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Issues Report

02

PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS WITH ANIMALS: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND EMERGING SOCIAL SERVICES RESPONSE GUIDELINES

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IN THIS REPORT

- 3 Introduction**
- 5 Experiencing Homelessness with Animals**
- 11 Understanding the Human-Animal Bond in Trauma-Informed Care**
- 14 Designing Supportive Environments**
- 22 Interior Design and Architectural Considerations for Co-sheltering Facilities**
- 25 Summary**
- 26 References**

INTRODUCTION

Companion animals enrich our lives and often share the most intimate spaces and moments with us — they amplify our joys, comfort us in times of sorrow, provide us with warmth and a sense of security as we sleep, and keep us active during daily walks. The same is true for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, perhaps to levels of even greater intensity than for those of us who enjoy the privileges of a stable home. Research has found that people experiencing homelessness with animals are even more highly bonded to their furry companions than housed people, as their animals are often their only consistent source of support, companionship, and motivation, and they mitigate the profound loneliness and depression unhoused people endure (Lem et al., 2016; Rhoades et al., 2015, Singer et al., 1995).

Despite the importance of animals in the lives of people experiencing homelessness, human services rarely support the human-animal bond and often discourage it. “No pets allowed” rules are standard in emergency shelters, permanent supportive housing programs, substance use programs, medical care centers, and other types of social services, in addition to the public transportation often required to travel to these services. These restrictions not only intentionally remove the ability for animals to enter space but unintentionally create a barrier for people who refuse to separate from their animals or for those who lack the resources to find safe and



dependable animal care (Bender et al., 2007; Donley and Wright, 2012; Howe & Easterbrook, 2018; Irvine, 2013a; Kidd & Kidd, 1994; Lem et al., 2013; Rhoades et al., 2015; Rullán-Oliver et al., 2022; Singer, Hart, & Zasloff, 1995; Slatter et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2004). Studies have found that animal guardians may refuse housing and shelter services if their animals are not welcome, and in some circumstances animal guardians assume that emergency shelters will not

INTRODUCTION (CONTINUED)

accept their animals, and thus they self-elect to forego attempting to access shelter (Cronley et al., 2009, Singer et al., 1995, Howe and Easterbrook, 2018).

To access services, some make the difficult decision to relinquish their animals. While there is limited research on how many people experiencing homelessness had an animal whom they relinquished, it is understood that losing or giving up an animal while staying at a homeless shelter is associated with grief, guilt, and further trauma (Labrecque and Walsh 2011; Slatter et al., 2012; Howe and Easterbrook, 2018, Rullán-Oliver et al., 2022). Through the two decades of academic research exploring homelessness and animal companionship, and from stories of people with lived experience of homelessness, the need for homeless services to accept companion animals on site is abundantly clear.

The body of research has identified the gap and need for homeless services to accept companion animals, but it has not yet identified best practices in serving people with pets, including in the fields of architecture and design that generate physical settings for care to occur. The authors of this report assume that providing appropriate, safe housing for animals alongside their humans will further support unhoused people's wellness, utilization

of services, and service plan outcomes. This report is the first installment of a two-part series on serving people experiencing homelessness with companion animals with trauma-informed design. Part 1 provides research-informed and lived-experience informed context that lays the foundation for Part 2, which is an actionable guide on architectural design recommendations. As an introductory report, Part 1 summarizes the input of a listening circle conducted with people who have lived experience of homelessness and animal companionship, researchers' findings on the perceptions and needs of people experiencing homelessness regarding emergency shelter design, program design recommendations based upon the authors' knowledge of co-sheltering practices within the United States, and preliminary design recommendations based upon a specific case study in Kitsap County, WA.

Most design recommendations made in this report are based on broad principles, to be applicable to many facility types and their varying layouts specific to the type of population they are serving (ie women, families, youth, single adult men, etc.). Although the report refers to shelter most frequently, these concepts may also be applicable to other facility types such as permanent supportive housing and other social services.

EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS WITH ANIMALS

Scope & Profile

Although there are certain subpopulations that have been found to more likely care for animals such as youth, single women, and individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, animal guardianship cannot be affiliated with a specific type of person experiencing homelessness (Rhoades et al., 2015; Cronley et al., 2009). Animal companionship is ubiquitous, and it is an important aspect of life for many people experiencing homelessness across all demographics. Similarly, the experience and anecdotes of people who work in or study the human-animal bond in circumstances of homelessness would lead us to assume that dogs are the most common type of companion animal accompanying people experiencing homelessness. There are, however, limitations to the existing literature that can help support this assertion - most quantitative studies with large sample sizes ascertain information about human demographics and impact, rather than asking specific questions about animals such as species, breed, and size. Anecdotal data garnered from the authors' experiences and those of partner organizations reveal that in addition to dogs, people experiencing homelessness are also accompanied by every type of common household companion animal such as cats, ferrets, fish, birds, hamsters, rabbits, and rats, among other types of animals.



The number of people experiencing homelessness with animals in the United States is unknown, but some efforts to quantify the experience of homelessness and animal companionship have been undertaken on a local level, showing a range of 5.5% - 23% across various geographic communities and sub-populations of homelessness (i.e. youth, survivors of domestic violence, etc.) (Cronley et al., 2009; Henwood et al., 2020; Rhoades et al., 2015). In Los Angeles, answers to pet ownership questions included in point-in-time count surveys from 2017, 2018, and 2019 were analyzed, estimating about 12% of unsheltered homeless adults experienced daily life with an animal. Among people surveyed with animals, about half reported being turned away from shelter because of pet policies (Henwood et al., 2020).

EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS WITH ANIMALS

In a 2009 study conducted in Knoxville, TN, researchers demonstrated a different way to use a broad data collection system to understand the prevalence of animal caregiving among people experiencing homelessness. Researchers used Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), a federally mandated “local information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to homeless individuals and families and persons at risk of homelessness” (U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development [HUD], n.d.), and found that 5.5% of the homeless population reported being an animal guardian at the time of the study.

Researchers of another quantitative study in Los Angeles developed their own survey instead of employing an existing government mandated data collection system. This study examined animal companionship among 398 youth experiencing homelessness, of which 23% reported having a pet (Rhoades et al., 2015).

Despite the lack of nationwide data, these local snapshots, some of which come from major metropolitan areas, give us insight into the prevalence of animal companionship. At the time of the writing of this report, the authors are also anticipating a large influx of data beginning in fall

2023 that may shed further light into the population size. In 2021, legislation was passed by New York City’s city council that created local law 97, requiring that the the City’s Department of Homeless Services publicly report every three months starting in January 2023 the following information:

1. The total number of families and individuals who applied for shelter disaggregated by those who reported that they had a pet; and
2. For each pet reported:
 - (a) Type of animal;
 - (b) Whether, upon the individual or family entering shelter, the pet was placed with a family member, friend or foster care provider, surrendered to an animal shelter or, in the case of any other placement or disposition of such pet, the details of such placement or disposition;
 - (c) Whether the individual or family reported forgoing shelter because they could not find an acceptable placement for their pet and, if so, the number of days such individual or family reported having forgone shelter for that reason;
 - (d) Whether the individual or family would have entered shelter with their pet if permitted to do so; and
 - (e) Whether the individual or family intended to regain possession of their pet upon obtaining housing that would accommodate their pet.

EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS WITH ANIMALS

Although they are often treated as two distinct fields, there is also a strong connection and overlap between homelessness, domestic violence, and the provision of emergency shelter for both populations. National data has been collected on the impact of pets on domestic violence survivors' decisions to leave dangerous situations in a collaboration between Urban Resource Institute (URI) and the National Domestic Violence Hotline (The Hotline). The results of this survey, the largest nationwide inquiry in the U.S. of its kind, were published in 2021 and revealed that among the 2,480 people who responded to the survey during the time of data collection, 49% stated that pets were a consideration in their current situation. Of the people who responded that they had pets, 81% stated that keeping their pets with them would be an extremely important factor in seeking shelter, and 50% stated they would not consider entering a shelter without their pets (Urban Resource Institute, 2021).



Characteristics of the Human-Animal Bond in Circumstances of Homelessness

Several themes emerge from the existing academic literature that describe the qualities of the bond between people experiencing homelessness and their animals. Among the most strongly repeated conclusions is the high attachment between people experiencing homelessness and their animal companions. It has consistently been found that people experiencing homelessness have high levels of attachment to their animals, and in some cases, even greater attachment than people who are housed (Kidd & Kidd, 1994; Singer et al., 1995; Yang et al., 2020).

Another undercurrent throughout the literature is the mental health benefits of having the constant companionship of an animal when unhoused. Youth experiencing homelessness with animals have been shown to have lower levels of depression and loneliness compared to youth without companion animals (Lem et al., 2016; Rhoades et al., 2015). Qualitative studies discuss the specific roles of dogs in ameliorating isolation, both simply through the relationship with the dog and through the dog's facilitation of increased walking and socialization with other humans (Scanlon et al., 2021; Irvine, 2013a).

EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS WITH ANIMALS

Caring for an animal while experiencing homelessness was also described across several studies as positively impacting motivation and responsibility. This includes motivation for continued survival in the harsh conditions of the street (Bender et al., 2007; Irvine, 2013a; Rew, 2000), obtaining housing (Lem et al., 2013), seeking treatment (Irvine, 2013a), and avoiding risky activities and behaviors including involvement in illegal activity, substance use, and emotional outbursts for fear of loss or separation from pets (Taylor et al., 2004; Howe & Easterbrook, 2018; Lem et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2006; Irvine, 2013a). In one study, most of the participants described prior or current alcohol or drug misuse, and many described how having their dog had reduced their use of drugs or alcohol (Scanlon et al., 2021).

Although the positive impacts of animal companionship on the lives and mental health of people experiencing homelessness may be a natural area of focus for advocates, the relationship can also be a source of emotional pain. People experiencing homelessness can find themselves in situations that are unstable and sometimes dangerous, which can lead to heightened risk of the loss of a companion animal due to death, relinquishment, runaway, theft, and removal (Irvine, 2013b; Lem, 2016).

Losing a companion animal in an already stressful circumstance can be traumatic and produce or exacerbate negative emotions such as guilt, sadness, loneliness, and increased substance use (Labrecque & Walsh, 2011; Slatter et al., 2012; Lem et al., 2013; Rew, 2000; Howe & Easterbrook, 2018; Thompson et al., 2016). Moreover, the highly bonded nature of the relationship can lead to distress if separation is a result of accessing human social services that do not allow pets. In a 2021 qualitative study, one participant described intensification of his mental illness when separated from his dog while awaiting shelter (Scanlon et al., 2021).

A listening circle of people with lived experience of homelessness with an animal was held by the authors in preparation for the development of this report. Qualitative information gathered from the listening circle revealed that comfort and attachment are perceived by the participants to be a two-way street. The comfort and connection from animals is necessary for the people, but the animals also need the comfort of their human caregivers (Trauma-Informed Design Focus Group, My Dog Is My Home, September 22, 2022).

“When I think about these types of settings separating us, it is also doing her a great damage

EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS WITH ANIMALS

and a great disservice to be without me, as much as it is doing me a great disservice and great damage to be without her. And so I consider those things active harms that are totally and completely unnecessary.”
— Listening Circle Participant #1

The benefits of animal companionship for people experiencing homelessness are physical as well as emotional. People experiencing homelessness have reported that being accompanied by a dog also provides warmth, security, and protection, especially when experiencing street homelessness or “sleeping rough” (Scanlon et al., 2021). For youth in particular, protection is explicitly named as a benefit (Rhoades et al., 2015; Bender et al., 2007; Rew, 2000; Thompson et al., 2016). Human caregivers experiencing homelessness have also reported an increase in physical activity and motivation to go outside associated with having a dog (Scanlon et al., 2021).

The Gap in Services

Informed by literature, interviews, and technical assistance experience nationally, it is the opinion of the authors that social services have largely ignored the importance of protecting and promoting the relationship between people

experiencing homelessness and their animals. This is evidenced by gaps in services that acknowledge and provide for animal companions in circumstances of homelessness. A person’s inability to access emergency shelters and housing programs with their animals is the most well-documented (Henwood et al., 2020; Kidd & Kidd, 1994; Rhoades et al., 2015; Scanlon et al., 2021; Singer et al., 1995), and perhaps the most serious, point along the continuum of care to be impacted, as discussed below.



In the two U.S. cities with the highest homeless populations, Los Angeles and New York City, “no pets allowed” rules have proved to be a significant barrier to accessing shelter and housing. Among people experiencing homelessness with animals in Los Angeles, 48% (n = 1,362) reported being turned away from shelter because of pet policies (Henwood

EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS WITH ANIMALS

et al., 2020). In a qualitative study examining barriers faced by people experiencing street homelessness in accessing housing and other services in New York City (n = 43), the most common barriers found were obtaining required identification documents, lack of accessibility of shelters amid complex healthcare needs, waiting as part of the process, and exclusion of pets from shelters and housing options (Wusinich, Bond, Nathanson, & Padgett, 2019).

Of course, shelter and housing are only a part of the suite of services which should be available to people experiencing homelessness. Animal guardians may also experience limited access to employment, medical care, public transportation, among other things (Cronley et al., 2009; Irvine, 2013a; Taylor et al., 2004), resulting in missed doctor's appointments, inability to find or maintain consistent work, and untreated mental health or substance use conditions.

UNDERSTANDING THE HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND IN TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

The connection between trauma and homelessness is well documented in a growing body of scientific literature, as is the need for trauma-informed care to appropriately serve people experiencing homelessness (Wiewel & Hernandez, 2021). Trauma-informed care is an approach to delivering services that recognizes the prevalence and profound impact of trauma. Service providers applying a trauma-informed lens to their work seek to create a safe and supportive environment for healing and recovery. It involves understanding and responding to the unique needs and experiences of individuals who have experienced trauma, while promoting empowerment, choice, and resilience (Hopper et al., 2010). Additionally, a report issued by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration highlights the significance of trauma-informed approaches in various settings, such as healthcare, mental health, and social services, as they enhance engagement, minimize retraumatization, and facilitate better outcomes for individuals affected by trauma. By integrating trauma-informed principles into practice, organizations and professionals can profoundly promote healing, resilience, and recovery in the lives of those impacted by trauma (SAMHSA, 2014).

Human-animal interaction, while long understood to be anecdotally beneficial to people in distress, also has strong emerging evidence of its positive impact on healing from trauma (Tedeschi & Jenkins, 2019; O’Haire et al., 2019). Structured animal-assisted therapy has a myriad of positive effects on survivors of trauma such as reduced depression, PTSD symptoms, and anxiety (O’Haire et al., 2015). However, benefits are evident in an unstructured environment and with unprescribed, commonplace activities as well. The mere presence of and interaction with animals in our everyday lives, such as with our companion animals with whom we share our spaces and family life, can facilitate resiliency and produce strong protective factors against stress (Brooks et al., 2018; Friedmann, 2013; Janevic et al., 2019; Schmitz et al., 2021).

Psychological benefits of a companion animal include increased participation in meaningful activities, higher social functioning, increased happiness, and positive self view. Companion animals can be an important social connection for people who experience social isolation, which helps shield people against the negative impacts of loneliness. The bonds and attachments people form with their animals are similar to those they form with other people, and this contributes to a better

UNDERSTANDING THE HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND IN TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

quality of life (Hawkins et al., 2021). Specifically, companion animals can mitigate against trauma and stress, acting as a protective factor against the development of psychological problems following potentially traumatic experiences such as homelessness and domestic violence (Hawkins et al., 2019).

Trauma can involve a single event but is more often experienced as multiple events. In cases of ongoing homelessness, poverty, discrimination, or domestic violence, companion animals provide their humans with the support that comes from a long-term relationship. The constant companionship may be among a few continuous protective factors through the duration of a person's ongoing trauma and human-animal bonds can intensify through shared experiences of trauma (Applebaum et al., 2021; Tomlinson et al., 2021).



There can also be danger inherent in situations when the relationship between people and their animals is ignored. People experiencing unsheltered homelessness may choose to stay in dire conditions in the absence of a shelter or other temporary respite environment that welcomes their animals (Irvine et al., 2012; Kidd & Kidd, 1994; Donley & Wright, 2012). Additionally, domestic violence service providers have found that when clients report an increase in violence towards their support animal, it often means that violence toward the person has also increased. Discussing someone's pet is often a successful gateway into discussing what is happening to the person because trust is developed — a prime example of how human connections can strengthen as a result of the human-animal bond (Taylor, Fraser & Riggs, 2020).

It is important to recognize that people only make up one side of this human-animal dyad. The animals in these situations also benefit from trauma-informed care, a growing topic within the animal welfare field. As scholars increasingly uncover the emotional lives of animals, they are confirming what animal lovers know intuitively about their beloved companions - our dogs and cats feel happiness and find comfort in their humans, and they also grieve the loss of relationships and experience stress from

UNDERSTANDING THE HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND IN TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

unexpected separation and situations (Tedeschi & Jenkins, 2019). Keeping animals with the people and families who love them when possible is increasingly the goal at animal shelters and among animal welfare professionals.

Because of the nature of a trauma-informed approach, a person who has access to trauma-informed services is likely to feel better supported, safer, and more open to learning about resources that benefit animals in their care. Furthermore, a person is more likely to take advice and instruction about the needs and well-being of the animal in their care if the service interaction is positive and non-judgemental. A trauma-informed approach for the humans at the other end of the leash allows for people who work in the animal service field to better recognize and respect the bond between the animal and the human, leading to richer opportunities to improve living conditions for animals through compassionate service delivery to their human caregivers (Morales & Stevenson, 2021).

DESIGNING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

While little formal research has been conducted on what makes a co-sheltering facility successful, the experiences of My Dog Is My Home, a national entity that supports homeless services transitioning their programs to pet-friendly, reveal important insights. My Dog Is My Home also heavily leans on the lived expertise of people who have experienced homelessness with an animal to inform, shape, and guide their work. In preparation for this report, My Dog Is My Home facilitated an exploratory listening circle with people with lived experience of homelessness with an animal. In addition to informing the authors' expertise, these suggestions were also considered through the lens of our own experiences, knowledge, and the academic literature. Largely, the recommendations and feedback from My Dog Is My Home and people with lived experience fall into six areas:

1. Keep people and animals together
2. Dedicate spaces and services for animal care within the facility
3. Provide pet-friendly transportation
4. Remove extraneous processes and paperwork for companion animals
5. Provide legal advocacy for post-shelter housing placement
6. Integrate wraparound health, wellness, and

housing services using a One Health perspective that serves people and their animals

Each of these are discussed further below.

Keep People and Animals Together

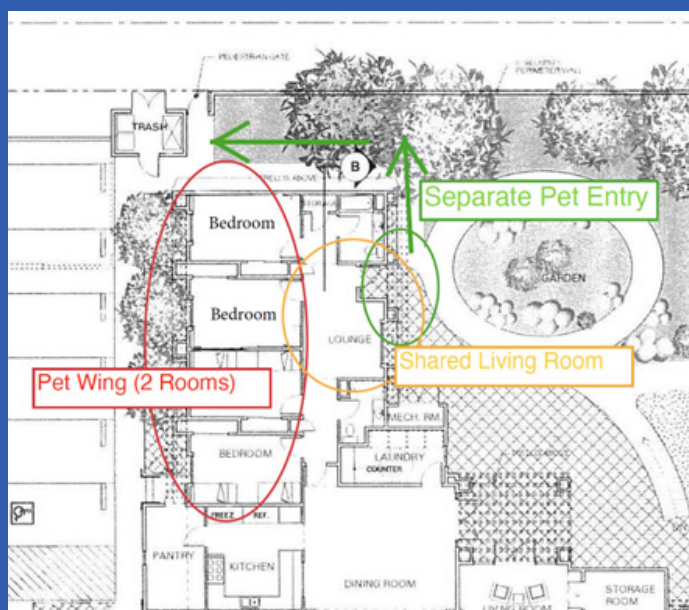
Emergency shelter entities interested in exploring co-sheltering often have the initial instinct to separate people from animals. This can take the form of having a room for dog and cat kennels that is separate from the sleeping areas for humans.

One of the first co-sheltering facilities known to exist in the United States is PATH's former emergency housing site in Hollywood, California, which was a 65-bed shelter for single adults with a standalone kennel space in the facility's underground parking garage. The kennel was originally designed to hold 5-6 animals at a time, and was described as a "shelter within a shelter" (SFGATE.com, 2008). Although the standalone kennel was a revolutionary step in keeping people and animals together at that time, creating an animal shelter within a human homeless shelter creates maintenance and veterinary health management issues that can be avoided with a fuller integration of pets and animals into sleeping spaces. Even in the best animal shelter operations, animals are at risk of experiencing stress and

DESIGNING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

transmitting disease, which can then lead to poor animal health and behavior outcomes (Bybee et al., 2011; Hennessy et al., 2020).

The preferred model for co-sheltering by My Dog Is My Home and people experiencing homelessness who are accustomed to having their animals with them at all times is called “cohabitation,” a term borrowed from emergency management literature and practices. Cohabitation allows animals to sleep in or around the same beds as their humans, allowing people and their animals to continue to draw upon the benefits of having close contact in stressful circumstances and environments.



However, employing a cohabitation model may not eliminate the need for dedicated animal care spaces. This is further discussed below.

Dedicate Spaces and Services for Animal Care within the Facility

There may be times when an animal must be crated or kenneled when their caregiver is off-site. In these situations, kennel spaces for temporary confinement in secure area is desirable. Without dedicated kennels, pop-up crates may serve as an alternative solution. The humane time frame an animal may spend in a kennel or crate depends on species, breed, individual behavior, physical characteristics, or other needs of the animal. While this level of nuance may make it difficult to create a standard operating procedure for all animals entering a facility, it is important to note that blanket rules may not be constructive and have the potential to cause stress and harm to individual families.

For example, a senior cat accustomed to sleeping most hours of the day may spend extended periods of time confined in a large crate before they start to experience stress. However, an active young adult cat who plays with their human as a part of their daily routine may find a full day of confinement stressful. To understand the needs of each specific

DESIGNING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

animal, the homeless services staff should consult with the animal's human caregiver and an animal welfare professional.

Focus group participants also expressed a desire for dedicated space within the shelter for veterinary and other animal professionals to deliver animal care services on site, rather than requiring shelter residents to travel with their animals to an off-site location. This would allow for preventative care, grooming, and behavior training to all occur at the location of temporary residence. Because common areas in a shelter environment can be distracting for animals, providing on site animal services in a high traffic space accessible to both people and animals at all times is not conducive. For example, delivering behavior modification training to a dog in a shelter lobby while people are walking in, through, and by the common space would not allow the dog to have a controlled and quiet environment where they can properly receive the training.

The desire to have professionals provide services on site may be influenced by the difficulty people experiencing homelessness have with accessing public transportation with companion animals, which is further discussed in the section below.

Provide Pet-Friendly Transportation

A lack of public transportation options for people with pets can compound barriers to human shelter access. In many communities, a shelter bed placement occurs only after a person experiencing homelessness has entered a different intake center or upon engagement with a street outreach team. Traveling from one location to another in order to access the pet-friendly shelter bed, if one is available, is difficult if transportation options between locations does not allow for companion animals. In these cases, all transportation options within the control of homeless services, such as transport provided by outreach and case management teams or vans which transport people from intake shelters to overnight shelters, must take into account that some people experiencing homelessness will have animals.

Relationships between animal control or other local animal welfare organizations can be built to arrange for transportation of animals; or, more simply, existing human transportation options can be equipped with collapsible dog crates, leashes, and any other supplies necessary to include the occasional safe transport of animals.

DESIGNING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

If animal care is not available on-site at the human emergency shelter facility, arranging for transportation to animal care services once a person or family is sheltered with their animal should be considered and may adopt a number of creative solutions. In some communities, volunteers are enlisted by local animal welfare organizations to help transport people experiencing homelessness and their animals between the human shelter and veterinary, spay/neuter, and grooming appointments, among other types of animal care services. However, volunteer networks require significant maintenance and may not be consistently available. Human and animal support organizations may also consider budgeting for the occasional taxi or other ride hailing service with a companion animal as a more reliable form of transportation.

Remove Extraneous Processes and Paperwork for Companion Animals

The majority of emergency shelter operators do not accept animals on site, with the exception of assistance animals, which include service animals and emotional support animals (ESAs). Providers often require a process called a “request for reasonable accommodation” to their no pets allowed rule in order to accommodate assistance

animals, and the processes for service animals and ESAs vary greatly in complexity. A person with an observable disability and a service animal is not required to show proof, certification, or any other documentation stating that the animal is a service animal. For example, if a person has a visual impairment and a seeing eye dog is accompanying them, the animal is clearly a service animal trained to perform a specific task to benefit the person with the disability. The housing provider should not ask any further questions or for proof that the seeing eye dog is a service animal.

If the person’s disability is not observable and it is not obvious that the accompanying animal is a service animal, the housing provider may make only two inquiries to determine whether an animal qualifies as a service animal: (1) Is this a service animal that is required because of a disability? and (2) What work or tasks has the animal been trained to perform? If the answer to question (1) is “yes” and work or a task is identified in response to question (2), grant the requested accommodation. Just as providers may not ask for further documentation when the disability is apparent, providers cannot require documentation, such as proof that the animal has been certified, trained, or licensed as a service animal when the disability is not apparent after

DESIGNING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

these questions have been answered (HUD, 2020).

ESAs, however, can be treated very differently and are often put through cumbersome processes before being approved as a reasonable accommodation to “no pets allowed” rules. When considering the animals themselves, there is essentially no difference between an ESA and a pet. An ESA is not required to have any special training or certification. The conditions for an ESA are created by the qualities of the human caregiver, not the animal. According to the Fair Housing Act, a person qualifies for an ESA if they have a disability, obtain emotional support from their animal, and need their animal to fully use and enjoy their “dwelling,” which legally includes emergency shelter (HUD, 2020).

As a part of the reasonable accommodation review process, the provider may also require the requester of the reasonable accommodation to submit a letter from a health care provider or other reliable third party verifying that the person has a disability, that their animal provides them with emotional support, and that they need their animal for full use and enjoyment of the dwelling.

Although providers may legally ask for this verification, they are not required to do so.

There are significant health and healthcare access disparities between the general public and people experiencing homelessness (Reilly et al., 2022). People experiencing homelessness are often disconnected from the type of service providers who would write a verification letter or there may be long wait times between available appointments. Requiring such a letter may delay a person’s ability to access shelter, or may present a barrier to them accessing shelter at all.

Some solutions to this are developing. For example, an emerging practice from large homeless shelter providers in Los Angeles, CA is to assume all animals accompanying people experiencing homelessness provide emotional support and that all human clients of their shelter have experienced trauma as a qualifying condition for an ESA. They do not require any additional paperwork which verifies these conditions, nor do they require a formal reasonable accommodation request. This practice significantly reduces the steps it takes for people experiencing homelessness with animals to access shelter and other services while potentially reaching the same or better outcomes for their clients.

DESIGNING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Just as requiring a letter from a healthcare provider to verify a disability and the need for an ESA can present a barrier, requiring specific veterinary care documents may also present a barrier. Other types of documentation requirements that may present unnecessary barriers to services for people experiencing homelessness with animals include up to date vaccinations and proof that the animal has been spayed or neutered prior to them entering the shelter. The recommended practice for addressing veterinary public health in a shelter environment is to follow a “shelter first” outlook - allow a person and their animal to access the shelter first, and then work with them on obtaining veterinary care or records of treatment.

The recommended approach is to both 1) allow people and their animals to enter shelter together and 2) address veterinary public health by following a low-barrier framework. People and animals must be able to enter a shelter environment easily and quickly, after which they can work on obtaining care and/or documents if necessary.

Provide Legal Advocacy for Post-Shelter Housing Placement

Although the momentum to lower barriers to

emergency shelters by accommodating animals on site has grown, it is an incomplete and short-term stop-gap measure on the journey to ending homelessness for people and families with animals. Pet-friendly permanent and affordable housing is still difficult to find, and there is a dearth of pet-friendly rental units in lower-income communities of color in particular (Applebaum et al., 2021; Rose et al., 2020).

To ensure that people and families with animals entering shelter have the ability to move on and obtain permanent housing, case managers and social workers in shelter systems must understand the reasonable accommodation process and be comfortable with advocating to ensure the rights of their clients protected by the Fair Housing Act. In the absence of pet-friendly rental housing, wielding the reasonable accommodation process may be necessary to keep people and their animals together.

The Fair Housing Act (FHA) is a federal law that prohibits housing discrimination because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), familial status and disability. Under the FHA a person with a disability includes (1) individuals with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more

DESIGNING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

major life activities; (2) individuals who are regarded as having such an impairment; and (3) individuals with a record of such an impairment. “Major life activity” is defined as activities that are of central importance to daily life, which includes but is not limited to seeing, hearing, walking, breathing, performing manual tasks, caring for one’s self, learning, and speaking.

By these definitions and within the parameters of the FHA, an animal accompanying a person who has experienced trauma, has difficulty caring for themselves, and whose animal helps them with their functioning through emotional support is an assistance animal, not a pet. The person may request reasonable accommodation at any time for their assistance animal. Where there is a nexus between a person’s disability and the requested accommodation, housing providers, including providers of emergency shelter, are legally obligated to grant reasonable accommodations to people with disabilities in order for them to have full use and enjoyment of the dwelling. The law permits the housing provider to require that the reasonable accommodation request be supported by a letter from a person knowledgeable about the individual’s need for the assistance animal, such as a healthcare professional. However, such a letter is not required by law (HUD, 2022).

Should case managers, social workers, and the shelter residents themselves need training or additional support to fully understand the rights of people with assistance animals under the Fair Housing Act, the shelter provider should build a meaningful relationship with a local legal advocacy organization for which they can call upon for assistance, such as a legal aid society, disability rights advocacy organization, or housing rights advocacy organization.

Integrate wraparound health, wellness, and housing services using a One Health perspective that serves people and their animals

One Health is a framework for looking at the relationships between people, animals, and the environment and their impacts on the health of all three parties (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], n.d.). Although One Health is widely applied on a more global scale, for example, with the spread of zoonosis like COVID-19, it may also be applied on the micro scale to a single person, their companion animal, and the housing they share.

In the context of people experiencing homelessness with their companion animals, a movement to serve people using a One Health approach is taking

DESIGNING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

shape. At the University of Washington's Center for One Health Research, a clinic is held at a local Seattle youth shelter twice a month and offers unhoused people and their animals opportunities to engage with healthcare practitioners across the spectrum of human and animal well-being. Among the services provided:

For humans:

- full primary care with an emphasis on trauma-informed care
- sexual health
- mental health
- substance use, including medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorders
- gender-affirming care for transgender patients
- laboratory services

For animals:

- wellness examinations
- vaccinations
- deworming
- flea or tick treatments
- referrals for free or reduced-cost spay or neuter surgeries
- referrals for treatments that cannot be performed at the clinic

Outside of a specialized One Health clinic, human shelter providers can do more to integrate One Health concepts into operations. Case managers and social workers are taught to assess the needs of their clients holistically, which should include the needs of their animals. In a co-sheltering environment where animals are being accepted on-site, social services workers should thoughtfully include questions about animals in client assessments and service planning, and also have animal services in their resource libraries to make appropriate referrals.

INTERIOR DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CO-SHELTERING FACILITIES

At the time of this writing, specific trauma-informed recommendations for physical environment design of co-sheltering facilities are emerging. In service to this important topic, My Dog Is My Home facilitated several 2023 conference sessions to begin a dialogue amongst providers, animal care experts and architectural/interior design practitioners. These are detailed below.

Part Two of this report series provides further applied architectural and interior design guidance for a co-sheltering facility that accommodates people and their companion animals. This can be referenced at

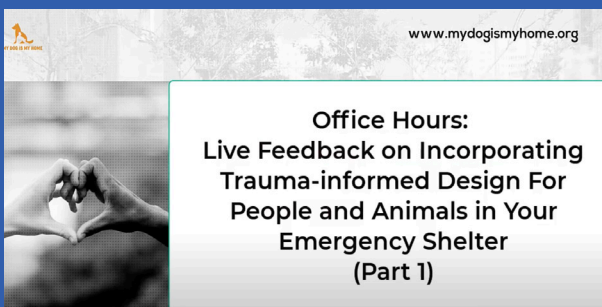
<https://www.mydogismyhome.org/> or
<https://designresourcesforhomelessness.org>

INTERIOR DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CO-SHELTERING FACILITIES

Case Study

In 2022, the government of Kitsap County, WA added questions to their local point-in-time count about companion animals, and the county discovered that having no providers in the area that accepted animals was a barrier to people experiencing homelessness receiving services and accessing shelter. In response, the county's latest efforts to provide low-barrier shelter will be pet-inclusive. The county purchased a fitness center of about 20,000 square feet which will be converted into a 75 bed low-barrier shelter. The new shelter will accept families with children, singles, couples, and companion animals.

The following [video](#) presents a case study on trauma-informed design for people and animals using the Kitsap County design plans for their new 75-bed shelter. This case study was developed for My Dog Is My Home's Co-Sheltering Conference 2023, which took place March 21-23, 2023.



Description of the Session

Office Hours: Live Feedback on Incorporating Trauma-Informed Design for People and Animals in Your Emergency Shelter (Part 1)

Speakers:

Dr. Jill B. Pable, project lead, Design Resources for Homelessness (designresourcesforhomelessness.org), Professor of Interior Architecture & Design at Florida State University

Dr. Rebecca Stuntebeck, DVM, Facility Design Veterinarian at UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program

Live Example:

Kirsten Jewell, Housing and Homelessness Division Manager, Kitsap County, Department of Human Services

Judy-Rae Karlsen, Project Coordinator, Kitsap County, Department of Human Services, Division of Housing and Homelessness

Moderator:

Vickie Ramirez, Clinic/Research & Evaluation Coordinator, One Health Clinic - University of Washington

INTERIOR DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CO-SHELTERING FACILITIES

This Office Hours session provided live feedback to emergency shelter providers regarding facility design which accommodates both humans and animals in the same space. The facilitators were chosen based on their unique ability to address how design and the built environments can support recovery from trauma. Part 1 took place on March 21, 2023 and was dedicated to providing feedback to 1 specific co-sheltering site that is currently in the planning stages in Kitsap County, WA. Part 2 took place on March 23, 2023 and was an open format Q&A so any provider could ask facility design questions and receive feedback from our design experts.

Design Highlights:

- Account for additional space being taken up by companion animals. Avoid creating pinched spaces if possible. Particular areas of concern - reception areas and hallways.
- Creating acoustic and visual privacy or conditions for lower stress in both people and animals.
 - Barking dogs is a stressor for both people and animals.
 - Invest in partial height panels to create sleeping “pods” that also give flexibility in

sleeping arrangements (6 people to a pod, or 4 people + 2 large dogs, etc.)

- Furnishings can be reconfigured if necessary in order to make accommodations for a cattery, dog crate, etc.
- Mitigate stress in animals for optimum physical and behavioral health.
 - Support positive human interactions.
 - Provide ample enrichment / exercise for both mind and body
 - Foster an Environment that promotes a rest / calm state
 - Separation of species
 - Opportunities for choice

SUMMARY

A wide variety of stakeholders can appreciate the importance of supporting the human-animal bond in circumstances of homelessness — homeless advocates understand the importance of lowering barriers to accessing shelter and housing by welcoming companion animals, animal welfare advocates embrace new solutions to keeping animals with their families and out of animal shelters, and most importantly, people experiencing homelessness themselves with their companion animals have expressed consistently in qualitative research that their animals are members of their family and help them cope. Many people experiencing homelessness have also experienced profound trauma. A trauma-informed approach acknowledges this issue and strives to provide a safe and supportive environment for people who are seeking services. Providing services without accommodating companion animals is not only a barrier to service, but can retraumatize people when they need support the most. Despite the challenges with conceptualizing a shared space where people in crisis can receive services and shelter with their animals, My Dog Is My Home and Design Resources for Homelessness together have identified practices that can inspire a vision for keeping people and animals together.

This report provides a research and practice-based foundation for exploring why inter-species shelter design is important. It also leverages the firsthand knowledge of individuals who have experienced shelter and housing services while caring for their companion animals, blending their insights with the evolving approaches of forward-thinking homeless and animal welfare organizations working to meet intertwined human and animal welfare needs. We trust that you share our enthusiasm for envisioning designs that challenge traditional boundaries, reaching far beyond the basic requirements solely for humans. By pushing ourselves to become more trauma-informed, innovative, humane, and inclusive, we can make a difference in the lives of the most vulnerable individuals and beyond.



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Photos on pages 9 and 25: Design Resources for Homelessness

Photo on page 15: Rainbow House Emergency Shelter floor plan, Rainbow Services

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My Dog is My Home

A national nonprofit dedicated to expanding access to shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness and their companion animals.

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