

## **Resolution 4: Strengthening the Awareness and Safekeeping of Individuals and Their Animals Experiencing Domestic Violence**

### **Club Name**

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### **Resolved Clauses**

**RESOLVED**, That CFUW urge the federal, provincial, territorial, Indigenous, regional, and municipal governments to recognize that cruelty to animals and domestic violence are often connected, known as the Violence Link, and to include the need for safety supports for animals of individuals experiencing violence in the home in the following ways:

1. Include language in appropriate policy and action plans that support victims-survivors of domestic violence that reflects awareness of the Violence Link and the importance of animals in their lives.
2. Review and initiate programs dedicated to providing immediate care for the animals of survivors of domestic violence because they are also at risk.
3. Provide options for continued safety of animals after individuals flee domestic violence including pet-inclusive affordable housing.
4. Provide sustainable and consistent funding for support programs.

**RESOLVED**, That CFUW urge the federal, provincial, territorial, Indigenous, regional, and municipal governments to raise awareness at all levels of society about the connection between animal cruelty and domestic violence, known as the Violence Link, by creating and widely disseminating informational resources and educational materials for the safekeeping of individuals and their animals.

### **Background**

Research on domestic violence has revealed a strong connection between the abuse of human family members and the maltreatment of their animals. 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). The overlap between animal abuse and other forms of violence, including domestic violence, is known as the Violence Link (Humane Canada, n.d.; National Link Coalition, n.d.) and is well documented (Ascione

et al., 2007; Overton et al., 2011; Barrett et al., 2017). The Violence Link is a significant barrier for individuals leaving domestic violence as companion animals are often viewed as family members, creating a vulnerability for being victimized along with human family members (Stevenson et al., 2017).

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

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). Therefore, 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).

Post-hoc investigations of women in emergency shelters show that 89% (Barrett et al., 2018), 56% (McIntosh, 2004), and 53% (Volant et al., 2008) of survey participants who owned pets stated their abuser threatened to hurt and/or hurt and/or killed their pet. Reported types of animal abuse included kicking, hitting, throwing an object at a pet (Barrett et al., 2018; Volant et al., 2008), throwing pets, swinging by tail, beheading/neck breaking, choking, hanging in air with lead, shooting, stabbing (Volant et al., 2008), and drowning (Barrett et al., 2018). Cruelty can also be in the form of emotional abuse such as leaving a pet outside longer than thought safe, intimidating or scaring a pet on purpose, and confining a pet in an inappropriately small space for an extended period of time. There can also be refusal to provide food, water, or medical care to a pet, and threats to get rid of a pet (Barrett et al., 2018).

### **Providing safekeeping for individuals and their animals in domestic violence (Resolved Clause #1)**

It is important that language in government policy and action plans reflect the vulnerability of animals in domestic violence and the importance of animals in the lives of victims-survivors. Currently, the Divorce Act (Divorce Act, RSC 1985) and Firearms Act (Bill C-21, Firearms Act, SC 1995) include statements related to threats and harm to animals with regard to family violence and domestic violence, respectively. However, much more needs to be done at all levels of government to address the need for safety supports for animals of individuals experiencing violence in the home.

*“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 intimate partner violence 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](#)).

*Supporting the safety of pets of survivors of intimate partner violence 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](#)*

Pet safekeeping programs have been developed to bridge the gap between animal services and human services in efforts to maximize the effectiveness of domestic violence prevention. The importance of such programs has recently caught the attention of the media ([Burke, 2025](#)). There have been wonderful initiatives of partnerships between Humane Canada and domestic violence shelters ([ACT-Humane Canada/Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis, n.d.](#) ; [ACT-Humane Canada/Genesis House, n.d.](#)). The Saskatchewan SPCA ([SaskSPCA, n.d.](#)), The Alberta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ([Alberta SPCA, 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. Options for immediate 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

Long-term options for continued care of animals after individuals flee domestic violence may include pet-inclusive affordable housing. Just recently, the federal government announced that the issue of the rights of tenants to have pets should be addressed when the national housing strategy comes up for renewal this year ([Woolf, 2025](#)).

### **Raising awareness at all levels of society about the Violence Link for the safekeeping of individuals and their animals (Resolved Clause #2)**

The link between violence towards humans and violence towards animals is often a hidden and misunderstood connection, but it is reliable enough to suggest the importance of early intervention so that violence against humans and animals are prevented ([Lunghofer & Shapiro, 2014](#)). Raising awareness of the Violence Link for the

safekeeping of individuals and their animals experiencing domestic violence is crucial to creating the necessary tools to help individuals flee domestic violence. Creating informational resources and educational materials for stakeholders including victim services, animal welfare organizations, police, veterinarians, and educators and the public at large will be vital to give appropriate, proactive support for those animal owners in crisis.

## **Implementation**

### **All levels of CFUW can:**

Advocate with stakeholders including animal welfare organizations and victim services for government to:

- Include language in action plans that acknowledges the correlation between domestic violence, the abuse of pets, and the barriers for victims regarding their animal's safety
- Provide funding, support, and/or organizational capacity 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 individuals fleeing violence 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 (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 link between animal abuse and domestic violence
  - Support the creation 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 community stakeholders to increase awareness with the general public and targeted groups
- Have speaker presentations focusing on the topic of animal abuse and its connection to domestic violence
- Advertise and promote online, in the press, on TV and radio, at schools, churches, community centres, local events, etc.
- Ask your municipal government to make a declaration that recognizes the link between animal cruelty and domestic violence

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