



# PALS Report and Survey

Domestic Violence and Pets:

Breaking Barriers to Safety and Healing

Presented by Urban Resource Institute and the National Domestic Violence Hotline



# PALS

People & Animals  
Living Safety

Report presented by:



**Urban Resource Institute  
People and Animals Living Safely (PALS)**

75 Broad Street, Suite 505  
New York, NY 10004

**[URINYC.org](http://URINYC.org)**

**[PALSinfo@urinyc.org](mailto:PALSinfo@urinyc.org)**

**Urban Resource Institute Vision**

A world free of domestic violence, homelessness, poverty, and trauma, where individuals and communities are safe, stable, and thriving.

**Urban Resource Institute Mission**

To empower individuals, families, and communities, particularly communities of color and other disenfranchised populations, to end cycles of violence, homelessness, poverty, and trauma by increasing safety and resiliency.

**National Domestic Violence Hotline**

PO Box 90249  
Austin, Texas 78709

**[thehotline.org](http://thehotline.org)**

**[hotline.requests@thehotline.org](mailto:hotline.requests@thehotline.org)**

**National Domestic Violence Hotline Vision**

We envision a world where all relationships are positive, healthy, and free from violence.

**National Domestic Violence Hotline Mission**

We answer the call to support and shift power back to those affected by relationship abuse.

Thank you to PetSmart Charities for generous support for the production of this report. The logo for PetSmart Charities, featuring the word "PETSMART" in a small, red, sans-serif font above the word "Charities" in a larger, blue, cursive font.

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# 1

# About Urban Resource Institute (URI) and the National Domestic Violence Hotline (The Hotline)



The Urban Resource Institute (URI) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1980 that is committed to a world free of domestic violence, homelessness, poverty, and trauma, where individuals, families, and communities are safe, stable, and thriving. URI is the oldest licensed provider of domestic violence shelter and services in New York State, with over 40 years of impact. Today it is the largest provider of domestic violence shelter services in the U.S. and a leading provider of shelter and services for homeless families.

URI works across the spectrum of innovative prevention and intervention initiatives along with residential shelters and services for domestic violence survivors. The URI goal is to empower individuals, families, and communities, particularly communities of color and other vulnerable populations, to build their safety, resiliency and self-sufficiency. There is a particular focus on serving populations that have traditionally experienced barriers to accessing shelter services, such as single individuals and families with pets.

Across all of its residential and nonresidential programs, URI has the capacity to provide services to over 40,000 individuals annually, including support

in securing permanent housing and programs such as job-skills training, professional development, financial literacy, and legal assistance. URI also offers prevention programs in middle and high schools, and trauma-informed intervention programs with individuals who cause harm. The organization operates in more than 20 locations around New York City, with accommodations for some 1,200 domestic violence victims and 1,500 homeless individuals every night. URI is recognized as a thought leader across the U.S. and beyond, in particular on the intersectionality of domestic violence, pets and animal abuse, including barriers to seeking shelter with pets and effective strategies for victims and pets sheltering and healing together.

The URI signature program People and Animals Living Safely (PALS) is the only program of its kind in New York City and the largest in the U.S. to provide co-living shelter for domestic violence victims and their pets. This report describes the history, growth and impact of PALS along with the findings of our survey executed with the National Domestic Violence Hotline that identifies the unique challenges domestic violence survivors face when they must consider the welfare of their beloved pets when seeking safety.

For more information on our history, programs and services, visit [urinyc.org](http://urinyc.org)

“Going from one desperate situation to another desperate situation repeats a destructive cycle and leaves no time for true healing. Urban Resource Institute and the PALS program gave me a safe space to think, to plan, and most of all to heal.”

**PALS Client**



The National Domestic Violence Hotline (The Hotline) is a vital service: the mission is to answer the call to support and shift power back to those affected by relationship abuse — 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Established in 1996 and headquartered in Austin, Texas, The Hotline is the only national 24-hour domestic violence hotline providing compassionate support, life-saving resources, and safety planning services via phone, online chat, and text for people across the United States. The Hotline has a strong national reputation as a direct service provider and has become a thought leader around intimate partner violence prevention and intervention by working on collaborative projects, research, and policy advocacy to amplify and support the needs of survivors. The Hotline has answered over 5.5 million call, chat and text contacts since opening, and demand for services continues to increase.

The heart of The Hotline is a highly-trained advocate staff who provide high-quality, trauma-informed education, validation and connection to services that empower victims and survivors to make life-changing decisions with dignity and respect. The Hotline recognizes that victims and survivors need a wide range of assistance; therefore, a robust database is maintained of approximately 5,000 carefully vetted providers and resources across the U.S., including shelter and transitional housing, counseling, culturally and linguistically specific programs, and legal services.

For more information visit [thehotline.org](http://thehotline.org)

# 2

## A Message from the Agencies' Executives

### Urban Resource Institute

Since the Urban Resource Institute was founded in 1980 in New York City, at every step along our journey we have clearly understood that the true experts on domestic violence are the survivors themselves. They, more than anyone else, know their situations best; they inspire and inform our ability to develop and deliver effective and responsive services. Over our first 40 years of service delivery we have consistently reached out to the community of survivors while engaging experts and partners and researching the literature to develop best practices and expand the scale and reach of our organization.

In 1980, the field of domestic violence shelter services was very new. Even today, addressing domestic violence remains a comparatively under-resourced field but one that is growing across the U.S. and around the world. As URI grew, we continued to work to identify and reduce the barriers that prevent all victims from finding safe spaces where they could retreat to and recover their lives. We committed to creating innovative solutions for populations who were being left out, including singles, members of the LGBTQIA+ community and victims with pets. These efforts, which included

expansion of residential services, facilitated URI's position as the largest domestic violence shelter provider in the U.S., with the capacity to provide gender identity inclusive, trauma-informed services to victims of domestic violence. While our programs have also expanded to encompass prevention and intervention, at our core URI provides safe places for adults and children impacted by domestic violence.

Watershed moments for URI occurred in 2011 and 2012 when we first began to hear of a barrier to seeking safety that had not been previously considered: pets. This issue was being raised by victims outside of our home base in New York City and discussed at conferences we attended. We were learning that pets were both a part of the cycle of violence and a barrier to seeking safety. Significant numbers of abusive partners threatened or abused pets as another way to maintain power and control, specifically warning their victims what might happen if they were to try to leave. And because nearly no shelters at the time accepted the pet members of families, these survivors were forced to either remain in the dangerous situation or leave their pets in the hands of their abusers.

Concurrently, we saw how important pets are to the emotional support, psychological health and recovery of people in crisis, and the power of the human-animal bond. We quickly realized that pet prohibitions were a critical and unnecessary obstacle for individuals and families to overcome when fleeing domestic violence, and the value of pets in the healing process. Yet at that time there were no shelters in New York City that allowed pets. We talked with survivors and experts, read the literature, and realized that there was not only a great need but also an opportunity for URI to do something truly innovative and inspirational that would make a difference and enable all family members to heal together – people and pets.

We also realized that we could not do this work alone. Success required a coordinated community response with corporate, nonprofit and government sectors committed to working together to achieve an effective solution. Having been in the domestic violence sector for many years, URI recognized that collaboration was and remains essential and must be supported by public and professional awareness and accurate data. We reached out to our counterparts in the animal welfare community to better understand the needs of pets. We talked with regulatory agencies to obtain support for implementation. By 2013, we were able to initiate a pilot People and Animals Living Safely (PALS) program which allowed people and pets to seek safety together, demonstrated the effectiveness of allowing pets in domestic violence shelters, and helped ease the concerns of regulators who were vital to the expansion of the program.

## The Growth of PALS

As we increased awareness of a domestic violence shelter that accepted pets and grew our partnerships with animal welfare organizations, URI began to take in more survivors with pets. Our [2015 White Paper](#) helped convince New York City and State to allow us to expand from a pilot basis to a full program to shelter people and pets.

As the PALS program grew, we recognized another need. Although the URI team is expert in working with people experiencing trauma, we needed to bring in animal welfare and behavioral experts skilled in working with pets who have similarly been witnesses to, and victims of, domestic violence. The ASPCA and the Mayor's Alliance for New York City's Animals were instrumental in helping us bring such expertise in-house to launch trauma-informed interventions for both the human and animal members of abused families and to train our staff on animal welfare concerns. They helped us find funding for the pets' daily needs – food, kennels and supplies – and for the parallel processes of caring for pets, including assessments, legal protections and veterinary care. Thanks to such generous funders as A Kinder World, the ASPCA, Banfield Foundation, PetSmart Charities, Purina, and others, we have been able to continually increase our capacity, deepen our partnerships and provide more and better services to save more lives.

This work has also led to increased awareness across a spectrum of stakeholders, from the mainstream press to professional publications to partnerships with law enforcement and criminal justice officials. But there is still a long way to go to build awareness of the problem and of the solution to pets in domestic violence. More domestic

## A Message from the Agencies' Executives

violence agencies today recognize that pets are members of families, too, but they often do not have the resources or capacity to accept pets. Some corporate funders have come to see that helping pet and human domestic violence victims rebuild their lives is an inspiring mission that is meaningful to their consumers, but more help is needed. New York State awarded URI a grant to provide statewide technical assistance to agencies assisting survivors of crime and abuse, but there is more need than resources, and this is just one U.S. state. The federal passage of the PAWS Act (Pet And Women Safety) continues to motivate us on our journey while helping to drive national awareness. And, of course, the inspirational experiences we hear regularly from survivors with pets are at the heart of our work.

### **Igniting a National Response**

This report, and the survey executed with the National Domestic Violence Hotline, are part of our most recent efforts to educate, influence and inspire across our city, state and nation – and outside the U.S., too. Our goal is to ignite a national response, advance the field with data, and motivate critical audiences to influence and implement change for domestic violence victims and their pets. We are prepared to lead the way with intention, innovation and cultural competence.

Key to a national response is building capacity outside our own organization. We recognize a responsibility and an opportunity to help other organizations to develop similar programs. Our new Community Response Model will enable shelters of all sizes to create programs for victims with pets that are tailored to their local capacity and scale and the unique conditions and needs of their communities. As we unite the creative thinking of domestic violence and animal welfare communities nationwide, we are creating a movement that will break barriers to safety for growing numbers of people and pets.

As the National Domestic Violence Hotline survey demonstrates, far too many domestic violence survivors are still unaware of services that are available for them and their pets. There is still much work to do and URI is committed to being a pioneer, creating novel solutions, increasing awareness, expanding funding, and developing even greater services that save all vulnerable victims of domestic violence.



Nathaniel M. Fields,  
Chief Executive Officer  
Urban Resource Institute  
April 2021

## The Hotline

The National Domestic Violence Hotline (The Hotline) is a vital service: our mission is to answer the call to support and shift power back to those affected by relationship abuse — 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Established in 1996 and headquartered in Austin, Texas, The Hotline is the only national 24-hour domestic violence hotline in the U.S. providing compassionate support, life-saving resources, and safety planning services via phone, online chat, and text. The Hotline has a strong reputation as a direct service provider and has become a thought leader around intimate partner violence prevention and intervention by working on collaborative projects, research and policy advocacy to amplify and support the needs of survivors.

We have answered more than 5.5 million contacts since our lines first opened, and demand for our services continues to increase. 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men will experience severe physical violence from a partner in their lifetime. Despite these numbers, many still don't understand the prevalence and impact of domestic violence in our families, communities and our workplaces. The National Domestic Violence Hotline doesn't work alone — we are proud to partner with hundreds of organizations serving survivors throughout the U.S. Our partnership with the Urban Resource Institute has spanned decades and we are especially proud to share the results of our important survey on the impact of pets in a survivor's journey to safety.

With only 3% of domestic violence shelters in the U.S. providing co-living options for survivors and their pets, individuals are far too often forced to make the choice of abandoning their pets to enter shelter or remaining in an unsafe environment and risking further abuse. Our 2019 research project collected data using a series of questions co-developed with the URI team. These questions were asked of those who contacted The Hotline directly (through call, chat or text) for support and services.

Domestic violence is an extremely pervasive issue affecting our families, communities and workplaces. It is also an extremely complex issue and our response to best support survivors must consider their comprehensive and unique needs. By collaborating on this important research, URI and The Hotline have the opportunity to shift outcomes for victims/survivors and their pets and work toward an important objective — the belief that every person and animal deserves to live a life free from violence. We hope the information shared in this report inspires you to stand with us.



Katie Ray-Jones,  
Chief Executive Officer  
National Domestic  
Violence Hotline  
April 2021

# 3

## The National and Local Landscape of Animal Abuse and Domestic Violence

### Pets and the Power and Control of Domestic Violence

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (2020a), an average of 20 people in the U.S. experience domestic violence every minute, or more than 10 million abuse victims annually. The National Network to End Domestic Violence (2020) reports that state and local domestic violence hotlines and the National Domestic Violence Hotline receive more than 19,000 calls every day, or more than 13 calls every minute. These statistics are staggering.

Closer to URI's home, regional statistics paint an equally troubling picture. Police each year respond to over 250,000 domestic violence incidents in New York City and 183,000 incidents in the rest of New York State (NCADV, 2020b).

Domestic violence encompasses much more than physical abuse: it includes multiple forms of intimidation, physical and sexual assault, battery, psychological and economic abuse, stalking, and threats as part of a systematic pattern of power and control by one partner over another. Domestic violence abusers can be women as well as men, although the vast majority of victims are female identified, and abuse occurs in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. Adding to the complexity, the impact

of domestic violence dramatically increases the likelihood of children being victims of child abuse, of engaging in violent behavior, and of developing serious lifelong psychological and physical health problems that perpetuate the cycle of violence (NCADV, 2015).

People often ask, "Why don't they just leave?" The answer is: it's not that easy. Abusers go to great lengths to prevent their victims from leaving, and in fact leaving an abuser is the most dangerous time for a victim of domestic violence. Barriers to seeking safety include: lack of resources and access to bank accounts; no transportation; unsupportive family and friends; no safe place to go; fear of losing custody of the children; and the abuser's threats including financial ruin and hurting or killing the children.

One unfortunate but extremely effective technique by which abusers enforce their power and control is to threaten, hurt or kill “soft target” family pets as a warning of what would happen if anyone tries to leave. Women are the primary caregivers of pets in 80% of homes (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2012), and pets are predominantly found in homes with children (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2007). Their emotional attachments to their pets become points of vulnerability for abusive partners seeking opportunities for additional power and control.



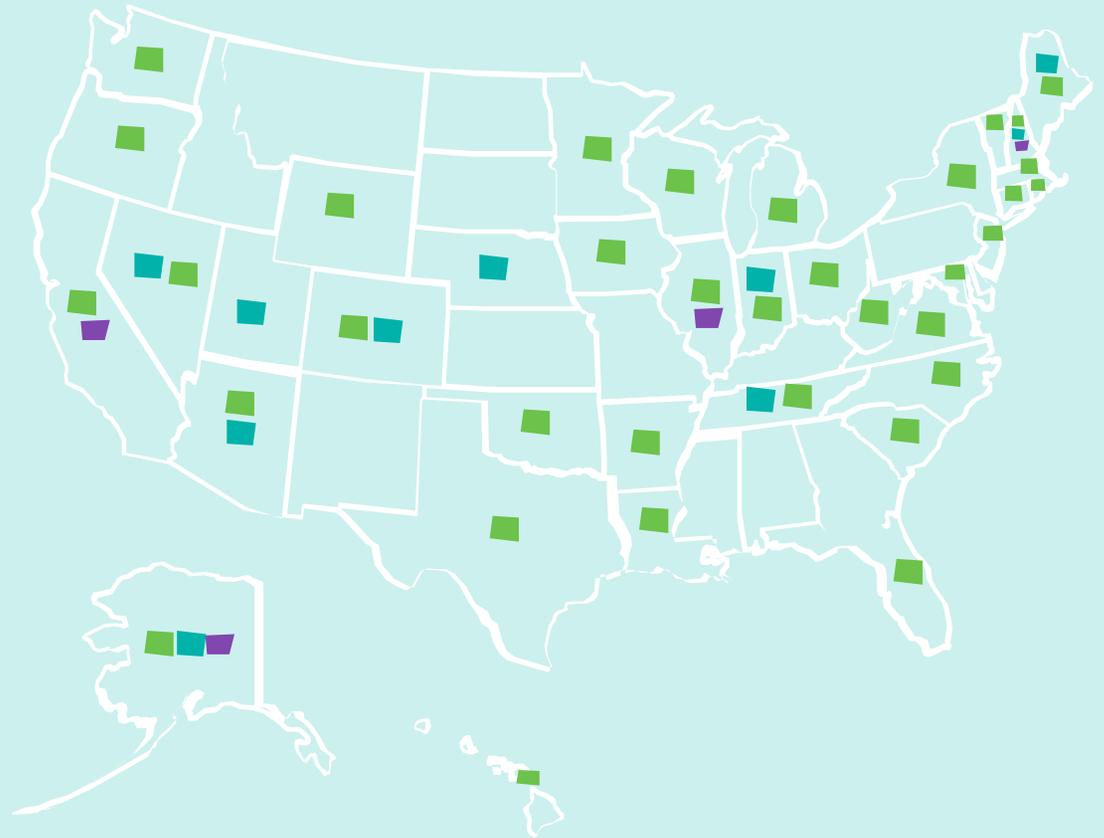
Decades of research confirm that the dangers faced by survivors of domestic violence are magnified when the welfare of pets must also be taken into consideration. This fear presents a significant barrier preventing many survivors from seeking safety:

- As many as **89% of victims with pets** say their abusers threatened, hurt or killed their pets as leverage to prevent them from leaving or to force them to return in order to care for the animals (Barrett et al., 2017).
- Some **94% of domestic violence shelter staff** report their clients indicated a history of animal abuse in their home (Krienert et al., 2012).
- The pets of family and friends who help victims leave are **also targeted as revenge** for their leaving (Roguski, 2012).
- Actual or threatened harm to animals is **one of the four greatest risk factors** for someone becoming a domestic violence abuser (Walton-Moss et al., 2005).
- Domestic violence abusers **who also abuse pets** are more dangerous, and use more forms of controlling behaviors and violence, than those who do not also harm animals. This results in victims being more fearful to report domestic violence incidents (Simmons & Lehmann, 2007).
- **87% of intimidating attacks against animals** occur in the presence of the spouse or partner; **75% occur in the presence of a child** (Quinlisk, 1999).
- Abusers who victimize both animals and people have more than double the rate of access to guns. **78% of victims** whose abusers also have histories of pet abuse fear they will be killed, **76% have been strangled**, and the risk of death to first responders in these cases doubles (Campbell et al., 2018).

## Understanding the Need and Reducing Barriers to Safety

The domestic violence community's response to these startling findings has been dramatic and comprehensive:

- As of this writing, 35 states allow courts to include pets in protection-from-abuse orders.
- Ten states define an act of animal abuse intended to coerce or control someone as an act of domestic violence. Laws in seven other states and the Navajo Nation refer to acts of animal abuse within the context of stalking, family violence, emotional abuse, or coercion.
- Alaska, California, Illinois, and New Hampshire allow courts to award custody of pets in bitter divorce settlements to the party determined to be in the animals' best interests – modeling long-standing procedures for child custody.



- + Hundreds of shelters are removing a significant barrier to victims' safety by establishing cooperative foster care housing for their pets with local animal welfare and veterinary groups.
- + Over 230 domestic violence shelters in the U.S., plus many more in Canada, Australia, Spain, and the Netherlands, have created pet-friendly housing spaces (Sheltering Animals and Families Together, 2021).

“ I knew I could not leave [my dog] with him because he had hurt her before and I was afraid if left alone she would not survive with him. I strongly considered returning to my abuser because I felt hopeless. PALS gave me an option to keep myself safe while keeping our dog with me and my daughters. ”

**PALS Client**

As part of our pioneering response to this issue, in 2013 URI launched our **People and Animals Living Safely (PALS)** program. Our rich and extensive history of innovation gave us a unique opportunity to design a trauma-informed program from scratch that would respond to the needs of both people and pets and keep them together during their time of crisis. We became the first organization in New York City – out of over 100 agencies that provide resources to victims of domestic violence and more than 25 that offer emergency shelter – to offer what we call co-living for victims and their pets. With our 2017 merger with the Center Against Domestic Violence, Urban Resource Institute is proud to be the largest provider of emergency domestic violence shelter in New York City, with the capacity to serve nearly 1,200 individuals in our 12 facilities every night. We are the largest provider of emergency shelter in the U.S. and the only agency in New York City dedicated to keeping victims together with their pets.



# 4

## National Domestic Violence Hotline and URI PALS Survey

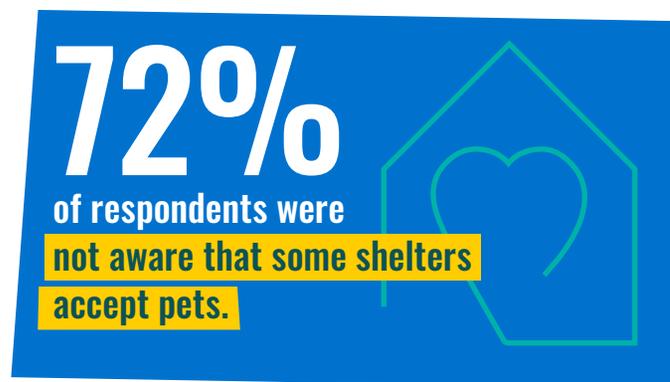
To gain a better and more current understanding of how domestic violence affects survivors with pets and their families, URI partnered with the National Domestic Violence Hotline (The Hotline) in 2019 to create the most comprehensive and current survey of its kind. The survey assessed nearly 2,500 individuals contacting The Hotline directly for support (via call, chat or text). The survey focused on how survivors felt about pets in relation to their experiences of abuse, their

considerations when seeking safety for themselves and their pets, and their awareness of resources for survivors/families with pets needing to leave an abusive situation. We hope that the very clear results demonstrating the important role pets play in a survivor's journey to safety will influence funders, stakeholders, policy makers and service providers' decision-making for years to come on how best to support survivors with pets.

Throughout this report we have included data points highlighting the survey's findings. The survey in the Appendix includes more detail. The key takeaways from the survey are:

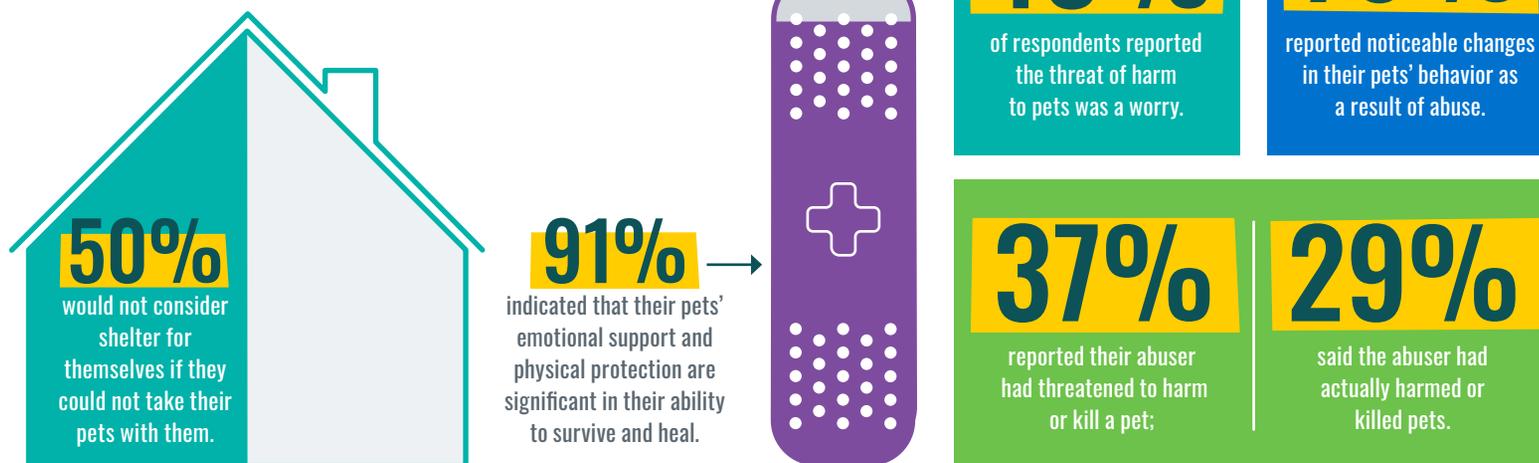
### 1. A Need to Raise Awareness among Domestic Violence Victims

Despite great progress to date, there is still not enough widespread awareness among the general public about the intersection of domestic violence and pets: the impact of domestic violence on pets and the availability of resources nationally to address this issue and remove a major barrier for domestic violence victims seeking safety.



## 2. A Critical Need for Shelter Options that Accommodate Pets

The vast majority of respondents said that keeping their pets with them is a critical factor in their decision of whether or not to seek shelter.



## 3. The Need for More Research and Evaluation of Programs Addressing the Intersection of Domestic Violence and Pets

There is an extensive body of research describing how animals get caught up in the cycles of violence, power and control of domestic violence; the National Link Coalition's bibliography contains over 230 references from academic journals and mainstream media. Several guides and protocols have been published to help domestic violence shelters establish programs. But more information is needed to:

- Illuminate the personal stories behind the statistics.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of on-site residential and off-site foster care programs for pets of domestic violence survivors.
- Quantify how many domestic violence survivors utilize their state's orders of protection which include pets.
- Determine whether there are different patterns of coercive-control animal abuse in urban and rural households and across different cultures.
- Design more and better co-living models for people and pets that meet changing needs in the future.
- And much more.

# 5

## Innovation: The PALS Model

PALS grew from the simple belief that pets are family too, and that people should never have to face the choice of leaving a family member behind when fleeing crisis, especially when that crisis is domestic violence. Since 2013 through March 2021, we have proudly served families including 293 adults and 438 children in our shelters.

From the first location in Brooklyn, PALS offers 172 co-living pet-friendly apartment-style units in seven of our 12 emergency and transitional domestic violence shelters confidentially located in three boroughs of New York City. The program includes PALS Place, the first domestic violence shelter built from the ground up specifically with housing people and pets in mind. It offers such features as a grooming station, an outdoor pet park with agility equipment, and pet-friendly flooring.

Although we are proud to offer an ever-growing number of pet-friendly units, the reality is that nearly 4,000 adults and children need refuge in New York City's domestic violence shelters each night; similar conditions are echoed across the U.S. and around the

world. Despite growing calls for shelters that can also accommodate pets and a greater recognition among human services that pets are family members, PALS remains the only program in New York City especially designed for co-living and among a very small percentage of all shelters in the U.S. that provide this critical service. We are committed to deepening our programming and constantly improving the resources we can offer to our residents and the wider New York City community, while also sharing our knowledge with our counterparts nationwide and around the world.

“Before entering shelter, I thought to myself that if I had to be separated from my kitties permanently, I would have to continue putting my life in danger and continue living in a risky environment. There was no way I would give up my boys.”

**PALS Client**

## PALS: The Numbers and Milestones in Program and Thought Leadership

Since developing the PALS program in 2012 and launching in 2013, each year has seen an expansion of the scale and scope of the services provided and the communities served. The number of PALS families in URI shelters at any given time has grown tenfold since the program launch in 2013. The program has expanded to accommodate single domestic violence survivors with pets as well as families – a unique option in shelters. It has progressed from only admitting cats in the pilot year to now accommodating a wide variety of animal species. Residents with pets are averaging two pets each.

PALS has served  
**293 adults**  
and  
**438 children**  
and welcomed  
**400 pets\***

\*As of March 31, 2021



3 bearded dragons



168 cats



11 fish



4 hamsters



26 turtles



5 birds



174 dogs



6 guinea pigs



3 rabbits

## Innovation: The PALS Model

# People and Animals Living Safely (PALS) Key Milestones

This timeline demonstrates the progress we have made each year in continuing to grow and improve the PALS program.

### Key Achievements: PALS Program

The thoughtful creation, implementation and expansion of the pioneering PALS program by Urban Resource Institute includes “bricks and mortar” PALS program sites, housing units and pet parks that provide the infrastructure for safety and healing, but this is only a part of the story. A growing number of staff provide specialized services and targeted programs to meet the needs of clients, including adults, children and pets. The continuous growth in program scale and scope generates increased impact on the people, pets, and communities involved.

In addition, the PALS thought leadership and program expertise is shared through conferences, webinars and special events that deliver insight, inspiration and information for other organizations to address domestic violence survivors and pets. The impact of the URI team has been recognized with numerous awards.

**Note: The length of time a family resides in a domestic violence shelter depends upon many factors, as does the referral of families to URI, causing the number of families served to vary year over year.**

### PROGRAM SITES

URI launches the first PALS program in a URI domestic violence shelter in Brooklyn, New York City.

The pilot PALS Program accepts only cats.

## 2012

### CREATION

Research completed and cross functional collaborations developed to conceive and create the People and Animals Living Safely (PALS) program.

## 2013

### ANNUAL IMPACT

10 PALS housing units are available; 8 families with 13 pets are served in the initial year.



### PROGRAM SITES

URI opens the Purina Pet Haven in Brooklyn, representing New York City's first pet park within a domestic violence shelter, providing safe play space for families and pets.

### PROGRAM SITES

The PALS program expands to a URI domestic violence residence in Manhattan with pet-friendly housing units. A new pet park is opened in a URI domestic violence shelter in Manhattan, providing play space for families and pets.

### PROGRAM SITES

A new pet-friendly residence is added in Manhattan, and a new PALS pet haven park is added to another shelter site, providing more families and pets with safe play space.

2014

### ANNUAL IMPACT

10 PALS housing units are available; 26 families with 35 pets are served this year.



2015

The PALS program expands to accept dogs and other small animals in addition to cats thanks to advocacy by URI for governing bodies to allow admission of more family pets, opening the opportunity for co-living shelter to more families.

### STAFF

A PALS Coordinator position is created to help manage the program and provide specialized support for domestic violence clients with pets.

### ANNUAL IMPACT

PALS expands to 27 available housing units; 13 families with 19 pets are served this year.

2016

### ANNUAL IMPACT

PALS expands to 37 available housing units; 18 families with 22 pets are served this year.

## Innovation: The PALS Model

# People and Animals Living Safely (PALS) Key Milestones

## Key Achievements: PALS Program

### PROGRAM SITES

The first pet-friendly Tier II site opens in Brooklyn, a transitional shelter in which domestic violence survivors and their pets can remain for a longer length of time than the emergency shelters.

## 2017

### ANNUAL IMPACT

PALS expands to 52 available housing units; 12 families with 21 pets are served this year.

### PROGRAM SITES

The PALS program breaks new ground with two meaningful achievements: In Brooklyn, the development and construction of PALS Place emergency domestic violence shelter, the first-ever of its size designed specifically for co-living of people and pets.

## 2018

In the Bronx, expansion to a URI domestic violence shelter that is the first in this New York City borough with dedicated units for single domestic violence victims (survivors without children in the shelter) and their pets.

### STAFF

A PALS Director position is created to provide strategic program management and support for clients with pets.

### ANNUAL IMPACT

PALS expands to 66 available housing units; 35 families with 49 pets are served this year.

### PROGRAM SITES

Two new 100% pet-friendly domestic violence shelters are opened by URI, complete with pet parks for safe play space as well as residences.

## 2019

### STAFF

A second PALS Coordinator position is added along with Training, Technical Assistance, and Supervisor positions, to strengthen expert support for clients.

### ANNUAL IMPACT

PALS expands to 172 available housing units; 87 families with 120 pets are served this year.



URI sustains uninterrupted operations during the COVID-19 pandemic, maintaining the capacity to provide safety, shelter, services and programs every night to 1,200 adults and children impacted by domestic violence in addition to 1,500 individuals from homeless families. Investment in time and resources and nimble implementation of new processes safeguarded the wellbeing of both staff and clients – and pets.

2020

#### PROGRAM SITES

PALS pet parks are complete and open at all seven pet-friendly URI domestic violence shelters, providing all residents and pets with safe play spaces as well as housing.

#### STAFF

A third PALS Coordinator position is added for the growing program to deliver expert management.

#### ANNUAL IMPACT

PALS continues to offer 172 housing units; 66 families with 78 pets are served this year.

#### PROGRAM SITES

New Tier II transitional shelters planned for Brooklyn and Queens, New York City, offering longer duration housing for domestic violence survivors, their families and pets.

#### STAFF

An additional PALS Coordinator position is planned to expand the specialized program staff and support available for clients.

2021

#### ANNUAL IMPACT

Total impact will increase dramatically with the addition of new residences.

**The milestone of 400 pets served is reached at the end of March.**



## People and Animals Living Safely (PALS) Key Milestones

### Key Achievements: PALS Thought Leadership, Awareness, and Education

Events and outreach by Urban Resource Institute continue to raise awareness and engage and educate varied stakeholders on the intersection of domestic violence and pets, the needs of survivors, potential solutions, and the learnings and impact of the PALS program to help advance progress on this issue.

“At the end of the day, we want people and pets to heal safely and for survivors to live life to the fullest without abuse.”

**URI PALS Staff Member**

URI releases the first White Paper on the intersection of domestic violence and pets, titled “Escaping Domestic Violence as a Pet Owner,” and convenes a unique multi-stakeholder round table event addressing the issue.

# 2014

The PALS program is presented at the Purina Better with Pets Summit to raise awareness among key animal welfare stakeholders.

# 2015



The URI PALS team leads an interactive workshop on the issue of domestic violence and pets at the Purina Better with Pets Summit, including URI's CEO serving as a panelist, sharing the new White Paper, showcasing a new PALS video, and a Purina employee service event assembling gift boxes for PALS program residents.

URI merges with the Center Against Domestic Violence and becomes the largest provider of domestic violence residential services in the U.S. The newly merged and expanded organization retains the URI name.

URI produces the first-ever National Summit on the intersection of domestic violence and pets with panelists representing the domestic violence and animal welfare sectors. The event, "Domestic Violence: Protecting the Hidden Victim," recognized the 5th Anniversary of the PALS program and unveiled details of PALS Place, the first domestic violence shelter built from the ground up to house people and pets.

2016

2017

2018

The first annual URI Celebration event and awards ceremony in New York City brings together leaders from the business, nonprofit, entertainment, and animal welfare communities to help raise awareness about domestic violence and pets.



URI conducts events for the media and elected officials during Domestic Violence Awareness Month, including preview tours of the new PALS Place residence in Brooklyn.



## Innovation: The PALS Model

# People and Animals Living Safely (PALS) Key Milestones

## Key Achievements: PALS Thought Leadership, Awareness, and Education

URI conducts the first-ever panel discussion in the Bronx borough of New York City on domestic violence and pets, convening city council members and animal welfare leaders with the URI PALS team.

PALS Program Director Danielle Emery serves on the plenary panel of the annual National Coalition Against Domestic Violence conference, reaching U.S. domestic violence leaders and service providers.

# 2019

The PALS program delivers the opening plenary presentation at the New York State Office of Victim Services' statewide conference on Innovation in Victim Services.

The PALS program is presented to an international audience of leaders and providers of domestic violence services at the World Conference on Women's Shelters in Taiwan.

URI CEO Nathaniel M. Fields joins the New York City Domestic Violence Task Force and is named to the New York City & State "Nonprofit Power 100" list.



# 2020

The PALS team participates in a workshop titled "NYC Policies, Programs, and Partnerships in Animals and Social Work" at the 6th International Veterinary Social Work Summit.

Two URI leaders are honored as "Advocate of New York City" by the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence: PALS Director Danielle Emery and Senior Vice President, Domestic Violence Residential & Legal Programs Jennifer White-Reid.



URI CEO Nathaniel M. Fields presents the PALS program to a global audience at the virtual Women for Women France international conference along with panelists from India, Australia and France.

URI PALS launches the “Compassionate Conversations” webinar series to highlight the importance of the human-animal bond in providing trauma-informed care to



## 2021

survivors of domestic violence, and to offer guidance to domestic violence organizations in adopting pet-inclusive services for survivors in their communities.

The PALS team presents at My Dog is My Home’s Inaugural Co-Sheltering Conference on a panel titled “Co-Sheltering in Domestic Violence Services.”

The PALS team presents “Domestic Violence and Pets: Preserving the Human-Animal Bond to Promote Healing for Adults and Children in Shelter Settings” at the National Conference on Health and Domestic Violence.

URI CEO Nathaniel M. Fields is included among the top 20 in the New York City & State “Nonprofit Power 100” List.



URI Deputy CEO Dr. Carla Smith is named to “Notable in Nonprofit and Philanthropy” List by Crain’s New York.



## Three Hallmarks of Our Unique Co-Living Model

Several features differentiate PALS from other shelters nationally and worldwide that also accommodate pets. For one, we call our model “co-living”. While many shelters have dedicated a room, a basement or even a satellite building to kennel pets, PALS focuses on keeping the entire family together in pet-friendly apartment-style housing. This special arrangement allows families and pets to live and heal together in a more homelike atmosphere. It adds additional emotional support for adult and child victims and a sense of security and safety for the entire family. Three features in particular distinguish PALS:

### **1. Preserving the Human-Animal Bond by keeping victims of domestic violence together with their pets while they seek safety.**

Pets are an integral and irreplaceable member of many families, including, and perhaps especially, those experiencing domestic violence. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (2018), 57% of American households have pets; 98% of pet owners consider their pets to be family members or companions. 61% of pet owners have more than one pet.

The emotional attachments that survivors have toward their animals make pets convenient – and, unfortunately, effective – “soft targets” and collateral victims; abusers exploit these attachments through harm or threats that intimidate their spouses and partners and retaliate against the families and friends who help them leave (Arkow, 2015a). For many domestic violence victims, pets are confidants, helpers and sometimes rescuers.

These conditions were confirmed in the National Domestic Violence Hotline survey. Almost three-quarters of people surveyed were unaware that some domestic violence shelters accept pets, despite the fact that about half of respondents said they consider their pets to be a factor affecting their decisions in their current situation. Of those who reported that pets would factor into their consideration



of shelter, almost half owned more than one pet. The PALS team's experience is that more pets and larger pets, in particular, make it increasingly difficult to secure safe housing or foster care.

Living in a domestic violence shelter can be an isolating experience. The individual or family has been uprooted from familiar landmarks, routines and social supports. The criminal justice and social service systems are complex to navigate. Residents are often simultaneously searching for employment and permanent housing. Although URI staff is supportive in all these efforts, having a loving family pet present in the midst of this transition is invaluable. PALS residents say that coming home to or falling asleep with their pets are among the few moments in the day when they believe that everything will be okay.

“While we were temporarily separated from our dog before finding PALS, my oldest daughter had nightmares that she was gone and my youngest constantly asked for her.”

**PALS Client**

Studies have shown that the presence of pets – as PALS makes possible – is important for the well-being of people under stress and can promote healing (Campo Uchino, 2013; Levine et al., 2013; Abate et al., 2011). Therapy animal visits to schools, daycare centers, hospitals, nursing homes, and rehabilitation centers provide psychological and physiological benefits to children and patients (Arkow, 2015b). Family pets provide these same benefits for their people, and our PALS families feel these benefits especially.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline survey confirmed our experiences. Over 90% of respondents indicated that their pets' emotional support or physical protection plays a significant role in their being able to survive and heal.

Because of these positive benefits, we believe that sheltering pets and people together in a co-living model creates an environment that is conducive to mutual healing. URI supports any initiative that encourages and allows individuals and families with pets to flee abusive relationships and find safety. But just as there are best practices for helping people to recover from abuse, there are also specific ways to facilitate a faster, fuller recovery for pets that have experienced trauma. Our trauma-informed practice understands, recognizes and responds to the effects of trauma on all family members; through co-living, we are able to address the needs of all family victims and ensure that the human-animal bond stays intact to the greatest extent possible.

## Children, Domestic Violence and the Human-Animal Bond

It is not only PALS' adult residents who benefit from the human-animal connection. The impact of coercive control to family pets – through either direct harm or indirect threats to animals – can create devastating emotional trauma for children who are simultaneously attached to their pets and conflicted about the turmoil they see swirling all around them. The nexus of animal abuse and child maltreatment within a domestic violence environment is exceedingly complex.

Studies have reported that early adolescents' companionship with animals plays a major role in their social development. Youths with pets are more likely to join social clubs and engage in group activities. Low-conflict, close child-pet relationships can be therapeutic and valuable, particularly by protecting young people from otherwise problematic interpersonal relationships (Cassels et al., 2017). Pets are often a child's best friend, non-judgmental confidants who can be talked to and share secrets with (Beck, 2011). The social and emotional support that pets can provide take on additional importance among children who are experiencing traumatic events and even help compensate for deficits in human bonds (Melson & Fine, 2019).

A child's having a favorite pet is a positive sign of an ability to connect with another living creature – but also makes the child more vulnerable to loss; witnessing abuse of that pet can be a terrifying experience that contributes to a child's feelings of helplessness and guilt (Boat, 2010). Leaving a pet behind when the family escapes an abusive situation can contribute to a child's fear of being similarly abandoned (Boat, 2014).

Studies have found that while bonding with pets may support children's mental health, exposure to animal cruelty may lead to subsequent mental health issues

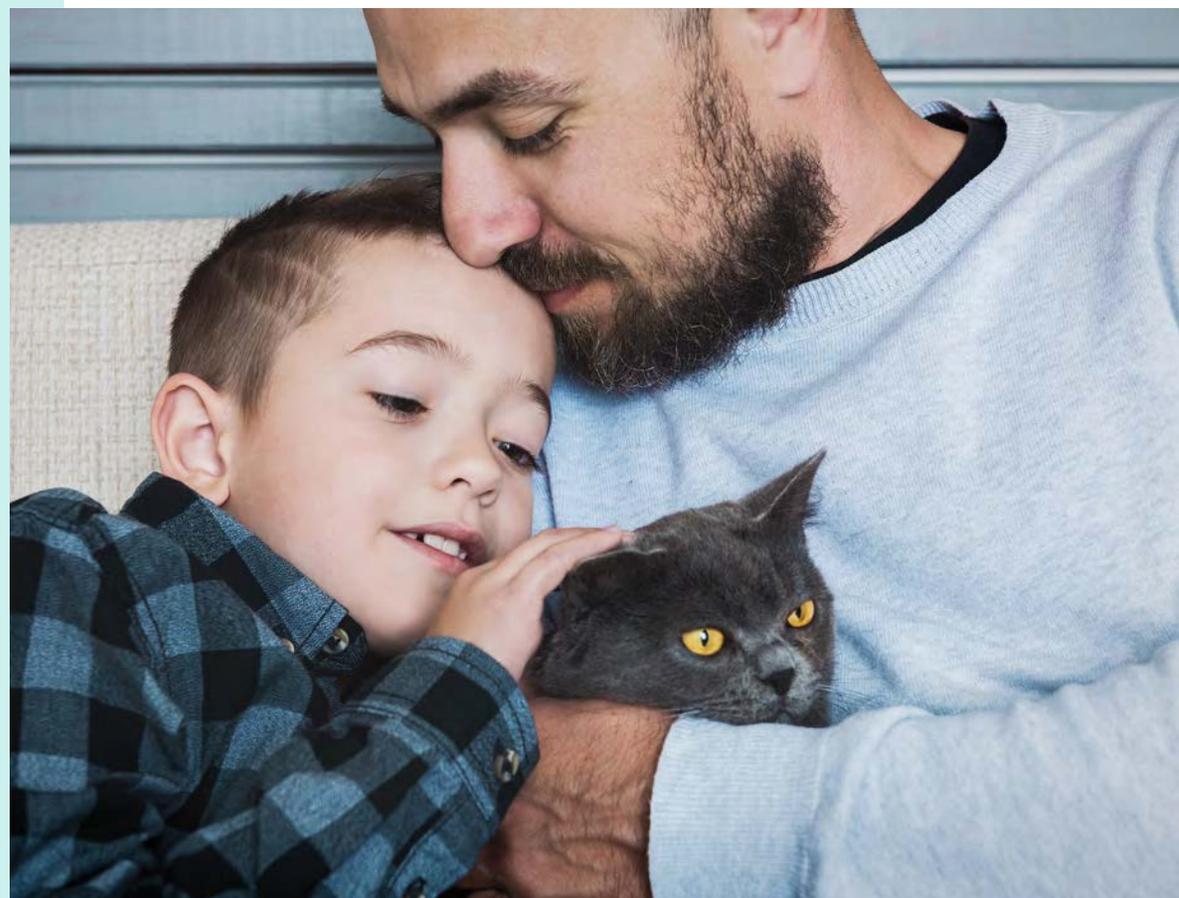
such as anxiety and depression and emotional distress (Girardi & Pozzulo, 2015). Children who have been exposed to domestic violence are three times more likely to be cruel to animals than children who have not (Currie, 2006). Children's exposure to animal abuse as well as domestic violence increases the risk for developing compromised socio-emotional well-being (Becker & French, 2004; Merz-Perez & Heide, 2004) and psychological abuse and sexual coercion in adult intimate relationships (Haden et al., 2018). Such exposure should be considered an Adverse Childhood Experience (Boat, 2014). At least nine states have enhanced criminal penalties for convicted animal abusers when the offense is committed in the presence of a child (National District Attorneys Association, 2014).

The largest study of its kind on this topic was a series of bilingual interviews with 242 children at 22 domestic violence shelters in Colorado who had experienced animal abuse. 24% of the children reported that someone in the home had either threatened to harm or kill a pet and/or saw or heard someone kill or harm an animal. These children were simultaneously upset, at risk for emotional and behavioral difficulties, and more likely to repeat the cycles of violence: 95% of the children who witnessed animals being harmed said they were upset by the incident.

Children who were exposed to animal abuse were 5 times more likely to have “severe problems” and 3 times more likely to be “struggling” versus their more resilient peers. Children were more than twice as likely to harm an animal when the mother’s partner had harmed an animal. The study said that children may be at greater risk when domestic violence perpetrators also engage in animal abuse.

But equally significant, 78% of these children reported that they had taken preemptive and protective measures and direct intervention to come to their pets’ rescue, which often resulted in their being directly victimized by the abusive partner. The large number of children who took steps to protect their pets from abuse suggested not only that pets are important to children, but also that pets are important resiliency agents providing comfort and constancy for children who are exposed to high levels of fear and uncertainty.

In addition to animals that were harmed to control a spouse or partner, some animals were harmed or threatened to punish a child’s misbehavior, which the researchers saw as leading to further emotional distress in the child. Animal abuse may also be a component of inter-sibling rivalries which are exacerbated in homes marked by domestic violence and which are marked by shifting alliances, competition, empathy deficits regarding sibling mistreatment, and collusion with abusing partners (McDonald et al., 2015).



## Innovation: The PALS Model / Three Hallmarks of Our Unique Co-Living Model

### 2. Integrating Pets into the Shelter Environment by including services for animals at all shelter locations.

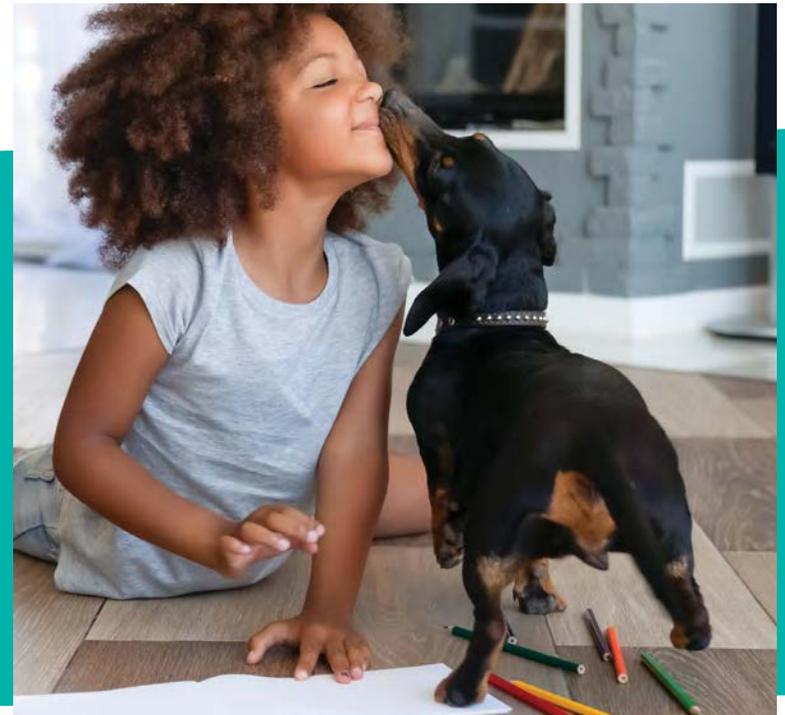
Our PALS team and shelter program staff work together to provide integrated services to all PALS families to promote healing. When PALS first launched, almost all pet-related responsibilities were shared among shelter program staff. It immediately became apparent that PALS would continue to grow and that dedicated staff would be necessary to support that growth. URI hired a full-time PALS Coordinator – believed to be the first position of its kind in the country – which allowed us to greatly enhance our service delivery.

As we continue to build a team with extensive animal welfare and social work skills and knowledge, we are able to devote time to developing relationships with individual PALS residents and pets, offer more PALS programming, and play a more active role in case management in all PALS sites, providing residents with ongoing advocacy and case management from the time they enter the shelter until they leave.

But it is not only the dedicated PALS staff that work to support survivors in shelter with pets – it is an integrated, collaborative effort. Case managers and social workers reinforce awareness of the link between domestic violence and animal abuse. Maintenance, security and other direct service staff are trained to understand basic animal behavior and to recognize if a pet family may be struggling or having a difficult time adapting to shelter. PALS and shelter program staff solve pet challenges and celebrate pet successes together as they would for any other aspect of a resident’s life.

“ PALS supported our family’s needs in giving us the necessary supplies for our pet and allowed our dog to open up in a new and healthy environment. Our dog has shown an extreme makeover and taken on a happier, more playful and healthier personality. ”

**PALS Client**



As PALS continues to expand, we are thinking deeply about not only making each location a safe place for survivors with pets, but also how we can provide knowledge and resources to all residents and staff and how to advance the program. Initiatives in development include regular sessions with certified professional dog trainers, visits from pet groomers and therapy animals to some locations, counseling programs to help victims cope with traumas associated with animal abuse and pet loss, and information sessions for teens and adults on career opportunities in the animal care professions.

A recent addition at PALS Place is a bi-monthly “PALS Pet Group”. This is an opportunity for pet families to build community with one another and share how abuse affects all members of the family. The Pet Group is also a forum for humane education, discussions about animal behavior, and a place where families can receive support and validation for their unique experience of living in shelter with pets.



“Residents who own pets consider them a part of their family. It is important for us to accommodate them into all service and safety plans, which we do daily.”

**Shelter Staff Member**

In addition to programs for adults, we have established a partnership with Humane Education Advocates Reaching Teachers (HEART) to provide therapeutic programming for school-age children at PALS Place. HEART adapted their humane education curriculum, originally designed for classrooms, to the ever-changing group size and composition of a shelter environment. PALS and URI’s children’s recreation staff conduct HEART lessons that combine guided conversations, creative activities and games to help children cultivate compassion for each other, animals and the natural world.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline survey confirmed earlier studies that reported that in addition to the negative psychological and physical effects of abuse experienced by the animals, the toll of children witnessing that abuse cannot be understated. One-third of respondents reported that their children had either witnessed abuse of their family pets or were aware that it had happened.

As PALS expands we will continue to provide the levels of service, quality of environment and integration into all aspects of sheltering that have made PALS such a success and aid our families in their healing journeys.

### **3. Support to Help People and Animals Heal — especially those impacted by violence — by providing education and resources**

Domestic violence also affects the pet members of the family, both physically and emotionally. In addition to the trauma and terror inflicted upon the adults and children, companion animals face risks of being killed or injured, being left behind with violent abusers, being abandoned, or sent to an animal shelter (Taylor & Fraser, 2019).

Even if a pet is not physically abused or neglected, it can still suffer the effects of their owners' trauma and of living in tumultuous homes. These can result in behaviors that are challenging for owners to manage, such as fear of strangers or men, reactivity towards people or other animals or difficulty walking outside. These changes, in turn, can compound the turmoil and dilemmas their owners are already experiencing. Our staff works with PALS families to detect pet behavior challenges that may have arisen from being abused or neglected or from living in an abusive home. We can bring in outside animal behavior experts to help uncover the sources of pets' issues and develop plans to lessen the animals' stress and fear.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline survey found that the fear of threat to pets was a worry for nearly half of respondents, regardless of whether a specific threat or actual history existed. About one-third of respondents reported their abuser had killed, harmed or threatened a pet, so those concerns are extremely well-founded. While in most instances the animal abuse was not serious enough to warrant medical treatment, a noticeable change in pets' behavior was seen by some two-thirds of respondents.

These national figures are reflected in our PALS families as well. We have heard heart-wrenching stories of pet abuse from PALS survivors, including animals that are seriously injured or need emergency care. Financial abuse is a common tactic of abusive partners who withhold money or forbid their partner to work as ways to further their control over the victim; denying access to money for pet care is not unusual (Fitzgerald et al., 2020). We frequently hear victims say they have either lacked the means or were prevented from providing regular veterinary care, grooming or a healthy diet for their pets. Many dogs coming to PALS wear this abuse in the form of long, dirty and matted fur. Because many victims are not able to get proper pet care until they leave the abuser, PALS works to ensure our residents can get their pets the care they need.

PALS has never been only about providing a safe place for individuals and families to shelter with their pets. Perhaps even more important, we want to ensure we are cultivating a healing and enriching environment for all. Throughout a PALS family's entire stay, pets are incorporated into case management services.

Families are given critical pet supplies including crates, litter boxes, food and bowls, toys, leashes and collars, blankets, and beds. All pets receive referrals to off-site veterinarians for no-cost medical exams, spay and neuter surgeries, vaccinations, flea and tick removal, and micro-chipping. Through collaboration with the ASPCA, Banfield Foundation, PetSmart Charities, Purina, and other organizations, URI is able to address animals' needs by offering resources that they may not previously have had access to. These include medical care, grooming, quality species-specific pet food, and a safe environment for enrichment and exercise.

At our PALS co-living sites, we are fortunate to have "Pet Havens": private, outdoor spaces where residents can spend time with their pets in a safe environment. Prior to entering shelter, abusers may have prohibited their partners from taking dogs for walks to keep them from leaving the home. Having opportunities to exercise safely and bond with their pets on walks in the neighborhood or in the Pet Haven is an immediate relief for many PALS residents. This pet enrichment also includes appropriate toys and treats to give the animals the physical and mental stimulation they need to live healthy lives.

It has been remarkable to witness the transformation of animals in the PALS program, from seeing a small dog lose nearly five pounds of matted fur, to a cat that becomes more comfortable around men. The progress an animal makes may not be dramatic, but it is always meaningful. Our PALS families often report that their animals are more comfortable and happier versions of themselves after settling into the quiet calm of the shelter environment.



# 6

## Building a Movement

### **PALS Community Response Model**

An integral part of the URI mission, including the PALS program, is to share our knowledge and experience with communities and service providers around the country in order to advocate for wider wrap-around services for domestic violence victims, including for PALS in relation to survivors and their pets. Our ability to speak as a peer directly to other shelter providers and domestic violence advocates is a persuasive tool in this advocacy. And as the only domestic violence shelter provider in the U.S. with a co-living program of this scale, scope, duration, and impact, we have a powerful and credible message.

Based on our experiences, we are in the process of developing the PALS Community Response Model to share with domestic violence advocates and shelter providers along with animal welfare organizations across the country. Our goal is to make the potentially intimidating process of including animals in service planning for survivors — either through PALS co-living or other co-sheltering or pet-inclusive options — achievable for domestic violence providers and their communities across the country. We will host interdisciplinary workshops, conduct site visits, and provide one-on-one virtual and on-site technical assistance.

The PALS Community Response Model will highlight URI's unique expertise in the field, providing the tools and resources needed for communities. The URI team is finalizing a series of modules that will support the provision of technical assistance and training so that other service providers can:

Create community connections that strengthen wrap-around support services in both domestic violence and animal welfare settings, centering the needs of survivors while also helping their pets.

Learn how to successfully incorporate pets into domestic violence shelter environments and foster proactive, cooperative relationships with individuals and families with pets.

Deepen their understanding of the human-animal bond and the importance of pets in the lives of those who have experienced trauma, particularly survivors of domestic violence.

Integrate pets into case management so that both human and pet family members are supported and included in healing, goal-setting and planning for a safe transition out of the shelter environment.



Our hope with the PALS Community Response Model is that our uniquely positioned team of both domestic violence and animal welfare practitioners will offer communities an informed and nuanced perspective that enables them to envision, grow and sustain programming that supports domestic violence survivors with pets.

## Building a Movement

### Outreach and Advocacy

An important component of URI's work is advocacy and building coalitions with community partners, funders and key decision-makers, including animal welfare agencies, government officials, researchers, private corporations, media, and victims who may need services. We conduct these efforts within both local and wider communities:

#### Local Outreach

To raise awareness about PALS locally, URI has worked extensively with New York City's Family Justice Centers, Domestic Violence Hotline, District Attorney's Offices in all boroughs, Animal Care Centers, the ASPCA, the NYPD, veterinarians, social workers, and additional animal welfare professionals to ensure they know PALS is an available resource for their clients and families.

We encourage service providers in all of these organizations to ask their callers and clients about the presence and welfare of pets in the home and to include pets in safety planning. Because domestic violence shelters historically have not accepted pets, many victims often assume they need to find alternate arrangements for their pets before seeking shelter. Informing the public that co-living is available prevents unnecessary relinquishments to animal shelters and painful separations from pets during an already difficult time.

This outreach has already benefited not only the hundreds of families we have sheltered, but also the more than 700 families who have reached out to us and for whom we have been able to offer safety plans and outside referrals when we were not able to accommodate them in our shelters. We have also conducted over 100 information sessions that have informed more than 4,000 individuals.



## Broader Advocacy

URI is committed to advocating for PALS and the need to accommodate pets in domestic violence services nationwide. To this end, we are working to raise awareness, educate, influence, and support policy on this issue.

In addition to our local outreach, PALS has conducted and participated in many events to raise greater awareness of co-living. These have included two national co-living summits, ribbon-cutting ceremonies and grand opening dedications, and community roundtables, luncheons and panels. In 2015 we published a White Paper, "[Escaping Domestic Violence as a Pet Owner: Insights from Survivors of Domestic Violence and Recommendations from the Urban Resource Institute's URIPALS Program.](#)" We have presented at national and international conferences as distant as Taiwan.

On the statewide level, URI works closely with regulatory agencies to raise awareness of the need for more pet-friendly shelters and to advocate for more inclusive language in state regulations governing domestic violence shelters. Due to our efforts, combined with a growing recognition by government leaders that pets are family, New York State issued amended regulations in April, 2020 explicitly authorizing agencies to create their own programs allowing pets to stay with their families in emergency residential programs for domestic violence victims.

With the success of PALS, we have emerged as a strong and vocal advocate and thought leader on the national level for having domestic violence survivors and their pets living together safely. A monumental success in this regard was the passage of the federal Pet and Women Safety (PAWS) Act in December, 2018. URI worked with other organizations in a national coalition to help secure passage of this new law which had previously languished in Congress for six years. The PAWS Act allows states' domestic violence protection orders that include pets to be enforced across state lines and on federal and tribal lands. It has already made \$4,500,000 in federal funds available to help shelters construct facilities and develop programs for pets. URI continues to work with the PAWS Coalition to advocate for additional funding for this grant program in years to come.



## Recommendations: What's Needed Next?

Every day, we see ongoing reminders and evidence of the importance of PALS in the lives of people and pets displaced by violence. We are humbled by the first seven years of PALS and by the number of families we have been able to serve at a vulnerable moment in their lives. By opening the first shelter in New York City that is 100% pet-friendly, URI wants to demonstrate – on an even larger regional and national scale – that providing shelter and services to families with pets is not appreciably different from serving those without pets. As the song says about New York, if we can make it there we can make it anywhere. We believe that the success of PALS Place will continue to help show our regional and national colleagues that pets are just like any other member of the family, so that one day all shelters will be 100% pet-friendly.

**Despite our tremendous successes, much work remains to be done. We recommend the following steps be taken:**

### **1. Enhance a national, centralized database that provides up-to-date information on domestic violence shelters that have services for pets and the types of services offered.**

Despite the best efforts of so many organizations and agencies across the country, information about pet-friendly housing for domestic violence victims, and resources to help direct them to such shelters, is fragmented among numerous entities. This creates a confusing situation for victims in crisis who need to know immediately where they can find a route to safety for themselves, their children and their pets. A centralized national database of co-sheltering sites that is fully accurate, accessible and up-to-date is not currently available. While others have created databases that have information available for persons who are aware of these resources, the National Domestic Violence Hotline recognizes that victims and survivors need a wide range of assistance; therefore, the Hotline maintains a robust database of approximately

5,000 carefully vetted providers and resources, including shelter and transitional housing, counseling, culturally and linguistically specific programs, and legal services. The Hotline has recently received funding, through the Office for Victims of Crime, to pilot a cloud-based version of this database that could one day be accessible to providers and survivors and would enable providers to make real-time updates to their availability and services in the database. This pilot could serve as a model for our vision of a centralized national database. It is our earnest wish that with adequate funding we can partner with The Hotline to expand the pilot and create, maintain and sustain a searchable directory of pet safety facilities that can be integrated into their excellent existing resources.



**2. Increase awareness – particularly within the community at large – regarding the availability of services for domestic violence victims with pets.**

Significant progress has been made across the U.S. in the last decade in increasing services for domestic violence survivors with pets. But as our survey results demonstrate, this information is not reaching survivors and the community at large. As the largest provider of pet-friendly domestic violence sheltering in the U.S. and the national domestic violence hotline, URI and the Hotline are uniquely positioned to inform and influence domestic violence and animal welfare communities nationally to enhance their efforts in informing and connecting the public to these resources and programs.

### **3. Expand funding resources that will allow service providers to provide training and technical assistance, such as the PALS Community Response Model, in communities across the country.**

URI's rich 40-year history and deep expertise in co-living and pet-inclusive services for domestic violence survivors gives us a credible, peer-to-peer voice in encouraging and enabling communities across the city, state and nation to build their capacity for assisting survivors with pets. Our unique perspective and experience as both domestic violence and animal welfare practitioners is invaluable to communities looking to build bridges and develop programs to support survivors with pets. Significant resources need to be invested in the PALS Community Response Model to help communities grow and sustain their own pet-inclusive services. This assistance can be offered to a variety of stakeholders, including government entities, law enforcement agencies, domestic violence programs, and animal care and control agencies.

### **4. Expand funding resources to support providing trauma-informed services for the entire family.**

The majority of current funding for pet-friendly domestic violence shelters across the country supports the construction of additional housing spaces but does not necessarily allow for hiring trained staff who can conduct trauma-informed interventions for all family members – adults, children and pets – who have been affected by

violence. In addition to private and corporate financial support, government legislation and regulations affecting co-living must be adequately funded. Meanwhile, URI will continue to expand the number of PALS units within our own shelters.

### **5. Address gaps in our knowledge through additional research.**

The National Domestic Violence Hotline survey is one step in an ambitious effort to share what we've learned from survivors and the Urban Resource Institute's knowledge and experience with communities and service providers nationwide to advocate for greater services for domestic violence victims with pets. Additional research is needed to further identify and resolve the barriers facing domestic violence survivors when they must also consider the welfare of their pets. One particular gap in our knowledge is a lack of understanding of the prevalence and dynamics of pet abuse as coercive control in vulnerable populations, such as LGBTQIA+ households.

The trust that our partner organizations, the local community, and our staff and residents have placed in us to provide safe co-living so that people and pets victimized by abusive relationships can survive, recover and heal together is what drives us to continue moving our work forward. And it is with that trust in mind that we look forward to the next seven years of PALS with excitement and great responsibility, leading the way with intent, innovation and cultural competence.

“When we were reunited with our dog, PALS provided everything we needed, from a crate to toys to food. Because of my situation initially I had nothing to care for her. To have a program like PALS that helped me probably saved her life.”

**PALS Client**



## Building a Movement

### How You Can Help

There are many ways for individuals, organizations, agencies, service providers, legislators, and funders to get involved and help address the issues and drive the solutions presented in this report.

Get to know the issue deeper and take action to support survivors in your communities. We encourage all to consider financial support of the innovative leadership of URI's PALS program, The Hotline or other organizations working on the front lines of providing safety, shelter and support. Supporting the URI PALS program will fund the construction of pet-friendly housing for pets in domestic violence shelters along with pet food and supplies, veterinary care, the operation of programs and services, and the hiring of trained, trauma-informed staff for wrap-around care for people and pets.

The Urban Resource Institute has extensive resources and technical assistance to help all interested parties to establish collaborative programs. The National Link Coalition (The National Resource Center on The Link between Animal Abuse and Human Violence) has a [Toolkit](#) to help build community-wide collaborations that work collectively to reduce domestic, animal, child, and elder abuse.

**There are many other ways to get involved and drive positive change including, but not limited to:**

#### Individuals

- Donate to the URI PALS program, The Hotline and organizations working on the front lines of providing safety, shelter and support.
- Donate to a local domestic violence or animal welfare organization (Ask them how they provide services for either survivors with pets or victims of domestic violence).
- Contact your state legislators to enact laws that address issues of pets affected by domestic violence. 35 states already allow pets to be included in orders of protection. 10 states already define intimidating animal abuse as an act of domestic violence. 4 states allow courts to award custody of pets in settlements to the party determined by the court to be in the animals' best interests.
- Start a conversation with friends, family members and community influencers about pets and domestic violence.
- Make a safety plan for your pets' care in case of a crisis or emergency. The National Link Coalition has [guidelines](#) and [samples of safety plans](#) that include pets. The [PALS section](#) of the Urban Resource Institute website includes Safety Tips for pets that include developing a safety plan.\*

### **Domestic Violence Service Providers**

- Acknowledge the importance of the human-animal bond with staff, clients and stakeholders.
- Add questions about pets to screening materials at intake and in ongoing work with clients.
- Contact URI to learn more about the Community Response Model.
- Research animal resources in your community – develop a fact sheet.
- Collaborate with local animal welfare organizations for fundraisers during October’s Domestic Violence Awareness Month.
- Bring therapy animals to visit.

### **Animal Welfare Organizations**

- Reach out to your local domestic violence resource providers and ask how you can help.
- Offer to foster pets temporarily while survivors seek safety.
- Donate pet supplies, food and veterinary care to domestic violence survivors’ pets.
- Partner with your local domestic violence resource providers to raise awareness of The Link between domestic violence and companion animals.

### **Mental Health Providers**

- Affirm the importance of pets to individuals and families in your work.
- Learn about the process for designating Emotional Support Animals and why they may be so important for survivors of domestic violence and homeless individuals under appropriate circumstances.

### **Veterinary Service Providers**

- Reach out to your local domestic violence resource providers to ask how you can help survivors with pets.
- Ask these organizations to provide you with brochures and other literature about domestic violence that can be displayed in your clinic’s lobby.
- Offer to provide free or discounted veterinary care to survivors’ pets.

### Legislators

- Research and enact local, state and federal laws that affect survivors with pets, such as including pets in orders of protection, defining intimidating animal abuse as an act of domestic violence, and allowing courts to award custody of pets in settlements to the party determined to be in the animals' best interests.
- Provide funding for local programs and service providers that support domestic violence victims and pets.
- Support the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and other domestic violence legislation that helps service providers to develop innovative programs that increase safety and services for vulnerable members of the family.

### Community

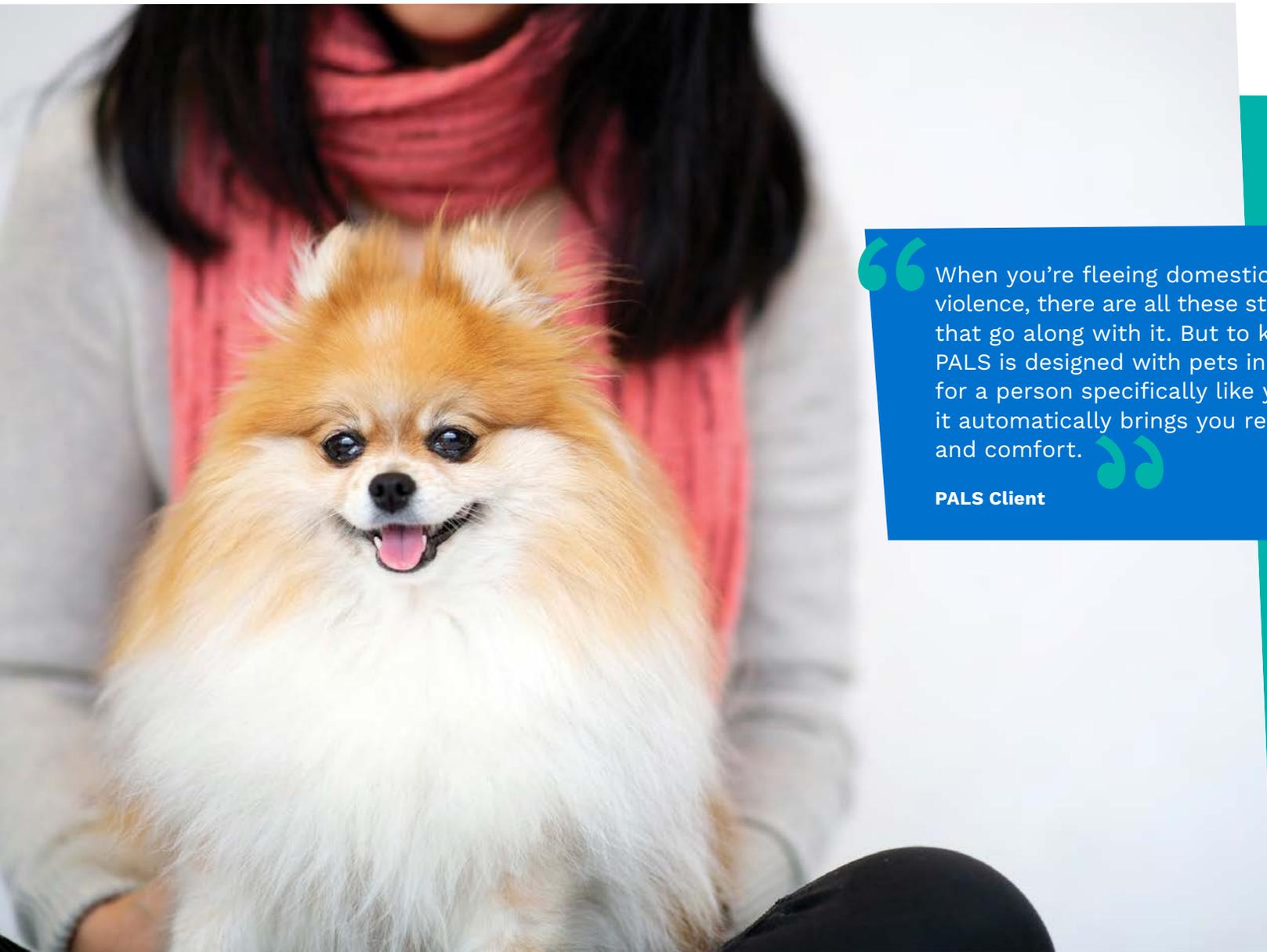
- Join the National Link Coalition (The National Resource Center on The Link between Animal Abuse and Human Violence) or organize a local Link coalition in your community.
- Include pets in Domestic Violence Awareness Month campaigns and fundraisers in October.
- Support your local domestic violence providers and state and national domestic violence coalitions.
- Raise awareness of domestic violence in general and the intersection of domestic violence with pets in particular.

### Corporate and Philanthropic Funding Organizations

- Award grants to organizations and service providers to create or expand programs that address the issue of domestic violence and pets including capital construction and remodeling, supplies and materials, staffing, training, awareness campaigns, and additional needs.
- Educate your leadership, board and staff on the intersection of domestic violence and pets.

### Pet and Animal Product Companies

- Create an awareness campaign for internal and external stakeholders on the intersection of domestic violence and pets.
- Develop an awareness and/or cause marketing campaign to engage customers during Domestic Violence Awareness Month (October), National Pet Month (May), or other relevant timeframe.



“When you’re fleeing domestic violence, there are all these stigmas that go along with it. But to know PALS is designed with pets in mind, for a person specifically like you, it automatically brings you relief and comfort.”

**PALS Client**

# Acknowledgements

No one organization or social services sector can tackle the intersection of domestic violence and animal abuse alone; it takes the dedicated commitment and collaboration of many multi-disciplinary agencies, organizations, funders, legislators, and individuals to pool resources, expertise and diverse perspectives to identify and achieve creative, innovative solutions. Since PALS' inception, the Urban Resource Institute has been fortunate to receive the support and collaborative power of many partners, without whom our successes and impact would not have been possible. We extend our appreciation to the organizations and individuals that have assisted URI along this journey, including, but not limited to:

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My Dog is My Home's Co-Sheltering Collaborative

National Domestic Violence Hotline

New York City Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence

New York City Animal Care Centers

New York City Animal Welfare Community

New York City Human Resources Administration

New York City Police Department (NYPD)

New York City Office of Animal Welfare

New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence

New York State Office of Children and Family Services

New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

New York State Office of Victim Services

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### Individuals

Phil Arkow

Steven Banks

Nancy Blaney

Jenny Coffey

Steve Dale

Hope Dawson

Aimee Gilbreath

Jane Hoffman

Katie Ray-Jones

Christine Kim

Anne Menard

Dr. Melinda Merck

Ann Michitsch

Cecile Noel

Kelli Owens

Marie Philip

Allie Phillips

Betty Pierre

Dara Ruiz

Abbie Tuller

Susan Urban

Kim Van Syoc

Dr. Kurt Venator

Elaine Wolff

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Colleen Parker

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**With deep appreciation to the frontline URI and PALS staff who every day deliver compassionate care and services to domestic violence survivors and their pets.**

# Glossary of Terms

**ASPCA** – the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. A national animal welfare organization headquartered in New York City. It is not the parent organization of local SPCAs in many communities: each of them is independent and autonomous.

**Battery** – any form of non-consensual harmful or insulting contact, usually performed with intent of inflicting injury on another person.

**Cisgender** – denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

**Client-Centered Practice (CCP)** – an approach to therapeutic interactions between a service provider and a client where the provider and client are in a respectful partnership. The goals of the client are integrated with priorities identified by the service provider.

**Coercive control** – a term developed by Evan Stark, an expert on the legal, policy and health dimensions of interpersonal violence, to describe domestic abuse as more than physical altercations. It is a pattern of behavior which seeks to take away the victim's liberty or freedom, to strip away their sense of self.

**Co-living** – domestic violence shelters in which pets reside with their owners in housing units, as in the PALS Model.

**Co-sheltering** – domestic violence shelters which accept pets which may be housed in residents' rooms or in other facilities, such as kennels, cages or crates.

**Cycle of violence** – The term cycle of violence refers to repeated and dangerous acts of violence as a cyclical pattern, associated with high emotions and doctrines of retribution or revenge. The stages of the cycle of violence include the tension building phase, acute violence, and the reconciliation/“honeymoon” phase. The cycle can also refer to violence continuing across generations, with children who witness or suffer violence significantly more likely to be victims or perpetrators in adulthood.

**Domestic Abuse** – A wide array of abusive behavior towards a domestic partner or member of the domestic household that may or may not include physical violence. Other forms of abuse include emotional, sexual, psychological, financial, and more.

**Domestic Violence** – violent or aggressive behavior within the home, typically involving the violent abuse of a spouse or partner, but can also involve children, elders, or pets.

**Economic abuse** – a form of abuse when one party has control over the other party's access to economic resources, which diminishes the victim's capacity to support themselves and forces them to depend on the perpetrator financially.

**Emergency Shelter** – a confidential location where survivors of domestic violence may live temporarily as they begin the process of healing and regaining independence. In New York City, survivors may remain in emergency shelters for 90 days and can be eligible for extensions of up to a total of 180 days. Time limits and policies for emergency shelter vary by jurisdiction.

**Human-animal bond** – the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) defines the human-animal bond as a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals that is influenced by behaviors essential to the health and well-being of both. This includes, among other things, emotional, psychological, and physical interactions of people, animals, and the environment.

**Intimidation** – intentional behavior by one party or person inflicted upon another that would cause a person of “ordinary sensibilities” to fear injury or harm.

**Intimate Partner Violence** – violence perpetuated against an intimate partner who may or may not be a spouse or domestic partner.

**LGBTQIA+** – an abbreviation standing for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning.” It also serves as an umbrella term for identities that do not fall under traditional heterosexual and cisgender categories.

**Physical assault** – the act of inflicting physical harm or unwanted physical contact upon a person.

**Order of protection (emergency protection order, protection-from-abuse order)** – any court-issued order intended to protect a person from harm or harassment. An emergency protective order is issued by the police, when court is out of session, to prevent domestic violence.

**Psychological abuse (emotional abuse)** – a form of abuse, characterized by a person subjecting or exposing another person to behavior that may result in psychological trauma, including anxiety, chronic depression or post-traumatic stress disorder. It may include, but is not limited to, bullying, cruel language, and gaslighting, which is a form of psychological abuse where a person or group makes someone question their sanity, perception of reality, or memories.

**Sexual assault** – the act of inflicting unwanted physical contact of an intimate nature upon a person. This can also include subjecting a victim to unwanted sexual language, imagery, or sharing private images or videos without permission.

**Soft target** – a person or thing that is relatively unprotected, that an attacker may target in order to get to their primary target.

**Stalking** – unwanted and repeated surveillance of another person or party with the goal of inflicting harassment or intimidation.

**Transitional Shelter (aka Tier II)** – in New York City, survivors who are approaching their 180-day limit in emergency shelters may qualify for a space in transitional shelter. Typically, transitional shelters do not have time limits and survivors may remain in the space as long as they are demonstrably searching for permanent housing or engaging in other supportive services such as mental health support.

**Trauma-informed** – practice that acknowledges the many ways that trauma may affect the lives and emotional functioning of clients and promotes a culture of safety, empowerment, and healing.

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# National Domestic Violence Hotline and URI PALS Survey

## Background

In 2019, the Urban Resource Institute partnered with the National Domestic Violence Hotline to conduct a 13-question survey with the intent of gaining the most extensive and comprehensive national data available to date on the scope of how the presence of pets affects domestic violence victims' options and decision-making. The result is the largest nationwide survey in the U.S. of domestic violence survivors on the topic of domestic violence and pets, directly capturing the voices of the survivors.

The Hotline regularly conducts focus surveys with users to gain data and insight on survivor experiences. These surveys are respected and leveraged across the field to further the response to supporting those impacted by relationship abuse. Examples of past surveys conducted (some privately funded) are: the impact of immigration on survivor experiences; challenges Latina women face in accessing services (in partnership with Futures Without Violence and Casa De Esperanza); and the perception of law enforcement by those affected by relationship abuse. These focus surveys provide a deeper window into domestic violence and the experiences of those affected by it. The Hotline's focus survey data have been presented at the White House, presented as testimony in Congressional Hearings and Briefings,

presented through webinars and official findings reports, and highlighted by the media many times.

Members of the URI and The Hotline's communications, program and technology teams co-designed the survey. Responses were collected between July 15 – September 30, 2019, from 2,480 participants impacted by relationship abuse who contacted the National Domestic Violence Hotline for direct support and services through phone, chat or text. Survey responses were collected, per service platform, as follows:

Telephone	1,538
Chat	864
Text	78
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,480</b>

# Results

The survey questions were organized into several key categories:

**AWARENESS** – to gauge domestic violence victims’ familiarity with the availability of pet-friendly shelters.

**NEED** – to identify the need for pet-friendly facilities and services.

**RISK** – to gauge victims’ level of fear for their pets’ welfare at the hands of their abuser.

**IMPACT** – to describe the impact of animal abuse on the animals and children in the home.

**ROLE OF PETS** – to find out how victims feel about their pets.

**URGENCY** – to identify how significant is the issue of pet safety as a barrier keeping victims from seeking safe shelter.

The results were compiled, analyzed and verified by The Hotline’s data team and shared with the URI team to be reviewed and verified. Respondents to the survey were not incentivized in any way nor were they required to take the survey. The respondents were asked to participate in the survey, should they wish to, at the end of their interaction with The Hotline’s live advocate.

## AWARENESS

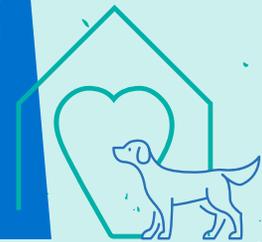
Over two-thirds of individuals surveyed were unaware that some domestic violence shelters accept victims with their pets, despite the fact that about half of the respondents considered their pets to be a factor in their current situation.

### Q1. Are you aware that some shelters accept victims with their pets?

The overwhelming majority of respondents were unaware that some shelters accept victims with their pets.

72%

of respondents were not aware that some shelters accept pets.

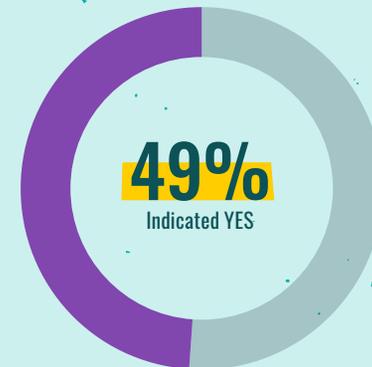


### Q2. Are pets a consideration in your current situation?

Roughly one-half respondents said pets are a factor.

49%

Indicated YES



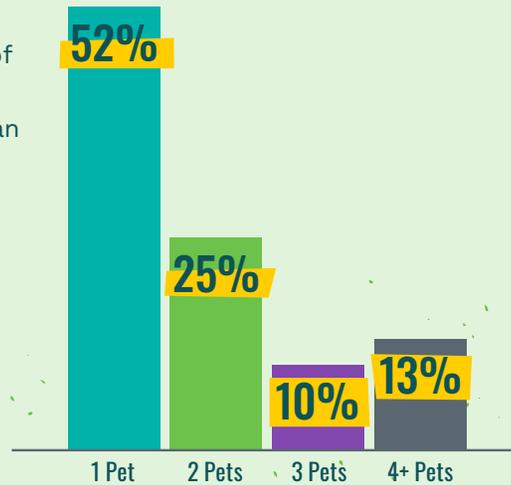
# Results

## NEED

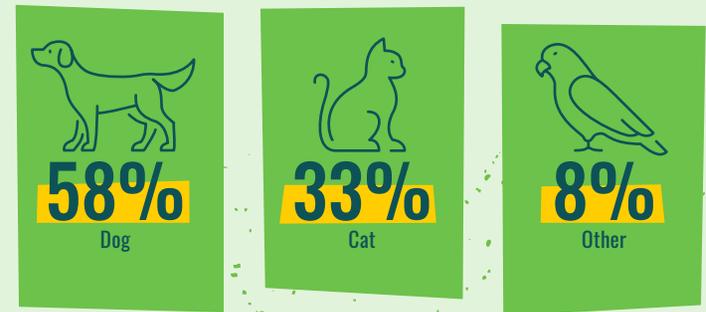
Of those who reported that their pets would be a factor in their seeking shelter, almost half had more than one pet. Fifty-eight percent of respondents reported owning dogs. Other species besides dogs and cats need accommodating as well. (Note: In the experience of the PALS team, as the number, size and variety of pets in the family increase, the more difficult it becomes to secure safe housing or foster care for them.)

### Q2a. How many pets do you have?

Nearly half of respondents had more than one pet.



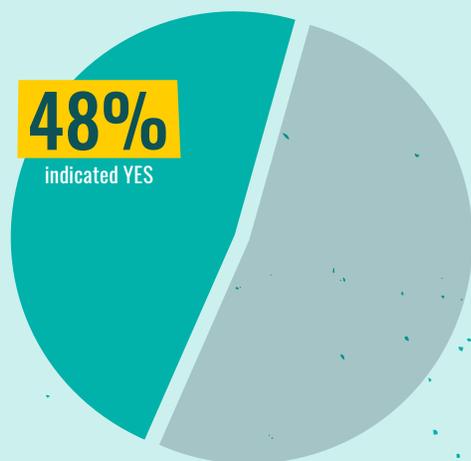
### Q2b. What type of pet(s) do you have?



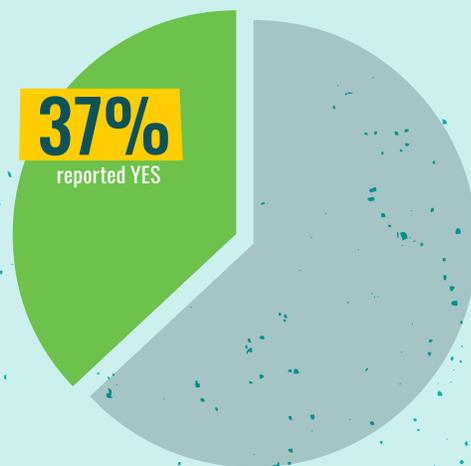
## RISK

The threat of harm to their pets was a concern for nearly half of respondents, regardless of whether a specific threat or history of pet abuse had occurred. Approximately one-third of respondents reported their abuser had harmed or killed a pet, or threatened to do so, so those concerns are extremely well-founded.

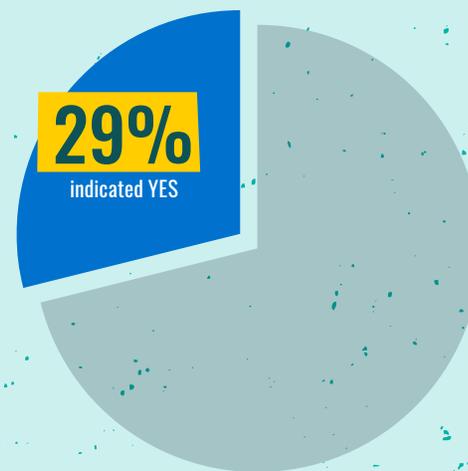
**Q3. Are you worried the abuser will harm or kill the pet(s)?**



**Q4. Has the abuser threatened to harm or kill the pet(s)?**



**Q5. Has the abuser ever harmed or killed pet(s)?**



# Results

## IMPACT

Where pet abuse had previously occurred, most instances were not severe enough to warrant seeking medical treatment — but a noticeable change in pets' behavior often occurred. Approximately two-thirds of respondents reported observing a change in their pets' behavior as a result of abuse directed towards them. In addition to the negative physical and behavioral effects of abuse on pets, the psychological toll that witnessing animal abuse may take on people — especially children — cannot be understated. Nearly one-third of respondents reported their children had either witnessed abuse of family pets or were aware that it had taken place.

Q5a. Did you seek medical treatment for the pet(s)?

23%

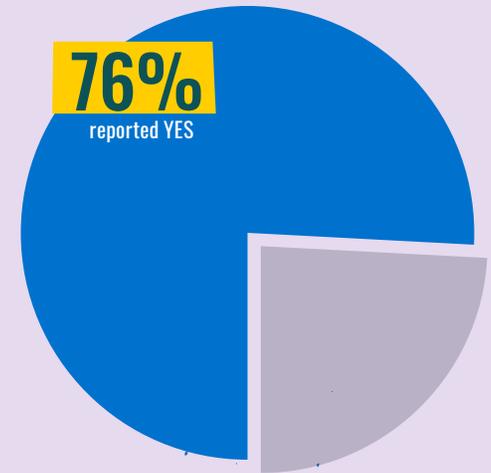
Indicated YES



Q5b. Have you noticed a change in your pet's behavior as a result of abuse?

76%

reported YES



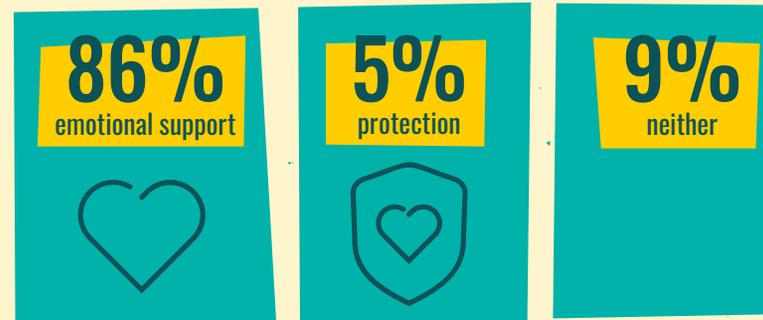
**Q5c. Have your children witnessed or been aware of abuse or threats to a pet?**



## ROLE OF PETS

Over 90% of respondents indicated that their pet plays a significant role in their personal experience of survivorship and healing, providing emotional support or physical protection.

**Q6. What would you say is the primary role your pet plays in your survivorship/healing?**

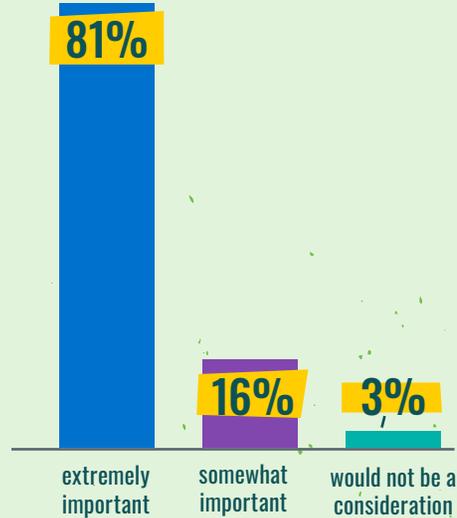


# Results

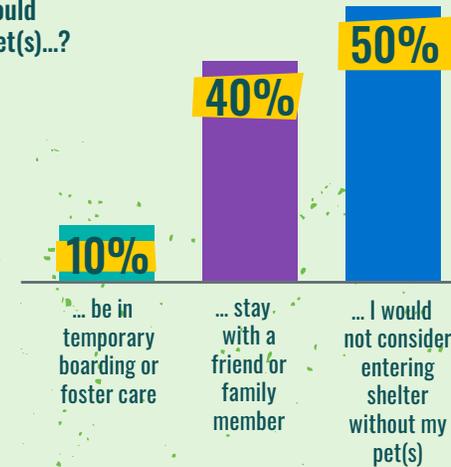
## URGENCY

The most significant conclusion of the National Domestic Violence Hotline survey is this: for the vast majority of respondents, keeping their pets with the family is a critical factor in their decision of whether or not to seek shelter. One-half of respondents would not consider shelter for themselves if they were unable to take their pets with them.

**Q7. If you were seeking shelter, how important would it be to keep your pet with you?**



**Q8. If you had to enter a shelter without your pet, would your pet(s)...**



# Conclusions

The results of this survey illuminate a great and ongoing need for additional awareness, outreach, funding, support, and technical assistance to enable more domestic violence shelters across the country to provide pet-friendly housing and services for victims. In addition to a critical shortage of such pet-friendly programming, public knowledge of co-sheltering programs that currently exist is quite limited.



“Domestic and gender-based violence devastate lives, families and communities, impacting 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men and leading to more than half the homicides of women in the U.S. Tragic outcomes are often the result of barriers to escaping abuse, ranging from financial insecurity to concern for vulnerable pets. URI is committed to helping drive client-centered, flexible and sustainable solutions (to include funding) through public-private partnerships in order to break down barriers to safety, create meaningful change, and end the cycle of violence. Join the movement.”

**Nathaniel M. Fields**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Urban Resource Institute**

