

American Humane Division Focuses on Human-Animal Bond

Programs to include animal-assisted therapy and humane education.

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The American Humane Association has created a new division with the hopes of enhancing people's understanding about the connection between people and animals.

The Human-Animal Division, which bridges the organization's existing Animal Protection Division and its Children's Division, will focus on programs surrounding issues such as animal-assisted therapy, pets and women's shelters, and humane education.

Initiatives include enhancing health care services and education by providing direct services of trained animal-assisted therapy teams; developing new humane education curricula for use in elementary and college classrooms, as well as for professionals and parents; and incorporating the organization's growing public education about The Link (the correlation between animal abuse, family violence and other forms of community violence) and American Humane's new Pets and Women's Shelters (PAWS) Program, which helps domestic violence shelters accommodate their residents' pets onsite.

"Americans are demanding more research, training and information on the positive impact of the human-animal bond, as well as how to prevent the negative impact of what we call The Link," says Marie Belew Wheatley, president and chief executive officer of American Humane. "Significant quantitative evidence exists that proves the powerful healing potential of animal-assisted therapy on people's lives ... In domestic violence situations, battered women often become prisoners in abusive relationships because they fear vengeful violence to their pets, should they leave them behind.

"Many would flee to safety with their beloved pets, but so many women's shelters don't allow animals. Our Pets and Women's Shelters Program is designed to change that.

"Also, in humane education, we are teaching young people compassion for animals, as well as for their peers, which is especially important in a world that sometimes seems at the boiling point of violent human eruptions every day."

American Humane plans to convene a national summit on the human-animal bond. It will look into forming an animal-assisted therapy coalition involving various other independent programs.