Programs Educate Law Enforcement on Link Between Animal Cruelty and Domestic Violence

By Claire Ponder, First Strike™ Manager, and Randall Lockwood, Vice President for Research and Educational Outreach, The Humane Society of the United States

In "Animal Abuse and the Link to Domestic Violence" (Police Chief, June 2000), Nancy Turner reports on recent findings that approximately 70 percent of pet-owning domestic-violence victims report that their pets also are abused and that at least 20 percent of those victims delay leaving their abusive relationship out of fear for their pets' safety. In addition, Turner cites a New Jersey study showing that 88 percent of families referred to the Department of Children and Family Services for child abuse also had a history of animal abuse. In two-thirds of these cases, the abusive parent abused the animals, while in one-third of the cases, the children were the animal abusers.

Given this evidence, police departments are paying more attention to claims of cruelty to animals in the larger context of responding to community and family violence. Law enforcement agencies across the country are partnering with anti-violence organizations to develop interagency collaborations aimed at reducing family violence and animal cruelty. This article will focus on four different model programs around the country—from both small, rural communities and large metropol-itan areas—and examine the origins, successes, and obstacles of each program. These programs offer methods that other police chiefs can apply to increase the safety of citizens in their communities.

Using the Connection to Reduce Family Violence

Domestic violence is prevalent in densely populated Baltimore County, Maryland. Each year, the Baltimore County Police Department receives approximately 64,000 domestic violence-related calls. In 1994, the department launched an aggressive program to reduce domestic violence through early identification and intervention for both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. The city started by establishing a domestic violence unit in each of city's nine police districts. Colonel Margaret Patten, who heads the domestic violence program, then initiated an outreach campaign to educate representatives from schools, hospitals, child protective services, adult protective services, and other community agencies about the scourge of domestic abuse.

After learning about the connection between animal abuse and domestic violence at a workshop in 1997, Patten felt it was also extremely important to work with the animal protection and veterinary communities to implement cross-training and cross-reporting systems. Patten, who faced public criticism in 1998 after applying for state funding to establish a network of veterinarians, animal protection organizations, and animal control officers trained in domestic violence issues, believes such a network is essential to identify and assist domestic violence victims who may otherwise never seek help from the system. "It's not about animals," Pat-
Watch for the 2001 IACP Training Catalog

Nearly 200 timely course offerings throughout the nation. All members will be receiving the catalog in the mail by mid-November.

Non-members can call 1-800-THE-IACP Training Division for their copy.

CWH Management Solutions

The Selection Experts
- Hiring
- Training
- Promoting
- Low Adverse Impact
- High Validity
- Defensible & Fair

Serving Law Enforcement for 20 years
303-617-3433
www.cwhms.com

...that work in a changing world

Circled. 5 on Reader Response Card
mestic violence in Baltimore County. This past year we had only five domestic-violence homicides and not one of the victims killed had ever had contact with our department. This is another reason why it is paramount that we find other ways to reach out to the victims of domestic violence that are represented by those five murdered victims."

Success from a New Program

Unlike some of the other programs that have been in existence for several years, the Humane Society of Missouri's program to address the animal abuse and family violence connection began just over a year ago. The Humane Society was prompted into action after a 1999 case in which animal control officers spent 12 hours rescuing a puppy stuck in a sewer only to discover that the house was filled with several other malnourished puppies and that the residents' two-year-old child was covered in animal feces. After rescuing the animals in the home, animal control officers reported the severely neglected child to the Department of Children and Family Services and subsequently invited the department to help form a 'Web of Cruelty Workgroup.'

On March 5, 2000, the "Web of Cruelty Workgroup," comprised of representatives from the Humane Society of Missouri, the St. Louis City Division of Family Services, the St. Louis Circuit Attorney's Office, the St. Louis City Police Department's Sex Crimes and Family Violence Unit, and the St. Louis Family Court, conducted a workshop to discuss how professionals at these agencies could start working together to reduce violence throughout St. Louis. Since this workshop, representatives from The Humane Society of Missouri have provided training on the connection between animal abuse and family violence at every new-employee orientation for the Department of Children and Family Services. In addition, representatives from the Humane Society have already presented 18 four-hour classes, certified by the St. Louis County and Municipal Police Academy, on "Animal Welfare and Law" to law enforcement agencies around the state. The "Web of Cruelty Workgroup," which meets monthly, is also developing a program to provide emergency shelter for the pets of domestic violence victims.

Although the program is new, the Humane Society of Missouri reports that its relationship with the police department and the other agencies in the workgroup has completely altered the way animal cruelty and family violence cases are handled. "Before we began this program, each agency worked independently and there was very little communication between agencies," says Christine Horton, rescue and investigation coordinator for the Humane Society of Missouri. "Since we began the program, all of our eyes have been opened to the number of cases where both animals and humans are victimized. Most recently, our animal control officers responded to a call that a 10-year-old boy had beaten his puppy to death with a belt," Horton says. "Through their education on the connection, the animal control officers were aware that this boy may have deep psychological problems and may himself be a victim of violence. The animal control officers referred the boy to the Department of Children and Family Services, which ended up referring the kid to a year of mandatory counseling."

Through the handling of this case and several other recent cases of intentional animal cruelty, Horton believes that attitudes about animal cruelty are changing. In particular, Horton emphasizes that the police are now treating animal cruelty as a serious crime and recognizing that such behavior is often an indicator of family violence. "We recently had a police officer call the Humane Society for assistance in..."
investigating a case in which several juveniles had put firecrackers in a cat’s mouth and killed it,” says Horton. “A year ago we probably would not have received a call in that case or any other animal cruelty case.”

Assessing the Impact of The Link in Rural America

Biddeford, Maine, has a population of only 21,000. But in spite of its limited resources, the city’s police department has one of the leading anti-violence initiatives in the United States. In 1998, Chief Roger Beaulieu received federal funding to start a domestic-violence task force. As part of the domestic-violence initiative, Officer Donald E. Harper, an animal control officer with the police department, was asked to expand his role to help prevent domestic violence as well as animal cruelty.

Harper has developed a training program and curriculum called “The Link” that he uses to educate law enforcement, domestic violence advocates, and other anti-violence professionals about the connection between animal abuse and family violence. Because of the success of this training program, Harper was invited to serve on the York County Domestic Violence Task Force and the Coalition against Violence. The latter organization, which includes law enforcement and animal welfare agencies, the Department of Human Services, and domestic violence groups, has developed a foster program to shelter the pets of domestic violence victims.

Harper reports that since he began his program, there has been a marked difference in how animal cruelty cases are treated and an increase in the number of animal cruelty cases that are actually prosecuted. “There is an awareness in this community now about the link, and people now know if they complain about an animal, then something really gets done,” Harper says. “We currently have a 92- to 94-percent conviction rate for all animal abuse cases.” Harper notes that in many cases where perpetrators may have been involved in multiple crimes, the animal cruelty charge is the only charge that sticks. “We had a case in October 1999 in which a man was found guilty of abusing his dog after a three-and-a-half-hour trial. When asked why he had picked up his dog, chest high, and then slammed him to the ground, his response was, ‘I was disciplining the dog.” On January 18, 2000, he was found guilty again on two counts of cruelty to animals. By this point, both his wife and daughter had left him for the same alleged abuse.”

This and other high-profile cases have changed the perception of animal control officers. Once dismissed as “dog catch-

Scheduling Headaches?

Get New VSS PRO 5.0
The #1 Law Enforcement Scheduler

Try Visual Staff Scheduler® PRO 5.0, RISK-FREE for 90 days and you'll know why it's the #1 law enforcement scheduling software. If you are not 100% satisfied, return it for a full refund of the purchase price.

• Fast • Flexible • Easy • Affordable

only $295
1-800-874-8801
90-day, unconditional, money-back guarantee

www.abs-usa.com

Circle no. 1 on Reader Response Card

Circle no. 52 on Reader Response Card

34 THE POLICE CHIEF/NOVEMBER 2000
ers," these professionals are earning recognition as an important component of the community's efforts to reduce family violence. Eventually, Harper would like every police department in Maine to follow Biddeford's lead and have a full-time officer on staff to handle animal cruelty cases.

Multidisciplinary Teams Provide a Seamless Response To Domestic Violence

In 1996, the Colorado Springs, Colorado, Police Department launched a nationally-renowned program called DVERT—Domestic Violence Enhanced Response Team—in an effort to reduce the high number of lethal domestic violence cases each year. By documenting acts or threatened acts of violence, DVERT seeks to identify individuals who pose a significant risk to their past or present intimate partners.

Under DVERT, an intake team reviews every domestic violence case that comes into the Colorado Springs Police Department. After assessing the potential lethality of a case, the team may label it a “DVERT case” and refer it on to a primary or secondary response team. The primary response team, which is on call 24 hours a day, includes a detective from the Colorado Springs Police Department, a district attorney, and a victim advocate from the Center for the Prevention of Domestic Violence. The purpose of this team is to assist the initial patrol officer in the investigation and to provide support services for the victim. When issues involving children, elders, at-risk adults, military personnel, or animal abuse arise, a secondary response team made up of individuals with special expertise in these areas is called in.

Detective Howard E. Black, who coordinates the DVERT program, says the secondary team is frequently called in to deal with cases involving children or animals. "About 40 percent of our DVERT cases involve animal cruelty, and approximately 50 percent involve child abuse," Black reported. "By using the experts in these areas to help us document the abuse, we are more likely to have the charges stick when we reach court and less likely to have to visit that house again. What we’re trying to do is provide a seamless system response to domestic violence." Although he has only anecdotal evidence on the success of his program, Black believes that DVERT has played a part in reducing the number of perpetrators who re-offend.

The clear message that we’re trying to send is a zero tolerance for any type of violence," Black said.

DVERT, which currently has a budget of over $1.6 million dollars from federal funds and $750,000 from in-kind donations, is currently expanding its objectives to research how it can better assist domestic-violence victims, their children, and their pets. Currently, DVERT is involved in 11 different research projects, examining such issues as stalking, lethality risk, and the impact of domestic violence on children. In addition, DVERT continues to serve as a national model for law enforcement agencies across the country. Each month, DVERT holds a two-day, on-site visit for representatives from other law enforcement agencies, animal control, and social service agencies around the country who are interested in learning more about the program.

Implications for New Programs

Much can be gained by implementing multidisciplinary programs to prevent family violence and animal cruelty. The diversity of the programs profiled in this article reflects the multitude of possibilities for law enforcement executives interested in starting programs in their areas.
and we continue to learn of new efforts, similar to these four programs, in other jurisdictions. Law enforcement officials considering a program on the connection between animal abuse and family violence should start by contacting their counterparts in social service and animal protection agencies and joining their local anti-violence coalitions. These contacts can be used to develop cross-training, cross-reporting, and multidisciplinary response teams. In addition, law enforcement agencies should include questions about animal abuse on their domestic violence intake forms. Data collected from these questions can be useful when an agency applies for funding to start a program or needs to demonstrate the need for a program in their area.

Most importantly, police chiefs and others who wish to launch violence education programs should learn more about the experiences of agencies that already have such programs (see contact information below). Law enforcement executives should also be aware that they can receive technical assistance, training, and educational materials from the Humane Society of the United States' First Strike™ campaign, a long-term national campaign that works to raise public and professional awareness about the connection between animal abuse and family violence. In the past, First Strike has conducted workshops, training, and/or provided technical assistance to each of the programs reviewed in this article.

For more information contact:

Colonel Margaret W. Patten
Police Commissioner's Office
Baltimore Police Department
601 East Fayette Street
Baltimore, MD 21202
(410) 396-2600

Christine Horton
Rescue and Investigations Coordinator
Humane Society of Missouri
1201 Macklind Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63110
(314) 951-1214
E-mail: chrish@hsomo.org

Donald E. Harper
Animal Control Officer
Biddleford Police Department
39 Alfred Street
Biddleford, ME 04005
(207) 282-5127
E-mail: ace@bpd.net

Detective Howard E. Black
Domestic Violence Coordinator
Colorado Springs Police Department
705 South Nevada Avenue
Colorado Springs, CO 80903
(719) 444-7813

Claire Ponder
First Strike™ Manager
Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)
2100 L Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
(301) 258-3076
www.hsus.org/firststrike/cponder@hsus.org

Reduce Liability while Increasing Personnel Safety with AMOS™
ADVANCED MOBILE OPERATIONS SIMULATOR

The AMOS™ (Advanced Mobile Operations Simulator) is a fully interactive driving simulator designed to provide a dynamic training environment for a wide variety of agencies. It helps refine judgment and decision making abilities, while teaching tactics and procedures. Each AMOS simulator allows a driver to interact with computer generated vehicles in a realistic environment. AMOS units can be linked to create real-time scenarios where cooperation and teamwork are practiced in the safety of the simulator.

USA and International Agents Wanted.

Circle no. 18 on Reader Response Card