

# A Safe Place for Domestic Violence Survivors and Their Pets

By SANDY ROBINS

**I**t's a sad reality that any member of a household can become a victim of domestic violence, even the family cat. And, because abusers are well aware of the bond between their victims and their fur kids, they often exploit that bond to control and punish their victims. And even kill.

**Here is the dark truth:** In a variety of surveys of domestic violence survivors, between 49 percent and 86 percent reported that their pets had been threatened, harmed or killed by their partners.

Even though intake interviews at domestic violence shelters do not routinely ask about pets, in a national survey, 85 percent of domestic violence shelters indicated that women coming to their facilities spoke of incidents of pet abuse.

Currently, less than 10 percent of shelters have any provisions for pets to stay with their families or be kept safe until they can be reunited.

## Kyle the Cat

An internet feline favorite, Kyle witnessed the murder of one of his pet parents, was held as police "evidence" until the case came to trial, and then was turned over to a shelter for adoption. And that's where Jen Rice found him and gave him a forever home. She created an Instagram account for



*A witness to domestic violence, Kyle helped raise awareness of the issue.*

Kyle to highlight the issue of domestic violence.

Although Kyle passed away in 2017 after having spent seven-and-a-half years living with Jen surrounded by love and care, she continues to work tirelessly in his memory to draw much-needed attention to this problem that often exists under a veil of silence in many homes.

"We think he was abused, too," Jen says. "He had a wonky ear, and flinched and mewed every time I tried to pet him and show him physical love and affection.

"I loved Kyle unconditionally and he meant so much to me. When I became aware that he was a survivor of domestic violence, I educated myself on the facts associated with pets and domestic violence. I was utterly shocked to learn that the majority of domestic violence shelters don't accept pets.

I couldn't imagine having to choose between my safety and being separated from Kyle and, even worse, leaving Kyle behind in an abusive household. If anything, pets are needed the most during those trying times to provide comfort and distraction."

Through Kyle's Instagram page (@mycatkyle), Jen shed light on the fact that domestic violence victims have to make decisions between pets and safety. Learn more at [mycatkyle.com](http://mycatkyle.com).

## Urban Resource Institute

The country's first entirely pet-friendly domestic violence shelter opened its doors in Brooklyn, New York, last October. It's specifically designed for survivors and their pets to live together and seek solace from abuse. The seven-story building is outfitted with 30 one- and two-bedroom apartments, where up to 100 people can



*A shelter resident spending time with her cat that is being safely housed at Noah's Animal House.*



heal together in safety. The shelter also includes dedicated spaces for pet grooming and play, and offers unique animal-centric programming to help residents of all species thrive.

The shelter is run by **Urban Resource Institute (URI)**, the largest provider of domestic violence shelter and support services in the United States. In 2013, URI established the **PALS** (People and Animals Living Safely) Program and subsequently began retrofitting existing URI shelters with pet-friendly elements. The program now has six facilities in Manhattan.

They have had huge support from the **Nestlé Purina Pet Care Company**, which not only contributed to the construction of dog parks in the facilities but also provided food and welcome kits for all resident with pets. For more information, visit [urinc.org](http://urinc.org).



*Cats at Noah's Animal House being cared for after being removed from their abusive home environments.*

## Noah's Animal House

For more than 10 years, pharmaceutical company **Bayer**, known for a variety of flea and tick medications, has supported an organization called Noah's Animal House ([noahsanimalhouse.org](http://noahsanimalhouse.org)), a full-service boarding facility on the grounds of **The Shade Tree Shelter**, the largest women's and children's shelter in Las Vegas. With Bayer's help, Noah's Animal House recently opened a second pet shelter on-site alongside a domestic violence shelter in Reno.

According to Staci Columbo Alonso, founder of Noah's Animal House, since the founding of her organization, more than 1,600 pets have been housed close to their families so that they have access to their beloved pets.

## RedRover

**Purina** has also joined forces with RedRover, an organization that provides temporary emergency sheltering, resources, financial assistance and emotional support when animals and people are in crisis. Through an initiative called **The Purple Leash**, the company is committed to giving more than \$500,000 in grants to keep pets and people safely together while escaping domestic abuse. (The color purple designates Domestic Violence Month, which draws attention to this issue annually in October.) Grants available from RedRover include:

**Safe Housing on-site grants** enable domestic violence shelters to create space for pets to live on-site with their owners.

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## #pawsforthiscause *So what can YOU do?*

1

**Work with domestic violence shelters in your area** to make them aware of the various financial aid options available to them to assist residents with pets.

2

If you are planning to **donate your car** to an organization, a victim of domestic violence could be a well-deserving recipient. When victims leave an abusive situation, they often do not have their own transportation.

2

**Offer your services to foster a pet** if a shelter doesn't have any provisions for pets.

2

**Share the video** on domestic violence created by **Bayer at [petandwomensafety.com](http://petandwomensafety.com)**. Use hashtags **#GrantsFurFamilies** and **#GivingTuesday**.

2

If you know someone who needs immediate help, **call the National Domestic Violence Hotline 24/7 at 800-799-SAFE (7233)**.



**Sandy Robins** is an award-winning, multimedia pet lifestyle expert, author and pet industry personality. Her feline muses, Ziggy and Tony, like to disrupt the workflow by demanding games of fetch with wand toys and directing food operations in the kitchen. Learn more about Sandy at [sandyrobinsonline.com](http://sandyrobinsonline.com).



**BE FURRACTIVE** *Continued from page 55*

**Safe Housing startup grants** allow domestic violence shelters to create their own program to help victims of domestic violence and their pets escape together.

**Safe Housing off-site grants** enable domestic violence shelters to partner with another local organization, such as an animal shelter or rescue sanctuary, to build housing at their facility specifically for animals whose owners are staying at the domestic violence shelter.

**Safe Escape Grants** help offset the cost of temporary pet boarding while a domestic violence survivor is at a domestic violence shelter — up to 90 days.

Learn more about RedRover and these grants at [redrover.org](http://redrover.org)

### Grants Fur Families

Bayer also launched this initiative whereby 13 domestic violence shelters in various parts of the country will receive approximately \$10,000 each to help support survivors and their pets by improving their existing pet-related facilities or open on-site pet facilities for the first time. Learn more by following @Bayer4Pets on Instagram and Twitter.

### The PAWS Act — Pet and Women Safety Act

Last December, President Trump signed the provisions of the **Pet and Women Safety (PAWS) Act** into law as part of the 2018 Farm Bill. The PAWS Act establishes a federal grant program for entities that provide shelter and housing assistance for domestic violence survivors to enable them to better meet the housing needs of survivors with pets.

The new law also takes the important step of including pets, service and emotional support animals, and horses in federal law pertaining to interstate stalking, protection order violations and restitution. These provisions provide law enforcement with additional tools for protecting victims from their abusers. ☺

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## DIY Ideas

It's easy to make a treat dispenser or puzzle toy for your cat using simple things you have around the house.

- ✦ Cut holes in a cardboard box or use an empty tissue box to entice kitty to use her paws to get the treats.
- ✦ Small plastic containers or empty plastic water bottles make great treat dispensers that roll across the floor.
- ✦ Paper towel or toilet paper tubes and egg crates make interesting nooks and crannies, too.

The best part is that these materials are free, plus you can recycle them when they need to be replaced. — *Tip and photo by Kate Benjamin*

