

We have our eye on Allie Phillips

by Elaine O'Connor



As an attorney, Allie Phillips spent eight years prosecuting difficult domestic-violence cases and discovered a disturbing complication. “Too many women stayed in abusive homes because a shelter did not appreciate the bond they had with their pet,” recalls the Alexandria, Virginia, resident. Filled with quiet fury, Phillips vowed to help.

In 2007, when she became the director of public policy for the child and animal protection group American Humane, Phillips made good on that promise. She launched the Pets and Women’s Shelters program (PAWS), which trains shelters to accommodate pets. The need is great: Some 1.3 million American women experience domestic violence each year, and research suggests that up to 48 percent of women will delay leaving an abusive home in order to save an animal. Of course, pets provide an important personal benefit, too. “For someone who has been abused, having a loving pet starts the healing process,” Phillips explains.

When she began, four of the 2,000 family-violence shelters in the U.S. accepted pets. Now 26 do, with seven more on the way. Phillips aims to have at least one PAWS shelter in every state in the next five years. “We have to acknowledge that pets are family members worthy of being protected.”