

Get in touch

PetRetreat

0300 123 8278

petretreat@rspca.org.uk

www.rspca-petretreat.com

ARE YOU SUFFERING FROM DOMESTIC ABUSE OR VIOLENCE IN THE HOME?

Please call the 24-hour national domestic violence helpline: **0808 2000 247** or visit: www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk



Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Wilberforce Way, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 9RS
Tel: 0300 1234 555 www.rspca.org.uk

The RSPCA only exists because of public donations

The RSPCA helps animals in England and Wales. Registered charity no. 219099.

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PetRetreat

The PetRetreat service is almost entirely reliant on public donations. Please help us to continue our work. To donate please call: **0300 123 0346** and quote PetRetreat. Thank you.



PetRetreat

The story so far

PetRetreat is the RSPCA's information, advice and pet fostering service for families fleeing domestic abuse

The cover photo is posed by a model and used for illustrative purposes only.

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PetRetreat: MEETING A NEED

Jean, a lady in her late-forties, had been abused by her partner for two years – mentally, physically and sexually. The abuse was so bad she had even considered suicide. She knew that she had to flee, but couldn't bear leaving her four small dogs behind.

One summer's day events escalated. Police held her partner and took Jean home to pick up her belongings and, most importantly, her pets. A place had been arranged for her at a refuge. The RSPCA's PetRetreat service arranged to collect Jean's dogs from a safe meeting place, then for a foster carer to look after them for a few months until she was settled and could take them back.



DANIEL KRUGER/CON GETTY IMAGES

Sadly, Jean's experience is not unusual. Domestic abuse knows no boundaries and is a serious problem. It accounts for one-quarter of all violent crime. One in four women – and one in six men – will suffer domestic abuse in their lifetime, regardless of ethnic origin or social status. On average, two women are killed by current or former partners every week.

One of the reasons many people don't leave an abusive partner is the fear of what will happen to their pet if they leave it behind.

"My abuser threatened to kill my cat if I couldn't take her with me," one woman told us. Another said: "My dog would take the physical beatings instead of me; he was kicked and thrown."

Unfortunately, refuges can't usually take pets because of health and safety and allergy concerns.

This is where the RSPCA's PetRetreat comes in. It is a vital service that helps women, men and families fleeing domestic abuse, by providing temporary foster care for pets so their owners can leave their abuser and find a safe home.

We also provide much-needed advice and information to hundreds of callers every month.



BRAND X/JUPITERIMAGES.CO.UK / POSED BY MODEL

One incident of domestic abuse is reported to the police every minute.

On average, a woman will have been assaulted **35 times** before she reports the abuse to the police.

It takes a woman an average of **seven years** to leave an abusive relationship.

Each year some **750,000 children** witness domestic abuse against a parent.

Around **one-half** of households in the UK own a pet, so it's no surprise that many of the families seeking refuge from domestic abuse have animals that need taking care of while they get settled.

THE PetRetreat SERVICE

PetRetreat was set up in June 2002 after a local refuge approached the RSPCA to see if we could do something to help the other victims of this abuse – pets. We were the first animal welfare organisation to set up and run such a service.

Once referred to us, pets are assessed and given any necessary veterinary treatment. They are then placed with a foster carer, where they are looked after for about six months until their owner has a safe place to live. PetRetreat sends the family photos of their pet and gives updates when a family calls to find out how they're getting on. We take confidentiality very seriously and ensure that no one can trace a family through their pets.

We meet all a foster carer's costs when fostering an animal. In addition, we neuter, microchip, vaccinate and provide flea and worming treatment for the pets, as required, as well as veterinary treatment, which costs an average of £5-600 for each pet fostered.

» IN PERSON

Petra

After overcoming some truly sickening treatment, this lovely natured dog found a new home where she could live the happy life she deserves.

Petra's male owner abused his wife and children and took out his anger on Petra. One day he kicked her hind leg so hard that it broke in several places. The poor dog had to live in awful pain for several days until an RSPCA inspector was alerted and took her to a vet for treatment. Sadly, the vet couldn't save Petra's leg and had to amputate it.

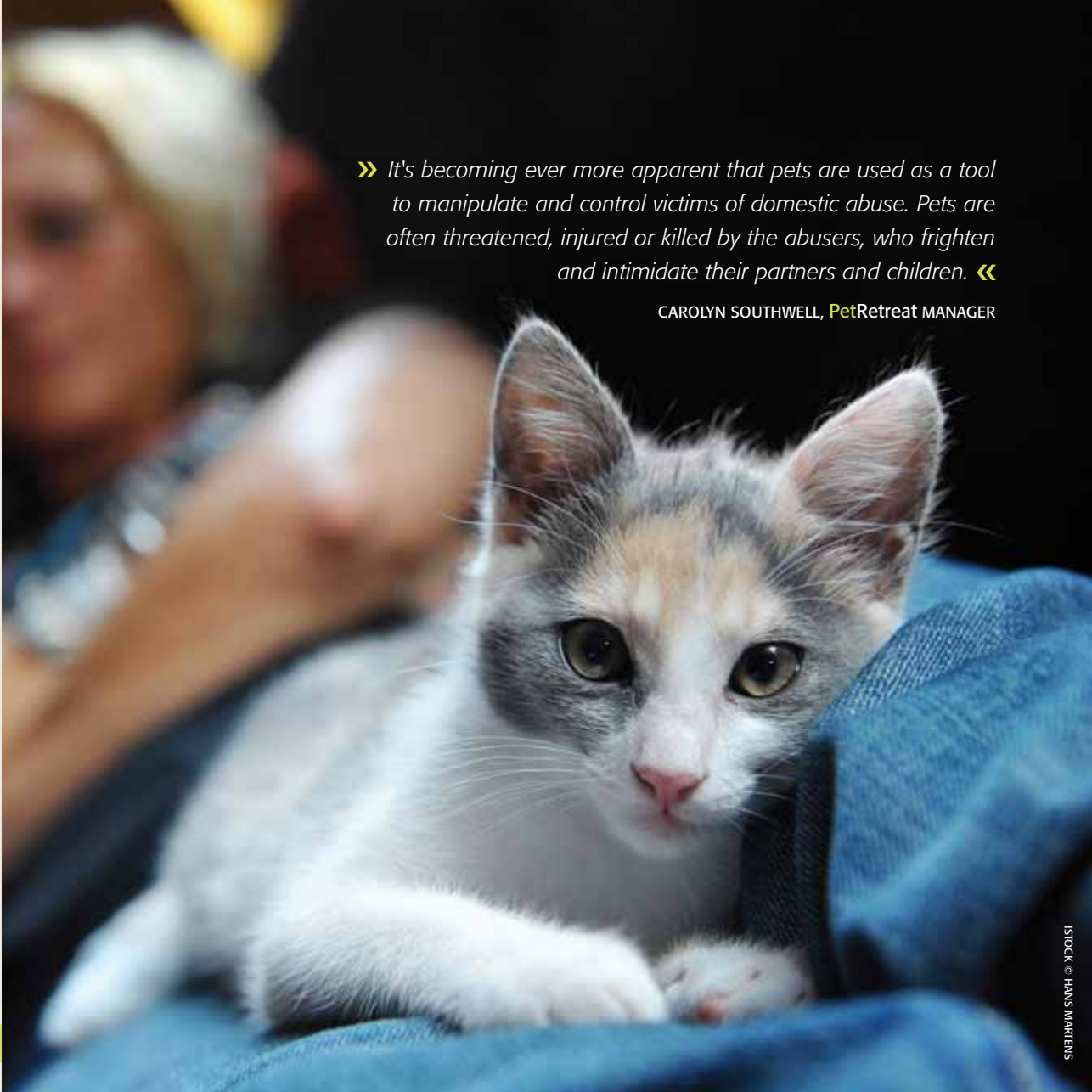
Thankfully, however, this marked a turning point for Petra and her family. Her abuser was prosecuted by the RSPCA, the family fled to a refuge, and Petra was taken in by a PetRetreat foster carer. With a long and painful recovery ahead of her and her children, Petra's female owner took the brave decision to sign Petra over to RSPCA care. Petra flourished and lives happily with her new owner.



RSPCA

» It's becoming ever more apparent that pets are used as a tool to manipulate and control victims of domestic abuse. Pets are often threatened, injured or killed by the abusers, who frighten and intimidate their partners and children. «

CAROLYN SOUTHWELL, PetRetreat MANAGER



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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Since the service began in 2002, PetRetreat has made a huge difference to many people's – and animals' – lives.

Although its roots are in the south west of England, PetRetreat has been rolled out across many areas of England and Wales, often in collaboration with regional charities such as Paws for Kids.

We started small – in our first year we helped 16 families by fostering 25 animals – but are growing. In 2009 PetRetreat was there for 118 families, including 97 children, and fostered 255 cats, dogs and other animals, including guinea pigs, rabbits, hamsters and birds.

Many more people need our help, however, and we would love to offer our service more widely. For example, in one of our regions there are more than 30 refuges but we can only deal with four of these at present.

Without the public's help, there would be no PetRetreat. Please help us continue saving families and their pets in the future by donating funds, fostering pets or helping to publicise our work.



ISTOCK © MICHAEL PETTIGREW

» IN PERSON



BECKY MURRAY / RSPCA PHOTO LIBRARY

Gill Client

Gill suffered domestic abuse for 24 years. She was beside herself with worry about what would happen to her beloved dogs if she fled her home.

"When I found out that the RSPCA could look after my dogs, Ella and Grace, while I got settled, I couldn't get over it – it was the answer to my prayers.

"I'm not saying it wasn't hard, as it was killing me to be apart from them, but I knew in my heart that they would be well looked after. I kept in touch every day by phone or text.

"All the people from PetRetreat and the women's refuge made it so much easier for me to get away from the hell that was my life. I can now get back my self respect and pride.

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

OUR FOSTER CARERS

Without a doubt, our foster carers are the backbone of the PetRetreat service. They give a loving, calm home to cats and dogs until their owners are settled enough to look after their pets again.

Because of what they have been through, many of the animals are nervous and frightened. It can take a lot of care to help them regain their trust in people, but it is hugely rewarding to see them grow in confidence and their personalities and little quirks emerge.

Our foster carers are amazing people and we really appreciate all that they do. They need to have experience with animals, be kind, patient and calm, and to be around a lot during the day, so that the pets aren't left alone too often. An animal typically stays with them for four to six months.

Once an animal is accepted for fostering, we assess them so we can match them with the foster carer best able to meet their needs. They are given a thorough health check and we provide veterinary care and vaccinate, microchip and neuter as needed.

We cover all an animal's expenses while they are in foster care, including pet food and veterinary treatment, and supply equipment such as leads, collars and bedding.

HELP! We are always looking for foster carers to provide temporary homes for dogs and cats. Could you help people escape a life of domestic abuse? To find out more please call: **0300 123 8278** or email: petretreat@rspca.org.uk.

If you'd like to help PetRetreat but can't foster an animal, please call us! We need volunteers to distribute leaflets, put up posters and raise much-needed funds.



ISTOCK © CLAUDIA DEWALD



BECKY MURRAY/RSPCA PHOTOLIBRARY

PetRetreat also helps families with other pets such as guinea pigs, rabbits, hamsters – and even horses. These are looked after in the RSPCA's animal centres where there are excellent facilities and experienced staff to care for them.

» IN PERSON

Bernice Foster carer



CHRIS BRIGHELL/RSPCA PHOTOLIBRARY

Bernice has fostered 12 cats over the past four years.

"As a PetRetreat fosterer, I get all the benefits of caring for an animal but without the long-term restrictions of owning a pet.

"To begin with they are often rather timid and frightened, however, after a few days they stop hiding and start to relax.

"Each of the cats has been affected in a different way. One of my cats was scared of wellies, another was petrified of carrier bags, but the saddest case was the cat that cried if he ever saw a man.

"By doing just one little thing, you can help families get their lives back on track. It is fantastic when a once frightened animal is returned to its owner all happy and relaxed. To be reunited with your pets must be an absolute joy."

WORKING TOGETHER

The notion that animal cruelty is linked to other forms of offending behaviour was first proposed in 1705. Today, expert opinion suggests that if an animal has been harmed in a household there is an increased risk that some other form of family violence is going on.

One UK study focused on 23 families investigated by the RSPCA for animal cruelty and found that 82 percent of them were known to social services as having children at risk. Another study noted that in some family settings where abuse occurs, pets seldom reach two years of age. Sadly, for many of these families and animals, the abuse will have a lasting effect.

The RSPCA, as the largest investigator of animal cruelty in the UK, shares information and cross-reports with child investigatory agencies to provide early warning and risk assessment information on child abuse.

» Where serious animal abuse has occurred in a household there may be an increased likelihood that some other form of family violence is also occurring and that any children present may also be at increased risk of abuse. «

Understanding the links: Child abuse, animal abuse and domestic violence, NSPCC

RAISING AWARENESS

In 2001, a multi-agency organisation, called the Links Group, was set up to raise awareness of the links between animal, child and domestic abuse, through publications, conferences and training programmes. Members include the RSPCA, NSPCC, Refuge, Women's Aid, British Veterinary Nurse Association and Paws for Kids. A better understanding of these links can help to protect victims, both human and animal, and promote their welfare.

IN PARTNERSHIP

Although PetRetreat is growing, we do not yet have the resources to provide a national service.

So, to ensure our provision is as far reaching as possible, PetRetreat is working with other organisations. These include Paws for Kids, which is based in the north of England, Refs4Pets in Nottingham and the Dogs Trust in London and Leeds.

» IN PERSON Kelly

Kelly and her mother fled a violent home to go into a refuge, while her dog, Prince, was fostered by PetRetreat. Her mother explains how the stress and upheaval affected Kelly.

"Kelly found being separated from Prince devastating. She wouldn't talk to anyone, she just clammed up. She tells all her worries to her much-loved pet. They are inseparable.

No-one should underestimate the trust and bond between a child and her dog.

"We lost our house and possessions, but losing our dog was far worse. Thanks to PetRetreat, we now have Prince back. A furry friend snoring at the foot of her bed is enough to give a little girl a peaceful night's sleep."



ISTOCK © Mariya Bliskova

