

Resolution 4: The Violence Link: Advocating for awareness and animal safekeeping for individuals fleeing domestic violence

Club Name

Prince George

Club President

Jane Young

Club Resolutions Committee Chair

Jane Young, 250-961-6484, janeyoung606@gmail.com

Proposers of the Resolution

Jane Young, 250-961-6484, janeyoung606@gmail.com

Wilma Hyslop, 250-961-3817, mountfever@yahoo.ca

Jennifer Fox, 250-219-1585, jafox@telus.net

Donna Brundige, 250-561-0835, donnabrundige87@gmail.com

Resolved Clauses

RESOLVED, That CFUW urge the federal, provincial, territorial, regional, municipal, and Indigenous governments to recognize the repercussions of the Violence Link and to include safety supports for animals of individuals fleeing domestic violence in the following ways:

1. Include language in appropriate policy and action plans relating to supporting victims and survivors of intimate partner and family violence that reflects the Violence Link and the importance of animals in their lives.
2. Review or initiate programs dedicated to providing care for the animals of survivors of intimate partner and family violence.
3. Provide options for continued safety of animals after individuals flee domestic violence including social infrastructure.

RESOLVED, That CFUW urge the federal, provincial, territorial, regional, municipal, and Indigenous governments to raise awareness at all levels of society about the Violence Link and protection of animals by creating informational resources and educational materials.

Background

The **Violence Link** is the well documented link between violence toward people (interpersonal crime) and animals (animal cruelty) ([Humane Canada, n.d.](#); [National Link Coalition, n.d.](#)). The overlap between animal abuse and other forms of violence, particularly intimate partner violence (IPV) and child maltreatment, has received increased interest in the past decades ([Ascione et al., 2007](#); [Overton et al., 2011](#); [Barrett et al., 2017](#)). The correlation is reliable enough to suggest the importance of early intervention so that violence against humans and animals, and other antisocial criminal behaviours, are prevented ([Lunghofer & Shapiro, 2014](#)).

The **Violence Link** is currently recognized in federal legislation:

- Threats of, or actual harm or killing of an animal, are included within the definition of family violence as of March 2021 when changes to the federal Divorce Act (Divorce Act, RSC 1985) came into force.
- In December of 2023, the definition of domestic violence in the recent amendment of the Firearms Acts (Bill C-21. Firearms Act, SC 1995) also includes harming or killing animals and will be a factor in determining whether to revoke a firearms license from perpetrators of domestic violence.

“Women with pets more likely to endure domestic abuse.” ~ Dr. Amy Fitzgerald, 2017, CBC News

Research on IPV have revealed a **strong connection between the abuse of human family members and the maltreatment of pets**. Animal abuse is also positively correlated with more types of partner abuse, and more frequent and severe abuse (DeGue & DeLillo, 2008; Barrett et al., 2017). Post-hoc investigations of women in emergency shelters show that 44-89% of survey participants who owned pets stated their abuser threatened to hurt and/or hurt and/or killed their pet (McIntosh, 2004; Volant et al., 2008; Barrett et al., 2017). Companion animals are viewed as family members, which creates a vulnerability for being victimized along with human family members in domestic violence (Stevenson et al., 2017).

The **Violence Link** is a significant barrier for individuals leaving abuse or violence. When an individual is forced to choose between their own safety and to leave their family pet in an abusive environment, many of them will choose to stay because they know that the animal's safety is at risk. **Multiple studies demonstrate that at least 50% of victims delay leaving out of fear for the safety of their animals** (Barrett et al., 2018). Concern for the well-being of their pets can impact the help-seeking behaviour and subsequent actions of abused women. This is used by perpetrators by controlling their partners to be silent about their abuse, a form of coercive control (Coulter, 2023).

“Leaving my pets behind just was not an option. No way. He would have killed them instantly. Since the local shelter did not allow them, my options were limited. We became homeless and lived out of my car”. ~ Survivor of Family Violence (Campbell, 2021)

The accommodation of pets has been identified as crucial for those escaping violence (Ascione, 1998; Volant et al., 2008). The vast majority of shelters do not allow women to bring their pets with them. In 2022/2023, under one in three (28%) Canadian facilities for victims of abuse offered pet accommodations (Statistics Canada, 2024). This proportion was similar to 2020/2021 (29%) and was almost a 50% increase from 2017/2018 (19%) (Statistics Canada, 2024). Rural and northern communities have unique challenges where domestic violence and animal welfare agencies are not

nearby. Results of a survey of residents of Saskatchewan indicate that many knew people who experienced IPV where their animals (including livestock) were also abused, and several assisted someone in planning for temporary animal safekeeping. The findings demonstrate the importance of “natural supports”, including family, friends, and neighbours, in these communities ([Giesbrecht, 2022](#)).

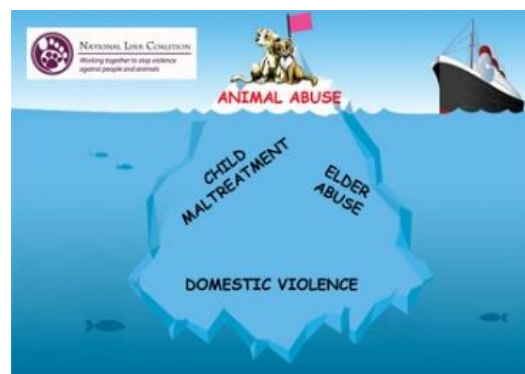
Some pet safekeeping programs have been developed to bridge the gap between animal services and human services in efforts to maximize the effectiveness of family violence prevention. The importance of such programs has recently caught the attention of the media ([Burke, 2025](#)). The Saskatchewan SPCA ([SaskSPCA, n.d.](#)) and Humane Canada ([Humane Canada, ACT To Keep Families Safe, n.d.](#)) provide excellent resources to help keep families with animals safe and to help organizations create pet safekeeping programs.

Supporting the safety of pets of survivors of IPV is an important social justice endeavour, not just for the protection of the animals but also for the women who care for them. ~ [Stevenson et al., 2017](#)

Options for animal safekeeping may include ([SaskSPCA, n.d.](#)):

- Foster-based programs where volunteer caregivers provide short-term care of pets while owners are staying in domestic violence shelters or transition housing
- “Pet-friendly” domestic violence shelters where pets may be cared for in the victim’s room, or in a kennel at the domestic violence shelter
- Collaboration of domestic violence shelters with local animal shelters to provide temporary care for pets

Raising awareness of the **Violence Link** is crucial to creating the necessary tools to help individuals flee domestic violence – or to prevent it in the first place. The Violence Link between animals and IPV is often a hidden and misunderstood connection. Education is a key initiative when it comes to understanding and recognizing abuse and its effects. It is important to understand too that animal abuse is “the tip of the iceberg” and “is part of an intergenerational cycle of violence” ([National Link Coalition, n.d.](#)).



([National Link Coalition, n.d.](#))

Implementation

All levels of CFUW can:

Advocate with stakeholders connected to the Violence Link including animal welfare organizations and victim services for government to:

- Include language in action plans that acknowledges the correlation between IPV, the abuse of pets, and the barriers for victims regarding their animal's safety
- Provide funding, support, and/or organizational capacity for emergency crisis shelters and second stage housing for implementation of innovative programs for survivors and animals
- Provide funding and support for animal shelter and foster pet safekeeping programs

CFUW clubs can do the following keeping in mind that each community in Canada has unique challenges (e.g., remoteness, funding, capacity):

- Create letter writing (to MLAs/MPs and to community media) and social media campaigns to:
 - provide/increase affordable, pet-inclusive housing
 - educate all stakeholders including police services and emergency shelters to ensure that they have the information they need to refer survivors of domestic violence to services that can foster their animals
 - explore funding for the care of animals
- Collaborate with other groups such as local SPCAs/humane societies/rescues and/or domestic violence shelters if they have a pet safekeeping/temporary fostering program for people fleeing violence or other emergencies to share the message in social media campaigns as well as in joint letter-writing campaigns
- Gather/produce resources in your community
 - Find safe ways to increase awareness (e.g., cards to give stating "If you need to get your animal out call ..."; car stickers about the Violence Link)
 - Map safe havens for animals and owners fleeing violence (see national map by [Shelter Safe](#))
 - Create short posters with contact information for supports for specific area
 - Create video presentations of related topics and share with other clubs
 - Create action packages about the Violence Link and share links and materials with other clubs (examples of available resources: [ACT](#); [RESOURCES | violencelink.ca](#); [Violence Link Toolkits](#))
- Raise general awareness of the Violence Link
 - Support the creation of a series of informational workshops/speakers to share what is meant by 'The Violence Link' and how we can start to affect awareness
 - Support the creation of panel discussions with stakeholders within the community to help create awareness with the general public and targeted groups
 - Have speaker presentations focusing on the topic of animal abuse and its connection to domestic violence
- Ask your municipal government to make a declaration that recognizes the Violence Link

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