

Canadian Violence Link Conference

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BUILDING LINK AWARENESS Canada Holds First Link Conference

On December 5th and 6th, professionals from all over Canada came together in Ottawa for the inaugural Canadian Violence Link Conference conducted by the [Canadian Federation of Humane Societies](http://www.cfhs.ca/) (CFHS). Hayley Glaholt, Executive Director of [Link Toronto](http://www.linktoronto.ca/), shared this wrap-up of this historic conference with [The February 2018 LINK-Letter](#):



“This conference was both innovative and ground-breaking, uniting various sectors throughout the country with the goal of ending cycles of violence for humans and animals. This was the first time a national Canadian conference on ‘the Link’ had been organized, and judging by the enthusiasm of its participants, it was a much-needed and valued event. Attendees included police, crown prosecutors, animal advocates, veterinarians, political representatives, academics, and women’s advocates. Regionally, British Columbia, New Brunswick, and Ottawa were well represented.

“Dr. Frank Ascione gave the plenary address, providing a fascinating overview of the evolution of academic research on ‘the Link.’ Of particular interest was his focus on children—specifically, the ways in which seeing or hearing animal abuse in the home can affect a child’s development and propensity to later commit violent acts.



“Conference sessions were varied and engaging. Topics included: ‘Investigation and Prosecution of Animal Abuse and Neglect 101,’ ‘Is There More than Meets the Eye? Seeing Signs of Child Abuse When Looking at Animal Welfare,’ ‘Cross-Sector Collaboration to Better Address High-Risk Interpersonal Violence and Animal Cruelty,’ and ‘Beyond Awareness: Tools for Supporting Sexual Assault Survivors.’



“Dr. Amy Fitzgerald, Associate Professor of Criminology at the University of Windsor and a member of the University’s Animal and Interpersonal Abuse Research Group, gave an informative plenary address on recent and ongoing Link research she has conducted throughout the country. Of great significance were statistics regarding domestic violence shelters and pet ownership in Canada.

Canada-specific numbers are quite difficult to find, and Dr. Fitzgerald’s work is extremely useful for Canadian Link professionals seeking to change policy and apply for funding. We found one of her observations to be particularly surprising: of 337 domestic violence shelters in Canada with publicly accessible websites, only 155 (46%) mention pets, and 70% did not mention any options for off-site pet services. She recommended that all shelter websites: a) acknowledge that pet ownership is a significant factor in determining if survivors will leave their abuser; and b) offer suggestions for safety-planning and finding safe care for pets while survivors are at shelters.



“An additional highlight of the conference was Dr. Margaret Doyle’s presentation entitled ‘Increasing Veterinary Recognition and Reporting of Animal Crimes.’ It was eye-opening to learn that many veterinarians do not and will not report animal abuse, even if they are mandated to do so. Dr. Doyle, who is part of Horizon Veterinary Group in Calgary, Alberta, discussed the reasons behind vets’ unwillingness to report (liability, financial concerns, uncertainty of process, not wanting to be the ‘bad guy,’ etc.), and provided information as to how vets (and related professionals) may resolve these

concerns. As one of Canada’s only forensic veterinarians, Dr. Doyle brought cutting-edge information to her presentation, and she made a clear case for why more training in forensics and procedure is vital when addressing human and animal violence.

“Throughout the conference, organizers maintained a focus on practical steps that could be taken to end cycles of violence in participants’ home communities. This focus was brought to the forefront in the final session, entitled ‘Catalyzing Action: From Problems to Solutions.’ Attendees were encouraged to make concrete plans as to how they were going to put knowledge into action, and to both harness and maintain the momentum they had gained throughout the conference. Link Coalition Toronto was grateful to network with so many inspiring and driven individuals from all over the country, and we came home with numerous plans to extend our Coalition in Toronto.

“Overall, the 2017 CFHS Canadian Violence Link Conference was a resounding success! The Canadian Federation of Humane Societies mentioned that they would consider holding the event annually or bi-annually, which was enthusiastically supported by all in attendance. It would have been encouraging to see more diversity (economic, cultural/ethnic, and gender) among participants, however, and we were cognizant of the fact that Link professionals must continually reach out to include and engage individuals from all areas of Canadian society. Violence leaves no population of the country untouched, and cycles of violence cannot be interrupted unless all voices and perspectives are included in creating and implementing solutions.”



Seeing Immediate Results

Planting Seeds Brings Results

Within only a few weeks of the Canadian Link Conference, law enforcement and humane officials already started seeing their work bear fruit. Barbara Cartwright, CEO of the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, shared this account:

“On New Year’s Day, two police officers in a major Canadian city responded to a call that an animal had been stabbed. The officers determined the animal urgently needed treatment and transported the puppy to a nearby veterinary hospital. Thanks to the expert training they received at the CFHS Canadian Violence Link Conference in December, they made the connection that a person in the home might be a victim of domestic violence. The officers investigated further and formed reasonable grounds that partner abuse had occurred. A suspect was subsequently charged with numerous Criminal Code offences – including two animal cruelty charges.

“We cannot name the police force or the location since the charges are pending before a court. However, in part due to the knowledge gained from the Canadian Violence Link Conference, the living beings (animal and human) in this instance were spared further abuse, and perhaps a human life was saved.

“The outcome of this case might have been very different if CFHS had not held this conference. If the police in this case had not looked at the family, including this puppy, holistically, the animal could have been brought back into the abusive environment. This time, it was a case of animal abuse, which helped the puppy's human companion receive the help they needed. Next time, it could be the animal who is saved through the intervention of a social worker, police officer or educator.”

Courtesy of the National Link Coalition LINK-Letter

A monthly report of news from THE NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER



ON THE LINK BETWEEN ANIMAL ABUSE AND HUMAN VIOLENCE



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