

Introduction to Domestic Abuse and Pets

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Together we'll cover...

- An introduction to domestic abuse
- Animal abuse & domestic abuse
- Impact on pets
- Specialist pet fostering services in the UK
- How we operate and why
- Referrals and signposting



The Link – pet abuse and domestic abuse

- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives
- 53% of UK adults own a pet (PAW Report, 2023)
- Endeavour, a Domestic Abuse Service, found that 75% of those who have family pets have had violence used against them as a threat or means of control
- Perpetrators will often threaten the animal and victim-survivors will likely be frightened to leave them behind, however, the majority of refuges are unable to accept pets



Relationships with animals...

'I had a dog. I had her from seven weeks old...and she was just amazing... She was my baby. I mean, I've got children, I've got four children, but she was our little baby. To be honest, she's the one that got me through during and after I left' (Marianne, 50)



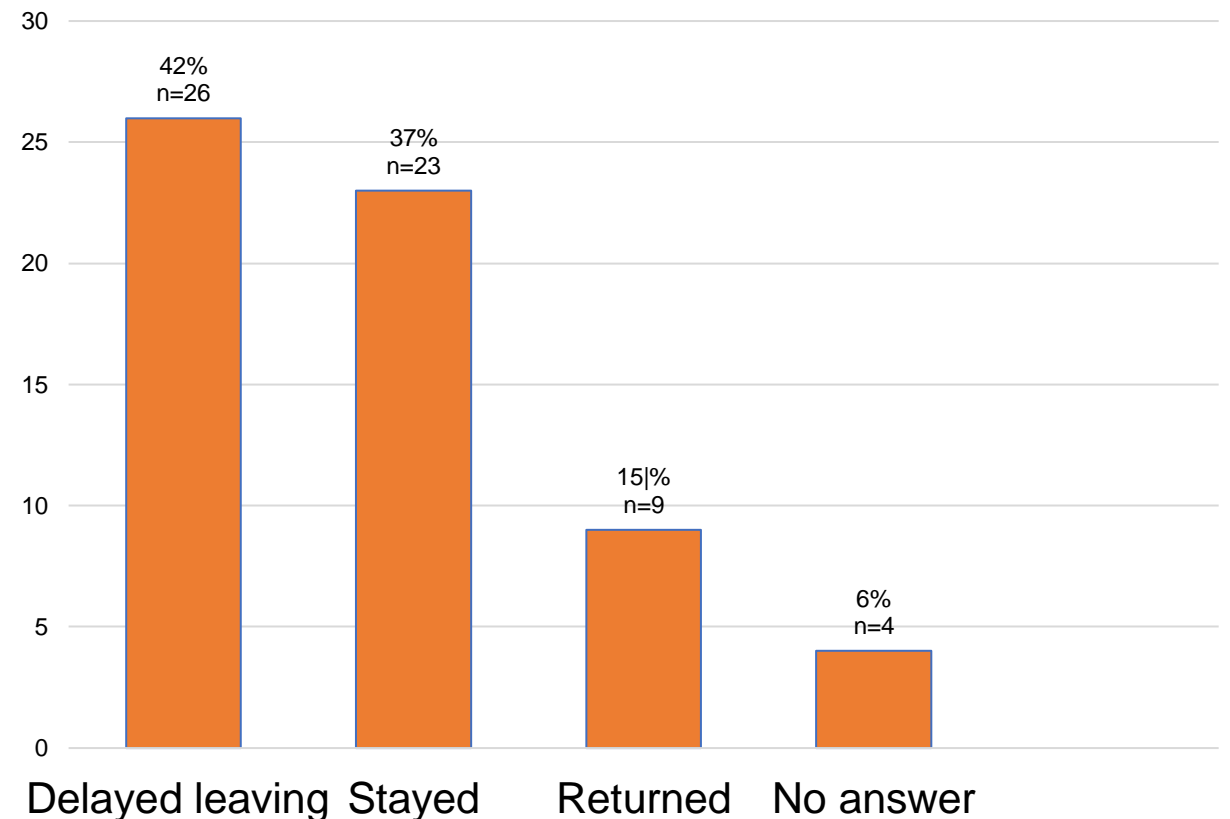
The impact of animal abuse

Dr Mary Wakeham

'I had three very big fish tanks with some fish in that I had nurtured from tiny little fish. He used to threaten... he used to throw things in there. And he used to like pull the fish out. And one day... I can't even remember what it was, it was something so stupid, it was like I had got home late and the dinner wasn't ready, and he took the bleach and poured it into the water. I just had to sit there and basically watch them die, because that was what happened, it was awful'

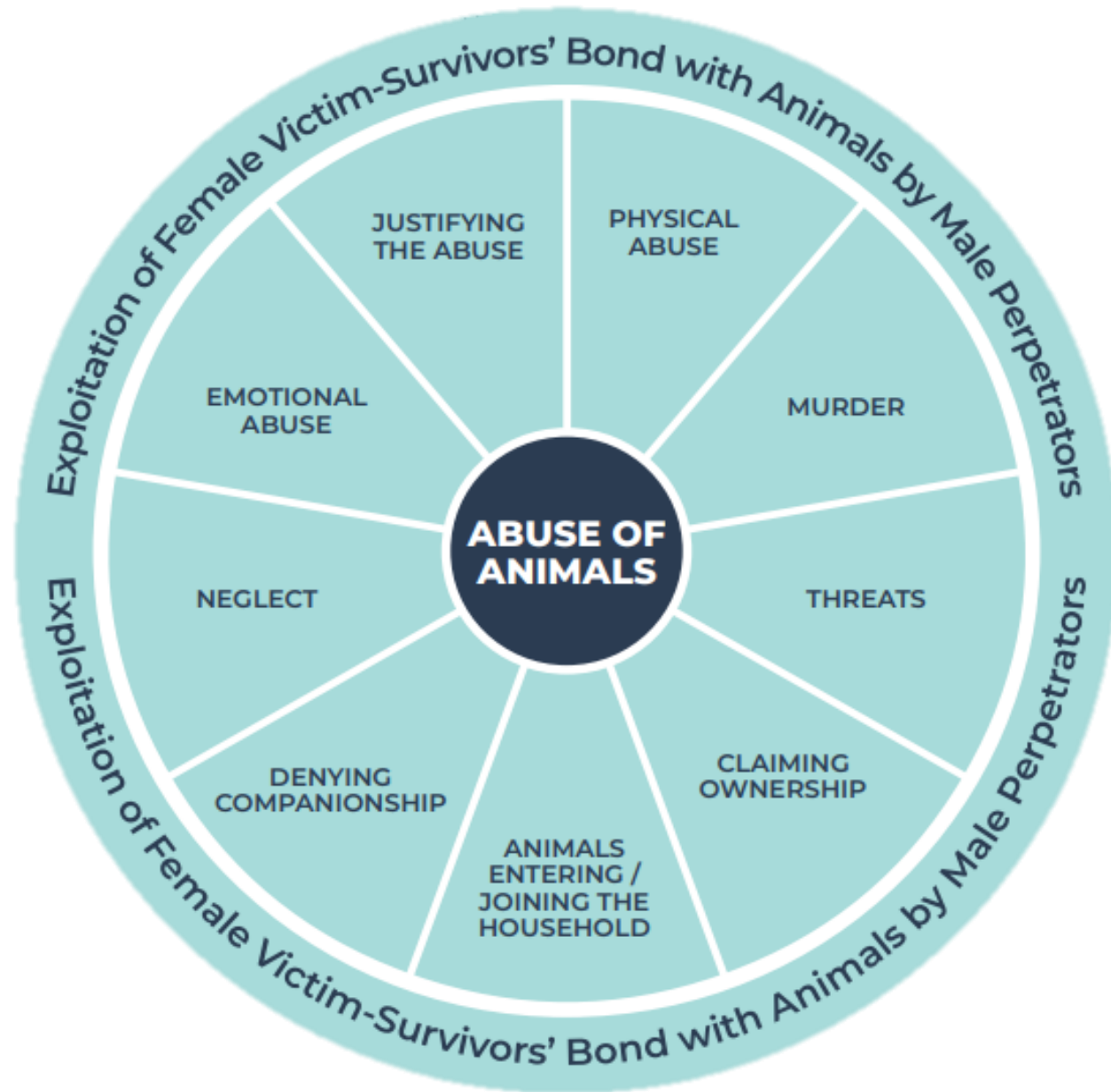
(Ann, 38)

How Animals Impacted Victim-Survivor's Decisions About Leaving
n=62





Power and Control Wheel



Power and Control Wheel Abuse of Animals

How can domestic abuse affect pet behaviour?

Dogs

- Lapses in house training
- Pulling on lead
- Struggling being alone
- Barking at dogs on walks
- Issues around food
- Nervous in the vet
- Shy and withdrawn



Cats

- Changes to normal behaviour
- Inappropriate toileting
- Over grooming
- Hiding
- Changes in vocalisation



Domestic Abuse Act 2021



Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Statutory Guidance

Coercive control:

Using animals to control or coerce a victim, e.g. harming or threatening to harm or give away pets or assistance dogs

Emotional/psychological abuse:

Using violence or threats towards assistance dogs and pets to intimidate the victim and cause distress, including threatening to harm the animal as well as controlling how the owner is able to care for the animal

Technology facilitated abuse:

Use of spyware or GPS locators on items such as phones, computers, wearable tech, cars, motorbikes and pets

Pets as a barrier

In your experience do you feel that some survivors will not leave their home/access safe accommodation without knowing that their pets will be safe too?



Pet Physical Abuse

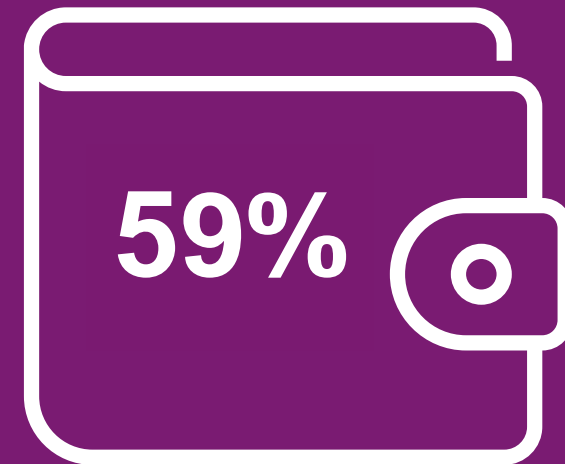
Do you know of any domestic abuse cases where pets have also been abused?



From a survey of 376 respondents, 2019

Pets and Economic Abuse

Do you know of any cases where pets, or an owner's ability to care for a pet, have been impacted by financial abuse?



From a survey of 376 respondents, 2019

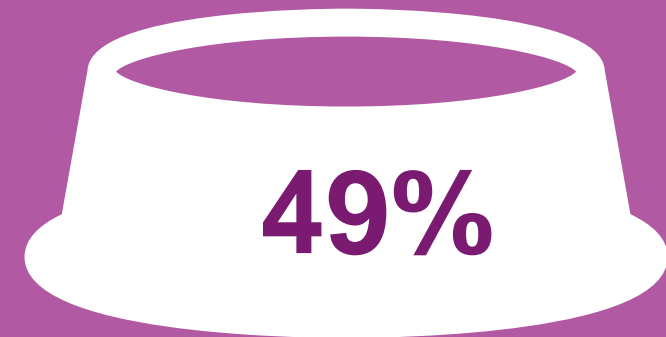
Pets and Coercive Control

Do you believe that threats to pets are used as a tool to attempt to coerce and control someone?



Pets that had been killed

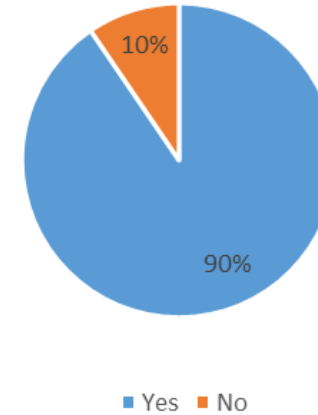
Are you aware of any domestic abuse cases where a pet has been killed?



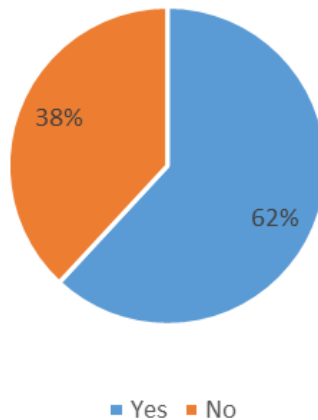
Cats and Domestic Abuse survey 2023

East Anglia-specific stats

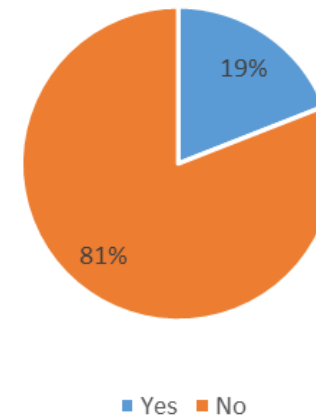
In your professional experience, have you come across cases where cats or kittens have been threatened with harm by the perpetrator?



In your professional experience, have you come across cases where cats or kittens have been physically abused by the perpetrator?



In your professional experience, have you come across cases where cats or kittens have been killed by the perpetrator?

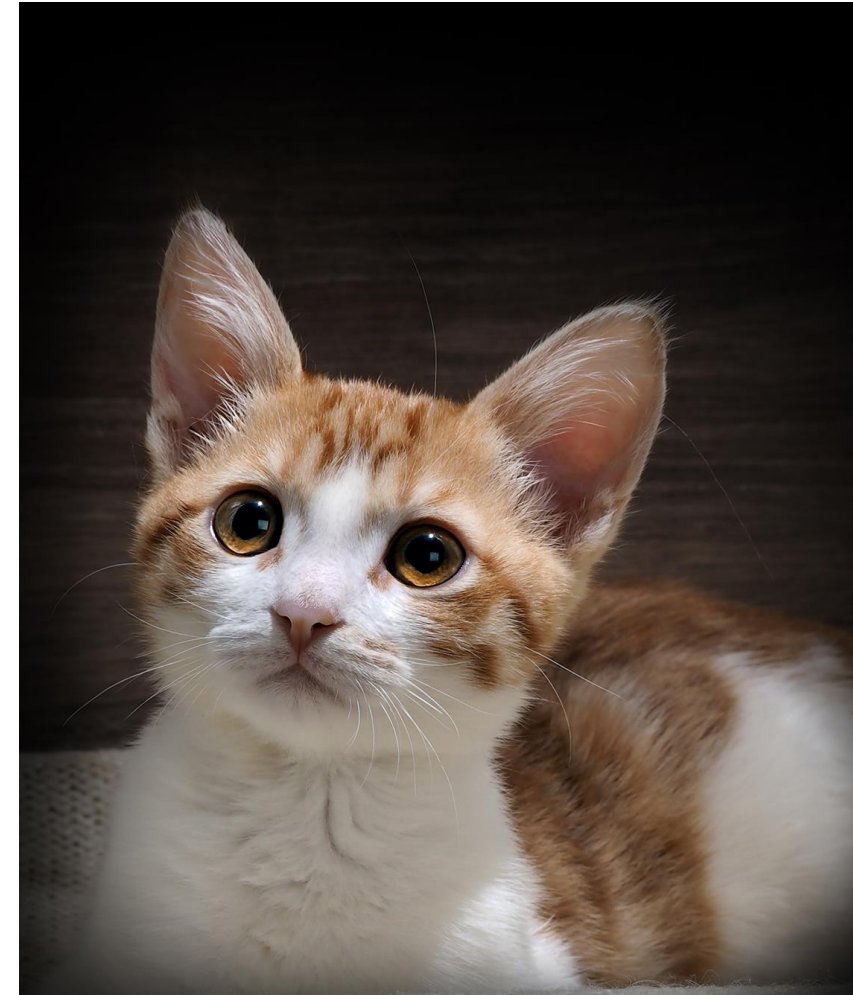


Where will the owner go?

- Making the first step to leave an abusive person
- Finding safe housing – refuge, emergency accommodation, friends or family
- Majority of refuges aren't able to accept pets

Where will the pet go?

- Friends or family
- Private boarding facilities
- Permanently rehomed
- Left behind (risk to life)



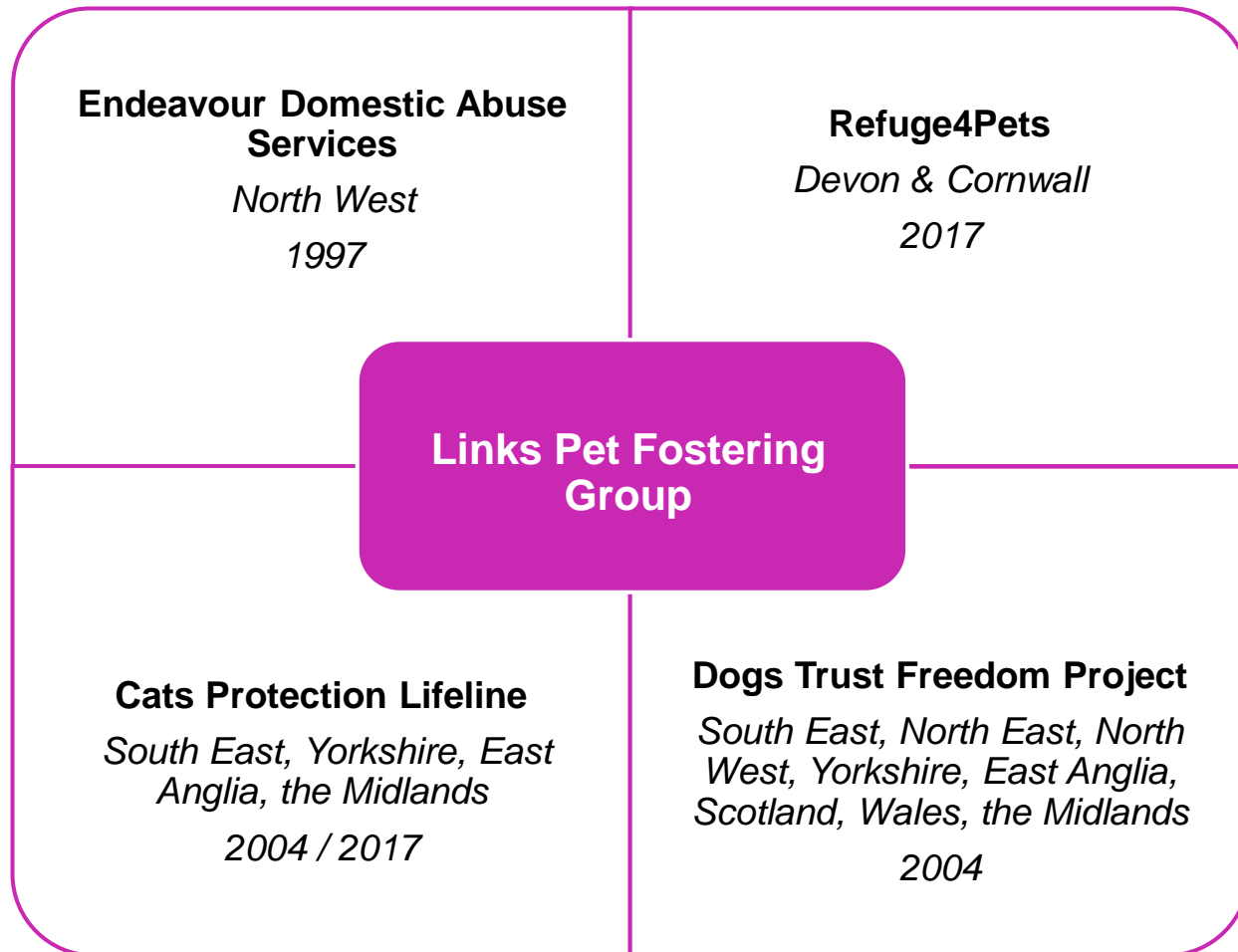
**More than 9 in 10 professionals (95%)
said that some survivors will not
leave their home without knowing
their pet would be safe.**

Without support...

**Owners feel they have no other
option but to stay with the abusive
person**

...pets and people remain at risk





Our History

The Links Group – raises awareness of the link between the abuse of people and animals through support, training and inter-agency working

The Links Pet Fostering Group - a coalition of specialist domestic abuse pet fostering services

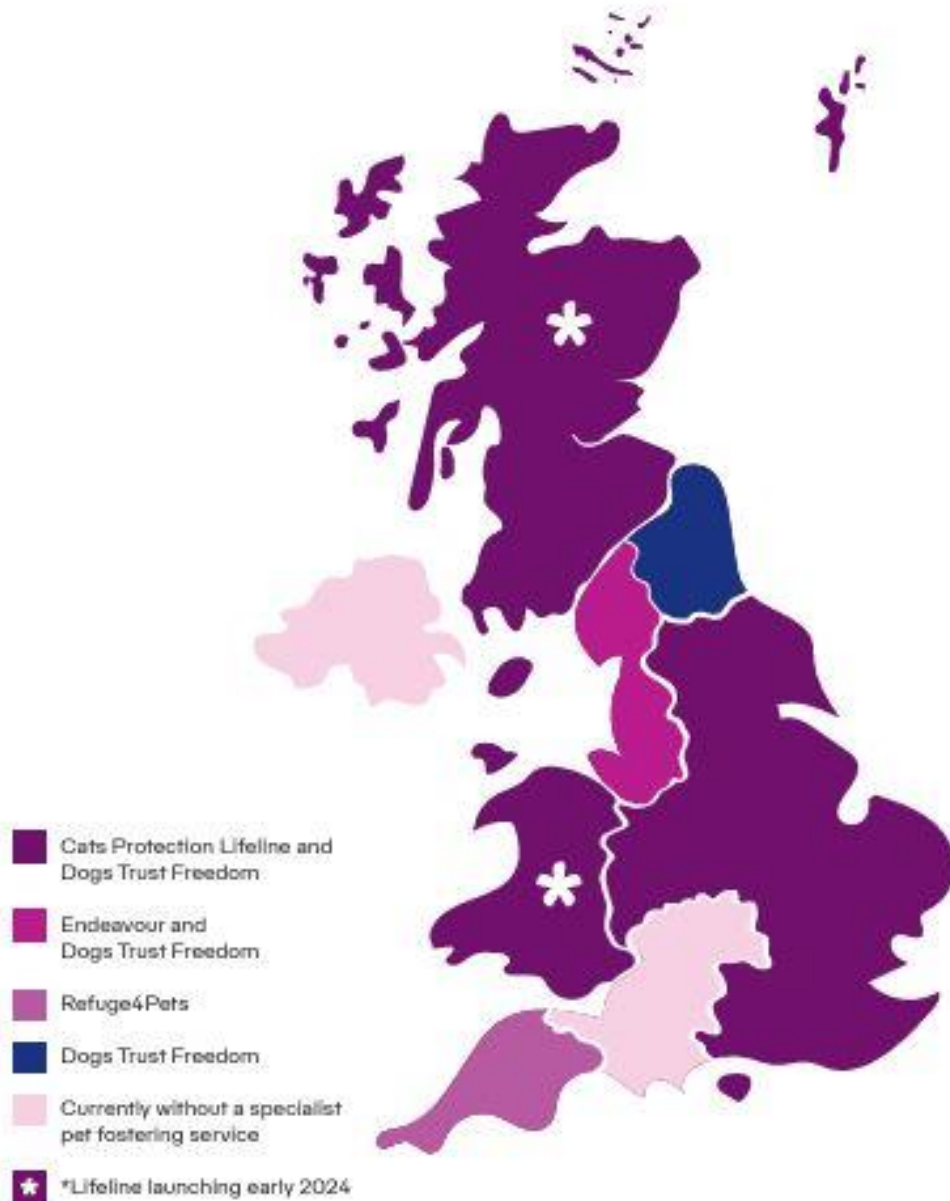


Our service areas

Future expansions planned:

- Cats Protection Lifeline into Wales & Scotland (early 2024)
- Cats Protection Lifeline and Dogs Trust Freedom into Northern Ireland (2025)

Our goal is for all postcodes to be covered by a specialist pet fostering service.





Referral from either a support worker or from a victim-survivor themselves

Form completed about the pet and service conditions signed

Team match pet to a foster home and arrange the safe collection

Pets are taken to new foster home and introduced to foster family

Owner will be kept updated regularly with updates and photos

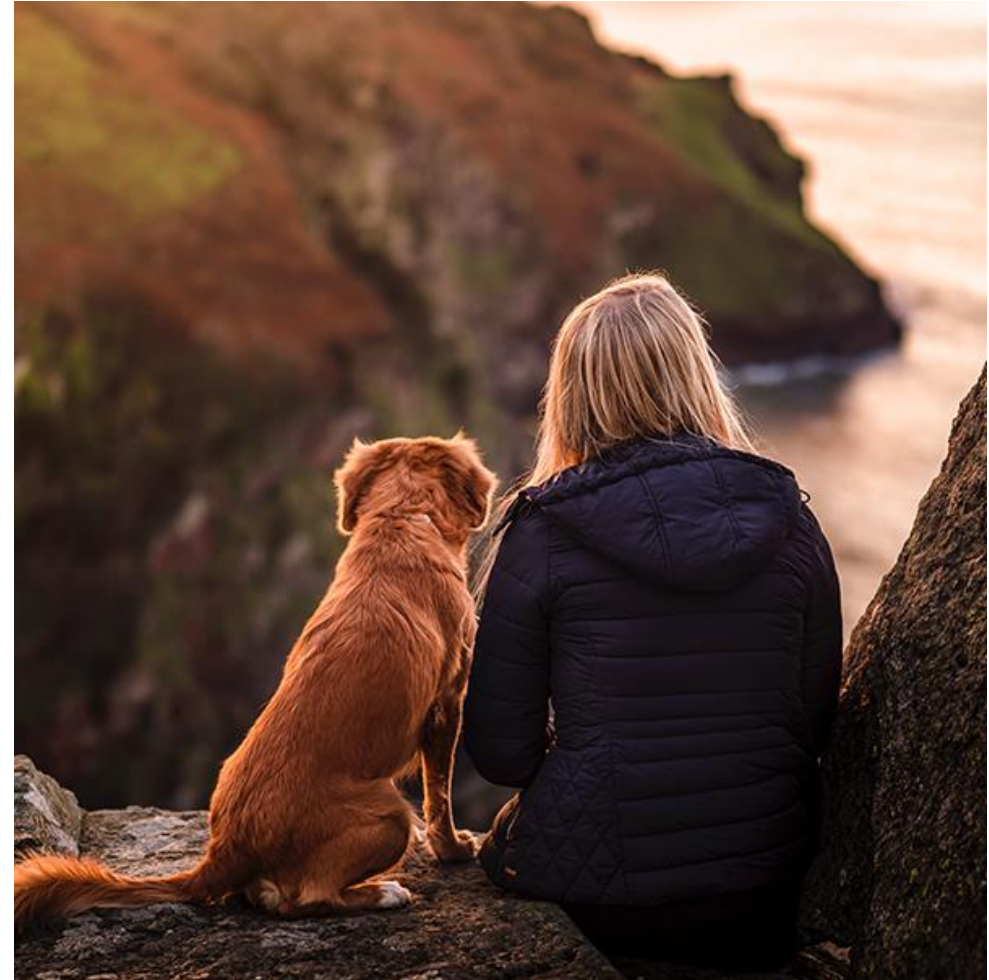
Family and pet reunited at end of placement



Their journey to safety...

Foster placements

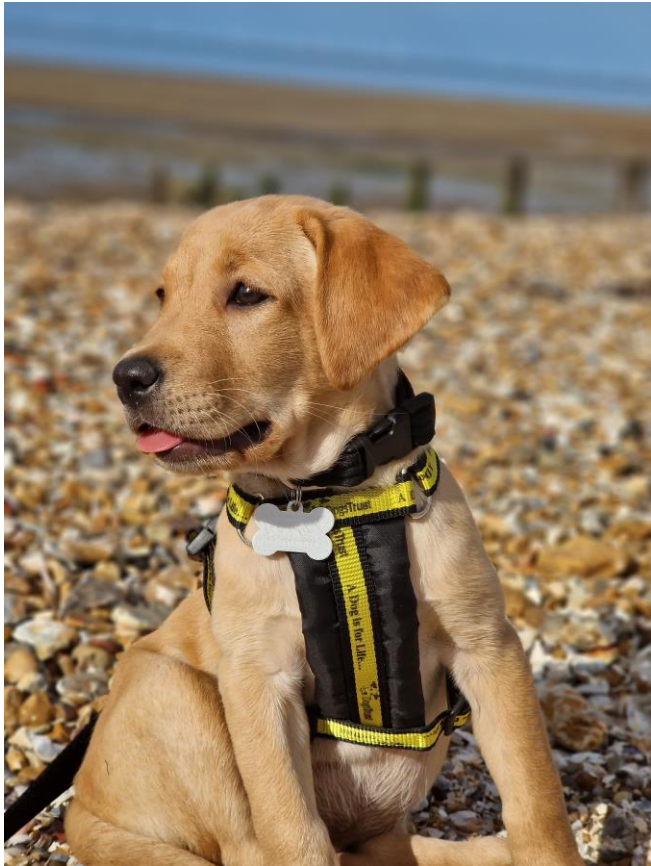
- Pets are cared for by volunteer foster carers
- Foster placements last on average 6-9 months
- We accept referrals for adult pets but can explore alternatives for younger pets
- Pets must be able to be safely cared for by volunteers
- We can collect from a safe location in any of the regions we operate in



Keeping pets and owners safe



97% of professionals said that pets are often used **as a means of controlling someone** experiencing domestic abuse.



- Services are strictly confidential
- Short windows of time to safely collect pets
- Unmarked vehicles for collection
- Pets are placed in different locations to where they came from
- No contact between carers / owners
- No social media / external communications about pets on the scheme
- Microchip details are kept secure and locked down
- All data is kept completely separate from the wider organisation (Cats Protection / Dogs Trust)
- Team experienced and trained in supporting survivors of domestic abuse, risk assessing and safeguarding

Economic Abuse

59% of professionals knew of cases where pets, or an owner's ability to care for a pet, had been impacted by economic abuse

- Perpetrators restricting funds for vet care, food or dog training classes
- Controlling whether the owner can access the vet or not
- Dogs may be unable to be walked / socialised
- Limited access to pet services – walkers, groomers, vets
- Direct impact on the animal's welfare – untreated conditions, overweight/underweight animals
- Behavioural impacts due to welfare needs not being met
- Highly distressing for owners to watch pet suffer
- Threats from perpetrator to report to the RSPCA = owner has a fear of animal charities



Services are free, non-judgemental and understanding of client needs

How can someone refer?

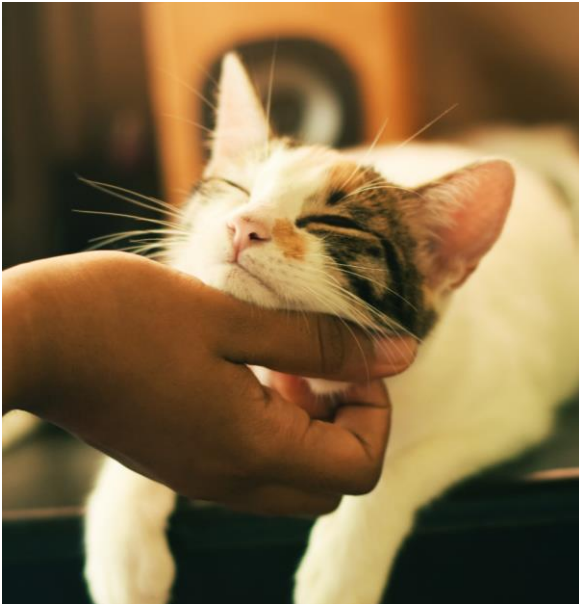
Self-referral – The owner can contact us themselves if it is safe to

Agency referral – An agency supporting the owner can refer to us on behalf of the owner

For example, the police, Women's Aid, independent domestic abuse charities, local authority and housing associations

We will need to obtain information about the pet's behaviour and personality and ask for confirmation from somebody supporting them

You can refer by calling our freephone numbers, or by email

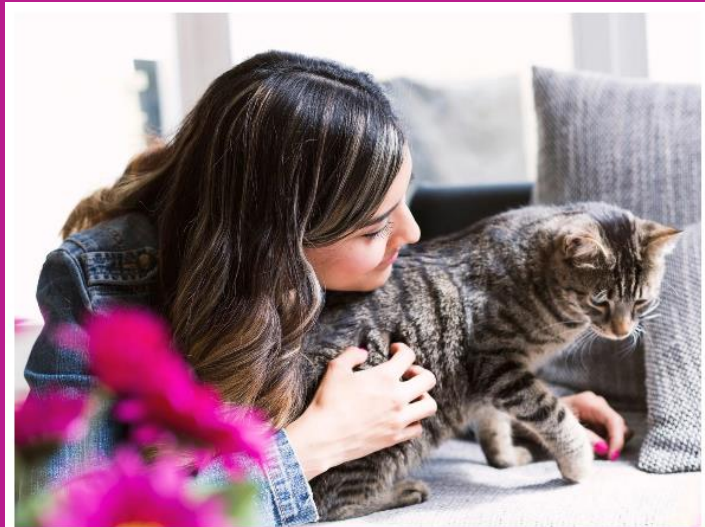


Dogs Trust Freedom Gemma's Story



From: BBC Stories

Could you foster for us?



Fostering

Find out how to foster for the Lifeline service.

[Lifeline Fostering](#)

Become a Freedom Project foster carer

Help change the lives of families fleeing domestic abuse by opening your home and heart to a foster dog.

[Apply here](#)

www.cats.org.uk/lifeline

www.dogstrustfreedomproject.org.uk



National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247

RESPECT Men's Advice Line: 0808 8010327

Thank you

Contact Us:

Email: freedom@dogstrust.org.uk

Phone: 0808 196 6240

Email: lifelineeastanglia@cats.org.uk

Phone: 0300 012 0283



Freedom A specialist service by

