



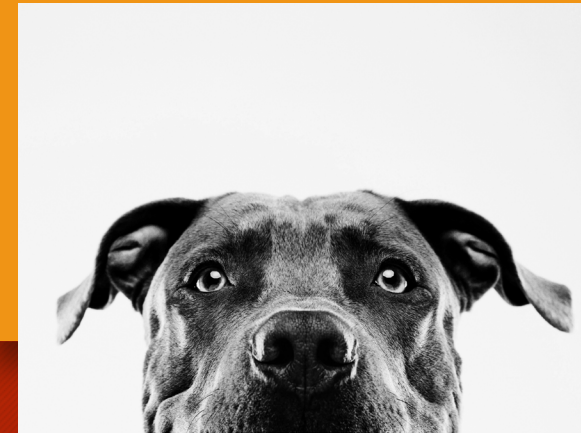
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# Shine a light on the shadows:

## The animal victims of domestic and family violence (DFV)



Through Their Eyes, RSPCA, 2024  
Dr Kristin Diemer  
Principal Researcher  
University of Melbourne



# We acknowledge

- the traditional custodians of the lands on which we meet today and recognize and respect their cultural beliefs, heritage and connection to the land. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.
- there may be victim survivors of DFV in the audience. We recognize those whose lives may have been taken and the strength and resilience of survivors - both animal and human.



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# Content/Trigger warning



- This presentation may be distressing for some viewers. It contains descriptions of animal abuse and coercive control. There will be a mention of stillbirth and infant loss.
- Animal abuse can be particularly disturbing.
- If this presentation raises any issues for you, please call 1800 RESPECT 1800 732732
- or Lifeline 131114 In an emergency call 000

# Advocacy, Awareness and Action

- Lucy's Project is a national network of human and animal services with a shared goal of supporting adults and children with animals who are experiencing domestic and family abuse
- 8 years old
- Registered as a charitable organization in 2023
- Largely run by volunteers and state-based chapters.
- Largely dependent grants and public donations.
- NSW government core funding in 2023



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# The early days

- “What do domestic violence and animal abuse have to do with each other?”
- “I’ve never seen it or heard of it. Except this one time....”
- “I thought I was the only one who knew”



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# Understanding the link: DFV & harm to animals



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- Three most reliable indicators of lethality in the context of DV
  - perpetrator threatening self –harm or suicide
  - access to weapons
  - animal abuse
- People who hurt animals, often don't stop with animals, likewise, people who hurt humans often don't stop with humans.
- Harm to animals is an indicator of escalation
- People who abuse animals are five times as likely to abuse other humans.

# DVNSW reports ...

- 81% of surveyed practitioners in DV, homelessness and community services reported that victim survivors disclosed that the perpetrator of violence also threatened to harm or kill animals.
- 48% of service staff reported that victim survivors have delayed leaving a perpetrator by more than a year due to fear or threat of an animal being harmed.

# 2022 Pets In Australia Report

- 28.7 million pets
- 6.9 million households have a pet
- 69% of Australian households live with animals
- 86% of pet owners are households with children present
- 74% regional or rural households
- Tong et al (2018) found that in 70% of DFV cases in Australia, companion animals are present
- ABS personal safety survey 1 in 4 women experience DV from a male intimate partner



# Case Study 1 - Rural Women

“The case worker telling me to just pack up and leave my animals added another instant layer of guilt because I felt like I was adding to my children’s suffering by not leaving my animals to fend for themselves.

Thankfully, I knew my kids were as attached to the animals as me.

Ripping them away from the animals and abandoning them without even knowing what was going to happen to them or where they would go would have added even more trauma to the kids.”

## Case Study 2 - Rural Women

“I left the house and our small herd of cattle because I felt he would better manage the farm.

He neglected the animals, and I received phone calls from the neighbours reporting the herd was not being fed and didn't have access to water.

So, I would return to check on them, and find him standing in the doorway watching me fill the water troughs.

I had a protection order, but then he used the animals to draw me back in and accuse me of breaching the protection order.

Eventually I had to report him, and they took the cattle away. It broke my heart to see them treated that way.”

# Opening opportunities for rural victim survivors

- “You just have to leave”
  - Women may need help with transporting animals or help on the farm.
  - Rural women make up a large proportion of victim survivors but yet some of the critical supports they need are considered ‘special circumstances’.



# Farming families



- Farming families can be intergenerational with long cherished histories on the land. ‘Walking away’ is easier said than done. The ‘animal way of life’ is just as hard to walk away from
- I couldn’t just pack my bags and leave them to their fate. I would have to live with myself and I couldn’t do that, they were my pets, my family members”.

# Coercive control



- “He would come home and kick the dog on his way in the house. Then I knew to keep the kids quiet and stay out of his way.”
- “When he was in his mood, he would pick up the cat and stroke her, slowly squeezing her harder and harder while she cried. The kids would be frantic, asking him to stop, but he would just stare at me, daring me to intervene. We just knew that if we crossed him, he would strangle her.”
- “He knew I was planning to leave. One day he came home and buried the cat up to her neck. He did this in front of the kids. They still have nightmares.”
- “When he would come home, the kids would grab [the budgie] and hide him under the bed. They knew that he would hurt him [the budgie].”

# Responding to need

- “what do you need?”
- In a crisis women might not even know all the elements they need to consider. Guidance and support can make all the difference.
- Listen to her, believe her, support her.



# What do we need?



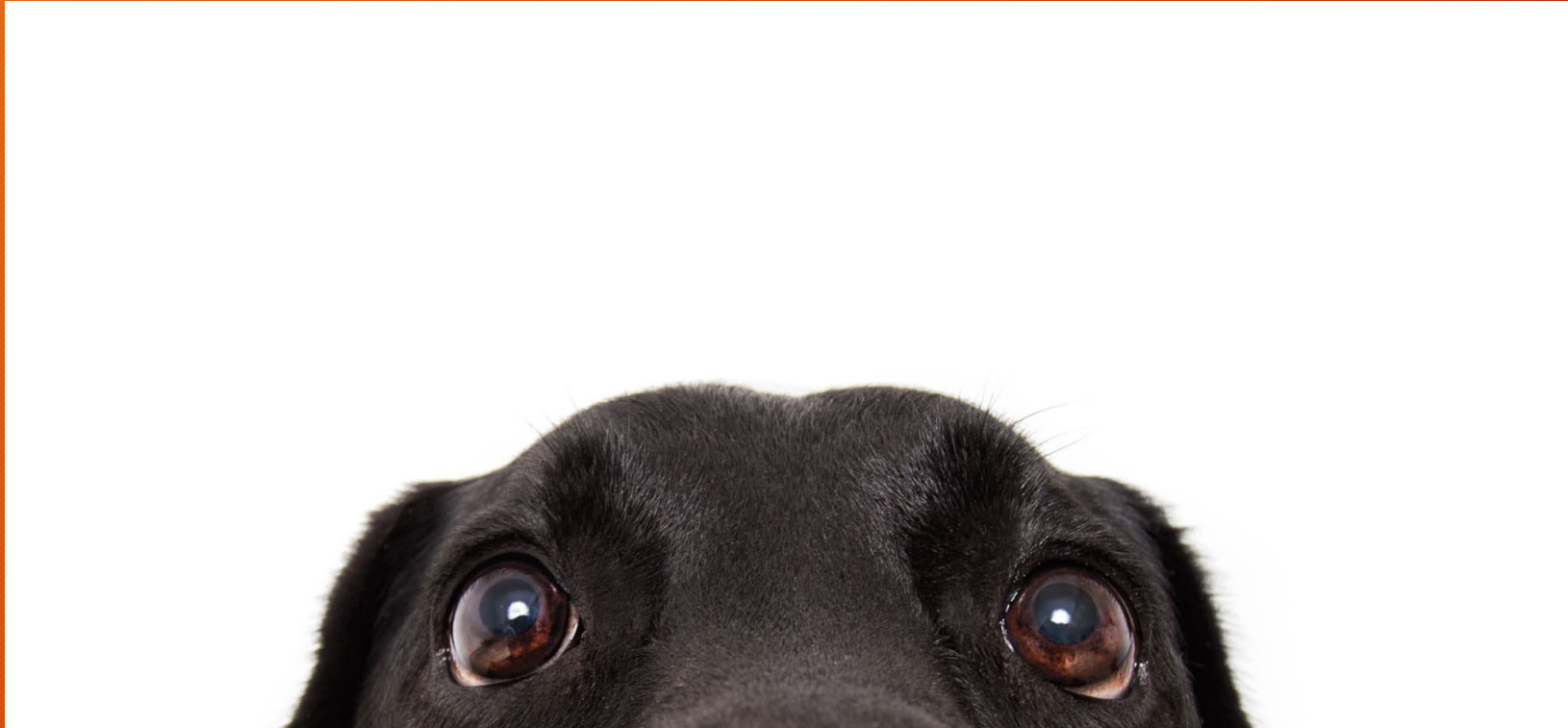
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- Awareness and education, broadly
- Animal friendly crisis accommodation
- Animal foster care networks/temporary care
- Informed and resourced animal refuges for surrendered animals
- Availability of emergency funds for victim survivors with animals
- Information and specialist knowledge for rural areas, companion animal registration, microchips, biosecurity measures, veterinary services etc.

# What does Lucy's Project do to open opportunities and help?



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# We deliver: Awareness, Advocacy and Action



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- Awareness and education
- Information and specialist knowledge for rural areas, companion animal registration, microchips, biosecurity measures, veterinary services etc.
- Bespoke solutions, consultation and training
- Advice to animal refuges and human refuges, government and non - government sector advice/consultation.
- A national network



# Project AWARE ARC

Animal aWare Animal Ready in Emergencies -in Animal Ready Communities



# AWARE ARC



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- Pilot in Lismore, funded by the Northern Rivers Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service.
- NSW Government, Women NSW funding to roll out in 3 areas
- Building cross-sector partnerships & referral pathways between DFV and other service sectors for people with animals:
  - DFV, animal, community and other services improve their capacity to support people and animals experiencing DFV.
  - Staff and volunteers in DFV, animal, community and other services can recognise, respond, and refer people and animals experiencing DFV (3 Community Engagement and Training Officers (CETOs) are equipped)

# What is the Gap nationally?



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- Lack of placed-based services that engage in the DFV and Animal Welfare space
- Reliance on the goodwill of community members, researchers and practitioners to provide our services
- Growing demand and evidence for the provision of innovative services provided by Lucy's Project across Australian

# For further information



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