



*The Linkage
Project*



One State's Experience Addressing
The Connection Between
Animal Cruelty and Human Violence

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Sam needed to include her cat Jackson in the petition for a Protection from Abuse Order – but where would Jackson live while Sam was in the domestic violence shelter? Animal Control Officer Mark has been out to a home multiple times to investigate dog abuse complaints and has been worried about the children who live there too. Can he report this to child protective services while protecting himself from civil or criminal liability? Senior citizen Mary has just lost her husband and is coping with the loss of her lifetime partner along with meeting the daily needs her 10 cats, 2 dogs, 4 goats, 15 sheep and 2 horses. Her family already worries that she has too many animals. What can they do to help? In-home worker Mia has been struggling with a family who is terribly neglectful not only of the children in the house but also of the family pets who have limited food, seem to need veterinary care and are ignored. Can she get help for the pets in the home without violating client confidentiality provisions?

The Linkage Project, based in Maine, is an innovative way to work toward developing policies and practices that can respond to all of these situations. Our goal is to raise awareness about the connection between cruelty against animals and violence against people and to take action throughout Maine and in the six counties where we have worked. This guide serves to share our experience in bringing together diverse public and private organizations in our community and to help in efforts to address the connection between violence against animals and violence against humans in your state, region, county, or municipality. Although this monograph presents the development of The Linkage Project primarily in chronological order, it's important to note that some of the work of organizations and individuals began prior to the project's conception, or occurred simultaneously, or was, at times, conducted separately from the project itself. However, all the work eventually came together. We absolutely would not have made the changes in policy and practice without the active participation of our multidisciplinary partners.

Raising Awareness, Connecting Collaborators and Changing Policy

The goal of The Linkage Project is to make the general public and community service agencies aware of the critical connection between animal cruelty and human violence; to spur community action through training, legislation, and other activities; and to foster systems change that alleviates animal cruelty/human violence.

We help public and private organizations—often with diverse missions—to collaborate. The Linkage Project has enabled alliances between individuals and groups involved in animal welfare, child protection, elder services, domestic violence prevention, and law enforcement. In many instances, this collaboration marks the first time that these individuals or organizations have found a common ground.

As a result of our work, in several communities in Maine there is no longer a separation of those who focus solely on animal protection and those who focus solely on human services. Individuals and organizations are recognizing how closely the lives of people and their pets are intertwined. Among the breakthrough efforts now underway in Maine as a result of The Linkage Project is cross-disciplinary response and reporting among animal welfare, law enforcement, and child and adult protection personnel. We have teamed with a wide variety of public agencies and community organizations to change Maine laws and the way that animal welfare and human service agencies do their work. We have helped spur the development of foster home programs to house the pets of families staying in domestic violence shelters. One of our long-term goals is to bring humane education and empathy awareness to Maine's schoolchildren.

The Linkage Project's Roots

The Linkage Project is built on the foundation of work carried out over several years by a number of individuals and public and private organizations in Maine. In the early 1990s, the York County Child Abuse and Neglect Council became aware of the critical link between violence against animals and violence against humans. To address the problem, this Council, serving the second most populous county in Maine, brought together a multidisciplinary sub-group that included social service providers, animal control officers, law enforcement professionals, and the county District Attorney's office. One of the sub-group's first goals was to raise awareness about the animal cruelty/human violence connection.

In the mid-1990s, Cumberland County, Maine's most populous county, joined the effort. The lead agency was the Family Violence Collaborative that had been organized by the City of Portland's Public Health Department to bring together many individuals and organizations concerned about family violence. The Collaborative was swayed to action on animal cruelty/human violence after inviting the director of a York County animal shelter to speak at one of its monthly meetings. The shelter director described research and national public awareness activities by The American Humane Association and The Humane Society of the United States.

Individuals from the two county groups then began to hold strategic meetings on expanding the effort. They called their initiative The Linkage Project. Gradually veterinarians, representatives of animal shelters, state humane agents, animal control officers, as well as groups and individuals in adult protection, child protection, mental health, and public health services became involved. The Linkage Project gave a presentation at the Maine Veterinary Association's annual meeting and designed brochures and posters for display in veterinarians' offices. The Project organized what it expected would be a small conference on animal cruelty and human violence, but hundreds of interested people attended. Another annual conference followed, along with development of a PowerPoint[®] train-the-trainer model on the animal cruelty/human violence connection. Two clinicians, one from each county, also began work that would eventually lead to joint publications about the assessment and treatment of juveniles who abuse animals. The Linkage Project took the steps toward systems change by supporting legislation that called for in-depth training of municipal animal control officers and state humane agents on the animal/human violence connection.

This earlier phase of The Linkage Project generally was met with only positive response. When the project mailed out 200 surveys on the need for action, 210 completed surveys were returned. The targeted survey recipients had quickly spread the word by copying their blank surveys and urging others to share their opinions.

However, just as Cumberland County's interest rose, the York County group began to dissipate. Then the City of Portland ended funding for the Family Violence Collaborative. Up until this time, The Linkage Project was staffed part-time by the City of Portland's Public Health Director. But when the City made budget cuts and the Health Director resigned, the project was essentially homeless and leaderless. The Cumberland County Child Abuse and Neglect Council (now called the Cumberland County Children's Advocacy Council), a member of the Family Violence Collaborative, stepped into the void and agreed to sponsor the project. The Child Abuse and Neglect Council was housed at Youth Alternatives, Inc. (now Youth Alternatives Ingraham) a private, non-profit organization founded in Maine in 1972. Youth Alternatives offers a broad range of services: strengthening families by mediating conflicts and providing parenting resources, creating temporary homes for children and youth, mobilizing communities to protect children from abuse and neglect, providing supportive employment services to youth and adults; and reaching out to vulnerable homeless youth. Youth Alternatives serves survivors of abuse and neglect, whether physical, emotional or sexual; parents in need of supports and resources; children and youth at-risk for homelessness or criminal behavior; and/or families at-risk of having a child removed from their homes. Youth Alternatives assisted more than 4,700 children, youth and family members throughout Maine in 2006.

In 2003, with no funding to move The Linkage Project forward, the Child Abuse and Neglect Council and Youth Alternatives submitted a successful two-year grant proposal to a family foundation, Jane's Trust. This grant, along with a grant from A Kinder World, allowed The Linkage Project to launch a website and to raise public awareness, as well as to continue training of professionals. In the early days, skepticism was the initial response. The President of Youth Alternatives believed that although the goals of The Linkage Project were commendable, they were too far removed from the organization's mission. But after grant funding, anecdotal evidence from Youth Alternatives direct service staff, and reviews of national literature, Youth Alternatives clearly saw the effect of animal cruelty/human violence on Maine's children and families and agreed to become the project's sponsor.

In early 2005, with the newly acquired foundation grants, The Linkage Project became an active part of Youth Alternatives and a program of the Child Abuse and Neglect Council. During the spring and summer of 2005, the project hired a part-time project coordinator and designed and further developed a website, along with a PowerPoint presentation used to train others. In the fall of 2005, The Linkage Project conducted train-the-trainer sessions for Adult Protective Services, Child Welfare Services, and Maine Department of Corrections staff in three regions of Maine. A Kinder World Foundation and other foundations have since provided financial support to The Linkage Project.

Pivotal Points: Staff, County Committees and the Advisory Committee

Most of The Linkage Project's early tasks were conducted on a volunteer basis. As mentioned above, in the spring of 2005, the first Project Coordinator was employed and the

first county Linkage Project committee formed. When the Coordinator left in late 2005, a new Project Coordinator from outside the agency was hired. The part-time Project Coordinator came to The Linkage Project having directed a number of agencies in Maine State government that provide child and family services and mental health and mental retardation services. The Project Coordinator's experience and connections enabled The Linkage Project to reach out to many different organizations and gave it credibility among key policy setters. In addition to the Project Coordinator, Youth Alternatives assigned its Vice President for Advocacy and Strategic Initiatives as liaison to The Linkage Project.

With new staff, the project concentrated on development of a statewide advisory committee and two more county committees. The Linkage Project sent letters—and continues to send information—to a broad range of Maine organizations in human services and animal services to identify where the missions and action agendas of these diverse organizations dovetailed. The Linkage Project also assessed current collaboration and potential collaboration among local communities and invited representatives of animal welfare and human services agencies to join an Advisory Committee.

As the newer Linkage Project grew, Maine had several cases of severe animal cruelty. In one Maine community, adolescent boys maimed a dog; in another community, young boys tortured a cat. These and other Maine cases drew wide media attention. The issue of animal cruelty and human violence was becoming part of public discourse. This exposure of the problem helped The Linkage Project as it set out to establish County Committees that had been planned in the first grant proposal. These cases also helped stir interest in Maine's District Court judges. At a Judicial Conference with assistance from a well-known animal law attorney and the director of Maine's Animal Welfare Program, the idea of legislation (LD 1881) to include pets in Protection from Abuse orders was generated. This became the basis for Maine's current law to protect pets from domestic violence.

Currently on The Linkage Project's Advisory Committee are high-ranking, influential and diverse policy setters. The member organizations and their representatives are:

- **The Animal Welfare Program** of the Maine Department of Agriculture. The program is responsible for ensuring humane treatment of animals under the state's animal welfare laws through communication, education and enforcement. The agency investigates animal cruelty, abuse or neglect complaints, trains local animal control officers, and inspects and licenses kennels, animal shelters, pet shops, and research facilities. The staff includes five full-time State Humane Agents, one intermittent Humane Agent, a full-time veterinarian, and a program director. The Program's Director of Animal Welfare, well versed in the human-animal bond, serves as the agency's representative on the Advisory Committee.
- **Maine Department of Public Safety:** The Department leads Maine's criminal justice, fire, safety and emergency response, including Maine State Police. A Maine State Police sergeant serves as the agency's representative on the Advisory Committee.
- **Maine Department of Health and Human Services:** DHHS provides a range of health and protective services for children, adults, elders, and families. Programs include Adult Protection Services, Child Welfare (child protective services), and

Public Health. The Director of Adult Protective Services and the Acting Director of Child Welfare Policy and Practice, Office and Child and Family Services serve on the committee.

- **Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence:** This is a group of private organizations across Maine that independently operates domestic violence hotlines, emergency shelters and transitional housing and provide court advocacy for victims, children's support groups, and batterer education. The Coalition's Advocate Training & Legislative Coordinator serves on the committee.
- **Maine Federation of Humane Societies and the Humane Society of the United States:** Some 20 animal shelters, humane societies, and breed rescue groups belong to the Maine Federation. Among the projects of The Humane Society of the United States is First Strike, aimed at increasing public awareness and community action on the animal cruelty/human violence connection. The Maine State Director of the Humane Society of the United States who is also a member of the of the Federation board serves on the committee
- **Youth Alternatives**
- **Ad Hoc Members:** The Commissioner of the Maine Department of Public Safety and the Legislative Director of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services participate in the Advisory Committee as needed. Both have expertise in various aspects of the human-animal bond.

The Advisory Committee, established in January 2006, meets monthly to identify statewide animal/human violence issues, raise awareness, develop needed legislation, and foster collaboration among agencies serving animals and agencies serving people. The Advisory Committee also responds to emerging issues voiced by county committees and others.

Our Activities and Successes

The Linkage Project's work has been in three major areas:

1. Make the general public aware of the animal cruelty/human violence connection by using public information campaigns, a website, brochures, and other media.
2. Change public policy and practice to alleviate animal cruelty/human violence.
3. Train professionals who provide services to animals and to people to recognize the animal cruelty/human violence connection and collaborate with others, in a multidisciplinary approach, to address the issue.

The Linkage Project has had many successes. With a PowerPoint® presentation and a train-the-trainer model, The Linkage Project has trained law enforcement, humane agents, direct care and social service workers, and foster parents about the connection between animal cruelty and human violence. From January 2006 through December 2007, The Linkage Project provided general or advanced training to nearly 420 individuals and presented a train-the-trainer model to 63 individuals.

The Linkage Project has worked to create mechanisms for cross-disciplinary reporting between agencies serving animals and agencies serving people. Social service professionals—many of them pet owners themselves—told The Linkage Project that when dealing with cases of child abuse, domestic violence, and elder abuse they were often stymied on whether they should or could contact animal welfare because doing so would violate client confidentiality laws. Equally frustrated were municipal animal control officials, who were not part of law enforcement, whose responsibility was to respond only to an animal’s needs, despite encountering possible abuse or neglect of children or adults in the household.

The Linkage Project led the effort for state legislation, signed into law, that a social worker can alert an animal control officer to suspected animal abuse, such as a malnourished or injured pet— without breaching client confidentiality. Another new Maine law exempts animal control officers from civil lawsuit or criminal action when they report suspected child or elder abuse.

The Linkage Project has helped child protection, adult protection, juvenile corrections, domestic violence, and human services agencies—both government and community-based—to include questions about a family’s pets as part of intake and assessment. For most agencies, pets were not taken into consideration unless they posed a danger to the visiting caseworker, but not to the family. A wide array of intake forms for Maine services now ask whether a family has pets and the status of those pets. The questions are:

Are there pets in the home?

How does each family member treat the pet?

Do you worry about something bad happening to your pet?

Another positive outcome is a new, collaborative approach to cases of suspected animal hoarding, a situation that harms both people and pets. When Humane Agents from the state’s Animal Welfare Program investigate animal cruelty complaints or seize abused animals, the agents now contact Adult Protective Services. When there are children in the household, they also contact Child Protective Services.

The Linkage Project supported state legislation that enables courts, in domestic violence cases, to prevent an abuser from having any contact with the family’s pets. Subsequent to the passage of this legislation, The Linkage Project received a grant to support training for humane societies and domestic violence agencies in creating foster homes for pets. Maine now has programs available in many counties to house pets when a domestic violence victim goes into an emergency shelter.

Other Linkage Project actions have included training foster parents and advocating for improved treatment services for children identified as animal abusers.

The Linkage Project invited a representative of the Animals and Society Institute to hold a workshop in Maine on assessing and treating animal abusers. Some 30 caseworkers attended a one-day event. The Institute also spent a day with 40 public policy makers to help them

better understand the social, public health, and financial impact of the animal cruelty/human violence connection.

The Linkage Project is now studying ways to encourage the integration of humane education and empathy training in Maine's K-12 schools. A long-term goal is to establish programs that enable elderly people with physical or other limitations to keep their pets in their homes.

Action on the County Level

Maine, a state with about 1.3 million residents, has 16 counties. The state is geographically and economically diverse. The distance from the northernmost point of Maine to its southernmost point is equal to the distance between Boston and Washington, D.C., (a driving time of 10 hours) proving a challenge for any statewide initiative. To provide services at a more local level, The Linkage Project has fostered the formation of its County Committees, all of which are at various levels of development and have diverse memberships. The Linkage Project's County Committees are in **Cumberland County**, Maine's most populated county that includes the cities of Portland and South Portland; **Kennebec County** which is a southern and central county and includes the state capital, Augusta; **Penobscot County** that encompasses Bangor and many inland rural areas; **Lincoln County**, a small coastal area; and **Washington County**, one of the most rural and low-income areas of Maine. In addition, The Linkage Project works in collaboration with the **Sagadahoc County Family Violence Task Force**. Sagadahoc is a densely populated coastal area north of Portland. Approximately 50 percent of Maine's population lives in these counties served by The Linkage Project.

County Committees bring together humane societies, domestic violence agencies, adult protective, child protective, elder, and sexual assault response services, regional State Humane Agents, local animal control officers, veterinarians, mental health providers, law enforcement, public health nursing, county District Attorneys, business professionals, and other interested community members. The Linkage Project encourages and assists each County Committee in addressing any of these core services in the way that best meets that county's needs and resources through:

- Train-the-trainer programs.
- Multidisciplinary responses to hoarding.
- Informing and supporting practice and policy changes, locally and statewide.
- Foster homes for pets of domestic violence victims.
- General collaboration, consultation, support, and joint problem solving on individual cases and regional issues.
- Humane education in schools.

Among the successes of The Linkage Project's County Committees has been an environment of open communication, concern sharing, and, in Penobscot County, for example, case review discussions. That County Committee conducts an informal analysis of how its members responded to a situation that involved both animal and human service issues. They recommend changes, based on that review.

The Project Coordinator of The Linkage Project takes an active role in the county committees by facilitating meetings, assisting with the agenda, reporting on the work of other counties, providing a summary of meetings, and doing any necessary follow-up.

Lessons Learned

The Linkage Project has much to share with other organizations seeking to alleviate animal cruelty and human violence. Among the lessons we've learned are:

- Public services are often categorized exclusively for people or exclusively for animals—an “animal world” and a “people world.” There is often a clear delineation in funding and public policy separating these animal services and people services. You will gain the most benefit if you strive to bring the two worlds together, showing them how their missions intersect.
- The facilitating organization must have staff able to bridge any gap between the animal and human services communities and must be comfortable within both communities. Staff needs to work with organizations on both a statewide and a local level. You can offer support to local coalitions as they meet the community goals they set for themselves and bring to the Advisory Board those issues requiring policy changes.
- Much of our success has come because our Project Coordinator brought to The Linkage Project established relationships in human services at the state level and considerable experience in setting public policy. The Project Coordinator, who had worked at many levels of state government, gave us entrée to the government system and legitimacy among key public policy makers. We suggest that you look for staff who have access to those in upper management and executive levels of state government and who have been involved in legislation, public policy setting and implementation.
- One-to-one contact is vital. All stakeholders—staff to advisory committee members—need to reach out to inform and recruit others to participate in and support the initiative. In our case, we found people in human services also had personal relationships with people working or volunteering in animal welfare, such as a social worker for elder services who also volunteers in an animal shelter. Encouraging participants to think outside their professional network is essential. You can ask everyone in your network, “Who do you know?” and “How can they help us?”
- An effort such as The Linkage Project can successfully be established outside of government, but it needs champions within government. In our case, The Linkage Project is sponsored by a community-based, non-profit organization. However, The Linkage Project includes advisors from government—those who set and carry out public policy. For The Linkage Project, the inclusion of the state’s leading animal welfare official and other state agency representatives gives us visibility and a voice when and where vital public policy decisions are made. Those champions exist in every community; you can find them and offer them meaningful involvement.

- An organization can be established without money. At its earliest stages, a project needs only to make connections, find intersecting missions among collaborators, and set mutual goals. The current Linkage Project began with volunteers; grant money came later. You can begin by seeking out volunteers.
- Focus attention where the interest is and then build coalitions from that point. The Linkage Project built the County Committees with individuals and agencies already concerned about either animal cruelty or human violence. Initially the Project wanted to engage all of Maine's Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Councils that would, in turn, spur action on the local level. However, the councils in two counties had little interest in participating, each deciding to stay within their clearly defined missions of serving children and families. In some counties, the Project first approached domestic violence organizations, but found stronger support among animal welfare organizations. These animal welfare groups were then willing to reach out to human services organizations. You may find that either a human services agency or an animal welfare organization could be the starting point for your project—whichever has the greatest interest and commitment.
- Look for partners that can help the project achieve the biggest impact and seek out those that have resources. Although The Linkage Project has activities going on in rural, low-income areas, much of our work is in Maine's more populous areas. You know your community best and can assess where you will have the greatest impact.
- A project should guide local communities in dealing with their priority issues. We've found success in assisting County Committees to identify their priority needs and determine how and where each committee will effect change locally. As a result, while all County Committees share the same goals and receive staff support from the project, each County Committee has the freedom to work in the way that is most effective for its region. As County Committees achieve the tasks they have set out for themselves, interest may decline. You may find that staying in touch with the latest news, scheduling less frequent meetings, and periodically reviewing possible activities will keep engagement when committees are lagging. However it is okay to let committees end when there are no planned activities.
- Do your own advocacy to change public policy rather than rely on hired lobbyists. Members of The Linkage Project's Advisory Committee and its County Committees have been instrumental in promoting legislation by contacting members of the Maine Legislature, testifying at public hearings, and sending action alerts to other citizens when important issues on animal cruelty/human violence are under debate. These citizen advocates have a vested interest in and credibility on the issue of animal cruelty/human violence. This grassroots advocacy is an important way for people to be part of the effort and is more effective in promoting change because it comes from the field.
- Be flexible and open to changing direction. The Linkage Project's original vision was simply to raise the awareness of the public and professionals about the connection between animal cruelty and human violence. It soon became apparent that many people were already concerned about that connection. To broaden our scope, one of

our primary goals then became system change: breaking down barriers between human services and animal services and encouraging a multidisciplinary approach to the issue. System changes included adding pet questions to social service agencies' intake and assessment forms, creating a mechanism to coordinate multidisciplinary response to hoarding situations, and advocating for changes to laws.

- Work with the resources you have and don't overextend your project. Given our current human and financial resources, The Linkage Project is currently limited on how much we can expand. With the geographic breadth of the state, a part-time Project Coordinator, and the necessary close involvement of the Project Coordinator in each County Committee, we are cognizant of stretching ourselves too thin. Clearly define the limits of your organizations and keep to those boundaries.
- A project that limits itself to one or two priority needs can still foster major change. Training for professionals, for example, may be one action area you can focus on. The Linkage Project has found that whether an agency serves animals or people, its professional staff always needs training. Most government and community-based organizations welcome any information and skill building that will enable them to better serve their constituents. You can provide training directly to staff, or you can develop a train-the-trainer program that agencies can use themselves.
- Look for and seize unanticipated opportunities. Sometimes the people, resources and opportunities line up in a way that allows something to happen that otherwise would be very difficult to do. Always look for these possibilities.

Building or Enhancing Your Community's Project

The Linkage Project is an effective model for Maine. However, your state or community would likely need to adapt our system and our lessons learned. All municipalities, regions, counties, and states are different. Within each governmental or private organization are different governing structures, ordinances, and resources—specifically for either animals or for people. It's important to know this about your community before you move forward on your project.

Law enforcement in your community may be part of municipal, county or state government. In Maine, for example, law enforcement is carried out by Maine State Police, which are responsible for handling certain crimes, local police in urban and suburban communities, and sheriffs in rural areas of the state's 16 counties. The Maine Department of Agriculture has primary responsibility for animal welfare and has state humane agents, but animal control officers are either part of local police forces, work in other divisions of municipal government, or are contract agents of municipalities.

It's also important to know whether domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and animal cruelty are handled on a local, county, regional, or statewide basis or are contracted out to private organizations in your community. Find where the interest is in your community—in a geographic region, an agency, a population, or a community-based collaboration—and go

where that interest is. You may find that either an animal services agency or a human services organization is your starting point.

If you plan to seek grants and other types of financial support, consider funders that have these priorities:

- Humane services and animal rights.
- Child abuse and neglect prevention services.
- Domestic violence prevention.
- Law enforcement.
- Child and family services.
- Public health.
- Juvenile corrections.
- Community building.
- Systems change.

You, as the reader, already know much about the link between animal cruelty and human violence. Sharing that knowledge is the first step in creating more humane communities. Any work that shares that knowledge, changes practices and policy and advocates for change improves the lives of people and animals. Remember – It is not enough to know of the connection, we must DO something about it. This monograph shares some of what we DO as we continue to learn about what’s needed and what works. Please feel free to contact us to share what you are doing and learning. We wish you much success!

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