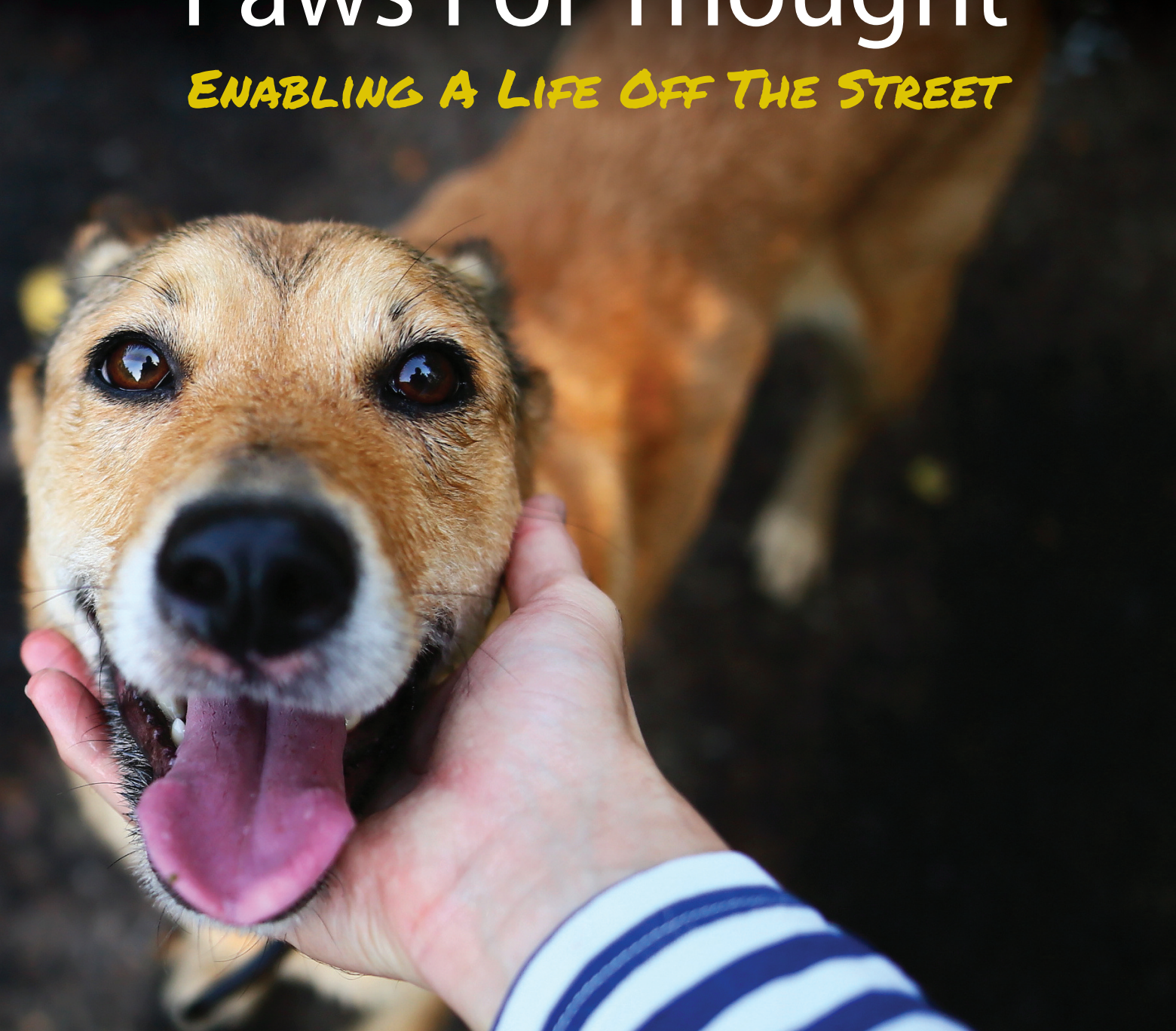




Paws For Thought

ENABLING A LIFE OFF THE STREET



PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS & PETS GUIDE



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Simon Community Scotland
PFSS (Pet Fostering Services Scotland)
Jollie Design
Glasgow City Mission
Nivensknowe Boarding Kennels and Cattery
Hillcrest Futures Bruntsfield Place, Edinburgh
The Dogs Trust

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THANK YOU EVERYONE!



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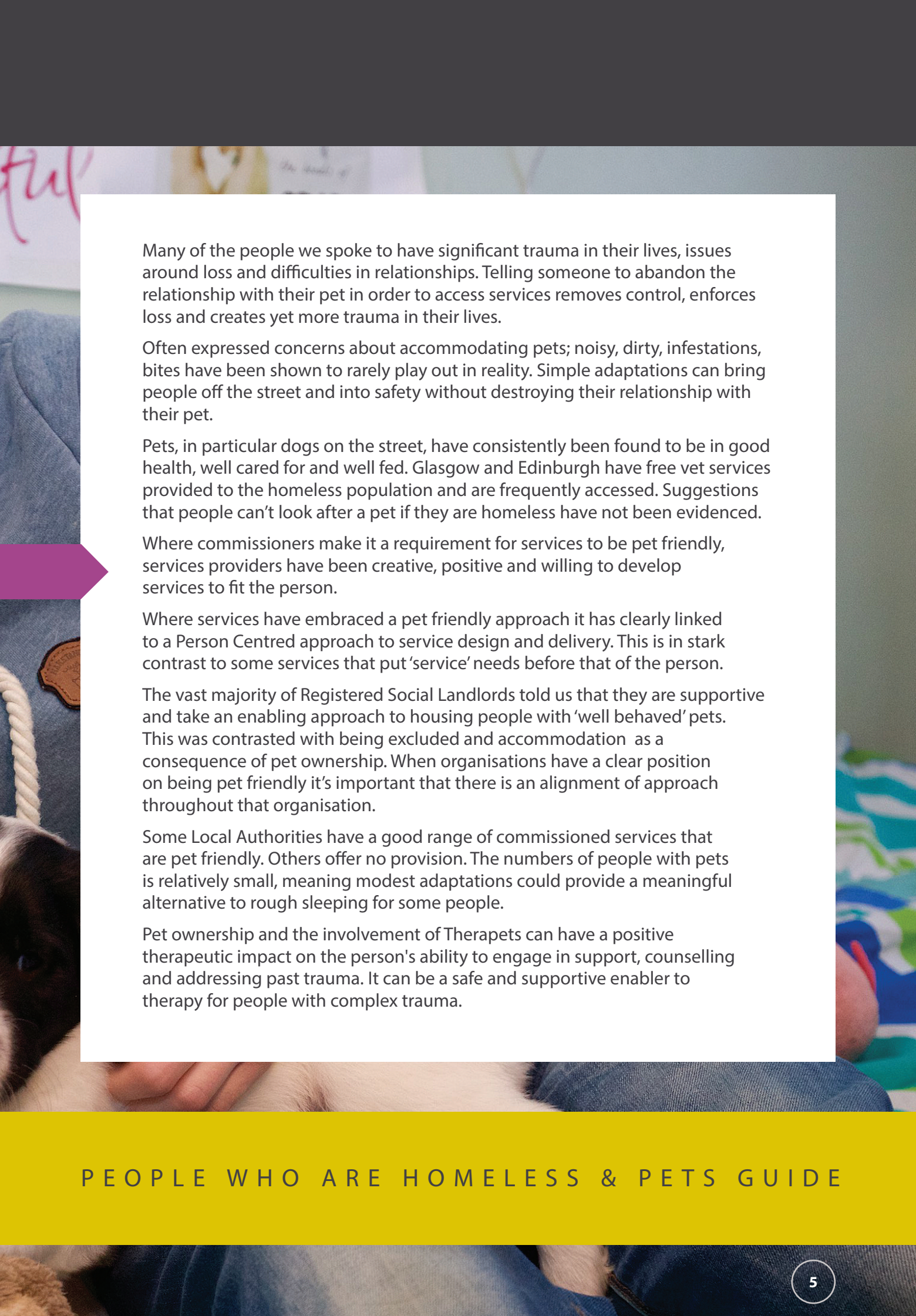
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is compelling evidence on the positive effect having a pet can have on your mental and physical health. There is equally compelling evidence of the negative effects of homelessness on health, wellbeing and life expectancy. Owning and caring for a pet can be a positive contributor to improving lives.



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A background image showing a person's hand holding a small, light-colored dog. The person is wearing a blue jacket. The dog is looking towards the camera. The image is partially obscured by a white text box.

Many of the people we spoke to have significant trauma in their lives, issues around loss and difficulties in relationships. Telling someone to abandon the relationship with their pet in order to access services removes control, enforces loss and creates yet more trauma in their lives.

Often expressed concerns about accommodating pets; noisy, dirty, infestations, bites have been shown to rarely play out in reality. Simple adaptations can bring people off the street and into safety without destroying their relationship with their pet.

Pets, in particular dogs on the street, have consistently been found to be in good health, well cared for and well fed. Glasgow and Edinburgh have free vet services provided to the homeless population and are frequently accessed. Suggestions that people can't look after a pet if they are homeless have not been evidenced.

Where commissioners make it a requirement for services to be pet friendly, services providers have been creative, positive and willing to develop services to fit the person.

Where services have embraced a pet friendly approach it has clearly linked to a Person Centred approach to service design and delivery. This is in stark contrast to some services that put 'service' needs before that of the person.

The vast majority of Registered Social Landlords told us that they are supportive and take an enabling approach to housing people with 'well behaved' pets. This was contrasted with being excluded and accommodation as a consequence of pet ownership. When organisations have a clear position on being pet friendly it's important that there is an alignment of approach throughout that organisation.

Some Local Authorities have a good range of commissioned services that are pet friendly. Others offer no provision. The numbers of people with pets is relatively small, meaning modest adaptations could provide a meaningful alternative to rough sleeping for some people.

Pet ownership and the involvement of Therapets can have a positive therapeutic impact on the person's ability to engage in support, counselling and addressing past trauma. It can be a safe and supportive enabler to therapy for people with complex trauma.

FOREWARD

THERE'S NOTHING GOOD ABOUT BEING HOMELESS.

The impact is far-reaching, affecting many aspects of people's lives. Health and well-being; connections with friends, family and society; safety and hopefulness; and even life-expectancy all suffer as a result of losing a stable home. We live in one of the most affluent countries in the world; no one should ever feel compelled to sleep on the streets of our towns and cities. And, while the number of rough sleepers seems relatively small, it is significant - just like the risks to their well-being and even their lives.

In 2018 the Scottish Government set up the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG). Their first action was to support preparedness within the homeless sector for a forthcoming winter, a season when risk to health and life rises significantly for people on the street. Evidence emerged that some people were left with no option other than to sleep rough because any offer of accommodation was dependant upon them 'giving up' their pet, usually a dog.

The HARSAG, under the stewardship of Kevin Stewart MSP (the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning), requested that this issue be explored. The group recognised the impact of trauma on people's journey into homelessness and the bond between a person and their dog. No one felt it was right that people should have to choose between their companion and safety.

Over the course of 2019, we ventured out with the street teams in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Glasgow, meeting with and speaking to people on the streets. Across Scotland we spoke to homeless service providers, planners, housing providers, landlords, commissioners, vets, animal charities, dog lovers... and even the occasional cat or lizard person. We also spoke to a lot of dogs and, though they didn't offer many comments of their own, we hope the images and stories reflect how they feel.



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During the process of putting together this report, we became acutely aware of the care and love the dogs we saw are experiencing from their owners, every day. Research strongly suggests that dogs belonging to people who are homeless are healthy, secure and well looked after; though sometimes this is at the expense of their owner's well-being. That said, the benefits of dog ownership are huge. Pets provide people with unconditional love, a sense of responsibility, companionship and safety in an often hostile world, especially for people experiencing homelessness.

Overall, we found that there is a great deal of good practice and understanding in the homeless sector. Our discussions with planners, managers and staff revealed an openness to adopt a more pet friendly approach, given the right support. We have presented six small case studies about what it means to people to have support to keep their pet. The case studies are real but we have changed the names, and some of the details, to protect the people and dogs involved.

Our aim is to provide an insight into the strength and importance of the relationship between people and their pets and to promote understanding of why this relationship can be so crucial in providing hope and recovery. Our conclusions highlight a number of ideas, practices, policies and approaches which services are implementing safely as well as the, sometimes very simple, solutions that can make a huge impact.

THANK YOU FOR TAKING AN INTEREST IN HOMELESSNESS AND OUR FURRY FRIENDS.

Hugh Hill



INTRODUCTION

KEVIN STEWART MSP

Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning



With nearly half of us owning pets, a large proportion of people in Scotland are in a position to know for themselves just how important relationships with dogs, cats, birds, fishes or even bearded dragons can be.

These animals are family members, sharing joys and helping during times of sadness. And if people are separated from their pets they and their animals feel grief just as we do for our human family members.

This can be traumatic even if we are lucky enough to have a comfortable home and strong relationships with our friends and family. For someone experiencing the loneliness of homelessness, being forced to choose between the relationship of trust and affection with their pet and a safe place to live where their pet can't follow can be a no-brainer – people often choose their animal.

If a person experiencing homelessness does have to separate from their pet, this can exacerbate the trauma which led to their homelessness. We know that people who experience homelessness are more likely to have suffered a succession of negative events and circumstances, including adverse childhood experiences, mental ill health and social isolation. It's no surprise people in that situation will hold tight to their animals in the face of a system which doesn't always understand that their pet (and it's usually a dog) might be the only thing in the world they feel safe with and loved by - that offers them purpose and comfort.

That's why I'm glad to see this report produced by the Simon Community. It clearly sets out why pets matter and provides practical steps to support social landlords in helping people experiencing homelessness to maintain pet relationships. Many services across Scotland already have good practice in place, but in a significant number of local authority areas there is little or no provision.

Supporting people to maintain the relationships with their pets contributes to the Scottish Government's intention to adopt a person-centred approach to homelessness services. It demonstrates our commitment to listening to people's lived experiences as we move forward with the implementation of the Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan. One early, practical step towards helping this is the creation of a Homeless Pet Friendly officer. The new role will work with the Dog's Trust and Simon Community to ensure all stakeholders recognise the importance and value of pets to people experiencing homelessness.

I would ask all local authorities to work with services in their areas to ensure they treat all users with dignity and respect and act to implement pet friendly policies.

Kevin Stewart MSP

Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning



Paws For Thought

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PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS & PETS GUIDE

SIMON COMMUNITY SCOTLAND

“

We know partnership working can break down barriers and support people to not only secure a safe place to live but have friends, money, purpose and good health. It's not always about more money, services or staff, but what we can achieve together by working smarter, faster and putting the person (and their pets), at the heart of our approach.

When you ask people who have made the journey out of homelessness how they would describe their experiences, what is most striking is that they say they now feel like they're being treated as human beings - a person who matters. Recognising the mutual bond, dependence and love that pets and their owners have for each other is vitally important in understanding the impact of asking someone to give up their pet in exchange for a roof.

Every life story and journey away from homelessness is different and our staff and volunteers, many with lived experience, take time to understand what is important to each person. For many of the people we support, trauma has been the start of their journey and they have learned to cope and survive the best way they can. Their tenacity, endurance and strength is incredible and I am regularly humbled by their resilience.

Compassion, empathy and humanity are often not words you'll find in job descriptions yet these are the qualities that are of the greatest importance in connecting with people whose life circumstances are incredible and shocking. It's not too much to ask, but it's a lot to give.

LORRAINE MCGRATH

CEO Simon Community Scotland

”



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BEING HOMELESS



What many people don't realise is that people facing homelessness in Scotland have strong rights to support and accommodation. However, these rights alone are not enough to ensure that the people who need most support are able to access it in order to get and keep a stable home: something that is so important to all of us.

Between April 2018 and March 2019 29,894 households were assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness. For 5.8% of these households (1,744) this was not the first time they had been homeless. 8% of those applying for help (2,876 households) reported that they had slept rough at least once during the previous 3 months.

The majority move into temporary accommodation while they await a settled home, and we know that 71% of unintentionally homeless households secured settled accommodation (mostly in the social rented sector) in 2018/19. Temporary accommodation can provide an important however the average length of stay of 6 months is far too long, made more challenging where the standards of that accommodation are not what we want.

The 2018 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group set out clear recommendations for change. These included a central recommendation that national and local government lead a transition across the homelessness system to rapid rehousing to reduce both numbers of households and length of stay in temporary accommodation and to prioritise a settled home instead. Scottish Ministers agreed to these recommendations – and Local Authorities have now set out their plans for making this change a reality.

But as the Action Group recognised, ending someone's homelessness often takes far more than a house alone. Almost half (49%) of those seeking help cite having one or more support needs, an increase of 15% since 2013/14. During 2018/19, over half of applicants with support needs cited a mental health problem as a support need (51% or 7,410). 47% specified support needs for basic housing management/ independent living reasons (6,866) and 23% cited drug or alcohol dependency (3,345) The increase in support needs identified in homeless applications may indicate a rise in more complex situations and it's vital that we respond better to meet these needs if we are to reach our shared goal to end homelessness.

This starts at a national level - we must do more to join up our planning and resources; respond better to people in moments of crisis and design systems and processes to act on opportunities to get people the right support and advice to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place. We must tackle the big, structural drivers of homelessness by doing more to ensure a more equal society and tackling adverse childhood experiences, poverty and exclusion. But perhaps above all: in the moment, at point of crisis and to support people off the streets and into a home of their own once more, we must embed a person centred approach which empowers all concerned to act with flexibility, creativity and compassion in response to individual needs. That's why – beyond all the numbers and strategic plans in response - this simple, evidence driven, common sense practice guidance is so important.

CATRIONA MACKEAN

Unit Head, Homelessness & Housing Support, Scottish Government

THE BENEFITS OF PET OWNERSHIP:

WE ALL LOVE OUR PETS

We are a nation of animal lovers with around 40% of households cohabiting with at least one animal. Currently, dogs are leading the pack – a quarter of our households have at least one... with cats sneaking up on them not far behind in popularity.

For many of us, the furry friends we welcome into our homes become adored members of our families. We all love our pets.

“

*SHE LOVES ME AND CUDDLES
ME WHEN I'M SAD AND
MAKES ME SMILE EVERY DAY.*

(MARY ON SKYE)

”

PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS + THEIR PETS

If pets are able to improve the quality of life for those of us who are lucky enough to have stable homes, settled families and the security of a regular income, imagine the profound difference they can make to people who can't take those things for granted...

For many people who find themselves homeless, without families and friends to rely on, the most difficult thing to contend with is loneliness and a lack of companionship. In these situations, a pet can be transformative, providing their person with unconditional love and loyalty – creating a family unit and, often, a source of great comfort and positivity.



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THE BENEFITS OF PET OWNERSHIP

Studies have consistently shown that owning a pet comes with many benefits for both body and mind. Here are just a few examples of how our pets can be good for us:

» **INCREASED LEVELS OF HAPPINESS**

Who doesn't want to be happier, more of the time? Our pets make us smile and laugh every day. In fact, over 90% of us feel that our animal companions bring us increased levels of joy and contentment.

» **IMPROVED PHYSICAL HEALTH**

We all know that walking a dog or playing with a cat is excellent exercise. And that's just the start... research has also shown that people with pets can benefit from lower blood pressure, increased immunity and improved overall fitness.

» **BETTER MENTAL HEALTH**

It's not just our bodies that benefit from owning pets. Our furry friends have been shown to provide emotional and therapeutic support for people suffering from depression and anxiety, as well as promoting lower stress levels.

» **LESS LONELINESS**

Animals are excellent company! The pets we share our homes with give us comfort and companionship. This can be particularly powerful for people who live alone or who don't have regular contact with family or friends.

» **A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY**

Many people use pets to educate their children about caring for others and life's daily responsibilities. Knowing our animals are fully dependant on us can bring a rewarding sense of purpose and motivation.

» **A WAY TO MEET NEW PEOPLE**

Whether you're a dog or cat (or bird or reptile or fish) person, you'll know that talking to other enthusiasts about your pet is a fantastic ice-breaker. Our pets help us socialise and can even introduce us to new activities and friends.

» **PERSONAL SAFETY**

Sometimes being alone can be scary. For many of us, having our dog accompany us on an evening walk or in our home brings a sense of reassurance and peace of mind*.

*Even if your 'guard dog' is more likely to greet an intruder with a wagging tail and a slobbery kiss than actually scare them off!

PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS +

MARY + SKYE CASE STUDY

Mary's life changed when, following the death of her child to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (commonly known as 'Cot Death'), she also lost her partner and her family within the space of a few months. Mary found herself spiralling into a cycle of mental health issues and drug use. Less than a year after her baby was born, Mary and her beloved pet dog Skye (a cuddly, white Staffie with grey spots) found themselves alone and sleeping rough.

“

I honestly don't think I would be here today without Skye.

To say she's like family isn't strong enough... she is the only family I have and I love her like I would have loved my baby. She is my baby.

When my little girl died, I thought that was rock bottom. The worst, you know? But I had no idea then how low I could go. I'm not angry with my ex or my family anymore - I know what I put them through - but I never thought I'd be alone. Aren't family meant to be there for you? Well, mine weren't...

But Skye's always there for me. No matter what. She doesn't care about the mistakes I've made or if I'm having a low-day. It means everything to me to know that there is still someone who loves me. It probably sounds silly but I know she'll never leave me. She loves me and cuddles me when I'm sad and makes me smile every day. She's got such a good nature! People always smile at her and give her a stroke and that makes me feel so proud - like I'm her mum.

She's good for me too. She helps me focus on my health and good choices, she makes me feel like life is worth it all, she gets me up in the morning. She listens when I talk to her and I can tell her how I'm feeling. What do I talk to her about? Just daily life, people we see, places we go... I talk to her about what our life will be like when I get myself together and we have our own place. She makes me happy. She gives me a reason to be here - taking care of Skye is my main purpose now. As long as she has food and is warm I feel good about myself. Skye is my family and I will never abandon her.

”



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THEIR PETS



People experiencing rough sleeping are extremely likely to have had significant trauma in their lives. In these cases, the positive impact of pet ownership takes on an even greater level of significance. We know that people who are homeless are much more likely to encounter the exact kinds of physical and mental health issues that pet ownership has been shown to alleviate.

Every day we interact with people who are homeless and our frontline workers report the tangible positive effects of animal companionship on the well-being of those who are fortunate enough to find services that are supportive of them as pet owners.

Additionally, sharing your life with a pet is about more than simple companionship – we have seen many times how the responsibility, sense of purpose and deep connection felt by service users who are pet owners can become significant drivers towards self-improvement and recovery. For too many people relationships were at the heart of their trauma, having a safe, unconditional and close relationship with their pet can be reaffirming and healing.



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PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS & THEIR PETS

FRASER + PUGLET CASE STUDY

Fraser, describes his dog Puglet as his “reason to be better”.

Puglet, a staffie-pug mix has been by Fraser’s side for almost nine years. Having spent some time in prison a few years ago, Fraser says that his dog sat by the door every day and pined for his return. When he got out, he made a promise to Puglet - and to himself - that he was never going back... and he’s sticking to it.

Fraser takes his responsibility as Puglet’s carer very seriously. He feels that love for his dog is the thing that’s helping him turn his life around:

“She’s my higher power; I could have ended up back in jail in those early days but she needed me so that wasn’t an option.”

Puglet provides Fraser with the motivation he needs to “stay out of trouble”, sign-on and look for work.


The Salvation Army, Dogs Trust Hope Project and All4paws have all helped Fraser and Puglet tremendously. He’s currently staying in a pet friendly hostel. Fraser likes how the Salvation Army encourage independence and responsible pet-ownership:

“It makes me feel good that they trust me to take proper care of Puglet and our home. I have too much at stake now to mess it all up.”



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While the people we support have sometimes had very different life experiences to many of us, they share the same hopes, dreams and ambitions – to be loved, to feel safe and to have purpose in their lives. The potential of dogs, (and other animals) to alleviate boredom, combat intense feelings of isolation, increase perceived personal security, provide a sense of motivation or purpose and to act as a substitute for human relationships makes them powerful tools in enabling people to manage their recovery.

We now know that domesticated dogs can prevent ill health, facilitate recovery and even detect certain underlying ailments and diseases such as cancer, oncoming epileptic seizures or hypoglycaemia .

Dogs also benefit us psychologically by reducing stress, anxiety and depression. They offer companionship to reduce loneliness and isolation, provide unconditional love, the opportunity for touch and promote social contact. With so many benefits, why would we not support pet ownership?

1 Wells, D.L. (2007) Domestic dogs and human health: An overview. British Journal of Health Psychology, 12, 145–156
(Dr Emma Williamson, Principal Clinical Psychologist and Clinical Lead)

THE CHALLENGES FACING DOG OWNERS

Trauma, Accommodation Issues & Negative Perceptions

“

I WOULD LOSE IT IF I LOST HER. TAKE THEIR DOG AWAY FROM A HOMELESS PERSON AND THEY WILL BECOME ERRATIC. YOU'VE TAKEN AWAY WHAT'S LEFT OF HIS LIFE. IT'LL SEND HIM OVER THE EDGE.

FRASER (ON PUGLET)

”

THE TRAUMA OF LOSING A PET

We are making huge progress towards ending homelessness in Scotland but we still experience people rough sleeping in our cities, many hundreds of people in temporary, or insecure, accommodation and many more at risk of homelessness. Rough sleeping is the sharp-end of homelessness where there are significant risks to health, well-being and even life.

No one should ever feel compelled to rough sleep yet some people with pets do find themselves in this position.

A lot of good work is being done in this homeless sector, but we need to acknowledge that disproportionate numbers of people are being turned away from, losing or self-refusing accommodation because of issues with housing their pets.

We know that owning a pet can increase levels of well-being and happiness, especially for vulnerable people such as those without stable homes. Unfortunately, the inverse is also true; when a person who has already been dealing with extreme stress faces the choice between losing their chance at finding accommodation or their pet, the impact of this re-traumatisation can be devastating.

Too many people simply drop-out of the system because they are unwilling to abandon their pets and the services on offer to them are either ill-equipped or unwilling to care for these animals.



MEGAN THINKS THE SOLUTION IS SIMPLE:

***MORE PET-AWARE SERVICES AND
ACCOMMODATION THAT ALLOWS PETS...
WE SHOULDN'T BE FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN
OUR DOGS' HAPPINESS AND A PLACE TO SLEEP.***



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MEGAN + FERN CASE STUDY

Megan is in her mid-forties and a little bit interview-shy (she does not, she says, enjoy talking about herself) but she desperately wants her story to be shared. Currently, Megan is settled, with her beloved Fern, in her own flat within a Simon Community Service in Glasgow. She obviously finds the past difficult to talk about, briefly mentioning suffering from a severe bereavement, as well as PTSD, schizophrenia and other ongoing mental health issues that she is finally learning to manage with support. Fern is a quiet jack russell terrier who stays close and follows Megan every time she leaves the room. The pair are inseparable.

Fern is Megan's 'rock'. They've been together for two years, through some of the toughest times of Megan's life. In the kitchen, Megan shows off the line of dog food tins she makes sure she has in because "Fern loves meat". Her weekly treat is a sausage or two from the local cafe. Megan does not have much but she always makes sure that Fern is well fed: "I would go hungry before I let her go hungry," she says, "I would go without."

Stressing how grateful she is for all the help she's had getting into housing, Megan feels that some of the services she's experienced could improve the care they give by making it easier for service users to bring their dogs with them into accommodation. Before her current set up, Megan was at a project in Possil that doesn't allow pets. This meant that she, was like so many others, forced to choose between sleeping on the streets and "abandoning" her dog. Tears gather in her eyes when she remembers this time – having recently suffered so much trauma, separation from Fern was an emotionally damaging experience for the already vulnerable Megan.

It is clear that the relationship with Fern has been healing for Megan. She proudly tells us that, when she's sad or crying, Fern will tuck her little head under Megan's arm. In Fern, Megan has constant companionship, loyalty and love. "Having" Fern gives me a new found energy, taking her out walking in the fresh air. She jumps over the bushes to see the squirrels!" She stresses that she "hates" the idea of putting Fern into a kennel, which is a real possibility if her current situation change "Kennels punish dogs that don't deserve it. I think I'd rather sleep rough again."

MAN'S BEST FRIEND

BY DR EMMA WILLIAMSON

In my professional capacity, I have seen first-hand the power of dog ownership and the role dogs can play in helping people access support and overcome trauma. The Psychology in Hostels (PiH), service bases a team of NHS Psychologists inside homeless hostels, working with staff to reach clients who have experienced barriers to accessing mental health support. Honey, my family pet and our therapy dog, is a key part of our work. I recognise the benefits she brings personally and the vital work she does to enhance engagement and address clients' psychological distress.

To illustrate how we use this special canine bond in our work, I'd like to tell you about Sarah* and her dog Max. When I first met Sarah, she was living in a small single bedroom in a 24 hour staffed hostel with Max. She was reluctant to talk to me about much; apart from her love for animals and how everything was meaningless without her dog. Max facilitated our social interactions, allowed us to go for purposeful walks together and provided us with a less threatening topic of conversation if things got too 'hot'. I also asked Sarah for advice about a potential therapy dog; it "had to be a Staffie", as they are the most affectionate "people focused" dogs. Following Sarah's advice, I rescued Honey (a Boxer-Staffie crossbreed) who began to join me in my work as an accredited 'therapy dog'.

Slowly, Sarah began talking about how relationships since childhood had often been violent and abusive and how she had always turned to the dog in her life for comfort. For people with histories of early trauma, neglect or disrupted attachments, a dog may have been their only secure attachment figure - a reliable, consistent, safe and loving presence. The importance of canine relationships should not be underestimated: attachment to a dog has been shown to support emotional, psychological and interpersonal development². Max had been Sarah's support but when she finally left her violent ex-partner, she was unable to find accommodation that would take them both. It is well documented that people across the UK can be trapped in negative cycles if they are asked to give up their pet and, due to the strong bond, decide to live on the streets. Once there, people can find it even harder to get safe accommodation, becoming stuck in the cycle of homelessness, increasing need and more entrenched difficulties. Like so many of my clients, rather than abandon Max, Sarah had lived in a tent for two years before being offered a dog-friendly hostel place. It is no small matter to be asked to give up your animal and we should exercise great caution around this. Many of my clients suffer with severe depression and have confided that without their dog they wouldn't get up, wouldn't see any point in living and may have committed suicide already. While this is not unique to homeless dog owners, it is more acute for them as their dog may be their primary reason for living. Anything that places people at risk of losing their dog - such as being separated in order to access housing - could increase the likelihood of suicide and self-harm and must be considered in any risk assessment.

*Name changed to protect identity.



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For Sarah, her animals had been a lifeline. She struggled to manage relationships and trust people due to her traumatic experiences but around animals she became calm, was able to regulate her emotions, lift her mood and manage other areas of her life more effectively.

By walking Max together and spending time with me and Honey, Sarah began to engage with therapy. In the first work of its type, the American child psychologist Levinson³ found enhanced therapeutic engagement and outcomes with patients when his dog Jingles was in the room. Likewise, we have found that therapy dogs - and clients' own pets - promote social interactions, help put people at ease and offer a third object to focus on rather than the intensity of the dyadic interaction with the professional. Levinson described how dogs could facilitate a safe channel for discussing unconscious fears, something I see when working with Honey. Simply through her presence, Honey is a repository for unbearable, threatening feelings that are unconsciously projected onto her by the client in order to make them more manageable. For example, they may comment at different times that Honey looks 'sad', 'angry', 'does not want to be in the room' or 'doesn't trust me' even though objectively Honey is in a constant state while at work. This communication can open-up conversations about whether the client could be feeling similarly and allow us to begin recognising and processing the cut-off feelings.

Honey grounds people in the present moment (valuable in trauma work) and gives them an experience of touch and closeness. Many homeless people can be quite deprived of contact and the action of stroking and touching a dog has repeatedly been shown to decrease blood pressure, heart rate and lower the autonomic stress responses to fearful situations. Dogs are being more widely used as an adjunct to trauma therapy as well as by crisis responders directly after a traumatic event to reduce traumatic stress and anxiety.⁵

There are so many ways that Honey has advanced our work and made a vital contribution to the support offered to Sarah, other clients and staff. It has been consistently demonstrated that dogs play a vital role in people's physical and mental health and wellbeing and have huge therapeutic utility for scaffolding relationships, bridging engagement, regulating emotions, managing risk and overcoming trauma. The benefit of contact with dogs is arguably even greater for people with multiple complex needs and those experiencing homelessness and unstable housing. Isn't it time that we recognise the power of 'man's best friend' and encourage all accommodation providers to adopt a positive pet policy and reduce the risk of further homelessness?

With special thanks to Sarah and Max.

2 Hawkins, R.D., Williams, J.M., Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Scottish SPCA) (2017). Childhood Attachment to Pets: Associations between Pet Attachment, Attitudes to Animals, Compassion, and Humane Behaviour. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 14(5): 490.

3 Levinson, B.M. (1962). The dog as co-therapist. *Mental Hygiene*, 46, 59-65.

4 Wells, D.L. (2007) Domestic dogs and human health: An overview. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 12, 145-156

5 Johanna Lass-Hennemann, J., Schäfer, S.K., Römer, S., Holz, E., Streb, M., and Michael, T. (2018). Therapy Dogs as a Crisis Intervention After Traumatic Events? – An Experimental Study. *Front Psychol.* Vol. 9, 1627.



Paws For Thought

ENABLING A LIFE OFF THE STREET





PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS & PETS GUIDE

ACCOMMODATION ISSUES

The main reason that homeless people become separated from their pets is that they encounter issues with accommodation. While there are examples of services in Scotland that are working hard to provide housing solutions for people who are homeless and their pets, many of the service users interviewed highlighted ongoing problems.

There is a limited supply of both temporary and permanent accommodation available which allows people to bring their pets with them. Most shelters don't take dogs and the majority of commissioned supported accommodation, bed-and-breakfasts, and temporary furnished flats, exclude pets. Across Scotland, there is simply not enough appropriate provision of services for pet owning users. While the City of Edinburgh Council does specify the ability to take dogs within its commissioning arrangements and has a 'dog-friendly' approach, in Glasgow there are still very few commissioned services that will accept dogs. Feedback in other areas suggests that senior level staff are inclined to be supportive of pet ownership but the messaging to people at the coal face is, lose the dog.

Despite there being limited evidence of animals posing any of these problems, some accommodation providers and almost half of all private landlords are still rejecting pets due to concerns about fleas, bites, smell, mess, neighbour issues or noise. Others list staff members' allergies, or fear of animals, as justification for turning homeless people with pets away. Perceived problems should not justify exclusion.

In addition to there being limited pet-friendly accommodation, there is also insufficient kenneling available for pet owners who may have been offered temporary or emergency housing. Service users are often faced with a gut-wrenching choice – give up your pet or lose your accommodation offer. Many of them, unwilling to sever ties with their pets, will choose to remain on the streets and at risk rather than give up their beloved companions.

Dogs Trust Hope Project recognises the barriers that many homeless dog owners face when trying to access accommodation and the huge impact that this has on their lives. Currently, less than 10% of hostels in the UK are dog-friendly, meaning that many dog owners are denied access to shelter, support and safety, simply because they have a dog. As a result, this dog welfare organisation works closely with hostels and housing providers through their Welcoming Dogs scheme to encourage the adoption of positive pet policies, so that this group of clients, many of which have become entrenched rough sleepers, are no longer marginalised. As part of this work they offer a number of free resources, available on their website, for hostels and other temporary providers that are considering becoming dog-friendly, and they will also carry out telephone or on-site consultations to provide more specific and in-depth advice in this area.



Paws For Thought
ENABLING A LIFE OFF THE STREET



NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES

One of the biggest challenges facing people who wish to remain with their pets is the impact of negative public perception, that is often at odds with their lived-experience. This can be a sensitive and controversial issue to address, notably because the concerns are often coming from people who believe they are acting in the best interest of the animals.

Common Concerns: questions we encounter from members of the public

- » Can someone who is homeless provide food and shelter for an animal in their care?
- » Aren't these peoples' pets more likely to cause disruption, be aggressive to other dogs or even dangerous?
- » How can people who are homeless cover the cost of vets bills, check-ups and vaccinations?
- » Isn't it irresponsible to get a pet if you can't even look after yourself?

" IF PEOPLE TREAT THEIR DOGS WELL, IT DOESN'T MATTER TO THE DOG THAT THEY ARE HOMELESS." (WILLIAM)

There is a feeling among some members of the public that people who are homeless shouldn't have pets because they might not have the capacity to care for them properly. While these are legitimate concerns, based on well-meaning sentiments, they are often the result of misinformation, stereotyping and - in some cases - prejudice.

"...WE FOUND THAT DOGS OWNED BY HOMELESS PEOPLE WERE HEALTHY ANIMALS, LESS LIKELY TO BE OBESE, HAD FEWER BEHAVIOUR ISSUES SUCH AS AGGRESSION TO STRANGERS AND SEPARATION ANXIETY WHEN COMPARED TO DOGS OWNED BY PEOPLE LIVING IN A CONVENTIONAL HOME." (WILLIAMS, D. AND HOGG, S. 2016)

In fact, the evidence suggests that animals in the care of people experiencing homelessness are often in better health than domestic pets. One study⁶ found that dogs belonging to people experiencing homelessness were healthier and had fewer behaviour issues when compared to dogs living in domestic environments. People who are homeless are able to access free veterinary services - including vaccinations, micro-chipping, checkups and de-fleaing/worming - in both Glasgow and Edinburgh and pet food was not a concern for anyone we spoke to.

“

WE SHOULDN'T BE FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN OUR DOGS' HAPPINESS AND A PLACE TO SLEEP.

MEGAN

”

“

{SHE} IS MY FAMILY AND I WILL NEVER ABANDON HER.

MARY (ON SKYE)

”

⁶ Williams, D. and Hogg, S. 2016. The health and welfare of dogs belonging to homeless people. Available at: <https://www.uco.es/ucopress/ojs/index.php/pet/article/view/3998>

NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES CONT'D

One negative stereotype that was highlighted through our conversations with the public, was an association between Staffordshire Bull Terriers and aggression, with some people concerned that these dogs are chosen for their ability to intimidate. The reality is that 'Staffies' are one of the most popular dog breeds in the UK because they are loyal, affectionate and friendly. The reason why they are such a common choice among people who are homeless is perhaps a direct result of their negative image: they are great companions and are relatively cheap to buy.

" SHE'S GOT SUCH A GOOD NATURE! PEOPLE ALWAYS SMILE AT HER AND GIVE HER A STROKE AND THAT MAKES ME FEEL SO PROUD..." (MARY ON SKYE, HER STAFFY)

Other studies have found that dogs in the care of homeless owners are better socialised, less likely to be left alone for significant periods of time and get more exercise than most pet dogs. In 2004, researchers investigating the issue of animal welfare and public opinion⁷ found that people experiencing homelessness are strongly attached to their pets - depending on them for companionship, stability and security - and showed that they were generally more empathetic towards animals than the general public. Furthermore, dogs belonging to people experiencing homelessness were significantly more likely to be quiet on command than domestic dogs and less likely to have significant behavioural problems such as incessant barking.

In contrast with negative perceptions, the animals belonging to people experiencing homelessness are consistently well looked after, exercised appropriately, regularly checked by community vets and socialised. The reality that we have experienced in our work is that, almost without exception, those experiencing homelessness treat the health and happiness of their pets as their highest priority, often putting an animal's well-being before their own... even when that means turning down an opportunity of accommodation.

" 99% OF THE TIME, SERVICE USERS LOOK AFTER THEIR ANIMALS BETTER THAN THEY LOOK AFTER THEMSELVES." (KEVIN BRODIE, MANAGER OF DUNEDIN HARBOUR)

Additionally, research and feedback from organisations and clients registered on the Dogs Trust Hope Project, confirms that many homeless dog owners will not be parted from their pet even for short periods of time. If this does happen, many dogs in these situations experience high levels of separation anxiety when away from their owners. This can be due to the very close relationship built up between the owner and dog – they are accustomed to spending most of their time together and have very specific circumstances related to their relationship.

Furthermore, on a practical level, many of these pets are not used to living within domestic households and routines. In many situations, being parted from their pet can have a detrimental impact on our clients as well as on the dogs. As a result, the Hope Project focuses on keeping people and pets together where possible by working with housing providers to encourage them to adopt positive pet policies.

Feedback from hostels and rehabilitation providers also tells us that clients are more likely to see out their housing and personal rehabilitation journeys successfully with the support of their pet than without them, and many hostels report that having dogs often enables them to help homeless people who would not usually engage with services.

7. Taylor, H., Williams, P. and Gray, D. 2004. Homelessness and dog ownership: an investigation into animal empathy, attachment, crime, drug use, health and public opinion. *Anthrozoos* 17: 353-368





WILLIAM + MISSY CASE STUDY

William, who was twenty last week, spent his childhood in care and dreamt of owning a dog. As soon as he reached eighteen he moved out and got Missy, a friendly, playful Staffie-Frenchie Mix. William says that at this time he had no idea that there were places he could go with Missy:

"I spent about six years sofa-surfing and making-do. It was tough. None of the services I spoke to - not one - ever told me that some accommodations would accept Missy too. And I never thought to ask. Would you? One time, I did three nights on the streets in Edinburgh because I wouldn't let Missy go into the kennels offered by the council'. I didn't sleep though; I spent the whole time worried that someone would steal Missy if I dropped off. That would be the end of me, I couldn't live even for an hour without my dog. She's everything to me."

Through a chance conversation with another service user on a particularly bitter day last year, William found out about the Ypeople project in Edinburgh and their dog-friendly accommodation. That was the turning point for William and Missy:

"It was a massive relief to find staff who understood how much Missy meant to me. Some of the workers I've met just aren't dog people, they say 'we've got no duty towards dogs' but the staff at Ypeople and Castlecliff are brilliant. They know what Missy means to me and they treat us both with respect. It means we get somewhere to stay and I can give Missy the life she deserves. That's all I want."

With the help of Ypeople, William and Missy are now settled at Castlecliff. William is reflective about his experiences and hopes that sharing his story can show the public that Missy, and other dogs belonging to homeless people, are well looked after. He would love to work with dogs one day and try to influence services to become more dog-friendly.

"I know people think that folk get dogs just to beg. Maybe some do but I don't ever beg. Anyway, those owners still love and care for their dogs. If people treat their dogs well, it doesn't matter to the dog that they are homeless. I wish people could see how happy Missy is and how much better my life is because of her. Missy sees the Dogs Trust vets regularly - they love her! She's walked and fed and cuddled every day, we even won a rosette on an agility course! Dogs are just like us. Better than us, really. All they ask for is love."

GETTING IT RIGHT:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING PEOPLE + THEIR PETS

"...WE FOUND THAT DOGS OWNED BY HOMELESS PEOPLE WERE HEALTHY ANIMALS, LESS LIKELY TO BE OBESE, HAD FEWER BEHAVIOUR ISSUES SUCH AS AGGRESSION TO STRANGERS AND SEPARATION ANXIETY WHEN COMPARED TO DOGS OWNED BY PEOPLE LIVING IN A CONVENTIONAL HOME.

WE SUGGEST THAT THESE FINDINGS SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT WHEN DECIDING WHETHER A HOMELESS PERSON WITH A DOG SHOULD BE ALLOWED INTO A HOSTEL AND INDEED THE GENERAL ATTITUDE OF THE PUBLIC TO HOMELESS PEOPLE LIVING WITH A DOG BY THEIR SIDE ON THE STREET." (WILLIAMS, D AND HOGG, S. 2016)

We are confident that, with the right strategies and attitudes, we can transform the experiences of service users with pets. The changes we recommend are largely attitudinal and definitely achievable. The good news is that many services across Scotland are already making positive efforts to actively improve the lives of people who are homeless - and their pets - by providing care and accommodation which respects and prioritises their relationship. These pockets of best practice demonstrate the powerful impact that positive policies for pets can have on our homeless communities.

While there is plenty of excellent work to celebrate, we must still acknowledge that, in several areas, we are failing to provide services that do enough to understand and cater for our most vulnerable and the animals they love. As we have shown, this can have negative consequences, with people finding themselves re-traumatised, rough sleeping and putting themselves in even more danger.

Moving forward, we must work collaboratively as a sector to challenge misconceptions, explore alternative solutions and change the way we operate. As we have seen, if we fail to take care of the animals involved, their owners can easily become victims of further trauma or slip out of the support system altogether.

But we should also approach this problem with a feeling of optimism. The solutions we suggest here are simple, achievable and have the potential to transform the lives of the people we work with, as well as the animals they love.



Paws For Thought
ENABLING A LIFE OFF THE STREET



ROBERT + BUSTER CASE STUDY

Robert and Buster, a small mongrel who “just wants cuddles”, are living proof that some services, such as the Pet Fostering Service Scotland (PFSS) are successfully finding ways to help service users care for their animals while suitable accommodation can be found.

Robert was a self-employed tradesman - an expert in Window restoring - who suddenly found himself without enough work to pay his rent. Reluctant to sign-on (he wanted to work) Robert lost his flat, his deposit and, without money for rent or anywhere to go, found himself sleeping in his car...

“I still can’t believe it all fell apart so easily. There must be so many people, like me, who are just one month away from homelessness. It was such a shock at first and those nights that Buster and I spent sleeping in my car are the lowest point of my life. Even when the council found me a room, they wouldn’t let me take Buster with me so he still had to sleep out there, parked-up out-front. I was so worried about him.


Thank God for the charity PFSS run entirely by volunteers. They got Buster fostered for six weeks while the housing association found me somewhere more permanent to stay. Buster went to two lovely foster homes. As soon as they offered me anything that would take pets I accepted it... and called the PFSS to get Buster back immediately. Charities like the PFSS really have our backs; without them, I would have had to go back to sleeping in the car or face giving Buster up for rehoming. I can’t even think about how hard that choice would be. I feel very grateful and very very lucky right now.”

CONCLUSION



Paws For Thought
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A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a dog's fur, showing various shades of brown, tan, and black. The texture of the fur is visible, and the lighting is soft, creating a warm and intimate atmosphere. The background is out of focus, emphasizing the texture of the fur in the foreground.

In putting together this report, we spoke to many people and their pets. They told us their stories, including their adverse childhood experiences, their adult trauma and their experience of pet ownership. By taking the time to understand the journey they have traveled, we were better positioned to apprehend the power of attachment they feel for their pets. What became clear was the depth of re-traumatisation we are unwittingly imposing on the very people we're working so hard to help. When the solution we offer people is nothing more than a Hobson's choice, we disempower them and often do more harm than good.

But it doesn't have to be this way. In this report, we have highlighted simple, effective and workable solutions that place the person at the very heart of decision making. Our recommendations are achievable for every organisation who takes a trauma-informed approach to supporting people in rebuilding their lives.

We are not, of course, suggesting that everyone who is homeless should have a pet (although there are much worse suggestions out there). But, for those that do, our work in this area informs our passionate conviction that we should be doing everything within our power to support these important, and often transformational, relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PEOPLE WHO MATTER

“

UNDERSTAND THAT DOGS ARE OUR FAMILY... AND WE WILL NEVER ABANDON THEM. **MARY**

”

“

IT'S PRETTY SIMPLE: MORE SERVICES THAT ARE PET FRIENDLY AND MORE PLACES TO LIVE THAT MAKE IT EASY TO BRING YOUR PET WITH YOU... WE SHOULDN'T BE FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN OUR DOGS' HAPPINESS AND A PLACE TO SLEEP. **MEGAN**

”

“

I THINK THAT RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO TAKE THEIR PETS WITH THEM. EVERYONE SHOULD SIGN A PET CONTRACT AND AGREE TO THE RULES. **ALLY**

”

“

NOT ALL HOMELESS PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT THE SUPPORT THAT IS OUT THERE. YOU NEED TO MAKE SURE THEY ARE AWARE OF EXCELLENT CHARITIES LIKE THE PFSS. **ROBERT**

”

“

PET AGREEMENTS ARE GOOD FOR EVERYONE. I'VE SIGNED A PET AGREEMENT AND I'M GLAD FOR IT. IT MAKES ME FEEL GOOD THAT THEY TRUST ME. **WILLIAM**

”

“

STAFF NEED TO BE TRAINED – LIKE THEY ARE AT CASTLECLIFF – SO THAT THEY UNDERSTAND THE ANIMALS AND HOW TO CARE FOR THEM WITH RESPECT.

WISH PEOPLE COULD SEE HOW HAPPY MISSY IS, AND HOW MUCH BETTER MY LIFE IS BECAUSE OF HER.. **WILLIAM**

”



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FOR THOSE SERVICES CONSIDERING BEING PET FRIENDLY, THEY MIGHT REASONABLY:

- » Consider how they are delivering services that are consistent with the National Care Standards, taking a rights based approach to delivering person-centred services (Animal Magic: The benefits of being around and caring for animals in care settings 2018).
- » Challenge negative attitudes and misconceptions towards service users and pets.
- » Introduce pet friendly policies (guides that homeless people must sign and agree to to access accommodation).
- » Support people in their service to meet the rules of pet friendly policies.
- » Consider where existing policies might inadvertently discriminate against people with pets. For example, curfews in homeless accommodation.
- » Support staff wellbeing by introducing comprehensive risk assessments to ensure there are no issues with staff members being allergic to, or afraid of, dogs etc.
- » Improve training for service staff in how to work with animals and working to develop both practical and emotional skills in supporting and understanding the issues facing homeless pet owners.
- » Encourage temporary shelters to have 'dog friendly' communal rooms or dog crates (ground floor/easy access to outside/etc.)

WE ALL COULD...

- » Consider our unconscious biases towards homeless people and pets.
- » Engage with the research around this issue, which suggests that both pets and their homeless owners benefit from relationship and that the animals involved are often looked after better than those in more conventional domestic environments.
- » Support organisations that offer donations, accommodation and support for homeless people with pets.
- » Listen to what homeless people have to say about this issue... the people we spoke to were all deeply passionate about the wellbeing of their animals and the positive impact that pet ownership has had on their lives.

WITH THANKS TO: KEVIN AT DUNEDIN HARBOUR FOR SHARING THEIR PET POLICY WITH US.

MODEL PET AGREEMENT*

All residents, including those without pets, are asked to sign our Pets Agreement. Owning a pet is a responsibility, and a privilege, which we respect and take seriously.

ADMISSIONS:

- » Pets must be declared at the beginning of tenancy. New pets cannot be introduced part-way through a residency.
- » Any resident keeping a pet in the property without consent, or permission, will be in breach of their license agreement.
- » Pets should only be admitted following completion of a satisfactory risk assessment.
- » Visitors cannot bring pets, including dogs, onto the premises.
- » All dogs must be microchipped (in accordance with laws introduced in April 2016). This is provided free of charge by the Dogs Trust Hope Project vet scheme.
- » Residents will receive information from staff on animal welfare and expectations. They should read this carefully and seek assistance if required.

RESIDENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES:

- » Residents are responsible for the behaviour of their pet. They must ensure that minimal nuisance is caused to staff, other residents, visitors and other animals.
- » Owners must not leave their pets in the building alone or in the charge of another resident without staff permission.
- » Dogs may be unrestrained in their owner's private rooms only. They must always be kept on a lead when moving around the property's communal areas and the local community.
- » Dogs must wear a collar and identity tag at all times (Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010).
- » Owners should clean up after their dogs, whether that is within accommodation or the local neighbourhood. Please use the bags provided by staff and ask if your dog needs more. (Failure to comply could result in fines of up to £80 (Dog Fouling (Scotland) Act 2003))
- » Dogs must be muzzled if they have any history of aggression or show any signs of aggression towards people or other animals, both within the accommodation or the local community. Owners whose dogs show any aggression during their stay will be asked to initially seek veterinary advice and then any further training or behaviour assistance as required.



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PET WELFARE:

- » Animals should be fed and watered in resident's private room. Staff can support with provision of food if necessary.
- » Residents must make staff aware of any health concerns they may have about their animal.
- » Animals must be fully vaccinated, wormed and neutered. Residents can apply for a veterinary entitlement card through the Dogs Trust Hope Project in order to access free vet treatment. Please ask staff assistance is required.

Failure to comply with the conditions of this Pet Agreement could lead to managers requesting that you make alternative arrangements for your pet or, in serious circumstances, to your eviction from the property.

Signed: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

THANKS TO DUNEDIN HARBOUR FOR SHARING THEIR PET FRIENDLY AGREEMENT.





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PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS & PETS GUIDE

ALLY + RUFUS CASE STUDY

ALLY + RUFUS CASE STUDY

Ally, who is in her early-twenties and fleeing domestic abuse, is currently staying in supported accommodation. Her dog Rufus, a sweet Jack Russell who won't let go of his favourite ball, is currently staying with her brother. Ally admits that she remained at home with her violent ex-partner for about six months longer than she should have because she didn't know what would happen to her dog if she left. She travels for over two hours every day to visit, walk and play ball with Rufus.

Ally has many suggestions for how services can better support people like her:

"I moved into my flat because I thought I'd be able to take Rufus with me. But I wasn't allowed. The flat is OK. It has the basics but it's still so empty without my boy.

I think that responsible pet owners should be allowed to take their pets with them. Everyone should sign a pet contract and agree to the rules: have the animal vet-checked and registered, house-trained and micro-chipped. You could monitor the dog's behaviour and get it examined by professionals to make sure it's not dangerous to people or other animals. Rufus would pass all these tests; then there'd be no problem.

I have a dog, but I also think that people with other animals - cats, hamsters, fish and others - should be able to take their pets in too. Having your pet with you makes any place feel like home."



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MORE INFORMATION

EXISTING SERVICES AND SUPPORT:

ACCESSING CARE AND TREATMENT FOR YOUR PET

- » Trusty Paws Glasgow - www.thetrustypawsclinic.co.uk
- » All 4 Paws Edinburgh - www.all4pawsedinburgh.org
- » Dogs Trust Hope Project - free veterinary treatment for dogs whose owners are homeless. Aberdeen, Dundee, Dunfermline, Dunoon, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, Stranraer - www.dogstrust.org.uk

ADVICE, INFORMATION AND USEFUL SITES

- » PDSA - vet care for pet owners on benefits - www.pdsa.org.uk
- » Scottish SPCA Rehoming - www.scottishspca.org
- » Pet Fostering Service Scotland PFSS - www.pfss.org.uk
- » Staffordshire Rescue Scotland - www.facebook.com/staffordshirerescue.scotland
- » Staffie Rescue - www.staffierescuescotland.co.uk
- » Staffie Smiles Rescue - www.staffiesmilesrescue.com
- » Any Dog II Do - www.anydogilldorescue.org
- » Cats Protection - www.cats.org.uk
- » Edinburgh dog and Cat home - www.edch.org.uk
- » Give A Dog A Bone - supports older people financially to keep a dog, and the dogs are all rescue) - www.giveadogabone.net
- » Dogs From Shelters - www.rescuescottishpets.co.uk
- » Simon Community Scotland - www.simonscotland.org
- » Dogs Trust Hope Project - www.dogstrust.org.uk

The Dogs Trust runs a veterinary scheme whereby homeless dog owners can sign up through a participating homelessness organisation and access free vet treatment, via a yellow membership at any of the 10 participating vet practices in Scotland. The scheme covers all preventative treatment (flea and worming, microchipping, neutering and vaccinations) as well as most additional emergency and essential treatment the dog may need. Homeless dog owners can register via participating homelessness organisations, which include Ypeople, Edinburgh Access Practice, Streetwork, Whitefoord House, Simon Community, Castlecliff, Dunedin Harbour, All 4 Paws.



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