



June 16, 2010

**CONTACT:**

**Lynn Speral, Rape and Abuse Crisis Center  
Director of Development  
(701) 293-7273**

**Nicole Ellis, YWCA Cass Clay  
Community Relations Coordinator  
(701) 232-2547**

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## **Collaborative effort protects pets of domestic violence victims** *"Safe Paws" empowers women to leave abusive households with their family pets*

For Immediate Release (Fargo, ND) – In an effort to provide safety for the family pets of domestic violence victims, the Fargo Moorhead Humane Society, Rape and Abuse Crisis Center, the YWCA Cass Clay, and a local veterinary clinic have teamed up to create the Safe Paws program. The mission of Safe Paws is to empower domestic violence victims to leave abusive households with their family pets and to provide safety for the animals caught in the middle.

Safe Paws acknowledges the richness of the bond between people and their pets, which often provide unconditional love and comfort to adult domestic violence victims and their children. "It is precisely this bond that can become a tool of violence for an abusive partner who is willing to injure or kill a pet as retaliation or to control and terrorize the victims," stated Nukhet Hendricks, FM Humane Society Executive Director. "That is why the Safe Paws program is not only needed, but absolutely necessary to provide a safe home for the family pets while the victims are getting the help they need."

National statistics show up to 48% of domestic violence victims delay leaving an abusive home out of fear for what will happen to their pets. Because victims understand the extent of the harm that their abusers will likely inflict upon their pets if left behind, many victims remain in violent relationships. "A person in crisis has many difficult decisions to make," said Greg Diehl, Rape and Abuse Crisis Center Executive Director. "We do not want a decision to flee an abusive situation to be based upon whether or not to leave their pet behind."

Safe Paws has been established to alleviate some of the stresses associated with leaving an abusive household. The collaborative effort will provide dogs and cats with a pre-approved temporary foster home for up to 45 days, the same time frame as families staying at the YWCA Emergency Shelter. "This is a critical addition to our programming as we often see families struggle to leave an abusive situation if they are unable to bring along their family pet to safety," explained Erin Prochnow, YWCA Cass Clay Executive Director. "It's important to support families in this way to keep *everyone* safe."

Start-up funds for the Safe Paws program were provided by Jordahl Custom Homes, as well through the Red River Area Learning Center's Philanthropy and Youth program. Safe Paws is currently accepting foster family applicants, as well as donations to the program. For more information, contact Nukhet or Heather at the FM Humane Society at (701) 239-0077.

**Fargo Moorhead Humane Society**

The Fargo Moorhead Humane Society is a privately-funded, non-profit limited access shelter, proving a second chance at happiness to lost, abandoned and owner-surrendered animals. Over the past 44 years, the Fargo Moorhead Humane Society has placed over 16,000 animals in lifelong homes. Find out how you can support the Fargo Moorhead Humane Society, visit <http://www.f-mhumanesociety.org>.

**Rape and Abuse Crisis Center**

The Rape and Abuse Crisis Center provides crisis intervention, advocacy, and counseling services to victims of child sexual abuse, domestic violence, and sexual assault. Services are provided free-of-charge to all persons in need of help. Emphasis is placed upon providing education and prevention programs in an effort to change society's attitudes, norms and behaviors in regard to personal violence. The Rape and Abuse Crisis Center helped 2,917 individuals in 2009.

**YWCA Cass Clay**

The YWCA Cass Clay is a nonprofit organization serving women and children facing homelessness in our community. Programs include emergency shelter, transitional and permanent supportive housing, shelter children's services, education and employment programming, racial justice work and a nationally accredited public childcare center, A Child's World. It is through these programs the YWCA Cass Clay carries out its mission of eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.

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