

Paula Abdul Backs American Humane PAWS program

Initiative promotes on-site housing of pets at women's shelters.

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Paula Abdul is lending her support to American Humane's PAWS program for domestic-violence victims and their pets. The American Humane Association and "American Idol's" Paula Abdul plan to collaborate to spread the message about helping abused women transition into a better life, along with their pets.

Abdul, who's also an platinum-selling recording artist, has signed on as a pro-bono spokeswoman for American Humane's Pets and Women's Shelters program (PAWS). As part of her duties, she'll record public service announcements for the program, as well as promote it in her other media and public appearances.

"The lives of women, children and pets are all at risk when they live in an abusive household, but getting out of that situation can be a difficult one for many reasons. By helping domestic-violence shelters make it possible for their residents to bring pets with them, American Humane's Pets and Women's Shelters Program provides a way for women to keep all of their loved ones together and benefit from the comfort their pets provide as they start a safe, new life together," says Abdul.

The PAWS program is the first national initiative to promote on-site housing of cats and dogs at women's shelters. It was created by Allie Phillips, director of public policy for American Humane, who as a lawyer was aware of the pain that victims go through when they stay in abusive situations because they fear for their pets' safety.

Nearly 85 percent of all women entering domestic violence shelters reported that a partner had threatened, injured or killed the family pet, according to a 1997 study. And because of the few options for safely housing pets from abusive homes, victims often feel they have little choice but to stay and subject themselves, their children and their pets to further violence, according to American Humane.

The goal of PAWS is to enable more domestic violence victims to leave abusive households without leaving their pets behind and at risk. With Abdul's help in getting recognition for the program, American Humane hopes that more people will care about this issue, said Jone Bouman, head of communications for the film and TV unit of American Humane.

Bouman said that the public will get a chance to view Abdul's messages about PAWS on the organization's website and on YouTube in the near future.

"She's known as someone who talks about her own dogs a lot, and how they play an important role in her life," Bouman said. "She is sensitive to these issues."