped an abusive partner (who simultaneously perpetrated companion pet abuse) reported their children had hurt or killed one or more family pet. Forty four percent of women reported to the Ontario SPCA their partner abused or killed one or more of their pets in front of the children (Ascione, 2004). Sixty one percent of children at domestic violence shelters across the United States were found to have witnessed pet abuse (Ascione, Weber & Wood, 1997a), with the researchers concluding "children of shelter women were more likely to engage in more severe pet maltreatment" (p.165). Ascione (2004) lists developmentally related motivations for animal abuse as curiosity/exploration; peer reinforcement; modification of mood; fear/coercion;

forced participation; identification with aggressor; posttraumatic play; implement of self injury; rehearsal for human victim and instrument of emotional abuse.

Flynn (2000) found women whose pets had experienced cruelty were more likely to report that their children had suffered abuse as compared to women not in violent relationships. Flynn (2000) further comments “ women whose pets were abused indicated stronger emotional attachment to their pets than women who did not report pet abuse ” (p.169). This concurs with the accepted notion of perpetrators using tactics such as companion pet abuse to control and coerce women, and to prevent them from leaving a violent relationship.

Sixty percent of the women responding to the West Australian study indicated fear of the abuser harming their pet(s) delayed the process of entering a women's refuge or safe place. Flynn (2000) found a 40% positive response to the question regarding delaying leaving home due to fear or concerns for their pet's safety. Ascione (2000) found nearly one in four shelter respondents said that concern for their pets welfare had prevented them from seeking safe shelter sooner. The Ontario SPCA 2000 Women's Shelter Survey found 43% delayed going to a women's shelter, as they feared the consequences for their pet. Pets hold a special significance for victims of domestic violence, and being separated from, or losing one's pet may escalate the trauma (Flynn, 2000). Current literature confirms the notion domestic violence advocates regularly anecdotally 'hear', of the companion pet being used to control her.

By threatening to harm the pet(s), abusers may be able to intimidate victims into dropping criminal charges and/or returning home. The current study found 47% of respondents did not make police charges against their violent partner due to fear of the pet(s) being harmed. Forty-seven percent also reported they delayed calling the police, as they were fearful for their pets' safety. Flynn (2000), Johnson (2004), Ascione (1998), Ascione, Weber & Wood (1997), amongst others, reported similar findings. This is akin to Walker's (1989) assertion that some batterers hold women's pets' hostage and one may conclude the woman sometimes has no choice other than to abandon her pet (as refuges generally do not accept pets particularly in Western Australia), as alternative care may be difficult to arrange.

Seventy five percent of respondents in the Western Australian study on companion pets and domestic violence stated they would require assistance in finding temporary housing and care for their pets if they were to go to a women's refuge, or safe place. Hence, abandonment is understandable. Twenty five percent of women with pets in the current study reported their pets were either given away (N=1), the ranger took the pet (N=1), and six women stated the pet was at home, presumed to be with the abuser. This is another form of trauma with which women must manage. The abuse of pets may prompt some women to leave their violent partner, yet it is increasingly becoming evident through empirical research that women's concern for their pets' welfare actually delays the woman from leaving the perpetrating partner.



## **Section 5: Recommendations for developing and operating a companion pet shelter**

As per The Humane Society of the United States, "Starting a SAFE HAVENS for ANIMALS PROGRAM" (2004) the need *has* been determined in the Perth, Western Australian context. This has been achieved via the understanding of international literature relating to domestic violence and companion pet abuse, and via the quasi-experimental study involving women associated with DV refuges within Western Australia, as both documented in section 3 and 4 respectively. The Patricia Giles Centre Inc is committed to such a project, especially considering the agencies strategic plan and long-term goals of ensuring women and children have the right and access to safe accommodations away from their perpetrator.

The HSUS (2004) recommends the next step involves collaborating with other agencies that deal with violence within the community. These may include animal care and control agencies (such as the RSPCA who have offered their support), domestic violence refuges (with positive feedback from several such agencies already ascertained), state and local law enforcement agencies, family crisis centres, social service agencies, veterinary clinics, schools and associations, and community programs or intervention groups. The HSUS proposes the combining of resources and expertise with other organisations will enhance the programs effectiveness.

In respect to the above-mentioned dialogue regarding collaboration, relevant agencies will be forwarded a copy of this paper, and the process of holding meetings and gathering and disseminating information will take place. The date for this initial group is confirmed for Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2006. Those relevant agencies will be contacted shortly and invited to attend. This process is anticipated to be lengthy, but once again, vital for the success of the program. After reviewing the experiences of existing safe pet shelters, this stage is paramount for the proposed program's success and time delays are to be expected and incurred.

Policies and standard operating procedures need to be developed once these partnerships have been forged. Parameters need to be defined in terms of the geographic area the program will serve. This will be determined by the interest and uptake of community agencies to come on board with the proposal. With the Patricia Giles Refuge Inc located within the northern suburbs of the Perth metropolitan area it is pertinent to note that this area intends to be serviced with a safe pets program; however, at this stage of developing such a program, it is yet unknown as to how broad and wide this will expand.

The drafting of service agreements and contracts is well under way, and solicitors affiliated with the Patricia Giles Centre will review these. The plethora of necessary documentation has somewhat overwhelmed the writer of this paper: however it is evidently clear that these 'forms' are essential and mandatory to ensure not only the safety and confidentiality of the pet owner, but also for the foster carer, the affiliated veterinarians', the coordinating refuge and its advocate

workers, and of course the pet at risk. These documents are not exclusive to, and include:

- An information brochure for potential foster carers
- A foster care agreement between the refuge and the foster carer
- An owner agreement between the pet owner and the refuge
- An owner information form
- An owner information brochure for the pet owner
- An animal intake form for the refuge
- A contract extension agreement for the refuge if fostering of the pet needs to be extended
- Veterinary intake and discharge forms
- An evaluation form for the pet owner to complete at time of collecting her pet
- Periodic contact between the pet owner and the pet foster carer agreement
- Release form for emergency medical care for the pet

To facilitate the readers understanding of the projected stages of development a flow chart has been devised. This is by no means the only approach to take, it just appears at this time to be the most relevant and time saving method. Hence, the writer underscores that there may be subtle changes or differences, but with the stated and implicit goal remaining unchanged. This is available in appendix 5, page 33.

## **Section 6: Summary**

The rationale to the need for a program which will offer to women and children who are escaping domestic violence the assurance that their pet(s) will be assured of safe accommodation has thoroughly been discussed in this paper. Worldwide empirical evidence, coupled with the insight to the needs of local Western Australian women via the questionnaire completed by forty-one women accessing refuge services underscores the link between domestic violence and companion pet abuse. Animal abuse can be used by the perpetrator as a tool to emotionally control and coerce their victim(s); hence, the deliberateness of interpersonal violence is exposed. Animal abuse *is* a criminal offence and should be treated as such. The implications for children exposed to pet abuse are wide ranging. Statistics inform us of the high correlation between animal abuse and human violence. Existing programs that offer safe shelter for companion pets vary greatly in their approach to service delivery; however, these programs continue to develop and continue to be implemented throughout the world. Domestic violence advocates are aware of pet abuse from the stories their clients tell them, from the heartbreak they share and the difficulties they experience in leaving their perpetrator due to fears of recrimination acted out on their pet(s). It is clear that the types of abuse human's experience – physical, sexual,

emotional, and neglectful – are frequently shared by our nonhuman companions and other animals

The questionnaire designed to determine the extent and impact of companion pet abuse in our own state, our own country, offered valuable insight to the complexities of domestic violence. The link between domestic violence and pet abuse is unmistakable and instantly recognisable when reading the results of the questionnaire. The urgent need for a program providing safe housing for pets is unequivocal when understanding the writings of women's responses. By establishing a safe shelter for pets program women's options are enhanced and the safety of women and children is improved. Children who are able to leave the perpetrator (with their mothers) are less exposed to violence and thus less at risk of mirroring abusive behaviours. With seventy five percent of the respondents stating they would require assistance in obtaining temporary housing and care of their pet(s) while escaping domestic violence, the need for such a program is ascertained yet again..

Collaborative arrangements between refuges, social service providers, veterinarians and volunteer foster carers is called for as victims of interpersonal violence includes both human and non-human animals. Understanding the interconnections of abuse gives legitimacy to all victims, human and animal. The goal of this research is to increase awareness of the connection between animal and human violence and to develop an effective prevention and intervention program. The Patricia Giles Centre is equipped and standing by to implement a program where companion pets can be sheltered from abuse by a trained volunteer foster carer while the human victim(s) seek their own safe shelter away from their perpetrator. By enabling pet's safe shelter, women and children will be more able to make the decision to leave their abuser and create a lifestyle for themselves far removed from domestic violence.

## **APPENDIX 1**

Animal Welfare Act 2002, of Western Australia.

*An act to provide for the welfare, safety and health of animals, to regulate the use of animals for scientific purposes, and for related purposes.*

Parliament of Western Australia enacts as follows:

### **Part 3 – Offences against animals**

#### **19. Cruelty to animals**

(1) A person must not be cruel to an animal.

Penalty: Minimum - \$2 000

Maximum - \$50 000 and imprisonment for 5 years

(2) Without limiting subsection (1) a person, whether or not the person is a person in charge of the animal, is cruel to an animal if the person:

- (a) Tortures, mutilates, maliciously beats or wounds, abuses, torments, or otherwise ill-treats, the animal;
- (b) Uses a prescribed inhumane device on the animal;
- Intentionally or recklessly poisons the animal;
- (d) Does any prescribed acts to, or in relation to, the animal; or
- (e) In any way causes the animal unnecessary harm.

(3) Without limiting subsection (1), a person in charge of an animal is cruel to an animal if the animal –

- (a) Is transported in a way that causes, or is likely to cause, it unnecessary harm;
- (b) Is confined, restrained or caught in a manner that-
  - (i) Is prescribed; or
  - (ii) Causes, or is likely to cause, it unnecessary harm
- (c) Is worked, driven, ridden or otherwise used-
  - (i) When it is not fit to be so used or has been over used; or
  - (ii) In a manner that causes, or is likely to cause, it unnecessary harm;
- (d) Is not provided with proper and sufficient food or water;
- (e) Is not provided with such shelter, shade, or other protection from the elements as is reasonably necessary to ensure its welfare, safety and health;
- (f) Is abandoned, whether at the place where it is normally kept or elsewhere;
- (g) Is subjected to a prescribed surgical or similar operation. Practice or activity;
- (h) Suffers harm which could be alleviated by the taking of reasonable steps;

- (i) Suffers harm as a result of a prescribed act being carried out on, or in relation to, it; or
- (j) Is, in any other way, caused unnecessary harm.

Retrieved from:

[www.s'p.wa.gov.au/options/services.htm](http://www.s'p.wa.gov.au/options/services.htm) at [www.statelawpublishing.com](http://www.statelawpublishing.com),  
retrieved May 2006.

## APPENDIX 2

# PATRICIA GILES CENTRE INC.

P.O. BOX 25  
JOONDALUP W.A. 6027

TELEPHONE: 9300 0340 FAX: 9300 2272

EMAIL: [pgc1@iinet.net.au](mailto:pgc1@iinet.net.au)

WEBSITE: [patgilescentre.org.au](http://patgilescentre.org.au)

## QUESTIONNAIRE REGARDING PET ABUSE

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE, WHICH AIMS TO HELP US ASSIST WOMEN, THEIR CHILDREN AND THEIR COMPANION PETS TO SECURE SAFE HOUSING. ALL INFORMATION GATHERED REMAINS CONFIDENTIAL AND YOUR NAME **WILL NOT** BE IDENTIFIABLE. PAT GILES CENTRE, 2006.

1. Do you have a pet(s)? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, where is/are the pet(s) now? \_\_\_\_\_

If no, have you had a pet in the last 12 months? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

2. Type of pet(s) currently in the home:

Dog \_\_\_\_\_ Cat \_\_\_\_\_ Bird \_\_\_\_\_ Fish \_\_\_\_\_

Rabbit \_\_\_\_\_ Guinea Pig \_\_\_\_\_ Mouse/Rat \_\_\_\_\_

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

3. Has your partner/ the abuser ever threatened to hurt your pet(s)?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

4. Has your partner/the abuser ever hurt or killed one of your pet(s)?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

5. If your partner/the abuser mistreated your pet, how often did this happen? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Has the abuser ever mistreated a pet by: (answer yes or no)

- Hitting, kicking, striking, punching, or throwing the pet(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- Depriving the pet(s) of food or water \_\_\_\_\_

- Leaving the pet(s) outside in extreme heat or cold for extended periods of time \_\_\_\_\_
- Refusing to take sick or injured pet(s) to the vet \_\_\_\_\_
- Sexual abuse of pet(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- Giving pet(s) illegal drugs or alcohol \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

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If so, did your pet(s) require veterinary treatment? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

7. Has any other member of your family/household ever hurt or killed one of your pet(s)? (Please give details) \_\_\_\_\_

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8. Has fear that the abuser will harm your pet(s) ever caused you to delay going to a women's refuge or to other safe places away from your partner? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

9. Has fear that the abuser will harm your pet(s) ever caused you to delay calling the police for help? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

10. Has fear that the abuser will harm your pet(s) ever caused you to refuse to make official police charge(s) against him? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

11. Would you require help in finding temporary housing and care for your pet(s) if you were to go to a women's refuge or other safe place? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

12. Do you have children? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please specify how many children you have, their age and gender.

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13. Has the abuser ever threatened or harmed your pet(s) in front of the children? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, have the children who witnessed this ever threatened, injured, or killed a pet or another animal? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE

**APPENDIX 3****PATRICIA GILES CENTRE INC.**

P.O. BOX 25  
JOONDALUP W.A. 6027

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TELEPHONE: 9300 0340 FAX: 9300 2272  
EMAIL: [pgc1@iinet.net.au](mailto:pgc1@iinet.net.au)  
WEBSITE: [patgilescentre.org.au](http://patgilescentre.org.au)

07-04-2006

Dear colleagues,

Many thanks for your willingness to help me gather the information I require to substantiate my research and subsequent submission regarding domestic violence and companion pet abuse.

If you could invite your residents, and any women you may be working with, to complete the two page questionnaire (I suspect it will only take a few minutes, but it may in turn trigger off traumatic memories...) I will be most appreciative. Just thought if you have the time I would really appreciate it if you would be able to note on the top of the first page if the woman responding is a resident, or a non- resident. This will be useful in the evaluation of the data.

Please find enclosed with your copies of the questionnaire a self addressed envelope for return of the completed papers. I am thinking a 5 or 6 week time span to distribute the questionnaires will be reasonable. I will email you around that time to remind you!

If you have any questions or queries regarding the project, please feel free to contact me on either:

9300 1022 (Wed, Thur or Fri), or email on  
[pgc1@iinet.net.au](mailto:pgc1@iinet.net.au) Mark it attention Lisa

Many thanks again,

Ms Lisa Refeld

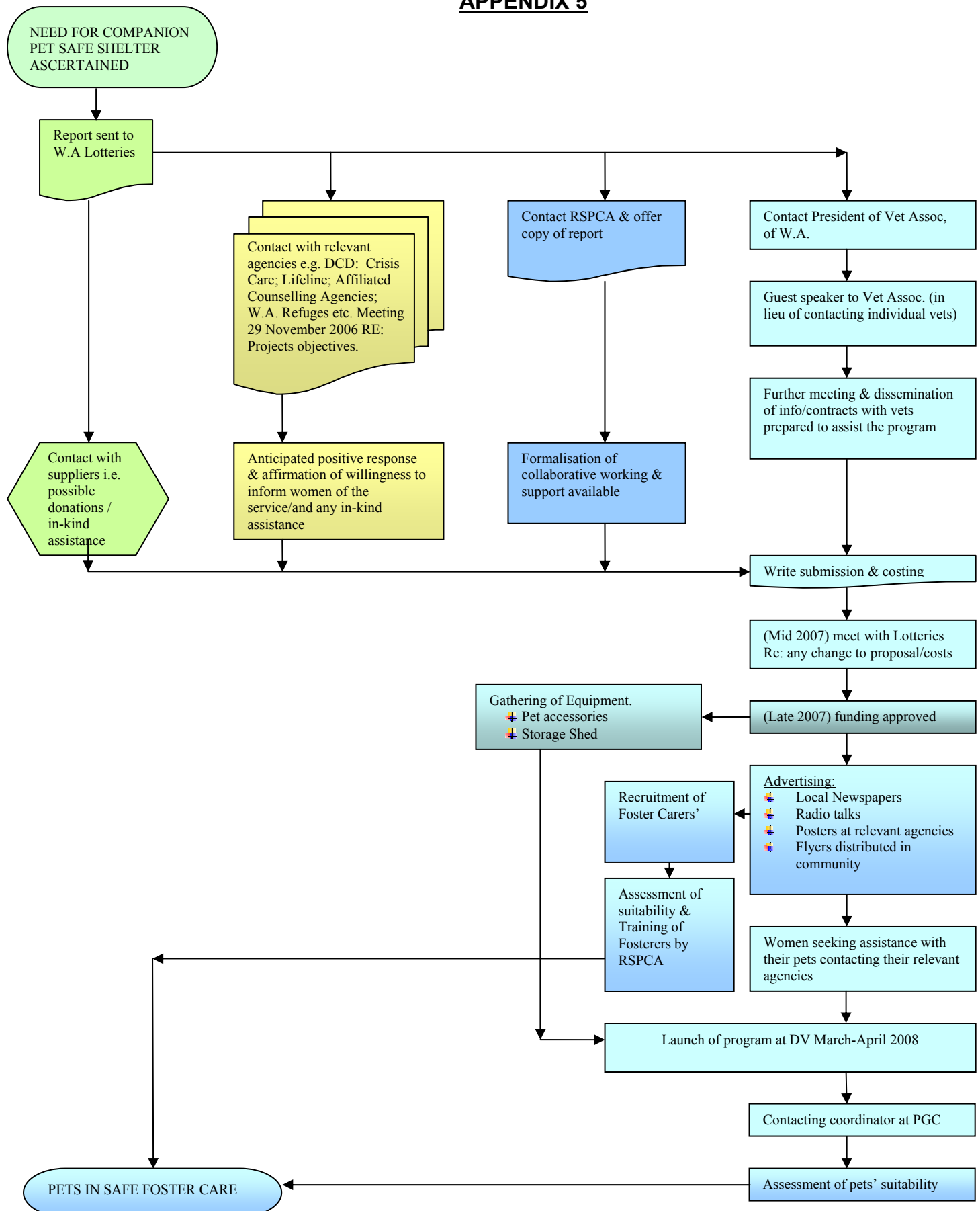


#### **APPENDIX 4**

Ten copies each of the two-page questionnaire were mailed to the following Perth metropolitan refuges. One West Australian country women's refuge was invited to participate in the survey.

- Byanda/Nunyara Women's Refuge
- Zonta House Refuge Assoc Inc
- Lucy Saw Women's Refuge
- Patricia Giles Centre
- Warrawee Women's Refuge
- Orana House
- South West Women's Refuge Inc
- Koolkuna Women's Refuge
- Wyn Carr House

## APPENDIX 5



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The writer would like to thank and honour the time, expertise and professionalism offered to her in the gathering of information and knowledge relating to establishing a program that will enable at risk companion pets to be housed within a safe shelter away from the perpetrator. The writer anticipates this service will enable women and children, otherwise feeling trapped and without options, to free themselves from their abuser with the understanding that their beloved pet is no longer at risk.

To the forty-one anonymous respondents of the questionnaire – my sincere thanks for your honesty, your integrity and your determination to contribute to making our homes safer. To the domestic violence advocates who work with these women, thank you for your assistance in distributing these questionnaires and returning them to me.

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