

Freedom Project



Ashley Szafranek
Freedom Project Coordinator -
Scotland

Freedom Project – supporting people and pets



- The need to leave in an emergency not practical to take pets
 - Safe accommodation or refuge unable to take pets
 - May be unsafe to leave pet with friends or family
 - Not practical to kennel dogs for long periods of time

Freedom Project – the need

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse – *pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and/or violent behaviour, including sexual violence, by a partner or ex-partner. Domestic abuse is overwhelmingly experienced by women and perpetrated by men.*

- Women's Aid



Within this definition:

- Financial abuse
- Online/digital
- Harassment/stalking
- Honour-based violence
- Forced marriage
- Coercive control

The Link – pet abuse and domestic abuse



- What happens to the pets?
 - Attempting to trace pets
- A powerful tool to get her back

The Link – pet abuse and domestic abuse

- What is the Link?
- Types of abuse
- The Links Group
- Impact on professionals working in both the animal and human sectors
- Need for awareness across both sectors



“When animals are abused, people are at risk... When people are abused, animals are at risk.” American Humane Association

Pets and Domestic Abuse

Intimidation

Harming or killing a pet and threatening that the same will happen to the survivor

Isolation

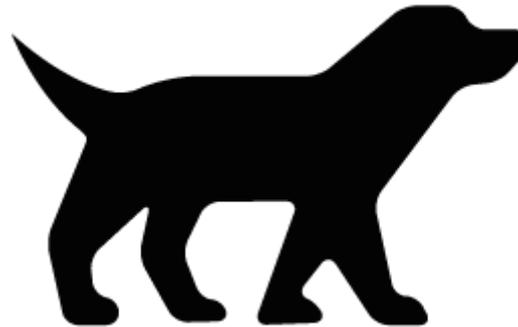
Refusing to allow the pet to be exercised or taken to a vet

Emotional

Pets are a source of comfort and so they may be harmed or given away to cause distress/fear

Denying/blaming

It's the pet's fault for the perpetrator's behaviour.
/ 'I do this because you love the dog more'



Economic

Restricting funds for vet treatments and food

Coercion and threats

Threatening to harm the animal as a way to control and coerce

Using children

Harming the pet to intimidate children
/ giving the dog away and blaming mum

Legal

Trying to take legal possession of the pet

Pets and Domestic Abuse – case study

“I suffered abuse from my ex-partner for 3 years. It started as psychological abuse and then escalated to physical abuse. I tried to leave but he always found me. I had nowhere permanent to go and I had my dogs.

The Domestic Violence Unit tried to persuade me to go into a refuge for 3 years, but I refused because there was nowhere for my dogs to go. If I left, he probably would have killed them.

In the last year he started harming the dogs. He began by making threats that if I went out (even just to the shops) then the dogs would ‘get it’. Then he started inciting them to fight, releasing them into roads, leaving gates open so they would run away. I couldn’t protect them and myself.

The Freedom Project was my only means of escape. In many ways it was my lifesaver. In time, he would have killed me and my dogs. I am thankful to Dogs Trust because they did everything to secure safe, loving homes for my dogs.

Without the Freedom Project, the abuse would have gone on and on. My abuser knew how much the dogs meant to me and knew I wouldn’t leave because of them.”

Pets and Domestic Abuse

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?



From a survey of 376 respondents, 2019

‘Survivors have stated they would rather be assaulted than witness their pet be assaulted.

This significantly impacts on the children also and be a huge factor that needs to be considered in an attempt to flee domestic abuse’

Domestic Abuse Support Service

Pets and Domestic Abuse

Are you aware of any domestic abuse cases where pets have also been abused?



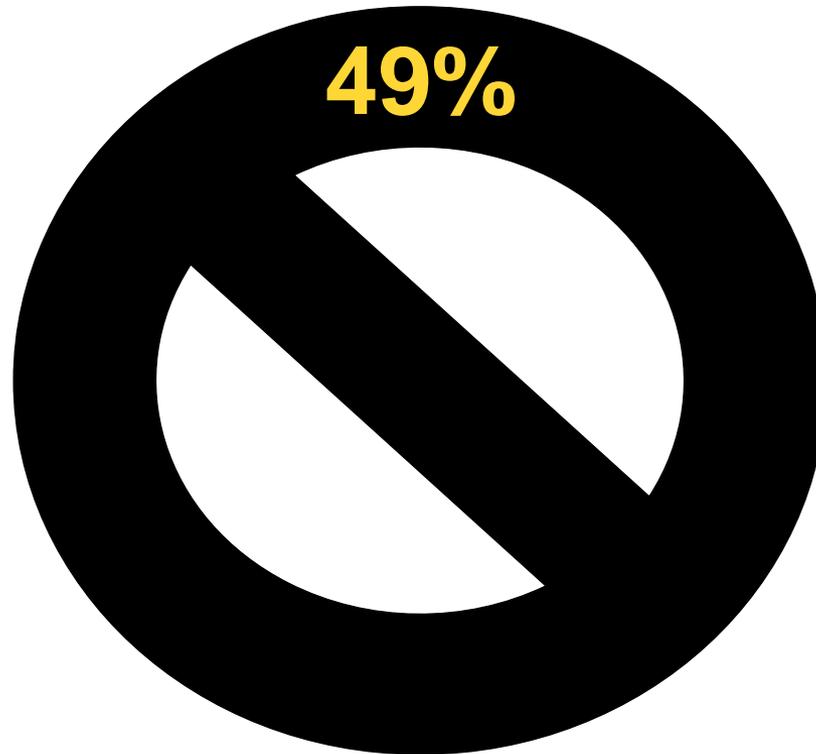
From a survey of 376 respondents, 2019

‘Pets can be the only ongoing good relationship a woman and her children have. This is a loving constant relationship with unconditional love when all around the landscape is unreliable, unreadable and unpredictable’

Domestic Abuse Support Service

Pets and Domestic Abuse

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



From a survey of 376 respondents, 2019

‘It keeps someone rooted to the spot and allows the cycle of abuse to continue due to the guilt and fear someone can feel over the safety of their pet - a pet is like family and is the only one that offers comfort’

Domestic Abuse Support Service

Pets and Domestic Abuse

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



From a survey of 376 respondents, 2019

Pets and Domestic Abuse

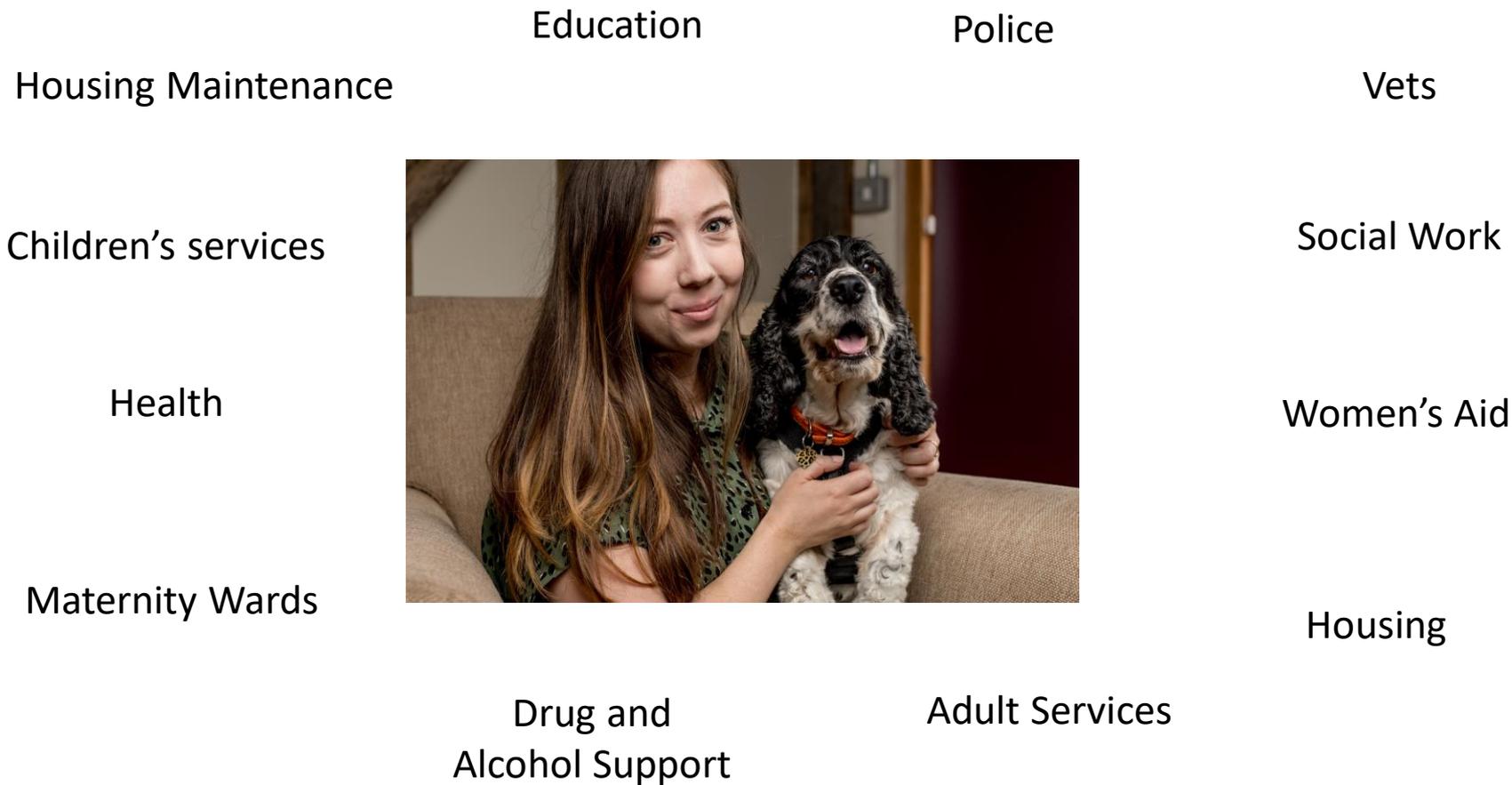
Do you know of any cases where pets, or an owner's ability to care for a pet, have been impacted by financial abuse?



From a survey of 376 respondents, 2019

‘Compliance is maintained in many ways, shapes and forms. Animals do not have a voice and remain silent to what they witness and experience. They are used as pawns within a situation where one individual demands all the power and control. When a pet is being abused as a means to prove a point to a woman or to children the psychological and emotional impact on individuals witnessing this is horrific. As well as the animal being helpless so are the members of the family. The need to protect and care for that animal is as important as it is for a child. Keeping the animal helps all party's heal. Removing the animals for good leaves the individual with a great deal of guilt and shame to carry around’

Freedom Project – the importance of partnership working



Freedom Project – Human-Animal Bond

- Emotional support
- Someone to talk to
- Child's best friend
- Exercise
- Social factors
- Health benefits
- Improved mood
- Reason to get up in the morning



Freedom Project – subtle signs of animal abuse

Environmental

- Is the animal confined?
- Are they kept outside?
- Crated?
- Odours?



Freedom Project – subtle signs of animal abuse

Physical

- Poor body condition
- Noticeable trauma
- Acts of violence towards the pet



Freedom Project – subtle signs of animal abuse

Behavioural

- Tail tucked
- Flinching
- Avoids eye contact
- Ears back
- Whinging / crying
- Lunging / barking
- Submissive / urinating
- Avoids touch



Freedom Project – dog behaviour

Shy, nervous,
withdrawn

Struggle
being alone

Bark at dogs
on walks



Lapses in
housetraining

Pulls on lead

Nervous in
the vet

Issues
around food

Easily
excitable

Freedom Project – a dog's journey



- Experienced, understanding foster carers
 - Safe space
 - Individual needs assessed
 - Regular updates to owner
 - Behavioural support
- Prepare for returning and reuniting

Freedom Project – the practicalities

- Temporary fostering service for up to 6 months
- Dogs are cared for by volunteer foster carers
- Completely free for the owner; vet costs, food and dog accessories are covered by Dogs Trust
- If the dog has not already been neutered, this will be done on the project
- Owner won't be able to visit their dog whilst they are on the project to maintain confidentiality



Freedom Project – the service

- Obtain information about the dog's behaviour and personality
- Match to one of our volunteer foster carers
- Collect the dog from a safe location and transport the dog to the volunteer foster carer
- Important that owners are not traced through their dogs
- Consideration for safety and confidentiality, including area dog is placed in



Freedom Project – the service

We currently provide the service in:

- **Greater London** (since 2004) and the **Home Counties** (since 2018)

Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Surrey and Sussex

- **Yorkshire and the Humber** (since 2005)

- **North East of England** (since 2017)

- **Scotland** (since 2018)

- **North West of England** (since 2019)

We work alongside other pet fostering services to provide cover for most of the UK.



Freedom Project – reuniting with the owner



- As soon as the owner has been safely and permanently rehoused, we arrange a convenient time to return their dog to them
- We notify the volunteer foster carer that their dog will be going home soon
 - Dogs always recognise their owners
- In some cases we can rehome their dog via a Dogs Trust Rehoming Centre

Freedom Project – the story so far...

Between 2004 and 2019:



dogs fostered



families helped



dogs referred



dogs returned

Freedom Project – Gemma’s story



From: BBC Stories

Thank You!

Freedom Project – Greater London & the Home Counties

(Hertfordshire, Essex, Kent, Surrey, East Sussex, West Sussex, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire)

T: 0800 298 9199

Freedom Project – Yorkshire

T: 0800 083 4322

Freedom Project – North East

T: 0300 303 3497

Freedom Project – North West

T: 0300 303 4139

Freedom Project – Scotland

T: 0808 169 4315



freedomproject@dogstrust.org.uk
www.dogstrustfreedomproject.org.uk