

# HELPING PEOPLE WITH ANIMALS WHO ARE FLEEING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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**S**urvivors of domestic violence who have pets often delay leaving their abusers if they have nowhere to take them. This is a topic that has been studied across North America and internationally. It is an animal problem, a human problem, and a community problem.

You would think that since we have statistics that show this issue—that 18 to 56 per cent of women delay leaving—there would correspondingly be a decisive solution and an abundance of resources. There are not. Many transition houses, emergency shelters, and other types of facilities for survivors do not allow pets for a number of reasons. Therefore, the availability of aid for the survivor becomes irrelevant if it is not an all-encompassing aid that includes their pets.

Luckily, as this issue is brought more and more out of the dark and is being observed by varying agencies who aid domestic violence survivors, other organizations are stepping up. Specifically, animal welfare organizations are helping people (who are leaving their abusers) by also helping to care for their animals, thereby alleviating that additional stress.

It is important for veterinarians to be aware of the resources in your area. Connecting with these organizations would be a great opportunity to build relationships and work as a community to help vulnerable people and pets.

The BCSPCA offers an emergency boarding program in shelters across the province where survivors fleeing an abusive situation can board their pets for up to two weeks. Extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis and can extend into foster care depending on the circumstances.

Paws for Hope recently launched the No Pet Left Behind Program, an emergency foster program in the lower mainland. Survivors are able to leave their pets with a designated foster family coordinated by Paws for Hope. Length of stay is initially three months with the possibility of extensions.

BC211.ca is another resource that can help survivors with pets. Their website offers a search option where the survivor can specify where they are and what they are looking for specifically. They can also call and speak with a representative who may be able to guide the survivor in the right direction if they cannot find the necessary resource on the website.

According to BC211's annual report of 2018, their government-contracted helpline, VictimLinkBC, received approximately 3,200 calls about domestic violence spanning 134 BC communities. Of these calls, 2,000 were from survivors looking for housing. According to BC211 staff, approximately 30 per cent of survivors who call in and are fleeing domestic violence have pets. They note that finding space in transition houses can be hard enough, but adding pets to the mix decreases housing options even further.

BC211 offers an entire range of resources outside of housing in areas including addictions, financial assistance, mental health, and education. There is also support tailored to young, elderly, Indigenous, and LGBTQ+ people. In all of these categories, the survivor can narrow down which service they are seeking.

For specific cities and shelters that accept pets or have pet-friendly resources, visit [safeforpet.org](http://safeforpet.org). This website allows the user to search by city and see what pet-friendly housing resources are in their area or close by. This website does get updated; however, it is important to note that some locations may not advertise that they accept pets due to overwhelming inquiries. See our list (at right) of some resources that may allow pets.

Though there are a variety of options, they are still quite limited and dependent on the situation, type of animal, and so on. However, for veterinarians to familiarize themselves with these resources is a great first step in helping a survivor leave the unsafe situation they are in and find a safe place for their pet. [WCV](#)

<b>SOWINS TRANSITION HOUSE/SOWINS SAFE HOMES</b> On-site	Penticton
<b>VIRGINIA SAM TRANSITION HOUSE</b> On-site	Surrey
<b>WESTCOAST TRANSITION HOUSE</b> On-site	Ucluelet
<b>WILMA'S SECOND STAGE PROGRAM</b> On-site	Chilliwack
<b>SOMENOS TRANSITION HOUSE</b> Off-site	Duncan
<b>ANN DAVIS TRANSITION HOUSE</b> On-site	Chilliwack
<b>ANNIE'S PLACE TRANSITION HOUSE</b> Off-site	Sooke
<b>ATIRA WOMEN'S RESOURCE SOCIETY</b> On-site	Vancouver
<b>FORT ST. JOHN WOMEN'S RESOURCE SOCIETY-SKYE'S PLACE</b> On-site	Fort St. John
<b>JEAN SCOTT TRANSITION HOUSE</b> On-site	Hope
<b>KELOWNA WOMEN'S SHELTER</b> On-site	Kelowna
<b>KSAN TRANSITION HOUSE</b> On-site	Terrace
<b>ISHTAR WOMEN'S RESOURCE SOCIETY: LIBRA HOUSE AND ISHTAR HOUSE</b> On-site	Langley
<b>AMBER HOUSE</b> On-site	Prince George
<b>PASSAGE TRANSITION HOUSE</b> On-site	Smithers
<b>PEARL'S SAFE HOME</b> On-site	Squamish
<b>WINS TRANSITION HOUSE</b> On-site	Trail
<b>DIXON TRANSITION SOCIETY</b> Dixon House Transition House, On-site	Burnaby
<b>SAGE TRANSITION HOUSE</b> On-site	North Vancouver
<b>PAWS FOR HOPE ANIMAL FOUNDATION</b> No Pet Left Behind, Off-site	Maple Ridge
<b>SALMON ARM WOMEN'S SHELTER</b> On-site	Salmon Arm