



DATE: July 10, 2024

TO: Division of Victim Services Grantees

FROM: Tonya Avery, DVS Director of Quality Assurance

SUBJECT: Welcoming Survivors and Their Pets to Shelter

This paper is not intended to be a directive regarding the allowance of pets in shelter environments. Please use it as a resource to guide your critical assessments and informed decision-making to best serve the needs of survivors in your communities.

**“When animals are abused, people are at risk;
when people are abused, animals are at risk.”**

Phil Akrow, Coordinator of the National Link Coalition – the National Resource Center on The Link between Animal Abuse and Human Violence

Service Animals

Pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), service animals are defined as dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. Examples of such work or tasks include guiding people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling a wheelchair, alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure, reminding a person with mental illness to take prescribed medications, calming a person with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during an anxiety attack, or performing other duties. Service animals are working animals. The work or task a dog has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person’s disability. **The ADA applies to certain types of housing, including emergency shelters.**

[Service Animal FAQ \(michigan.gov\)](https://michigan.gov/service-animal-faq)

[Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals and the ADA | ADA.gov](https://ada.gov/frequently-asked-questions-about-service-animals-and-the-ada)

Emotional Support Animals

Support animals provide companionship and may relieve loneliness, help with depression, anxiety and other issues but do not have special training to perform tasks that assist people with disabilities. Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service animals under the ADA.

Companion Animals/Pets

There is no universal definition for a pet or companion animal, although there is a current trend to use these nouns interchangeably. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) defines a companion animal as

“domesticated” or “domestic-bred” and whose physical, emotional, and social needs are readily met. They do not qualify as service animals under the ADA.

From barrier to benefit. Why is it important to consider welcoming both survivors and their pets to shelter?

Currently, only about 250 shelters in the U.S. are pet-welcoming but others have made alternative care arrangements for pets. Red Rover is a leader in providing resources and funding to bring survivors and their pets together to heal. Their 25 by 2025 Campaign goal is to get 25% of all domestic violence shelters welcoming pet survivors as well as human survivors. Red Rover is working in partnership with PetSmart Charities and Greater Good Charities, and has support from Purina, to reach this goal. Might you be part of that movement?

Although emotional support animals and companion animals/pets do not qualify as service animals under the ADA, consider becoming a shelter that also welcomes these types of animals. The PALS Survey [URI-PALS-Report.pdf \(urinyc.org\)](#) was released in 2021 as part of Urban Resource Institute’s People and Animals Living Safely (PALS) program in partnership with the National Domestic Violence Hotline. [PALS-Report-Exec-Summary.pdf \(urinyc.org\)](#). The welfare of pets is a barrier that may keep survivors from leaving abusive situations to find safety. This is evidenced by the survey findings which demonstrate that:

- 97% of respondents said that keeping their pets with them is an important factor in deciding whether to seek shelter.
- 50% of respondents would not consider shelter for themselves if they could not take their pets with them.
- 91% indicated that their pets’ emotional support and physical protection are significant in their ability to survive and heal.
- 48% were worried that the abusive partner would harm or kill the pets.
- 37% reported that the abusive partner had already threatened to harm or kill pets.
- 29% said pets had already been harmed or killed.
- 30% said their children had witnessed or been aware of abuse or threats to a pet.
- 76% of respondents reported noticeable changes in their pets’ behavior because of abuse.
- 72% of respondents were not aware that some domestic violence shelters accept pets.

Source: [Pets are Critical Priority for Survivors Seeking Safety - The Hotline](#)

Before implementing or expanding your pet-welcoming shelter, organizations are strongly encouraged to develop written policies and protocols with consideration given to the critical questions listed below. Each of these issues should carefully consider the potential impacts on clients, staff and others, both in terms of benefits and possible risks.

- Pet health and safety. Vaccines? Licensure? Are they required/current?

- Are there admission criteria for allowing a pet (behavior and demeanor)? Is the admission on a trial basis?
- Other residents' concerns, fears, exposure. Traffic flow?
- How does the agency ensure all people feel safe?
- Environment. Is it pet friendly? Carpet or hard flooring? Durable furniture? Are there areas that will be off limits to pets? How will pet waste be handled?
- Collaboration with animal shelters and veterinarians.
 - Does the agency have relationships with animal shelters and/or veterinarians for survivors to utilize if they do not currently have vaccines that may be necessary for health and safety?
- Pet allergies. How will they be addressed? HVAC units that circulate air for each room? Separate pet area?
- Should the pet interact with other residents? How does staff determine comfort and safety for all?
- What if housing a pet doesn't seem to be working out? Are there criteria for exiting a pet with alternative placement resources in place?
- What types of pets can our organization welcome into shelter? Consider not only size, but varying species, including dogs, cats, rodents, fish, reptiles, and others. What about horses, goats and other livestock? Consider contacting other agencies who may be willing and able to board or foster these animals.
- Identify collaborative partners.
- What is the cost of set up and maintenance?
- Will we need additional insurance?
- Are there any legal issues to consider?
- How do we fund our program?
 - Developing a budget is critical to the ongoing success of the program.
- Longer term considerations:
 - What if a resident abandons their pet?

Additional guidance for decision making and support can be found in the resources below:



Additional Resources	
<p>Domesticshelters.org Webinar From Barrier to Benefit: Overcoming Challenges of Creating Pet-Friendly Domestic Violence Shelters (youtube.com)</p>	<p>This is an excellent resource that will walk you through the following steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Why 2. Common Challenges 3. Strategies to Overcome those Challenges 4. From Barrier to Benefit 5. Resources and Next Steps (Outlines specific funding resources)
<p>Home - RedRover</p>	<p>Mission statement: Our mission is to bring animals out of crisis and strengthen the bond between people and animals through emergency sheltering, disaster-relief services, financial assistance, and education. We accomplish this by engaging volunteers and supporters, collaborating with others and maximizing the use of online technology.</p>
<p>Home - Don't Forget the Pets (dontforgetthepets.org)</p>	<p>Handbook is very helpful for things to consider/guidelines for implementing pet inclusive housing.</p>
<p>Planning for Pet Safety (domesticshelters.org)</p>	<p>Because pets are typically seen in the eyes of the law as personal property, the concept of ownership plays a role in custody and is important to consider establishing. While you may not experience a dispute over where an animal ultimately resides, it is better to prepare for the possibility.</p>
<p>SAF-T Start-Up Manual - SAF-T Program (saftprogram.org)</p>	<p>Free to DV shelters.</p>
<p>Our SAF-T FAQ will answer most of your questions - SAF-T Program (saftprogram.org)</p>	<p>Website offers many ideas to consider.</p>
<p>Michigan National Link Coalition</p>	<p>Where to report suspected animal abuse in Michigan by County.</p>