Section 5. Qualitative Research Findings: Interviews with Service Providers

Types of Participants

10 Women’s Shelter-related Service Providers
- Manager, Southern Alberta
- Social Worker, Central Alberta
- Program Manager, Southern Alberta
- Child Support Workers North, Central and Southern Alberta (3)
- Executive Directors, (2) Northern Alberta
- Crisis Intervention Worker, Northern Alberta
- Outreach Worker, Northern Alberta

10 Other Topic-related Service Providers
- Humane society boarding program managers, Central Alberta (2)
- Boarding Kennel Owner, Northern Alberta
- Bylaw Officer, Southern Alberta
- Spay Neuter Project, various locations
- SafePet Ontario (OVMA)
- Safe Pet Manitoba (MVMA)
- Vet and PHD student, Guelph University (Veterinary School)
- Instructor, University of Calgary (Veterinary School)
- Lawyer, public legal education

Demographics

Demographic information regarding women’s shelter populations served by the interviewees is for the most part presented in the relevant quantitative sections, similar to it, or was not specifically recorded. Staff from all women’s shelters reported the refugee and immigrant populations to be minimal, for a variety of reasons some of which are geographically specific. For example, in a northern town:

We now have a fairly large Filipino population, but I don’t think we have ever had one in the shelter. They are on work permits, they are not in relationships, they don’t have pets. They are single, working and sending money back home.
(Women’s Shelter Executive Director)

Aboriginal populations were reported to be very high in women’s shelters, about 50% across the province, varying somewhat between those women who were reserve or non-reserve based. This was believed by participants to mirror the higher than average reported incidences of Aboriginal domestic
violence in general, and reflected the fact that this population often had few options other than arriving at a shelter. Also matching the questionnaire data, intake workers noted that:

We hardly ever have women from reserves bringing animals. *(Women’s Shelter Executive Director)*

Six different women’s shelter staff noted that very few women arrive with older children:

Most are very young, toddler age, occasionally an older one. If they do have older ones, they usually place them with family or friends. Usually the older ones don’t want to come to the shelter. They are embarrassed, or they don’t want their friends to know they are in shelter, so they will usually find other arrangements for them. *(Women’s Shelter Child Support Worker 2)*

Most of the concerns reported by clients were about pets, rather than livestock, especially for the women who actually end up coming to the women’s shelter. Horses, chickens and cows were reported to be the subject of inquiry phone calls where the woman did not then follow up. For example, a worker related a conversation she had with a woman who owned 16 horses. One belonged to her young son, the others were her livelihood. Her husband threatened to kill them all if she left. Although counseled to leave for her safety and that of the child, there was no solution for the horses. At the time of the interview the intake worker had not heard back from the woman.

Families were reported to usually stay for the allocated 21 days, if in fact they stayed more than a few days before leaving, which was also common. Families in the north were reported statistically to stay in the women’s shelter for longer periods of time than those in central and southern Alberta.

Referral sources differed from place to place, but self-referral and word of mouth were rated first at all women’s shelters. RCMP, Family and Child Social Services, a variety of agencies, hospitals, and Greyhound drivers (where service existed) were all mentioned as consistent referral sources.

We get referrals from a variety of different agencies, from the hospitals, victim services, RCMP, child welfare, parenting support. There is a layover with the Greyhound and quite often the Greyhound will tell them about our number and let them use the phone to call here. We are a small town and word gets out fast, in most cases. *(Women’s Shelter Executive Director)*

Five different comments were offered about transportation as a barrier to reaching the women’s shelter. Recently announced cuts to many of the traditional Greyhound routes was of great potential concern. Having to reveal the situation to others in order to get transportation was a problem mentioned three times. Transportation for animals, that often did not have appropriate cages, was also noted to be an issue.

One of the barriers for some of the on-reserve women, the only way to get transportation to the shelter is to talk to someone in the band office, who might be related to their partner. *(Women’s Shelter Crisis Intervention Worker)*
Importance of Animals to Clients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of Animals to Clients (multiple responses possible)</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animals are just like their kids</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won’t leave without animals</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals offer unconditional love</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took risk to go back for animals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals more important than personal risk</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned home to be with animal</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals help clients feel safe, courageous</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals are their only friend</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reports from service providers were similar to those of the clients themselves: animals were like the woman’s family, women did not want to leave without them, and they would put themselves at risk by either staying or going back to get their animals:

She took a huge risk to go back to some place where all the evidence suggested she wasn’t wanted. He didn’t want her back, so she was putting herself at increased risk of violence by doing that. But she didn’t think he would take proper care of the animals and that was more important. These women get very attached to their pets because the animal provides that unconditional acceptance. They don’t very often get that from people. *(Women’s Shelter Executive Director)*

One case that always has stuck with me was a woman whose son was abusing her, he was 17 and addicted. We took in her puppy who had a broken leg from the son. She called us on her cell, said she had lied, she had been off her depression meds and made the whole thing up, nothing had happened to her dog, and asked to take him back, as she was leaving the shelter. She picked it up and went back to living with the son. *(Animal Welfare Worker 1)*

Pets in general; they are their baby. *(Kennel Owner)*

Partner Abuse of Animals

Most service providers offered anecdotal examples of the cases involving animals that had most impacted them. From these was extracted the actual harm reported to have been inflicted on the animal. Six stories reflected physical harm, two the intentional killing of a pet, and one leaving animals unattended for an unsafe period of time. Other interviewees commented more globally about the number of women filling out the questionnaire or calling in who told what they described as “horrific” stories. Two brief examples follow:
A local resident phoned me to remove a dog from her residence, it was being abused. She reported her husband would kick, yell at animal, and was often intoxicated at the time. She wanted to give it up for adoption to save it from the present conditions it was under. (*Peace Officer*)

She got up one morning, opened her living room curtains, and her cat was hanging from a tree. She said it sent me a very clear message, I wasn’t going anywhere, the message was clear, I was next. At that point she decided it was safer to stay there. Eventually she did end up leaving because she came to the shelter, but it took her years before she actually left. (*Women’s Shelter Crisis Intervention Worker*)

### Control of Clients Through Animals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control of Clients Through Animals (multiple responses possible)</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partner would harm animal if client not compliant</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner used animals to get client to return</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitbulls used by partner to create fear/control</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client would not testify, afraid partner would kill animals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner won’t release animal to force client to stay</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner left with the client’s kids and dog</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Control of victims through animals was a common theme reported by service providers, as it was from the clients themselves. Two (different) incidents of pitbulls being under the control of men and therefore being used to control women were related by this group of interviewees.

We had a lady who came from (northern town) with 2 little dogs. One came in healed, but had been thrown from a balcony by the partner, and had brain damage. She (the client) had been locked in her room and never allowed out of the house, so the dogs had no vet care. She was controlled by him through the dogs, if she didn’t do exactly what he said, he would injure them. (*Animal Welfare Worker 1*)

She was unwilling to testify or provide a statement to animal abuse so he could be charged, too afraid. (*Bylaw Officer*)

One of my outreach clients, her partner uses the pet to control her. She was out one night, he had the children for his visit, and he decided he was tired of having the kids and wanted her to come home, didn’t want her to have fun, and called her and told her the dog, which was her baby, was whining and complaining and
he kicked the crap out of it and it was lying on the floor bleeding. Come home now. So of course she did, dropped everything and ran home, and the dog was perfectly fine. *(Women’s Shelter Outreach Worker)*

**Children and Animals**

Those whose job it is to interact specifically with children reported generally that those children were very attached to their animals, missed them and would plead with their mothers to return home, if the animals were elsewhere.

They sometimes put pressure on their mom to go back, because they don’t want to leave the pet. They may put pressure on for other reasons, like their friends, or not wanting to change schools. It is one more thing that the children use to get mom to go back. *(Women’s Shelter Crisis Intervention Worker)*

They worried about the animals’ safety (3), whether they were being cared for (2) or refused to leave without them (2).

They report being worried because they have no idea what will happen to the animal or who will take care of it now that they are gone. Some think it might get hurt, but not by someone specific that they name, in most cases. One boy had been very involved with the livestock and running the farm, and was very worried about would happen to them. If we leave, who is going to take care of the animals? *(Women’s Shelter Child Support Worker 2)*

The boys were saying if we leave the cats, dad will kill them, we aren’t going, we can’t go without our cats. So they had to find a place for the cats quickly, before this man came home again. *(Kennel Owner)*

In the therapeutic setting, most children and youth were reluctant to talk about animal abuse they had witnessed. Therapists intuited that they had been instructed to keep the secret:

Honestly, not many kids open up about the abuse they have seen to the animals, they more so talk about why they miss them. They talk about how much they miss them, and what they did with them but I don’t think I have ever come across a kid who has talked about actual abuse to a pet. I would think they have been told not to say anything, because in other situations, they say my parents told me I can’t say anything, so I am sure it would be the same. *(Women’s Shelter Child Support Worker 1)*

Child and youth counselors reported using the following techniques to deal with these important issues:

- Don’t ask directly with younger children
- Do ask directly grade 6 and up
- Use therapeutic drawing
• Use stuffed or toy animals to start the conversation
• Use picture books and literature
• Use related movies, cartoons

Therapeutic interventions are often reported to be revealing:

They often name the stuffed animals, toys, or animals I read about in books with their own animal’s name, which gives me a chance to ask questions. For the kids that do come from the farm, I always ask what kind of animals did you have, and usually they talk about a pet that they missed, rather than the farm animals, because they are so young. (Women’s Shelter Child Support Worker 2)

I more do therapeutic drawings and stuff like that to see what I can get out of them from that. If they drew their family with their dog, say, I would ask what they did with their dog. And what kind of fun things did you do, where is your dog now, and I just keep going. Most of them draw their families, and their dog will be in the picture. (Women’s Shelter Child Support Worker 1)

One child care worker noted that perhaps a first stage shelter was not the best place to address these issues with children:

When the kids get here, they have so much on their plate, as do their parents, and they find it overwhelming, so it is hard to tell which things of all of it are bothering the kids the most. It would be a better question to ask at second stage housing, somewhere like that. Most stay about 21 days, if they stay more than a few and then leave. (Women’s Shelter Child Support Worker 2)

Five anecdotal incidents were passed on where participants were aware that children who had been abused or witnessed were themselves abusing animals. For example:

She said that she witnessed domestic abuse growing up, and by the time she was 12 violence had been so normal to her that one day her cat had kittens, and she put the kittens in kind of a pot hole in her yard and ran the lawn mower over them. At the time she was so numb to violence that she never thought of it as being cruel. But she was in the shelter for abuse by her partner as well. (Women’s Shelter Crisis Intervention Worker)

The kids were being abusive to the dogs too, dragging a puppy around with baling twine as a collar. (Bylaw Officer)

Certainly, therapists viewed children’s abuse of animals as a warning sign of other issues:

When a child seriously abuses an animal, not like a 2 year old squeezing too hard or pulling a tail, where there is intentional harm, that is often a signal that something is really wrong in the child’s life and unfortunately the animal takes the brunt of it. (Women’s Shelter Executive Director)
Rural Factors

Not unlike the clients, service providers noted the secretive and gossipy nature of rural areas, the isolation, and the lack of access to services for the victims or their animals as impacting the ability to leave.

My experience was that the calls were very rare from rural families. The isolation is a problem as they can’t simply pop over to a neighbor to talk, or to get support, most don’t want family to know, and they often are not aware of sheltering services due to the relative isolation. When I spoke with this population, there was almost always an underlying fear of losing everything if they leave the relationship. The woman most often does have responsibilities outside of the house type of work and the amount of time, and effort they put into the running and maintenance of the farm/property (I think) makes it harder to leave. I think sometimes their thinking goes along the lines of “I have invested my life in the relationship and farm/property and I will not walk away from what I am entitled to.” When this is coupled with a lack of awareness firstly of the fact that what they are experiencing may be abuse, and the fact of isolation—many have little to no life or support outside the family – choices become very limited. (Written Communication, Women’s Shelter Executive Director)

Impact of Farm Environment for Clients

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<tr>
<th>Impact of Farm Environment for Clients (multiple responses possible)</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Client won’t leave because of animals</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client only left after justice system intervened</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client had no place for animals to go</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm animals (e.g. barn cats and dogs) are not pet, less emotional attachment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients wait to leave until their kids are independent</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client went daily from shelter to care for livestock</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Service providers universally reported that the group that found it hardest to leave their animals and come to the women’s shelter was the farm women. They might call intake, but rarely did they leave and appear at the shelter. Some waited until their children were gone and they had other resources, a phenomenon that was also reported by the farm women interviewed.

I got a call from a woman who had 12 chickens. I remember thinking oh my god, they are just chickens. I grew up on a farm, to me chickens are meat. But for her, she would not come in, she would not leave her chickens behind. We phoned everywhere looking for some sort of safe place for these animals and
found nothing, and she did decide to stay. Another lady had all kinds of livestock, cows and horses and so on, and it was the same thing, there was just no place for the animals to go, and at that point she chose not to leave. It is definitely an issue. *(Women’s Shelter Outreach Worker)*

As the police investigated, they found that there had been long term and ongoing physical and emotional abuse of both the boy and the mother, and released the boy and arrested the dad. However, police made them leave the farm, which neither of them wanted to do, and they stated they had stayed through the abuse because of the livestock, and only left because the gun incident brought it to attention. They moved back to a nearby rural town, but were not allowed to return to the farm. *(Women’s Shelter Child Support Worker)*

With some of these older farm women, they leave when they don’t have any more responsibility for animals, 40 years later they are leaving. The ones that do come from farms also gain monetarily from them, so they are more likely to be looked after because the man’s livelihood likely depends on it. Pets, on the other hand, would be a different story. *(Women’s Shelter Executive Director)*

### Impact of Reserve Environment for Clients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of Reserve Environment for Clients (multiple responses possible)</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clients do not have personal pets and livestock</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients don’t bring animals to shelters</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients show less emotional attachment to all animals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients ask neighbours and friends to care for “loosely owned” animals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserve animals do not live inside, free roaming</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserve dogs run in packs, client fears animals</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal will be fine without client</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little vet care available or sought</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients don’t own dogs so they avoid being charged for dog’s actions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation to services an issue</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

As with the women participants who had knowledge of reserve life, service providers who had this knowledge did not see animals as a pivotal issue for clients who came from the reserve.

I don’t think the presence of animals makes a difference to decision making on First Nations’ reserves. If women need to leave, they may ask neighbours or relatives to look after the dogs, which may or may not happen. They are loosely
owned and sporadically fed; they forage for themselves, often in groups. It does not seem that women hesitate to leave because of the animals. Often the residents are afraid of animal control/RCMP/security enquiring about their dog so they will not claim an animal as theirs because they may be afraid that the dog has bit someone or become a nuisance (on reserve). *(Spay Neuter Project)*

There is the assumption that if you were feeding a dog on reserve before you came to shelter that someone else is going to feed that dog. Same with cats, they are under decks, and under houses. They do that for survival, they don’t get fed regularly, they don’t live inside, they are pretty much wild. I don’t live on a reserve, but I grew up living with people on reserves and grew up in some of their homes. I have personally observed all of this. *(Women’s Shelter Crisis Intervention Worker)*

**Lack of Knowledge**

Service providers see potential clients as lacking knowledge about services for themselves and their animals. Four reasons were presented as possible causes: lack of appropriate advertising by service providers, fear by the clients of what will happen if they ask about services, isolation, and a shortage of actual services so they stop looking.

I do the outreach and the public ed, and I continually run into people who say I didn’t know there was a shelter in town and we opened in ’91. There are still lots of people who don’t know we exist. And I know most people have no idea that we will take women who have pets. *(Women’s Shelter Outreach Worker)*

There is a general shortage of organizations that will take in animals, many women do struggle with what to do, where to take them. We refer them elsewhere when we get calls. *(Spay Neuter Project)*

Some think their partner will get into trouble if they ask anything. *(Women’s Shelter Child Support Worker 1)*
Impact of Animals on Clients’ Decision Making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of Animals on Clients’ Decision Making (multiple responses possible)</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stayed because of danger to pets</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No choice but to leave animals</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have to choose between safety of family and safety of pets</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left because of danger to pets</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left animals with relative</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals are an ongoing worry for clients</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay because no other animal caregiver</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay because shelters won’t take animals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won’t leave without animals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won’t leave because children won’t leave without animals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stays in personal danger to save pets from harm</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not know what happened to animal left behind</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal safety highest concern after leaving</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried friends can’t keep animals forever</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
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In general, service providers believed some client decision making was impacted by fear and anxiety about their animals; fear of leaving them, and fear of taking them with.

Although we serve both urban and rural Southern Alberta, too many times we have heard the stories of women not wanting to leave for fear of their animal’s safety (livestock and household pets). (Women’s Shelter Child Support Worker 1)

Many did not know if the animal was being cared for. Some were being cared for by the abuser, others a relative. To have someone say they don’t know, I think that is an indication that they really sacrificed the animal to leave an impossible situation. But there is ongoing worry if the abuser is caring for it, particularly if the abuser has abused the animal, but sometimes they feel like they just don’t have any choice. I think the ones who really feel that they have to care for these animals, they just don’t leave, or they don’t go to shelters. (Women’s Shelter Executive Director)

Unfortunately, most of the women who come feel they have no choice but to leave the animal with the abuser. Or sometimes they have a cousin or brother they can leave the animal with. Mostly they have to make a choice, between themselves and the pet. (Women’s Shelter Crisis Intervention Worker)
Friends will only do it for so long, then they need to give the animals back, that is often when women then go back. *(Women’s Shelter Child Support Worker 1)*

Barriers to leaving unrelated to animals that were identified included: lack of services; lack of policing in the community; isolation; transportation; and lack of communication (cell phone are hidden or have restricted plans, or they have no funds to buy and run one).

### Housing Implications for Clients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Implications for Clients (multiple responses possible)</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shelters will not take pets</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less housing available for pet owners</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low cost/second stage housing will not take pets</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t afford housing that allows pets</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faster to get out of shelter with no pets</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have to pay extra damage deposit</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have to put pet up for adoption or abandon it to get housing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Professionals were in agreement with the women interviewed; having animals made it harder to find a place to go to either immediately or after time in a shelter, and the time in the shelter might become longer because of the pet.

One of the problems is that there is very little rental housing available that will accommodate pets, so that even if they bring their pet to the shelter, they often can’t take it where they go next. So I think a lot of women realize before they even come that they will not find housing with a pet. *(Women’s Shelter Executive Director)*

It is faster to get out of the shelter if you are not looking for housing with a pet, or they can’t afford a pet, then they put them up for adoption or abandon. In a few cases the animal is returned again to us, found abandoned in the new apartment. *(Animal Welfare Worker 1)*

One issue that sometimes arises is smuggling pets into housing where pets are not allowed. All the subsidized housing in our area has a no-dogs and no-cats rule. However, some of the women want a dog or cat so much that they will smuggle one in. It would be nice if there were more landlords willing to accept pets. *(Written Communication, Women’s Shelter Executive Director)*
Staff and Animals

When asked by the interviewer about what services existed for women with companion animals or livestock, unless the women’s shelter was specifically aligned with a service, very few respondents had an answer. In one women’s shelter where 3 different types of employees were interviewed, they all had different answers, some of which were contradictory. As one noted:

We would have to talk to the SPCA and find out what they are willing to offer, since we don’t even have consensus on that among the 3 of us. (Women’s Shelter Outreach Worker)

Women’s shelters also varied as to whether they had policies with regard to staff taking animals home for clients. Those who had encountered a problem were most likely to have a policy. As one ED noted:

We have no policy about staff taking animals home. We should have guidelines for liability purposes, and should be asking for a consent and release of liability. (Women’s Shelter Executive Director)

Lack of staff knowledge impacts clients and their animals if staff does not complete the appropriate referrals to agencies that will take animals, either from lack of awareness or lack of time. Staff does not always see this as a priority, given the many other urgent issues the clients present with. This means the humane service has to refuse, or chase down the worker, as none will take animals without a referral:

The shelter sometimes just sends the woman and the pet without the referral; they don’t seem to take the animal issue that seriously. (Animal Welfare Worker 1)

Legal and Related Issues

Deciding whether or not calling the RCMP will actually provide safety for a woman is seen as problematic for some service workers. Distance and time for RCMP to respond was identified an issue, and RCMP are perceived as unable to attend unless there is immediate danger to human life. Women were reported by interviewees to not always be pleased that the call has been made on their behalf. They are afraid they: will be charged themselves for child or animal abuse; will have their children taken away; will be forced to leave their home; or that the RCMP will find other illegal activities at the same time, and they will be blamed by their partner or charged.

They will not go out there just to transport somebody, I can tell you that. They will only go out if there is an immediate disturbance, and even then, it might take them two hours to get there. She said there is no way they can save me, if he comes to my door, I am dead before the police arrive. (Women’s Shelter Outreach Worker)

Usually we ask the woman if she wants us to send the RCMP in, unless we can hear him assaulting her or something, then we would just call the RCMP. Usually
they tell us she will be a lot safer if we don’t. *(Women’s Shelter Executive Director)*

Peace Officers and Bylaw Officers may have jurisdiction in some instances where initial complaints have to do with animals and there is no other person with legislative authority. Such officers can come on the property and remove or seize the animal through provincial legislations or local bylaws. They usually work in cooperation with the nearest RCMP and humane societies. Their actual policies (such as kill or no kill) and facilities (paddocks or not) vary from place to place.

Like RCMP, they are likely to come in contact with situations of domestic abuse. A bylaw officer who was called in on a “lack of care for animals” complaint where domestic violence had been attended to previously by RCMP, noted that the abuser additionally:

> blamed her (his partner) for his arrest at trial, because if the SPCA or the Peace Officer hadn’t been there, they would not have found the narcotics that led to his arrest. *(Bylaw Officer)*

Legal issues around the animals were reported by various kinds of providers as being complicated. Determining legal ownership of animals and retrieving them was seen as especially problematic:

> The husband demanded the dog back, and he was told no, it was not his or registered to him. If it was not in her name, I would have seized it, but she then would have to testify of the abuse and the courts would decide the animal’s fate. If there are no witnesses, it becomes hearsay evidence and may be quashed. Judges in our town tend to rule in the peace officer’s favor, but lots of others just automatically give the dog back to the man. *(Bylaw Officer)*

We take the word of the crisis intervention worker as to whose animal it is. Whose ever name is on the vet records or license. If there is either, he or she is considered the owner of the animal, who is considered property. *(Animal Welfare Worker 1)*

> If a woman fled without the animal, who is going to go and get it? It has to be timely. A vet can’t go in without police. Bylaws have to be observed. If he paid for the animal from a breeder but she provides all the care, who owns it? *(Manitoba Safe Pet Program)*

We tried to get some kind of charges laid here, and we went to child welfare here and in Saskatchewan, and we were mostly interested in getting the children back because this was a nightmare for this woman. But because the guy had been with the woman for over two years, he was considered legally in loco parentis having the same rights as a parent. They refused to lay kidnapping charges. He may have taken the dog because the kids wanted it, but he took the kids and the dog. I was astounded. If he had just taken the dog, there would also have been nothing we could do. That was appalling. *(Women’s Shelter Executive Director)*
Legal issues in Alberta were also noted by the Animal Legal Defense Fund (2011) in their report ranking provinces in this area. They noted that Alberta was a Tier 3 province, and that Quebec, Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and Alberta were the best provinces and territories to be an abuser of animals, based on a variety of legal criteria.

Accommodations for Animals

**Housing Animals at a Women’s Shelter**

One women’s shelter had a dog and cat run available to clients, short term. The Executive Director explained:

> There have been a number of situations over the years where pets have been a major issue. So we don’t want people not to leave abuse because of pets, we want to get them here and accommodate them while they are here. We have never had more than two animals at once. We could probably do without it (the run), but I am glad we have it. I don’t have any desire to get rid of it, it can really ease the transition while we are trying to get an animal placed in a kennel, if they are full, or we need to get immunization. It gives the women more options. *(Women’s Shelter Executive Director)*

This solution is not without its problems, and the women’s shelter has an arrangement with a local kennel to ensure the animal stays at the women’s shelter are in fact short term. For example:

> My experience is that even if we do tell them about the run, if they are a little dog that usually snuggles with them in bed, that they will feel bad about leaving their dog outside to be a dog, because usually they live inside. *(Women’s Shelter Crisis Intervention Worker)*

> We had one woman who we allowed to have her dog in the shelter, she told us the dog was ill, and she had no place to put the dog overnight. She was going to keep it in her room and take it out, it was trained. It ended up being all over the top floor and in the crib, and peeing, and she did not keep her word. *(Women’s Shelter Executive Director)*

All the rest of the women’s shelters clearly did not allow animals inside or outside the residence. Nevertheless, three reported having animals show up with clients, three reported knowing animals were living in client vehicles, and two admitted to occasionally bending the rules. It was reported that most women who made it to the women’s shelter stayed, even if the animal could not, but no actual statistics were available.

> There have been a few families who have brought pets to the shelter, and we can’t keep them here. Sometimes we do take the pets up to the floor just for a little bit, until we find a place that can take them, the shelter or whatever. In some cases they leave when we say no, but most stay, because most of them
have children, and most women know that staying here is the best for them and their children. *(Women’s Shelter Child Support Worker 1)*

Problems noted with having animals resident in or around the women’s shelter include: risk of spreading disease; animals arriving without ownership papers; animals with no previous vet care or inoculations; client and staff allergies; damage to the shelter; neighbour complaints if outside; security if partner finds them; lack of winter coats on inside animals who are put out; sneaking animals inside; and a host of legal and liability issues. An example follows:

They really don’t have a place for them in the shelter. If dogs are kept outside, first of all they’ll disturb, because the shelter is in a residential area and the dog barking all night is not going to make anyone happy, and people can go by and see, and if the dog looks like their dog, they are going to want to get in that shelter. You can’t put inside animals outside, especially in winter time, because those dogs don’t have a coat, they can’t stay outside, even in a heated doghouse, that’s not enough. *(Kennel Owner)*

**Arrangements with a Kennel/Foster Care**

Two organizations reported having an arrangement where animals were referred to a kennel, with no cost to the client. In both cases, kennel owners never met the animal owners, for security reasons. In one case costs were picked up by the kennel owner and shelter in combination, in the other by a humane society as part of a wrap-around service. Issues reported included: animals being abandoned; tying to find out about previous vet care and inoculations and having to quarantine; not all animals being suitable for kennel living; a variety of costs; and insurance and liability (which is dependent on the breed of animal). Those shelters who did not have such an arrangement reported having no nearby kennel, no willing kennel, or no funds to take on this work.

There was one dog actually abandoned by the client at the kennel. The kennel owner fed this dog for several months, and then I think found some sort of placement for her. And that is why we have this arrangement with the kennel, because then there is no cost to the client. And if she can’t afford dog food, then the shelter pays for the dog food. *(Women’s Shelter Executive Director)*

The first time I took an animal I had someone from the band calling, asking if I could take 2 cats, did I board cats and could I take two. He asked if he could bring them in an hour. Do they have their shots, he didn’t know. Don’t know how old they are, don’t know anything. There were two kids and the mother was taking these two kids finally out of this abusive relationship but the boys were saying if we leave the cats, dad will kill them, we aren’t going, we can’t go without our cats... Kennel insurance is difficult, for example if you take Rotties or pitbulls, they won’t insure you. So every year, my insurance broker has to really look around it takes a while to find someone who will insure me. It is really hard if you have a pet that is older and never been boarded out, always been with family or friends or neighbours, or someone, never been in a kennel. I don’t
usually meet the actual owners, someone from the shelter will bring the dogs. It
is safer for everyone that way. *(Kennel Owner)*

Three agencies had access to boarding through other organizations, usually through a fostering
arrangement. This too was reported to have its complications: finding appropriate and willing foster
parents; transportation of animals; various costs; and security.

You have to deal with the privacy issue even for the foster families, who may
turn out to know the victims, or how do you know they don’t live next door to
the abuser? *(Manitoba Safe Pet Program)*

**Humane Society Programs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of Humane Society by Clients (multiple responses possible)</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women’s shelter workers unsure what humane provides</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees prohibits client use</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client fear of humane society</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No way to transport animal</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennels have larger runs than humane society</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other placements are less traumatic for animals</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won’t take older animals</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a wait list to surrender animals</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not legally able to retrieve the animal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was no consistent response regarding the use of the humane societies for placement of client
animals. Some shelters have no humane society within a reasonable distance. Some had never asked
such an organization for help and those who asked, received various kinds of responses. Women’s
shelter workers also reported that some clients refused to ask for humane society help for fear of
repercussions to themselves (charges) the animals (disease or trauma) or even their partner (charges).
It was noted by some women’s shelter workers that humane societies had the same limited space and
funds in rural areas as they did.

For the general public there’s a $50-$75 surrender, it depends on the
adoptability of the animal. If we make it higher, no one would use the service.
We won’t take owner surrenders that are over 5 years old, they don’t adjust, get
depressed, and die. We operate off a waiting list. If you come in and we are full
you can’t leave your animal. *(Animal Welfare Worker 1)*

You can’t really call the SPCA and say in the past my husband has kicked this dog
and injured it and I have had to leave the animal with him, can you do
something. I don’t think the SPCA can act on that. It would be really nice if there
was some action there, but my perception is anyway that there has to be an imminent situation where the animal is in danger. *(Women’s Shelter Executive Director)*

I can share my experience with the local SPCA is you can’t even just take in a lost animal, without a fee, which I think is an issue for women who if they wanted to leave, and said I have no place for my pet and take it there, they will not accept it without charging them a fee. I know that for sure. *(Women’s Shelter Outreach Worker)*

Even those in the employ of humane societies are not sure which of their branches offers what:

I was under the assumption this (boarding for shelters) was something all SPCA’s did when I started, and then found out we were probably the only one. *(Animal Welfare Worker 1)*

Employees from two different Alberta humane society sites where there was an ongoing relationship with a women’s shelter were interviewed. In one case, the animals were kept only on-site. In another, a combination of boarding with foster parents and the humane society site was used.

It began because a previous manager kept getting calls from women and workers inquiring and decided it was a need. To get into emergency boarding there has to be a referral from a professional. It comes in spurts, at the moment we have 6 cases in care. We keep animals or have them fostered for the same time as the shelter keeps the women, 21-30 days, and will do an extension if needed, maybe an extra week. If they are not in contact with us, or we don’t hear from them for 2 weeks, we will inquire if they are still at the shelter and adopt out if the animals appear to be abandoned. Last year, Oct –Sept 30 we had 48 cases, 70-80 % reclaim the animal. *(Animal Welfare Worker 1)*

We try and put the animals for emergency boarding in foster care. This is safer for the animals and for us, no one knows where they are then except me. They find it easier to adapt in a house, it helps normalize things for the animal until they can be reunited with the owner. We vaccinate and de-worm them for free to protect them, and they are vet checked. *(Animal Welfare Worker 1)*

Both of these interviewees report dealing with clients who appeared without a shelter referral as a problem. Security, if the abuser knows the animal is there, is a potential problem encountered to date at one site but not the other.

The only problem we have encountered is when people show up without a referral, getting hold of someone who can do that, especially if the client has not been there first. *(Animal Welfare Worker 2)*

One boyfriend came every day. The RCMP detachment is only 5 minutes away. One time he sent a friend. He grabbed me and cornered me. This was when we
were in the old building with only 3 staff and I was alone. I managed to lock myself in a room and call the RCMP. (Animal Welfare Worker 1)

Both interviewees were strong proponents of such programs being part of the humane society mandate where circumstances allow, and both report that the women’s shelters they serve are grateful for the service.

I would encourage any organization like ours if they are thinking about it to just do it, it makes a difference when people are thinking about leaving a bad situation and we have never had an issue. The shelter believes it makes a difference; they even gave us a donation last Christmas from their staff. (Animal Welfare Worker 2)

This service is very important, the woman’s emotions are already high, and worry about the animals makes them higher. They are always grateful, always crying when they leave, most call every day to see how their pet is. When they have access, I send them photos by email and updates. I know how much of a difference we are really making for those women. (Animal Welfare Worker 1)

Veterinarians and Veterinary Associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Veterinary Services (multiple responses possible)</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most clients have never accessed a vet</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vet costs an issue for clients</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal-human abuse link should be taught in vet school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional code needs to mandate reporting of suspected human abuse</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s shelter will pay some vet cost</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge by women’s shelter staff about vet services and costs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vet-client confidentiality an issue for reporting suspected human abuse</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In small towns, vets are nervous report, get involved in issue</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of client knowledge about vet services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That veterinarians might be in a position to play an important identification role was mentioned by a variety of professionals in different areas. For example, one reflected that:

I heard a lawyer say if the person is worried about the pets before the kids it can’t mean much, but often it becomes about the dog because they are not stupid enough to threaten the children. (Written Communication, Lawyer)
Veterinarians were reported by interviewees from both women’s shelters and their own association to vary greatly on how much they were able to help women in need of animal care or housing. Some veterinarians were paid by other agencies or municipalities to do this, some did so voluntarily by agreement, and some simply could not accommodate. Access to vet care was also highly dependent on location; in some cases the closest vet was minutes away, in others, well over an hour.

Access to a vet is really good. You can get in to see a vet a lot quicker than you can see a doctor, as long as you have the money. We have taken animals to the vet clinic here, and the shelter has paid, and they have given us a discount because it has not been a very large bill. We don’t budget for it specifically, it comes out of direct client costs, which is an area of our budget, and we consider that supporting the needs of a client. (Women’s Shelter Executive Director)

She signed a vet consent form and we contacted the clinic, who advised it was not the first time for a broken bone. She always had an excuse, like the other dog did it. We did not have the other dog, did not know if it even existed. The vet issue is their oath of confidentiality to the client. They don’t want to ruin their business by having word get out in a small town that they report clients. They don’t want to get involved in the personal stuff generally. There needs to be something at vet school that teaches about the relationship between human and animal abuse, and some way of making them liable to report. (Animal Welfare Worker 1)

At a vet in town, you walk in the door and it is a $75 exam fee. It’s the reason they don’t go. (Kennel Owner)

However it might be provided by veterinarians, there was demonstrated need for inoculation, spaying and neutering for most animals who appeared at women’s shelters, as well as care for specific injuries or diseases.

The particular group of abused women who come to shelter, they are mostly quite poor, they live in poverty. There isn’t money for vet bills. A lot of times they end up with pets, but there isn’t very much money so the animal doesn’t go to the vet, get its shots, or if it is kicked or abused, it still doesn’t go to the vet. (Women’s Shelter Outreach Worker)

The researcher conferred with faculty at two veterinary schools in Canada, and it did not appear there was any consistency with regard to the information future vets were exposed to during training with regard to the links between human and animal abuse, or related issues. Typical was an email response:

I am not aware of where or who might be covering this topic in the current curriculum. I do know that animal abuse, to which this is tied, is being covered in greater detail in the curriculum. (Written Communication, Veterinary School Official)
**Provincial Safe Pet Initiatives**

At least three Canadian provinces have cooperative, multi-agency initiatives in which the human-animal cruelty connection is addressed: Ontario, Manitoba and New Brunswick. Representatives from the Ontario and Manitoba initiatives were interviewed for this report, Ontario being the oldest and Manitoba being the newest such attempt.

Ontario’s Pet Safe is currently run by the OVMA, with 80 of 1200 veterinary clinics participating in cooperation with local women’s shelters. They provide vet care for up to two weeks with the goal being to remove the initial barrier to women leaving abusive situations. They are associated with the Farley Foundation, who will help abused women, seniors and the disabled with a variety of veterinary costs. The second component of the program has been created through a partnership with the OVMA and the Ontario government. Community members can sign-up at local veterinary clinics to become temporary pet foster parents. These volunteers will take care of the pets in their home, and have access to a veterinarian for expert advice on taking care of pets, when needed. In 2011, the OVMA estimated the annual cost of caring for a 40 pound adult dog at $1856, a cat at $1442.45 and puppies and kittens are more (www.omva.org/pdf/fifi_fido_finances11.pdf).

The spokesperson remarked:

> The clinic would take the animal for two weeks, do all the legal paperwork to protect themselves and the clients, feed and shelter the companion animals, do an exam and treat the normal issues such as lack of vaccinations. We now know that two weeks is just not enough time for people in this situation, and that is something we want to address as we move forward. Serious issues would be discussed with the client, who in some circumstances could apply to the Farley Foundation for assistance. *(OVMA’s SafePet Program)*

He also noted they only deal with companion animals, but often get calls about livestock and large animals.

Manitoba has recently announced a multi-agency approach including: the Ministers for Family Services and Consumer Affairs, Labour and Immigration, and the Status of Women; Winnipeg Humane; MVMA; City of Winnipeg Animal Services; Police Domestic Violence Intervention Unit; Domestic Violence Support Service of Manitoba Justice; and 2 women’s shelters. It is a pilot project operating only in Winnipeg over next few years. After assessment it may broaden its reach. It was initially started by the MVMA but after assessing all the needs with someone from Family Violence and Prevention, it became clear it was a huge and multi-faceted issue. Winnipeg Humane will now be coordinating, and responsible for housing animals through their foster family data base.

Safe Pet is described in a November 2011 government news release (http://news.gov.mb.ca/news/print,index.html?item+12523) as one of five related initiatives that is:

> A leading edge shelter program for family pets while survivors transition from abusive situations, based on findings that people don’t feel comfortable leaving
a relationship if a pet is left behind and that children experience further trauma when a pet is left at risk in the home.

A spokesperson states:

Rural shelters would like it to be province-wide, but we can’t do that right now until we are sure we have solved all the potential issues. The OVMA realized it was a big mistake to try and do it provincially all at once. It is a huge partnership with fuzzy feelings all over, so we think it should succeed and have funding. We have no idea what the eventual costs will be, it depends how many animals are actually in need. We need to see what the demand and issues are, that is why we are starting with a small pilot. (Manitoba Safe Pet Program)

Those reporting on both programs felt they met an important need, and offered comments for others wishing to undertake similar work:

I think the largest drain on the veterinarians is goodwill and time. They really do want to help, but as they are volunteers, as with any sort of volunteerism, care has to be paid to ensure they are not being taken advantage of or drained of their desire to help by the trouble and stress. Not all clinics are open on weekends or provide boarding, so some are relying on their staff, on a paid or volunteer basis, to cover hours they do not normally work. (OVMA’s SafePet Program)

Types of animals are a concern. Being a city project likely prevents us from having to deal with large animals like livestock, and only starting with two shelters should help manage the volume...There is concern about the abuser showing up at any of the cooperating agencies, as they are all listed on the brochure. (Manitoba Safe Pet Program)

Summary

Service providers voiced the same concerns as the clients and witnesses. They noted the general difficulty in leaving abusive situations for women with companion animals, and that for rural or farm women with livestock it was very difficult if not impossible. Such women rarely appeared at women’s shelters despite some actually making calls for information. Housing post-shelter for women with pets was seen to be problematic, and children were affected by the separation from their pets. Services were not seen as coordinated or predictable, and one agency could be unaware of another. Women were often seen to be in a forced choice situation, having to choose among their own safety, that of their children, and that of their animals. Legal issues around pet ownership and the retrieval of pets were also noted. As one women’s shelter worker remarked:

I would like to reiterate, I think sometimes the animals are the casualties of these situations. They are sacrificed in order for the rest of the family to be safe. (Women’s Shelter Executive Director)
Service providers reported various kinds of attempts to solve the issue of what to do with the animals when a woman needed or wanted to leave. *Every service provider interviewed recognized that the problem is easy to describe but hard to solve, and most noted that it was harder for large animals/livestock than companion animals.*

Of the various solutions available for families and animals in abusive situations, coordinated service was reported to offer the best possibility by both women’s shelter and other kinds of service providers. Alberta based providers were unaware of Safe Pet projects, or did not comment on them. They did unanimously report being unable to do everything themselves, and agreed that a solution for animal housing would be very enabling for women in abusive situations. As one agency who coordinated between a women’s shelter and animal foster parents remarked:

> This service is of the utmost importance, there would be no justification for stopping it. We need to expand to other people in need if anything. It costs us less than for adoptable animals actually, because they don’t stay as long. *(Animal Welfare Worker 1)*