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Committee on Criminal Justice

Senator Stephen R. Wise, Chair

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, CHILD ABUSE AND CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

SUMMARY

There is a complex cycle of violence connecting the crimes of child abuse, domestic violence (including elder abuse), and cruelty to animals. The real potential of saving lives exists if we recognize the links among these crimes.

In one research study, conducted in New Jersey, of the families of children who were referred for services because a child had been abused, the connection between child abuse and animal abuse was quite evident. In 88% of the families at least one person had abused pets. In approximately two-thirds of those families it was the abusive parent who had injured or killed a pet. In the remaining one-third it was a child who abused the pet. (Lockwood and Hodge, *The Tangled Web of Animal Abuse: The Links Between Cruelty to Animals and Human Violence*, The Humane Society News, Summer, 1986.)

Most of the research focusing on adult crime and animal abuse indicates that the animal abuse behavior began at an early age in the abuser's life. In a study recently conducted in a Florida Department of Corrections maximum security prison, researchers found that violent offenders who committed crimes as adults were significantly more likely than nonviolent offenders to have committed acts of cruelty against animals as children. (Merz-Perez and Heide, *Animal Cruelty: Pathway to Violence Against People*, AltaMira Press, 2004.)

The relationship of a child abuse, domestic violence, or elder abuse victim and his or her pet can be a source of extreme vulnerability, taken full advantage of by the abuser in order to coerce compliance and silence from the victim.

Often the pet is the only source of comfort to the victim, and an astounding percentage of domestic

violence victims have actually remained in an abusive situation out of concern for the well-being of the pet, as shown by research reported herein.

The many junctures at which crimes of abuse and neglect committed upon these vulnerable citizens and creatures intersect provide a possibility for intervention, investigation, and breaking the cycle of violence.

BACKGROUND

Research has demonstrated a strong link between domestic violence, child abuse, and animal cruelty. For example, a 1997 survey of 50 shelters for battered women indicated that 85 percent of women and 63 percent of children who entered the shelters reported incidents of pet abuse at home.

Children who witness domestic violence or are victims of abuse themselves may commit acts of animal cruelty out of frustration and anger, or imitating what they have witnessed.

Childhood acts of animal cruelty are good indications of dysfunction in the child's life. Without early intervention, the child has a greater likelihood of growing up to become a violent adult offender than children who do not abuse animals, according to the research in this field.

Sometimes citizens are aware of the abuse of animals in a household, when they would be less likely to witness the domestic violence, elder abuse, or child abuse that is usually committed out of the public eye.

The link between animal cruelty, domestic violence, and child abuse is a potentially powerful tool that could be used to detect and deter crimes of violence against human victims as well as animal victims. This report takes a closer look at these connections.

METHODOLOGY

Staff reviewed scientific research, literature, and articles on the connection between domestic violence, child abuse, and cruelty to animals. Additionally, staff attended a full-day seminar on the issues presented in this report and conducted informal interviews and information gathering from other workshop participants and experts in the field.

FINDINGS

Children and Animal Cruelty

The link between animal abuse, crimes committed against children, the delinquent acts committed by children, and the adult criminal behavior that may follow has been the focus of many scientific research studies. Below are a few examples of this connection:

- Parents kill a child's pet to punish the child
- Parents threaten to kill or harm a child's pet to secure acquiescence or silence for sexual abuse
- Children kill their own pets to rehearse their own suicide
- Children kill animals before a dominant adult can do so
- Children torture animals as gang initiation rites or to gain status among their peers
- Children identify with their abuser and begin to abuse animals themselves
- Children create a fiercely loyal bond with an animal and escape to an imaginary world where the abuser cannot hurt either of them.

(Arkow, *Breaking the Cycles of Violence, A Practical Guide*, A Latham Foundation Publication.)

Child Abuse

"We are tested, and sometimes we fail. The maltreated child cries, "I hurt." Unheard or unheeded, that cry becomes prophesy." – Andrew Vachss, Another Chance to Get it Right, 1993.

Data available from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System for 2001 indicates that in 2001 alone approximately 903,000 children were confirmed victims of maltreatment and an estimated 1,321 children died as a result of abuse and/or neglect. (American Humane Association, *Fatalities Due to Child Abuse and Neglect Fact Sheet* <http://www.americanhumane.org>, site last visited July, 2004.)

Awareness of the "red flag" of animal abuse and its potential connection to child abuse could save lives or

save children from many years of emotional abuse, physical abuse, or neglect. In one comprehensive article reviewed by staff, this lesson is illustrated by the following account:

"In a recent fatality case review, a protective services worker followed up on a call from a neighbor who witnessed a three-year old boy being severely beaten by his father. The neighbor also reported that the father had killed a cat in the presence of his family by slamming the cat against a wall. The protective services worker investigated the family and wrote in her report that the father denied mistreating his son but he did admit to killing the cat...The worker dismissed the act of killing the cat by noting that the incident had happened over a month ago. No further interventions were offered to the child and family. Two months later the boy died of a cerebral hemorrhage inflicted by his father." (Boat, *Abuse of Children and Abuse of Animals: Using the Links to Inform Child Assessment and Protection*, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse, Purdue Press, edited by Ascione and Arkow, 1999.)

It should be noted that had the killing of the cat occurred in Florida, the father *could* have been arrested by law enforcement on felony animal cruelty charges, which might have been just the break the family needed to end the abuse in the household. (*see* s. 828.12(2), F.S., which also provides the potential for psychological counseling or an anger management treatment program.)

Boat also suggests that protective services workers and law enforcement should be aware of the presence of animals in homes where there is an allegation of neglect of a child, or a "failure to thrive" child (children whose growth is significantly less than the age-appropriate norms for a child). Evidence of adequate and accessible pet food, and the absence of sustenance for the child, may be additional evidence that the neglect of the child is not inadvertent, but rather, willful. (Boat, *Abuse of Children and Abuse of Animals: Using the Links to Inform Child Assessment and Protection*, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse, Purdue Press, edited by Ascione and Arkow, 1999.)

Because a child's pet is often a source of comfort for the child, it is also a source of vulnerability. This special bond between child and companion animal can

be easily exploited by one wishing to control a child for his or her own harmful purposes. Chief Judge Stan Morris of the Eighth Judicial Circuit in Florida recalls at least one case in which animal cruelty and child abuse were undeniably linked. In sentencing the defendant after trial on the child abuse allegations, Judge Morris observed how the defendant had beaten a little puppy in front of the child-victim and thrown the puppy in a trash bin for the purpose of intimidating the child so the abuse of the child could continue undetected. (*Personal communication from Hon. Stan Morris*, October 2004.)

In his chapter in the book “Child Abuse, Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse,” Frank Ascione, a professor of psychology at Utah State University, recounts the following: “In one case, I learned that a child was photographed in the act of animal abuse and the adult child abuser then used this photo to threaten the child into compliance and silence.” (Ascione, *The Abuse of Animal and Human Interpersonal Violence – Making the Connection*, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse, 1999, Purdue Press, edited by Ascione and Arkow.)

A study conducted in England, in 1980, looked at 23 families that were known to both the Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and social services or probation offices. The study assumed that “the companion animal (within the household) takes its place as an integral part of the dynamics of family life and could therefore act as a diagnostic indicator of multiple varieties of abuse within families.” (Hutton, *Animal Abuse as a Diagnostic Approach in Social Work: A Pilot Study*, New Perspectives on Our Lives With Companion Animals, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.)

Of the 23 families with referrals to the RSPCA for animal abuse, 82.6% (19) were known to social services and 60.8% were known to probation. After analyzing all the data gathered in the study, the researcher concluded that the evidence suggested that animal abuse may be “symptomatic of similar dynamics within the larger family group,” and that information about the treatment and condition of companion animals (as defined by the study) may be a useful diagnostic tool to professionals in child protection or other social services. (Hutton, *Animal Abuse as a Diagnostic Approach in Social Work: A Pilot Study*, New Perspectives on Our Lives With Companion Animals, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.)

A similar study was conducted in the United States in 1983. Researchers looked at the care of pets in 57 families referred to New Jersey’s Division of Youth and Family Services because of incidents of child abuse. In 88% of the families in which a child had been physically abused, at least one person had abused pets. In approximately two-thirds of those families it was the abusive parent who had injured or killed a pet. In the remaining one-third it was a child who abused the pet. (Lockwood and Hodge, *The Tangled Web of Animal Abuse: The Links Between Cruelty to Animals and Human Violence*, The Humane Society News, Summer, 1986.)

Delinquent Acts

“One of the most dangerous things that can happen to a child is to kill or torture an animal and get away with it.” – Margaret Mead, Anthropologist.

Most of the research focusing on adult crime and animal abuse indicates that the animal abuse behavior began at an early age in the abuser’s life. Young children will learn and exhibit empathy by as young as two years of age. Empathy can be seen in children at that age when they view distress in another and react with personal distress. For example, we have all seen children start to cry for no apparent reason other than the fact that someone in close proximity is crying or upset. In children from ages 2 through 4, empathy is typically expressed by attempting to comfort the person who is upset or crying. (Reported by Dr. Tom Knobbe, Clinical Child Psychologist, presentation given at Shattered Lives, Pets to People Seminar in Tallahassee, Florida, April, 2004.)

Animal abuse may desensitize the abuser to suffering in general, and reduce the capacity for empathy, whether with an animal or a human victim. One well-known example of this behavior pattern is the October, 1997, Pearl, Mississippi case in which 16-year old Luke Woodham was convicted of killing his mother and two high school students, and injuring seven others in one extended episode of violence.

“Sometime prior to this mayhem, Luke had allegedly written in his diary about the torture and killing of his own dog, Sparkle. After being beaten with clubs, Sparkle was doused with lighter fluid, set on fire, and thrown into a pond. The diary entries include: ‘I’ll never forget the sound of her breaking under my might.’ ‘I will never forget the howl she made...It sounded almost human. We laughed

and hit her more.’ ... Sparkle’s killing was witnessed by an adult neighbor. The incident was never reported to the police or animal control. Was this an omen ignored, a portent that could have prompted intervention and prevented the human tragedy on October 1?” (Ascione, *The Abuse of Animal and Human Interpersonal Violence – Making the Connection*, citations omitted from quotation, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse, 1999, Purdue Press, edited by Ascione and Arkow.)

Childhood cruelty to animals has been linked to other antisocial acts committed by children in several studies reviewed and summarized by Dr. Frank Ascione, a Professor of Psychology at Utah State University. The studies showed:

- 21% of youths being evaluated (observed and assessed) and 15% of those in detention reported purposely hurting or torturing animals within the previous 12 month period.
- Cruelty to animals was reported in 14% of homicidally aggressive 8-12 year olds – compare to 3% of similar children who are not homicidally aggressive.
- Sadistic behavior towards humans was found in 32% of youths who had records of animal cruelty – compare a similar group, not sadistic towards humans, at 12%.
- 35% of boys and 27% of girls, ages 2-12, who had been sexually abused had committed acts of cruelty to animals. (Arkow, *Breaking the Cycles of Violence, A Practical Guide*, A Latham Foundation Publication; see also Ascione, *Children who are Cruel to Animals: A Review of Research and Implications for Developmental Psychopathology*, Anthrozoos (VI) 1993.)

A pattern of animal abuse by children, without apparent remorse, is recognized as an early predictor of Conduct Disorder. (American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV*, 1994). Since Conduct Disorder that emerges in early childhood, left untreated, means the child has a comparatively poor prognosis for his future mental health, early diagnosis and treatment is important, as the disorder can aid in the prediction of similar adolescent and adult disorders.

Adult Criminals – the Link with Animal Abuse

“The custom of tormenting and killing of beasts will, by degrees, harden their minds even towards

men; and they who delight in the suffering and destruction of inferior creatures, will not be apt to be very compassionate or benign to those of their own kind.” - John Locke, Some Thoughts Concerning Education, 1705.

Childhood cruelty to animals has been linked to adult criminal behavior in studies, reviewed and summarized by Professor Ascione. The results of these studies indicate childhood or adolescent histories of animal cruelty in:

- 25% of aggressive male prison inmates
- 30% of convicted child molesters
- 36% of assaultive women offenders
- 46% of incarcerated sexual homicide perpetrators
- 48% of convicted rapists
- Adult homicide perpetrators who were sexually abused as children report higher rates of childhood cruelty to animals (58%) than perpetrators not reporting sexual abuse (15%). (Arkow, *Breaking the Cycles of Violence, A Practical Guide*, A Latham Foundation Publication; see also Ascione, *Children who are Cruel to Animals: A Review of Research and Implications for Developmental Psychopathology*, Anthrozoos (VI) 1993.)

Early research, reported in 1966, by Drs. Hellman and Blackman studied the backgrounds of 84 prison inmates. Their research showed that 75% of those charged with violent crimes had an early record of cruelty to animals, fire-setting, and bed-wetting. Subsequent studies looked for this “triad” with mixed results. Later research by psychiatrist Alan Felthouse and others has identified a slightly different triad of physical abuse by parents, cruelty to animals, and violence toward people. (Lockwood and Hodge, *The Tangled Web of Animal Abuse: The Links Between Cruelty to Animals and Human Violence*, The Humane Society News, Summer, 1986.)

A particularly pertinent study was recently conducted by Linda Merz-Perez and Kathleen M. Heide in a Florida maximum security Department of Corrections facility. They targeted two sample groups – 50 violent and 50 non-violent offenders. Ninety-seven interviews were completed with the original group of 100, and lasted from 45 minutes to over two hours.

Ultimately there were 7 inmates disqualified from the study, two for mental health restrictions and 5 of the offenders in the non-violent group because it was later

learned that they had violent histories. The study was designed to examine the relationship of cruelty to animals and later violence toward humans.

The researchers report that the overall results supported previous research that indicates a relationship between childhood cruelty to animals and adult violence against humans. Violent offenders who committed crimes as adults were significantly more likely than nonviolent offenders to have committed acts of cruelty against animals, in general, and pet and stray animals in particular, as children.

The findings of the Florida study are reported in great detail in the book “Animal Cruelty: Pathway to Violence Against People,” (Merz-Perez and Heide, AltaMira Press, 2004.) but for purposes of this report, some of the highlights of the research are as follows:

- In the case of nonviolent offenders, dogfighting was the only form of cruelty to pet animals reported. It was significant that those offenders did not view the dogfighting as cruelty at all.
- Acts of cruelty to pet animals committed by the violent offenders included such acts as stomping a kitten to death, setting a dog on fire, and having sex with an animal. One subject reported having done something “very bad” to a puppy but “could not say” what it was. Another related he had “done something” to a pet animal but that he “could not talk about it.”
- Both violent and nonviolent offenders had been exposed to animal cruelty committed by others – nonviolent subjects reported 67 acts of cruelty observed and violent offenders reported 75.
- Both groups of offenders had observed similar types of cruelty committed by family members, including the beating of an animal, prolonged slaughter, choking or suffocating, the feeding of a dangerous substance (i.e., broken glass in food), and the teasing and/or tormenting of an animal.
- A significant difference in response or perception between the violent offenders and nonviolent offenders to acts of animal cruelty committed by others was found. Potential responses to witnessing the cruelty were: intervention, remorse, not cruel or no affect, thrill, power/control, and sadism. Responses of intervention or remorse indicated the subject empathized with the abused animal. On the other end of the spectrum, responses of power/control or sadism indicated that the subject recognized the acts were cruel and nonetheless achieved satisfaction or enjoyment from them.
- Seventeen cases of observed acts of cruelty to *pets* were reported by nonviolent subjects – twenty by violent subjects.
- Nonviolent offenders reported a response of intervention five times – none of the violent offenders reported this response in observed acts of cruelty to pets.
- Responses of power/control or sadism to acts of cruelty committed upon pet animals were only reported by the violent offenders.
- The study also revealed that the majority of nonviolent and violent subjects had endured some type of childhood abuse. Despite this common background, only the violent subjects went on to violently victimize others.
- Findings from the study suggest that empathy may be the operative factor with respect to those who choose violence and those who do not. (Merz-Perez and Heide, *Animal Cruelty: Pathway to Violence Against People*, AltaMira Press, 2004.)

The FBI has long recognized cruelty to animals as part of a continuum that includes violence against humans. Agent Alan Brantley of the Behavioral Science Unit (ISU – Investigative Support Unit) counsels law enforcement officers that “investigating animal cruelty and investigating homicide may not be mutually exclusive.” He further opines that “This (animal cruelty) is not a harmless venting of emotion in a healthy individual; this is a warning sign that this individual is not mentally healthy and needs some sort of intervention. Abusing animals does not dissipate those violent emotions; instead, it may fuel them.” (Lockwood and Church, *Deadly Serious, an FBI Perspective on Animal Cruelty*, Humane Society News, Fall, 1996.) The list of serial killers who abused animals as children is exhaustive, and the FBI includes animal cruelty in the profile of serial killers. (Lockwood and Hodge, *The Tangled Web of Animal Abuse: The Links Between Cruelty to Animals and Human Violence*, The Humane Society News, Summer, 1986; Merz-Perez and Heide, *Animal Cruelty: Pathway to Violence Against People*, AltaMira Press, 2004.)

Domestic Violence and the Animal Abuse Connection

“A spaniel, a woman and a walnut tree: the more they’re beaten the better they be.” Old English proverb

Why do people who commit domestic violence also abuse animals? Information gathered and published by the Humane Society of the United States, as well as

anecdotal evidence reviewed by staff, indicates the following reasons exist:

- To demonstrate and confirm power and control over the family
- To isolate the victim and children
- To force the family to keep violence a secret
- To perpetuate the context of terror
- To prevent the victim from leaving or coerce the victim to return
- To punish the victim for leaving
- To degrade the victim through involvement in the abuse (Humane Society of the United States, 2003 *Report of Animal Cruelty Cases.*)

Some victims actually postpone leaving a domestic violence situation out of fear or concern for their animals' welfare. In a 1995 study conducted at a shelter for battered partners in Utah, 18% of the women with pets indicated that they had not come to the shelter sooner because of pet-related concerns. At the Shattered Lives seminar, in April 2004, Dr. Randall Lockwood reported that our tendency is to view our pets as more than just "property." In fact, of those surveyed, 2% thought of their pets as property, 51% categorized them as pets or companions, and 47% considered their pets to be "family members." The relationship of a domestic violence victim and his or her pet can be a source of extreme vulnerability.

There is much anecdotal evidence of batterers taking full advantage of this vulnerability in the victim. The following report is a good example:

"My first day as a newly hired, freshly graduated, starry-eyed counselor at the local battered women's shelter almost made me run home crying. Not because of the black eyes and bruises that shadowed the women's faces. Not even because of the haunted looks in the small children's eyes. No, I was prepared for that (as much as one can be)... What I wasn't prepared for were the pictures my first client brought to show me, apologetically, to explain why she had to return home. The pictures were of her 'loving' husband cutting her beloved dog's ears off with a pair of garden shears. He had sent the ears along, too...."

As I started ranting about calling the police and animal shelter, my client calmed me down, and with tears in her eyes, explained that in her county there was no humane

society, and that the local sheriff was her husband's cousin, and that if she went home she could take care of the dog and the other animals on the farm and thank you very much for all the help but couldn't I please understand that it was best that she just go back?... She returned home and we never heard from her again." (Quinlisk, *Animal Abuse and Family Violence*, Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse, 1999, Purdue Press, edited by Ascione and Arkow.)

In a 1995 study aimed at gathering more than just anecdotal evidence of animal abuse in domestic violence situations, 38 women entering a shelter for battered partners in Utah were interviewed. Of those women:

- 74% reported current pet ownership or pet ownership in the previous 12 month period.
- 71% of the pet owners reported that their male partner had threatened to hurt or kill and/or had actually hurt or killed one or more of their pets.
- 57% reported actual harm or killing of their pets.
- 22 women had children and 32% of them (7) reported that one of their children had hurt or killed pets. (Ascione, *Domestic Violence and Cruelty to Animals*, Paper presented at Conference on Family Violence, July, 1995, <http://www.parkc.org.domestic.htm>, site last visited July, 2004.)

A 1997 survey of 50 of the largest shelters for battered women in the country indicated that 85% of the women and 63% of the children entering shelters discussed incidents of animal abuse in the family. (Ascione, *The Abuse of Animals and Domestic Violence: A National Survey of Shelters for Women Who are Battered*, Society and Animals, 5(3), 205-218, 1997.)

It has been reported by some victims of domestic violence that the response of law enforcement to complaints of animal cruelty perpetrated by the batterer may lead to feelings of further isolation and helplessness in the domestic violence victim. When the victim or a citizen/witness to the animal abuse calls for law enforcement assistance and the officer on the scene responds as if the animal cruelty is nothing serious, the victim may come to believe that their own victimization is likewise nothing serious. The abuser/batterer is then able to take full advantage of the victim's resulting feeling of powerlessness and

helplessness. (Anecdotal evidence reported at Shattered Lives seminar, Tallahassee, Florida, April, 2004.)

In one Florida case discussed at the Shattered Lives seminar, the batterer had become so brazen that he actually called local Animal Control officials to come and help him capture the third family cat – he had already drowned the two he had caught, but was unable to catch the third! In that case it was reported that the abuser was charged with two felonies and served a six-month jail sentence. (Anecdotal evidence reported at Shattered Lives seminar, Tallahassee, Florida, April, 2004.)

Elder Abuse

“Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.” – Albert Einstein, New York Post, 1972

Elder abuse in the domestic setting affects at least 500,000 elderly persons each year. The 1998 National Elder Abuse Incidence Study estimated that for every one case reported, five go unreported. In more than two-thirds of the reported cases, the perpetrator is a family member. (*Making the Connection: Helping Vulnerable Adults and Their Pets*, brochure developed by the HSUS and the National Center on Elder Abuse, 2001.)

Elders can be particularly vulnerable to abuse because of limited mobility and dependence on their caretakers for the most basic of needs. Physical abuse and psychological abuse of elders are sometimes used by greedy family members to coerce the elder to sign over assets. Perhaps the limited income of the elder is being used by the caretaker for his or her own gains, to the detriment of the elder.

Because an elder’s pet may be his or her only link to the past, or only source of comfort, the animal provides a particularly easy target for elder abusers to mistreat in order to psychologically abuse the elder victim. The elder victim may suffer in silence, or out of sight of the neighbors, but oftentimes the abused animal will be seen. Reporting such observations could save the life of not only the animal, but the elder victim as well.

One California Humane Officer, who investigated animal cruelty cases for 25 years, stresses the importance of being observant and aware, as an investigator. In the article, *Watch for Pet Abuse – It May Save Your Client’s Life*, Officer Barbara Fabricant is quoted: “Elder and animal abuse go together so often

that when I see one I automatically look for the other.” She recounts the following examples of cases she has seen in her work as a Humane Officer:

- Fabricant receives a call from a neighbor: “Something’s wrong with the dog next door. He’s screaming in pain.” Fabricant rushes next door, and finds the shrieking dog, whose legs are all broken. On her way back through the house, she hears another whimper. Thinking it’s another dog, she opens the closet door to find an old man with bruises all over his arms. The man tells her: “Every day my son orders me to sign over the house to him. When I refuse, he punches me.” On this day, the son had slammed the dog against a concrete wall. Had it not been for the report of the dog, the elder gentleman may not have been found.
- Another call is received by Fabricant. The voice pleads: “My neighbor’s dog keeps crying. Please investigate.” Fabricant finds the dog shackled to a two foot chain, standing in water, in the pouring rain. “My dog used to sleep with me,” an old woman reports, “but my son moved in and won’t let my dog in the house. He’s doing this to torture me.” (Rosen, *Watch for Pet Abuse – It Might Save Your Client’s Life*, Shepard’s Elder Care/Law Newsletter, McGraw/Hill, July 1995.)

Lt. Sherry Schlueter of the Broward County Sheriff’s Office is in charge of the Special Victims of Family Crimes Unit. The Unit is unique in that it investigates crimes that occur in the family setting. Lt. Schlueter has seen many crimes illustrating the connection between animal abuse, child abuse, and domestic violence.

She was involved in a particularly memorable investigation in the late 1980’s of a woman named Vicki Kittles. According to Lt. Schlueter, Kittles was what is commonly called a “hoarder” or a “collector.” Cases of animal neglect are common where a hoarder is found.

Hoarders typically accumulate a large number of animals; they fail to acknowledge the resulting deteriorating condition of the environment and of the animals due to lack of basic care and sanitation needs; they often fail to recognize the negative effect of the animal collection on his or her own health and well-being, and on that of other household members. (Patronek, VMD, PhD. and the Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium, *The Problem of Animal Hoarding*, The Municipal Lawyer Magazine, May/June

2001 edition, The International Municipal Lawyers Association.)

In the Kittles case, Lt. Schlueter reports that there were 37 dogs, a number of cats, and 2 horses being kept by Kittles in her mother's suburban house. Schlueter says there was evidence that the mother was being financially exploited. Kittles absconded prior to the resolution of the animal neglect case brought against her. Her mother disappeared as well. Kittles went on to be tracked through at least 4 western and Pacific northwestern states where she was finally successfully prosecuted after being found to have 115 dogs, 4 cats, and 2 chickens on a school bus parked in a rural area of Oregon.

Breaking the Cycle of Violence

"Through awareness, vision, courage, and tenacity, the insidious cycle of violence may finally be broken." – Lt. Sherry Schlueter, Broward County, Florida, Sheriff's Office

The opinion of experts throughout the literature and research reviewed by staff for this report can be summarized as follows:

- Professionals in the investigative, medical, teaching, and "helping" professions must be educated and made aware of the connection between domestic violence, child abuse, and animal cruelty.
- Early intervention is key in helping to turn children who abuse animals from the very real potential for a continuing spiral of escalating violence.
- In the family dynamic, one incident of violence or cruelty likely signals the existence of others, and should be viewed as the potential "tip of the iceberg."
- A cooperative approach among those who work with children, animals, and abuse victims is imperative if the system of aid, intervention, investigation, and prosecution is going to be effective.
- Judges and lawmakers need to be aware of the potential future impact of decisions they make with regard to enforcing and passing laws in this connection-filled area.

Florida Law

The Petition for Injunction for Protection Against Domestic Violence set forth in s. 741.30, F.S., recognizes the connection between domestic violence and animal abuse by including "intentionally injured or

killed a family pet" on the checklist of acts the respondent may have committed that gave the petitioner reasonable cause to believe he or she is in imminent danger.

The Florida Legislature considered but did not pass legislation that would have mandated cross-reporting of animal and child abuse cases observed or suspected by animal control officers and child protection staff in 2002. (*see* SB 282) A similar bill was never heard in committee during the 2001 Legislative Session. Section 39.201, F.S., provides that "any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, abandoned, or neglected... shall report such knowledge or suspicion to the department..." Animal control officers are not listed among the professions that must give their names to the staff at the department's abuse hotline, but, arguably, they are required to report knowledge or suspicion of abuse like any other person. Child protection workers are not, however, required to report suspected or known animal abuse.

Florida does have rather innovative animal cruelty statutes that require the offender to undergo mental health counseling or anger management counseling in certain felony cases where an animal was tortured or intentionally abused. (*see* s. 828.12, F.S.)

Section 828.073, F.S., provides a mechanism by which animal control or law enforcement officers can seize animals in distress. This can prove helpful in cases of animal hoarders, or, perhaps more critically, in cases where an animal is injured or neglected by an abusive spouse, parent, or caretaker in a domestic violence, elder, or child abuse situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff makes no recommendations with regard to suggested modifications in existing law or the creation of new law.

Staff does, however, hope that the contents of this report will serve to bring the connection of animal abuse, child abuse, and domestic violence to the minds of the members of the Florida Legislature as decisions are made in these areas.

It is further suggested that, as local community leaders, the members may help to educate the citizens of Florida, so that they will perhaps be encouraged to report abuse, whatever form it takes, so that we can do our part to break the cycle of violence.