



Freedom*news*

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Dogs Trust Freedom Project - Providing temporary foster care for dogs belonging to families fleeing domestic violence

Freedom from Fear

Joan had been in a violent relationship for more than two years. With the violence escalating day by day, her key worker genuinely feared for Joan's life. The owner of two elderly crossbreed dogs, Lily & Poppy, Joan refused to leave the situation until she had somewhere safe for her dogs to go. With no family or friends who could help care for the dogs and no money for kennels, she had no choice but to stay in a violent home.

Her key worker, on hearing about the Freedom Project, immediately contacted Dogs Trust. Having secured care for her dogs, Joan made the decision to leave her partner and fled to a refuge on the day the Freedom Project staff picked the dogs up. With regular updates of her dogs' wellbeing & the knowledge that she would one day be reunited with Lily & Poppy, Joan survived a number of personal tragedies and came through an extremely difficult time in her life.

As many as one in four women experience domestic violence during their lifetime and research has identified a strong link between domestic violence and animal abuse. With perpetrators using threats and carrying out acts of violence against family pets in order to intimidate and control their partners, many women see no other option but to remain in a violent situation just so their beloved pets are not harmed.



Photo: Dogs Trust

Dogs Trust Freedom Project, a pet fostering service, opened its doors to families fleeing domestic abuse in Greater London in June 2004, shortly followed by the launch of the Yorkshire service in 2005. During this time hundreds of families and pets have received our help.

We provide a much needed but largely overlooked support system for families fleeing from violence. As many refuges cannot accept pets, this is a vital service and one which allows these women to focus their attentions on removing themselves from a dangerous situation without the associated guilt and worry of having left their dog behind.

The service is **free** to access and the dogs are cared for by experienced volunteer foster carers in their own homes until

they can be reunited safely with their families. All costs during the period of foster care, such as pet food and veterinary costs, are met by Dogs Trust. It is completely confidential; carers and clients are ensured anonymity, maintaining safety for both parties. Foster carers are given continuous support by the Freedom Project team through regular contact and home visits, and clients are frequently updated on the wellbeing of their dog.

Women like Joan have sadly in the past had many obstacles to surpass in order to get themselves, their children and their pets to safety. With services such as the Freedom Project acknowledging the difficulties they face and so providing them with that lifeline, it makes it just that bit easier for women to make that all important decision to leave a violent home.

Making the Links

The Links Group is a multi-agency group made up of organisations involved in the fields of human and animal welfare. Dogs Trust has been a member since the group formed in 2001. Mounting research and clinical evidence shows there are sometimes inter-relationships, commonly referred to as “links”, between the abuse of children, vulnerable adults and animals.

The group’s aim is to raise awareness of the “links” to all professionals working in related fields and in time raise awareness to the general public. The group also promotes the welfare and safety of vulnerable adults, children and animals so that they are free from violence and abuse. Other members include Intervet, NSPCC, RSPCA, Paws for Kids, PDSA, Refuge, Women’s Aid and Wood Green Animal Shelters.

Most of the animal charities involved in the group also provide pet fostering services to pets belonging to women fleeing domestic violence and together the group covers an extensive area of the UK. Please email us direct at freedomproject@dogstrust.org.uk if you would like a leaflet detailing all the services available. For further information on the “links” go to www.thelinksgroup.org.uk.



Nuts about Neutering



Every dog fostered by the Dogs Trust Freedom Project must be neutered (castrated or spayed). Dogs that are unneutered when they are referred to the project will be neutered as soon as possible. Sam Scott-Smith, who has worked in a veterinary practice for many years and is now a member of the Freedom Project team in Yorkshire, explains our reasons for this.....

Unless a dog is neutered, he or she could be responsible for the birth of many unwanted puppies. In an ideal world every puppy would go to a suitable home. Unfortunately this is not the case and thousands of abandoned and unwanted puppies and dogs are destroyed each year.

Female Dogs

A female dog normally comes into season twice a year. Seasons can last for up to three weeks and are extremely messy and inconvenient. It’s essential that she is kept away from unneutered male dogs for this duration, which is extremely hard to do as they will know she is in season and try to mate her.

Spaying is a routine operation which is carried out under general anaesthetic and we recommend that it’s carried out from 4 months of age. Spaying a dog prevents pyometritis (a life threatening infection of the womb), mammary cancers, ovarian cysts and tumours. Neutering will also prevent the production of hormones that trigger false pregnancies.

Male Dogs

Castrating a male dog is also a straight forward operation performed under general anaesthetic. Neutering a male dog removes the risk of them developing testicular cancer and prevents prostate disease and some other tumours. It also prevents the production of testosterone so the dog will normally become calmer if neutered early, and other dogs will not want to be aggressive towards him. If a local female dog is in season, an unneutered male dog will do whatever he can to escape. In this situation he may be involved in a road traffic accident, fight with other male dogs or even go missing.

Refuge Conference



In November last year Dogs Trust Freedom Project and the LINKS Group were invited to attend and participate in the REFUGE 5th annual conference: Preventing Domestic Violence – Challenging Public Attitudes and Changing Behaviour.

Refuge is a national charity for women and children experiencing domestic violence. Its network of safe houses provides emergency accommodation for women and children when they are most in need. The 24-hour National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline **0808 2000 247**, run in partnership with Women's Aid, provides emotional support and practical information, and refers women to refuges across the UK.

The conference was a great opportunity to raise the profile of the Freedom Project. Speakers included Harriet Harman QC MP (see picture) and Sheryl Gascoigne who gave a very moving and thought provoking account of her personal experience of domestic violence.

Rosanna Boylan (Freedom Project



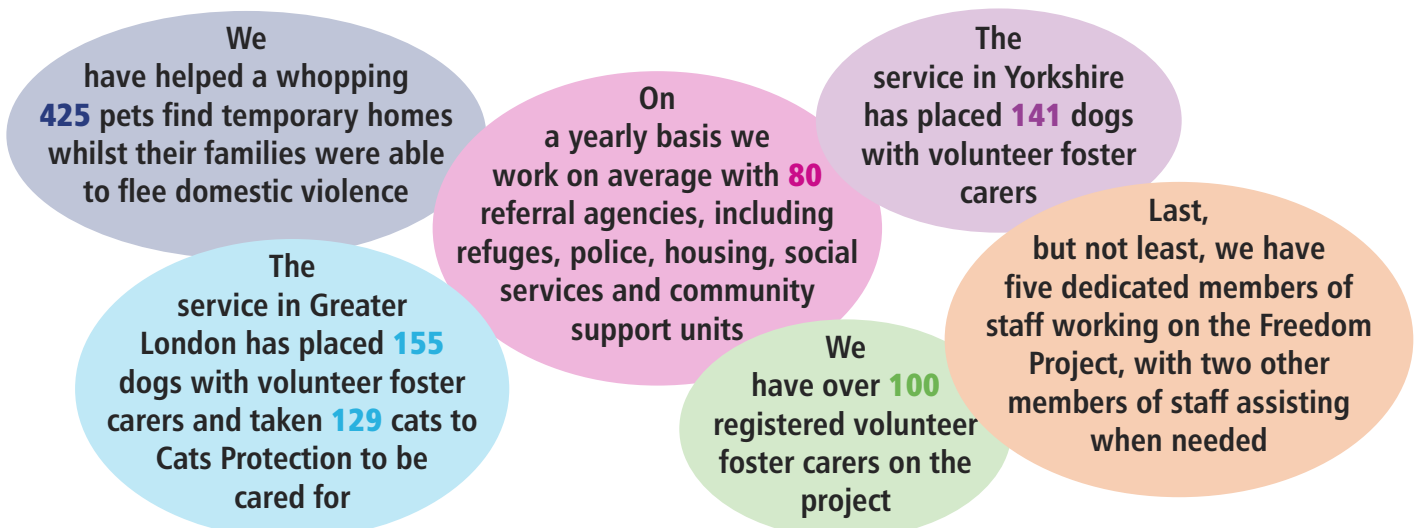
Co-ordinator Greater London) spoke about how the London and Yorkshire fostering service operates, while Dr Ian Robertson (a member of the Links Group, veterinarian, barrister and lecturer), spoke about understanding the LINKS between Domestic Violence, Animal Abuse and Child Abuse and the aims of the LINKS Group. This was

followed by a Q&A panel which Louise Taylor (Freedom Project Co-ordinator Yorkshire) also joined. Attending events like these allow us to maintain good working relationships with frontline members of staff from refuges and women's support organisations who refer their clients to us.

Some Facts and Stats

The Greater London service will celebrate its fourth birthday in June this year, with the Yorkshire service celebrating its third in July. All we can say is *"Doesn't time fly"*, it only seems like yesterday when we started to recruit our first foster carers and take our first referrals! We are so grateful to everyone involved in making this a successful fostering project and we would like in particular to thank the many volunteer foster carers who have kindly given up their time and their homes to help us.

We have included some stats below to give you an idea of what we have achieved to date (to the 1st April 08).



Working with Cats Protection



Photo: Cats Protection

The Freedom Project in Greater London is able to offer help to cats as well as dogs due to the important participation of Cats Protection.

Dogs Trust staff arrange the collection of cats and then take them to one of the Cats Protection Adoption Centres where they are well looked after in one of their pens. These pens are spacious, light and have heating. Staff and volunteers spend time with each cat every day grooming, playing and exercising them – as well as giving the cats lots of cuddles!

Similarly to all dogs on the Freedom Project, all our cats will be checked by a vet and will be microchipped, vaccinated and neutered. All food and veterinary expenses are met by Cats Protection. As the project is confidential, owners are unable to see their cats whilst at Cats Protection but photos and updates are sent on a monthly basis.








Interested in becoming a Volunteer Foster Carer?

We continually recruit foster carers for both the Greater London and the Yorkshire services.

Our Volunteer Foster Carers should be:



Photo: Clive Tagg

-  **Patient**, committed and have a genuine love of animals
-  **Experienced** in caring for a dog, either through owning/looking after a dog
-  **Available** during the day (not leaving a foster dog for more than 4 hours)
-  **Flexible** about the types of breed you will foster
-  **Able** to commit to the project for at least 6 months

Want to help but unable to foster a dog?

We are also looking for volunteers to distribute leaflets, put up posters and fundraise in your local area.

Freedom Project Yorkshire also needs volunteers who can make lovely comfy beds for our foster dogs.

If you are able to help us in anyway, please contact your local service direct.

Contact The Freedom Project

Greater London: PO Box 50208, London EC1V 7XP
T: 0800 298 9199 F: 020 7833 2830

Yorkshire: PO Box 280, Leeds LS14 9BF
T: 0800 083 4322 F: 0113 281 4932

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