Submission into 'Safe Places Emergency Accommodation Program – Inclusion Round'

LUCY'S PROJECT Ltd.

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Acknowledgement of Country

Lucy's Project would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Australia on which we operate. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and acknowledge First Nations communities' continuing connection to land and water. Always Was, Always Will Be Aboriginal Land.

We also acknowledge that First Nations women and children experience domestic and family violence at much higher rates and in different ways to non-Indigenous women and children due to the ongoing impacts of colonisation. We support an Aboriginal-led, trauma-informed response to family violence crises in Australia.

About Lucy's Project

Lucy's Project is the national peak organisation for services which support people with animals experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV), including community and animal services. We facilitate communication between human and animal services, advocate for the prevention and response to DFV perpetrated against people with animals and provide a platform for people with animals who have experienced DFV and its effects.

Our work centres around CARE:

- **Collaboration** to build partnerships across services and sectors to promote a coordinated and holistic response to people with animals experiencing violence.
- **Advocacy** to highlight policy, program and legislative changes needed to increase the supports people with animals experiencing violence require to be safe.
- **Research** to increase the evidence base on the issues faced by people with animals experiencing violence and the supports needed, in collaboration with key partners.
- **Education** to improve the capacity of DFV, community and animal services and workers to provide support to people with animals experiencing violence.

Lucy's Project is based in Lismore, New South Wales, and run by a team of volunteers. This includes our experienced board members who have expertise in animal abuse in the context of DFV.

Lucy's Project recognises that animal abuse in DFV situations is common, traumatising, and a risk factor for the most severe kinds of abuse. It is also a crime in and of itself. Including animals in our DFV conversations and practice saves human and nonhuman lives. We advocate for human and animal victim-survivors because we know that when an animal is at risk of abuse, there is a human at risk of abuse.

We live by our vision of Safe Families- paws and all. We envision a world where humans and animals are safe from domestic and family violence. It is our mission to make a positive impact on their lives by improving safety and long-term outcomes. We value innovation, compassion, diversity, inclusivity, equity and non-discrimination. We also believe in the importance of joy- the joy that an animal can bring to the lives of the people who love them, the sense of purpose they represent, the happiness they can offer a child, even in the darkest of times.

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1. Introduction

Lucy's Project welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the NSW Government's Safe Places Emergency Accommodation – Inclusion Round. In the nine years that Lucy's Project has been in operation, improving access to safe accommodation has remained a key priority for our organisation. Accessible housing which caters to the needs of all victim-survivors is critical to ensure that leaving a violent situation is always an option. For victim-survivors with companion animals, this is only possible if emergency accommodation caters to those animals.

Currently, DFV victim-survivors with animals have few options when leaving a violent situation with their companion animals. In many cases, victim-survivors are forced to stay in the abusive situation, where they remain at severe risk, due to an inability to access accommodation that can accommodate their pets. DFV peak bodies across NSW, including Lucy's Project, have called for state-wide programs that would increase the supply of animal-friendly accommodation to support victim-survivors in their recovery (DVNSW, 2022; WSNSW, 2020). This submission details the key issues surrounding the intersection of DFV and animal abuse, with accommodation being a primary concern and barrier to safety for victim-survivors with animals.

Lucy's Project strongly recommends that within the upcoming Safe Places Inclusion Round, animal-friendly accommodation is included as a priority area, with equitable funding directed towards projects which remove barriers to safety for the many victim-survivors who have animals under their care.

2. Background

2.1. Domestic and Family Violence, Animal Abuse, and Barriers to Safety

Domestic and family violence is a common and pervasive issue in Australia. Approximately one in four Australian women have experienced physical and/or emotional abuse by a current or former intimate partner (ABS, 2016), and, on average, one woman every week is killed by a current or former partner (ANROWS, 2018). Australia also has high rates of animal ownership, with over two-thirds (69%) of Australian homes having at least one companion animal (AMA, 2021). This means that in households where DFV is occurring, there is a high likelihood that an animal is present.

The abuse of an animal in a home can be a strong indicator of a high-risk DFV situation. Studies have shown a clear link between violence towards animals and violence towards humans, with people who abuse animals being more likely to physically or sexually abuse other people (Conroy, 2015; Bright et al., 2018; Degue & Dilillo, 2009). Threats to harm the family pet is ranked as a high risk factor for severe abuse and lethality in a DFV situation (Arkow, 2014; Barrett et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2018), as well as a high risk factor for child abuse specifically (Coorey & Coorey-Ewings, 2018).

The presence of an animal in a DFV situation can impact both the kinds of abuse being experienced in the home, as well as help-seeking behaviours and access to support. For many people, leaving an animal behind to an uncertain fate is inconceivable. Studies have shown that almost half of victim-survivors with companion animals report that they delayed leaving a violent home because there was nowhere safe to go with their animal (Ascione et al., 2007; Carlisle-Frank et al., 2004). In cases where victim-survivors do leave without the animal, they remain at high risk of continued abuse and

manipulation by the perpetrator through threats or actual harm to the animal. In some cases, victim-survivors may be coerced into returning to the person using violence in order to protect the animal from harm (Arkow, 2014). A lack of safe and accessible animal-friendly accommodation leaves victim-survivors vulnerable to delayed help-seeking and further abuse.

Despite the severe trauma that can result from a beloved companion animal being harmed, victim-survivors often report that the bond they had with their animal was what helped them through the abuse. Pets can play an important role in the emotional well-being of victim-survivors of DFV and are often seen as family members (Thompson et al., 2003); Taylor & Fraser, 2019). The support that victim-survivors receive from their animals can be central to their recovery. One study, for example, showed that animal-inclusive DFV programs provided better outcomes for victim-survivors on metrics such as mental health, increased safety, and greater satisfaction with services (Faver & Strand, 2019). Pet ownership and caring for an animal can also provide a sense of independence, control, and empowerment for victim-survivors (Kogan et al, 2019). For children who have experienced family violence, animals can be a source of security for a child in a turbulent home (Taylor & Fraser, 2019). Escaping to safe accommodation with the family pet can ensure continuity in their source of comfort, security, and enjoyment of life during a time of great uncertainty, fear, and change.

The importance of maintaining togetherness with animals can be understood through taking a trauma-informed approach to DFV service provision. A trauma-informed framework emphasises the significance of understanding the impact of trauma on individuals and providing services in a way that promotes safety, choice, trust, and empowerment (Harris & Fallot, 2001; Reeves, 2015). For victim-survivors of DFV, pet ownership plays a critical role in their healing and recovery process (Taylor & Fraser, 2019). Providing animal-inclusive emergency accommodation is important to promote safety, security, and choice for victim-survivors.

Increasing animal-friendly accommodation is also central to the achievement of an equitable and intersectional DFV support system in NSW and across the country. Intersectionality theory demonstrates that social identities and systems of oppression intersect to shape experiences of interpersonal and systemic violence and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1991). For victim-survivors of DFV, social identities such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and disability impact their experiences and access to services. Providing animal-inclusive emergency accommodation is important to ensure that victim-survivors are not further marginalised due to their pet ownership, with this being a specific risk for those with disability and emotional support animals.

In all, the increased provision of animal-friendly accommodation contributes to breaking the cycle of violence through removing barriers to safety, and promoting healing and wellbeing. By providing a safe place for both humans and animals, we can prevent harm going forward.

2.2. Successful model of animal friendly/inclusive emergency accommodation

There exist many examples from across the globe which demonstrate the successful outcomes of animal-friendly DFV accommodation. In order to inform the assessment of Safe Places projects with relation to animal inclusivity, we recommend taking note of the below case studies for examples of best practice:

- One successful and sustainable example of animal-inclusive emergency accommodation for victim-survivors of DFV is the PAWS Atlanta Safe Haven program, located in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. This program is a collaboration between PAWS Atlanta, a local animal shelter, and Partnership Against Domestic Violence (PADV), a local DFV organisation.
- The program provides emergency housing for up to 30 days for pets belonging to victim-survivors of DFV, along with their human companions. The facility includes a separate wing for pets, complete with kennels and play areas, and a separate wing for human residents, including private bedrooms, bathrooms, and common living areas.
- PAWS Atlanta Safe Haven also provides comprehensive services for both humans and animals, including veterinary care for pets, counselling and case management services for human residents, and support for victim-survivors to find longer-term housing and other resources.
- Since its launch in 2014, the program has provided a safe haven for over 400 animals and their human companions, and has achieved a high rate of successful placement of both pets and humans into longer-term housing options.
- The program's success is attributed to the collaboration between animal welfare and DFV organisations, as well as the comprehensive and integrated services provided to both pets and their human companions. By recognizing the importance of pets in the lives of victims of DFV and providing a safe and supportive environment for both animals and humans, PAWS Atlanta Safe Haven serves as a model for sustainable and effective animal-inclusive emergency accommodation.

3. Program Feedback

3.1. Proposed funding amounts and competitiveness

- Lucy's Project recommends small grants between $50,000 and $300,000 to support existing emergency accommodation to re-design and renovate to make the existing space animal friendly and inclusive.
- Lucy's Project agrees to the proposed funding amounts of between $500,000 and $8 million per project for new emergency accommodation grants and animal inclusive/friendly facilities must be incorporated.

3.2. Factors to consider and plan when building or re-developing the emergency accommodation for victim-survivors of DFV:

- Plan for animal-inclusive accommodation: When designing or retrofitting existing facilities, it is important to consider the needs of both the human and animal victim-survivors. This may involve creating separate living quarters for different types of animals, such as farm animals including horses, and smaller animals like dogs, cats, and birds.
- Develop protocols for animal intake: Develop protocols for intake and care of animals. Consider including a thorough animal health screening to ensure that the animals do not have any underlying health issues or contagious diseases that could put other animals or humans at risk.
- Work with animal welfare organisations: Partner with local animal welfare organisations to provide animal care and assistance to victim-survivors. Local animal welfare organisations also help provide temporary housing for animals in the event that the emergency accommodation is at capacity.

- Train staff on animal care: Provide training to staff on how to care for animals, including feeding, exercise, and monitoring animal behaviour. In addition, train staff on how to identify and respond to signs of animal abuse.
- Develop policies for animal-human interactions: Develop policies for animal-human interactions that promote safety for both the animals and humans. Consider implementing safety protocols, such as requiring animals to be leashed or crated when in public areas or during transport.
- Provide support services for pet owners: Recognise that pets may provide emotional support to their owners and provide support services for pet owners to help them cope with the trauma of the abuse.
- Consider the needs of animals: Ensure that the accommodation is designed to accommodate the specific needs of animals, such as access to outdoor space, adequate ventilation, and temperature control. Consider how the accommodation can be adapted to accommodate different types of animals, such as dogs, cats, and other smaller animals.
- Consider sustainability and self-sufficiency: Consider building accommodations that are sustainable and self-sufficient, using local resources and materials where possible. This helps ensure that the accommodation is resilient and withstand natural disasters or other emergencies.

3.3. Best measures to support First Nations women and children

- Engage with the community: Consult with First Nations leaders, Elders, and other community members to ensure that the accommodation is culturally appropriate and meets the needs of the community.
- Consider the unique needs of First Nations peoples: Consider the unique needs of First Nations peoples, such as their connection to the land, traditional medicines, and cultural practices. Consider incorporating cultural activities and ceremonies, as well as traditional healing practices into the accommodation.
- Train staff in cultural competency: Ensure that staff members are trained in cultural competency and understand First Nations cultures, traditions, and values. Staff members should be able to communicate effectively with the local community and be sensitive to the cultural practices and values of the community.

3.4. Best measures to support to meet the needs of women and children from CALD backgrounds

- Provide interpretation and translation services: Ensure that victim-survivors have access to interpretation and translation services so that they can communicate effectively with staff members, service providers, and other residents. Consider hiring staff members who are bilingual or multilingual to better communicate with residents.
- Train staff in cultural competency: Ensure that staff members are trained in cultural competency and have an understanding of the cultural practices and values of the cultural communities with whom they work   . Staff members should be able to communicate effectively with residents and be sensitive to their cultural practices and values.
- Ensure that people's religious needs are being met through the provision of things such as religiously-appropriate food, prayer spaces, and facilities.

- Provide access to specialist support services: Ensure that victim-survivors have access to support services that are culturally appropriate, such as counselling services, legal assistance, and medical services. Consider partnering with local organisations and service providers to provide these services.
- Ensure that people who have cultural and/or religious objections or reservations surrounding interactions with animals are respected. Ensure that there are dedicated animal-free zones, and that there are procedures in place to ensure that animal carers/owners understand and respect other residents' boundaries.

3.5. Best measures to meet the needs of women and children with disability

- Physical accessibility: Ensure that the accommodation is physically accessible to people with disabilities. This may include features such as wheelchair ramps, grab bars, wide doorways, and accessible bathrooms.
- Sensory accommodations: Consider the sensory needs of individuals with disabilities. For example, some individuals with autism may require quiet, dimly lit spaces, while others with hearing impairments may require visual alerts.
- Accommodations for service animals: Ensure that the accommodation is designed to accommodate service animals, including access to outdoor spaces and adequate space for the animal to move around.
- Communication accommodations: Ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to communication accommodations, such as sign language interpreters, captioning, or assistive technology.
- Medical accommodations: Consider the medical needs of individuals with disabilities, including access to medical equipment, medication, and other support services.
- Staff training: Ensure that staff members are trained in disability awareness and accommodation. Staff members should be able to communicate effectively with individuals with disabilities, understand their unique needs, and be sensitive to their experiences.
- Collaborate with disability organisations: Partnering with disability organisations is helpful in identifying the specific needs and accommodations required by individuals with disabilities. These organisations may be able to provide guidance and support in designing the accommodation to meet these needs.

3.6. Standard of the Liveable Housing Australia design guidelines should include and reflect in emergency accommodation to support victim-survivors

- Safety: Many victim-survivors of DFV are reluctant to leave their pets behind, as they fear for the safety and well-being of their animals. By providing animal-friendly accommodation, victim-survivors can bring their pets with them, ensuring that both they and their animals are safe from harm.
- Security: The security of both humans and animals should be a top priority. This includes ensuring that animal areas are secure and that there are no potential hazards that could harm the animals. Additionally, emergency accommodation should have procedures in place to address potential issues such as animal aggression or medical emergencies.

- Accessibility: The emergency accommodation should be designed to be accessible for both humans and animals. This may include features such as wide doorways, ramps, and outdoor areas for exercise and play. Additionally, consideration should be given to the needs of animals with disabilities, such as mobility issues.
- Comfort: The emergency accommodation should be designed to be comfortable and accommodating for both humans and animals. This may include providing comfortable sleeping areas for animals and humans, providing access to water and food, and ensuring that the accommodation is climate-controlled and well-ventilated.
- Privacy: Victim-survivors of DFV may be hesitant to leave their pets behind due to concerns for their safety or well-being. To address this, animal-inclusive emergency accommodation should be designed to provide privacy for both humans and animals, and to ensure that there are no shared spaces between pets and other animals in the accommodation.

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