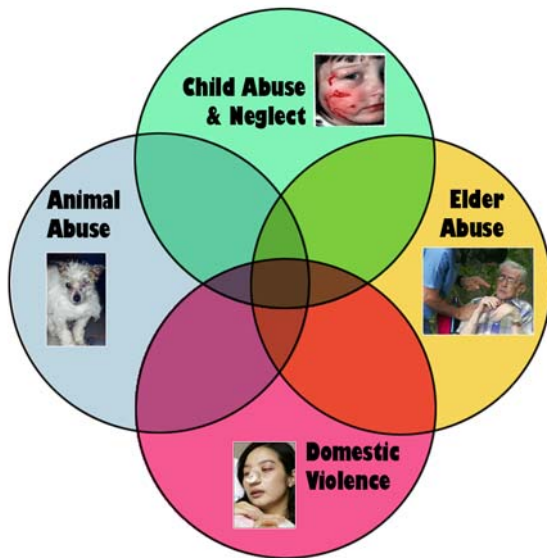


A relevant One Health Issue...



The National Link Coalition: Multi-disciplinary Human-Animal Partnerships to Prevent Family and Community Violence

Provided to One Health Initiative website/team January 12, 2012:

By PHIL ARKOW

Coordinator, National Link Coalition
37 Hillside Road, Stratford, NJ 08084
856-627-5118

arkowpets@snip.net - www.nationallinkcoalition.org

Much as the One Health movement emerged from veterinary medicine and envisioned partnerships with human healthcare to effect more comprehensive solutions to health issues affecting humans and other species, the National Link Coalition was born in 2008 as a way to improve well-being through unique human-animal collaborations. The Coalition came about through impetus from the animal welfare community, in response to growing scientific evidence from the social sciences, criminology and behavioral health fields, about the impact of animal cruelty on interpersonal aggression and other criminal behaviors. Like One Health proponents, we believe that human and animal interests are inextricably intertwined, and that animal welfare is also a human well-being issue. We promote a collaborative approach between humane and human services that transcends institutional and disciplinary boundaries to ensure a more effective approach to breaking the cycles of violence and protecting all vulnerable members of society.

The National Link Coalition is an informal, multidisciplinary, collaborative network of individuals and organizations in human services and animal welfare who address what we call "The Link": the intersections between animal abuse, domestic violence, child maltreatment and elder abuse (see *diagram below*). We explore these linkages through research, public policy, programming, and

community awareness. We believe that human and animal well-being are inextricably intertwined and that the prevention of family and community violence can best be achieved through partnerships representing multi-species perspectives. The National Link Coalition's vision is:

The Link between violence against humans and violence against animals is widely known and understood. We believe that through the recognition and integration of this understanding into policies and practices nationwide, humans and animals will be measurably safer.

With 98% of Americans considering pets to be significant companions and members of the family, it is apparent that a "siloeed" approach in which veterinary medicine, animal welfare, animal control, and animal cruelty prevention are segregated from their human health, social services and law enforcement counterparts is no longer appropriate.

Research continually demonstrates that acts of animal abuse serve as indicators, and frequently as predictors, of family dysfunction, behavioral health problems, and interpersonal violence. We believe that a synergistic approach, on the local, national and global levels, can be more effective in bridging gaps and treating violence prevention holistically. Our trainings to veterinarians cite the One Health concept as a rationale for practitioners to recognize not only animal cruelty but child abuse, domestic violence and elder abuse as well. Our trainings to physicians and human healthcare personnel encourage them to be sensitive to the emotional attachments their patients may have towards pets, and to see animal abuse and neglect as sentinel problems indicating potential human wellness issues.

We believe that the prevention of family and community violence is amenable to public health solutions and therapeutic interventions. We focus on what we call "the dark side" of the human-animal bond: the broken bonds that emerge from negative interactions between the species and how these events frequently manifest in interpersonal violence. We also work with the good side of the human-animal bond, using animal-assisted therapy and unique behavioral health approaches to treat the perpetrators and victims of animal abuse.

Our programs include an extensive speakers' bureau with trainings targeted to human and veterinary medicine, law enforcement, social work, the criminal justice system, child welfare, domestic violence, adult protective services, and many other disciplines; a monthly electronic bulletin, *The LINK-Letter*, now being distributed to 970 readers in 25 countries; partnerships with sister organizations in the U.K., the Netherlands, and Spain; monthly webinars for prosecutors handling animal cruelty cases in collaboration with the National District Attorneys Association, the ASPCA and the Animal Legal Defense Fund; practice management guidelines to help veterinarians recognize and respond to family violence; and campaigns to establish community coalitions against violence, cross-reporting and cross-training programs that integrate humane and human services agencies.

For additional information please visit www.nationallinkcoalition.org or contact coordinator **Phil Arkow** at arkowpets@snip.net.