



NATIONAL LINK COALITION

*Working together to stop violence
against people and animals*

National Link Coalition Guidelines for Directories of Domestic Violence Pet Support Programs

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a growing public and professional interest in providing safe housing options for animals affected by intimate partner violence. Many domestic violence shelters are establishing referral protocols with animal organizations and adding on-site pet housing capabilities to make it easier for families to leave abusive situations without having to leave their pets behind and at risk. Families needing such animal housing – usually under emergency conditions – need accurate, current information describing these pet-friendly domestic violence programs. In response, several organizations are compiling directories of these facilities.

The National Link Coalition created these Guidelines in order to advise these organizations as to how to structure and maintain these directories. Our goal is to ultimately benefit the abused human and non-human family members needing help. These Guidelines are based upon the collaborative expertise and experience of the National Link Coalition's members and what we have learned from extensive discussions with national and local organizations in a variety of fields.

The guiding principles for any such directory must be based upon:

- **Accuracy:** Information that is correct and continually updated. Giving domestic violence survivors outdated or inaccurate information under emergency situations only adds to the chaos of the moment and can do more harm than good to someone in a time-sensitive crisis situation.
- **User-friendliness:** The domestic violence survivor may find such directories by a variety of electronic, printed or personal means, and may not have immediate resources to determine the geographic parameters of the shelter's service area or the details of its pet support policies.

These Guidelines represent our recommendations to create opportunities for families with animals to find safe housing in an efficient manner. The National Link Coalition is also available to provide technical assistance and in-service training as appropriate.

2. DEFINITIONS

The National Link Coalition defines a Domestic Violence Pet Support program as any program that facilitates the care of animals belonging to individuals seeking safety from intimate partner violence. Typically, Domestic Violence Pet Support programs generally refer to, but are not limited to:

A. Foster Care

1. Off-site programs by domestic violence shelters (often called “safe havens”)

These programs provide short- or long-term foster care for animals belonging to survivors needing shelter and/or transitional housing. Agency policy determines whether the program does or does not require clients to be residents of the shelter. Animals are cared for at secret off-site locations by a variety of foster caregivers, such as:

- a. Animal shelter, animal rescue group, animal sanctuary, or farm, or their volunteers’ or staff’s homes.
- b. Veterinary clinic or their staff.
- c. Animal boarding facility or their staff.
- d. Screened agency staff members or volunteers.

We recognize that not all foster care pet support programs are formalized with written agreements and this should not exclude them as a resource. However, a simple referral by a domestic violence program to a non-participating animal organization does not constitute a Domestic Violence Pet Support program.

2. Emergency services programs by animal groups

These are programs operated by animal shelters, animal rescue groups, animal sanctuaries, farms, veterinarians, or similar agencies. They provide short- or long-term foster care for animals for families experiencing domestic violence; they may also include housing for animals in other emergency situations, such as homelessness or disaster relief dislocation.

B. On-Site Pet Housing

Domestic violence shelters that provide on-site housing of animals, either in kennels or residents’ rooms, are a specialized type of Pet Support programs such as SAF-T™ (as part of the Sheltering Animals & Families Together™ program).

A domestic violence shelter may have both an off-site foster care and an on-site program to assist families.

3. GUIDELINES FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PET SUPPORT DIRECTORIES

a. DEFINITIONS

Directories should only list programs that meet the above definitions. On-site pet housing programs should also be included and identified as such in the directory.

b. ACCURACY

For any directory, it is critical that publicly posted information be timely, accurate and updated regularly, at the minimum at least twice a year. Accurate information is important for the safety of individuals seeking assistance who may have few safe opportunities to contact shelters for help.

c. FORMALITY

Programs listed may be formal or informal, with or without written agreements among participating domestic violence and animal organizations, but at the very least they should be institutionalized to such degree that persons answering telephone and e-mail inquiries are aware of the existence of the program and will provide the caller with accurate information regarding program details.

d. USER-FRIENDLINESS

Some survivors may be seeking a pet support program in their own community; others may be seeking one in a more distant location. These individuals may or may not be familiar with the geographic area, the location of various cities and counties, or the service area covered by the shelter. In addition, they may be researching such programs under stress, limited access to information, and life-threatening conditions. Consequently, listings should be presented in as user-friendly a manner as possible and organized geographically, consistently and logically to enable callers to quickly identify programs potentially meeting their needs.

Because some programs cover a wide geographical region, such as several counties, the program should be listed under each county in its service area.

A search by ZIP Code or by map graphic interface may also be appropriate.

e. SAFETY

The directory should prominently display a Safety Alert warning users that if they are in danger they should use a safer computer or call 911 or their local or U.S. National Domestic Violence Hotline. The Safety Alert should also include an immediate escape button from the web page and technology safety tips. The Safety Alerts posted on the top of the home pages of the National Network to End Domestic Violence (www.nnedv.org) and Ahimsa House (www.ahimsahouse.org) may serve as models.

f. SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Many survivors will not know which organizations publish pet support directories and may not know how to search for pet-friendly shelters easily. It is recommended that online directories include numerous meta-tags to facilitate survivors searching for such

terms as “pet,” “animal,” “dog,” “cat,” “safe haven,” “shelter,” “housing,” etc. to increase the likelihood of locating a directory of facilities.

g. TYPES OF DIRECTORIES

A *basic* directory listing should include:

- County(s) served
- City where program is located
- Agency name
- Contact telephone number(s): Crisis line and/or administrative line
- Shelter’s preferred form of contact (phone or E-mail)
- Website (if applicable)
- Whether individual must be a shelter resident to utilize pet support services
- Whether the program offers off-site foster care or on-site housing
- Fees charged or donations requested, if any.

An *advanced* directory listing should include additional program details such as:

- Species accepted
- Number of animals allowed per family
- Breed restrictions, if any
- Animal temperament, age, spay/neuter restrictions, if any
- Pet vaccination requirements, if any
- Maximum length of time pet support services are offered
- Pet supplies, equipment, food and documentation client must provide

h. LIST MAINTENANCE

- A specific person or persons should be identified as responsible for correcting and updating the list.

- Pet support program directory administrators should work openly with the National Link Coalition and other relevant agencies and individuals specialized in this area, and update their information at least twice a year to confirm listed shelters’ active participation and the addition of new information.

- “Updated on” dates in the directory should identify the date the information was last fact-checked, not the date of data entry or today’s date. Current, accurate listings will help families who are seeking assistance and avoid embarrassing publication of obsolete information.

Approved by the National Link Coalition Steering Committee
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About the National Link Coalition

The National Link Coalition is an informal, multi-disciplinary collaborative network of organizations and individuals addressing public policy, programming, public awareness and research at the intersections of domestic violence, animal abuse, child maltreatment, and elder abuse. We believe that human and animal well-being are intertwined and that the prevention of family and community violence can best be achieved through partnerships representing species-spanning perspectives. Members of the Steering Committee:

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