

Making Central Virginia a Safer Place for People and Pets

By Julie Palais, Chair, Central VA Link Coalition Working Group

“Animal abuse by a member of the family, whether parent or child, often means child abuse is going on too” - Randall Lockwood, Senior Vice President of Forensic Sciences and Anti-Cruelty Projects for the ASPCA

As part of Domestic Violence Awareness Month a forum to raise public awareness about the Link between Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse was held on Saturday October 20, 2012 at the Best Western Plus Crossroads Inn and Suites Conference Center in Louisa, VA. Attendees learned about the link between family violence and animal abuse and what is known about the social and cultural factors related to animal abuse. The morning session ended with a discussion about the importance of sheltering animals and families together in domestic violence cases and were shown examples of a large number of shelters around the country that have provisions for this sort of co-located housing for families who want to escape an abusive situation with their pets. Only one of these shelters exists in VA (in Arlington; Doorways for Women and Families). In the afternoon the group brainstormed ways for community groups to collaborate and share information in order to increase communication and cooperation and eventually reduce family violence and improve the sharing of information, which could lead to more comprehensive case management and a reduction in the resources (i.e. \$\$\$) needed by social service organizations to provide support to a families in need.

In the afternoon following a lunch that was catered (thanks to Bruce Rittenberg) by Decidedly Delicious, Region Tens's catering services program, the attendees spent the afternoon brainstorming further about all of the advantages to forming a community coalition and some of the ways to encourage others to join. They then created a list of organizations and groups in the community (and the names of people to contact at those organizations) in order to encourage others to join in helping us to build a community coalition. The group ended the day with a decision to work toward forming a community “link coalition” in Virginia to not only help raise awareness about “the link” but also to help bring animal control officers, veterinarians, child protection workers, domestic violence shelter workers, teachers, nursing home caregivers and other concerned community members together to communicate and collaborate since this is the “best way to stop multiple forms of violence perpetrated by the same abusers”. The decision was made to start small initially and to hopefully interest others from throughout the state and the region to join our group.

At the end of the day a small group of those in attendance volunteered to serve on a working group to further our goal of forming a link coalition in Virginia. If you are interested in learning more about the link and how the formation of such group will improve your ability to serve families and their pets throughout our region please contact one of the people listed below on the working group. We are planning our first meeting in late February or early March at which time we will begin developing a list of interested people and organizations who are committed to helping us make a Virginia Link Coalition a reality. In addition, members of the working group (see list below) have agreed to do some outreach to the community. If you or your group are interested in hearing a short presentation about this effort please contact one of the working group members and ask them to come give a presentation for you and your group. Finally, in addition to a renewed endorsement of the Central VA Link Coalition planning efforts by the Virginia Animal Control Association (VACA), the Virginia Federation of Humane Societies has also agreed to endorse the formation of such a

group. Keep an eye out for notices about an upcoming meeting that will take place somewhere in the Central Virginia region in late February or early March. If you live outside the Central VA region but are interested in becoming involved please let one of us know since this will help us garner support for making this a State-wide activity.

Speakers at the workshop included Phil Arkow of the National Link Coalition:

<http://www.nationallinkcoalition.org/>, Dr. Clif Flynn of the University of South Carolina Upstate and Allie Phillips, Director of the National District Attorneys Association's National Center for Prosecution of Animal Abuse and founder of the Sheltering Animals and Families Together (SAF-T) Program. This day-long seminar brought together professionals, volunteers and concerned individuals from across the spectrum of public, human and animal services to learn about the link between animal abuse and interpersonal violence and those in attendance discussed how communities have organized coalitions to address this issue and how we might form such a group here in Virginia.

Finally, in conjunction with the Central VA Link Coalition workshop, the University of Virginia Law School hosted a symposium on Friday Oct. 19 that was put on by the Virginia Animal Law Society (VALS) entitled: "**The Current State of Animal Abuse Laws**". In addition to Dr. Clif Flynn, the Virginia Assistant Attorney General Michelle Welch and the Vice President of the Virginia Animal Control Association, Rob Leinberger were among the speakers.

On behalf of members of the Central VA Link Coalition Working Group:

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A "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

— *Margaret Mead*