

The Link Between Animal Abuse and Family Violence

"There were times that he would discipline the children, and his way of doing that was he would threaten to kill them and he would demonstrate on the pets as to how he would do that."

Professionals are just beginning to understand how child abuse, domestic violence and animal cruelty are linked. That they are connected is clear. In fact, some contend that animal abuse is one of the most reliable predictors of violent behaviour:

- ▶ 71% of women seeking shelter for family violence reported that their partner had threatened to harm, or actually harmed or killed at least one of their pets. Ascione, F. (1998). Battered women's reports of their partners' and their children's cruelty to animals. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*. 1(1), 119,125.
- ▶ A 1998 survey conducted by the Ontario SPCA found that 48% of women leaving abusive relationships said that concern over the safety of their pets prevented them from leaving sooner. Johnson, Gail, *The Pattern of Violence*, Fall/Winter 2002 - Online Edition, *Animal Sense*.
- ▶ 82% of families investigated for animal abuse or neglect were also known to local social service agencies as having "children at risk". Hutton, J.S. (1981). *Animal Abuse as a diagnostic approach in social work: A pilot study*. Paper presented at the international Conference on the Human/Companion Animal Bond, Philadelphia, PA.

"I kind of came to the realization that his violence had nothing to do with me or anything that I did or didn't do, said or didn't say. It did have to do with me somewhat because I was there [but] ... it could have been the dog, it was whoever was close and in the house."

It is not easy to come to the aid of victims with pets. Most animal shelters do not take in pets while victims and their families look for safe homes. There are many issues to consider - safety, confidentiality, pet ownership, financial needs, veterinary care, pet transportation, staff training and ethical codes. The PEI Humane Society provides short-term care for the pets of women staying at Anderson House.

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The quotes in this document are from PEI women interviewed in 1999 during herStory of woman abuse and the PEI justice system, a project of the Woman Abuse and the PEI Justice System Research Team of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research.