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Better **Together**

Purina joins the fight to help domestic abuse survivors stay with their beloved pets

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Angela never expected to need a new place to stay alive. But when her once-amicable relationship turned violent, it became clear that she and her dog Ivy had to escape. Beyond the obstacles that most of those experiencing domestic violence face—how to leave, how to protect her finances, how to cut ties with the abuser—Angela also had to consider where she could stay that would also welcome Ivy, the 15-year-old rescue dog who serves as her primary source of emotional support. “She’s the love of my life, the reason I live and breathe. I would have never made it through this nightmare without her,” she says. (To protect the privacy of a domestic abuse survivor, we are using pseudonyms to refer to Angela and her dog).

Anyone with a treasured dog, cat or any other pet knows that they can be full-fledged members of the family. According to the 2023-24 AAPA National Pet Owners Survey, 66% of all U.S. households—that’s 86.9 million homes—include a companion animal. When an abuser turns violent, that wrath can be directed not only at humans but toward animals as well. Some perpetrators will leverage that human-pet bond to intimidate and manipulate. And, since fewer than 20% of domestic violence shelters nationwide accept animals, it can be difficult for survivors to escape with their four-legged family members in tow. Nearly half of survivors say they wouldn’t leave if it meant leaving their pet behind. It’s a serious issue, particularly considering that, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, one in three women and one in four men have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner.

Even after harrowing experiences such as having a gun shot next to her head and having a knife held to her throat, Angela’s love for her smallv but mighty mixed-breed dog is what ultimately motivated her to escape. One night, while being forced to live in a storage unit, the abuser kicked a heavy golf cart battery, aiming for Ivy. “It nearly hit her. I drew all the strength I needed that night from her to run away,” Angela recalls. “If it weren't for her I might still be with him, but she doesn't deserve that.”

After fleeing, Angela’s challenges were just beginning. “I kept running into problems [with where to stay]. I told everyone that I’d rather live on the side of the road with Ivy than to live anywhere without her,” she says. When Angela couldn’t find a shelter with availability in her home state of Texas to welcome her and her pet together, she spent weeks sleeping outside, hiding in bushes at night. Finally, after more than seven months of uncertainty and bouncing from place to temporary place, sometimes at homeless shelters where the threat of violence was palpable, she was accepted into a dog-friendly shelter in another state.

Keeping survivors united with their pets—often their primary support during an unbelievably trying time—can prove to be therapeutic. “For me, her presence has been crucial to my healing,” says Angela, as she sits in a quiet place at her new shelter, with Ivy draped across her feet. Science backs up Angela’s personal experience. A 2018 study by the National Institutes of Health stated there were significant findings for the benefits of canine companionship for military veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including effects on reducing feelings of loneliness, depression, worry and irritability, and increased feelings of calmness. A 2019 study by the University of Warwick’s Department of Psychology found that students who interacted with dogs experienced a reduction in their anxiety and an improvement in their overall mood. And most recently, a 2023 poll by the American Psychiatric Association showed 69% of respondents saying their pets reduce stress as well as provide unconditional love and support.

Angela’s journey is not an anomaly. In fact, it’s such a pressing issue that in 2018, the Pet and Women Safety (PAWS) Act was signed into law and established a grant program for entities that provide shelter and housing for domestic violence survivors to help them better meet the needs of survivors and their pets. The law also includes pets and service animals in federal law pertaining to interstate stalking and protection order violations, giving law enforcement additional tools to protect people targeted by abusers.

While supportive laws are a vital step, the needs remain critical. Since Purina, a leading pet food manufacturer and pet care company, is committed to the health and wellbeing of dogs and cats—and their owners by extension—the company has partnered with animal welfare nonprofit RedRover to launch the Purple Leash Project, an extension of RedRover’s Safe Housing program. Since 2019, Purina has contributed more than $1.2MM in grants to help domestic violence shelters across the country become pet friendly so survivors and their pets can escape and heal together.

For survivors like Angela, such help from organizations to stay united with a loyal pet is a lifeline. “There have been times when I haven't been able to afford to feed my dog, and organizations like RedRover and Purina have stepped up to make sure that she has gotten her grooming and vaccinations,” Angela says. “Ivy is my best friend. She's the best relationship I've had in my whole life.”

Join Purina in helping create more pet-friendly domestic violence shelters so survivors can escape and heal together with their pets by visiting purina.com/purple-leash-project.

PURPLE LEASH PROJECT

PURINA + RedRover