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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **This Domestic Violence Awareness Month, C.A.R.E.4Paws Fundraises for a Confidential Pet Refuge to Keep Pet Families Together Through Life's Toughest Times**

Community support is needed to launch the region's first emergency pet boarding facility for families escaping abuse or navigating a crisis such as deportation and wildfires.

*Santa Barbara, Calif., September 25, 2025* – More than 10 million pets in the United States live in households affected by domestic violence, making them silent victims of abuse and often a critical factor in whether or not survivors can escape. Because for many individuals facing violence at home, the fear of leaving a beloved animal behind becomes another barrier to safety. October's Domestic Violence Awareness Month brings these stark realities into focus along with the urgent need for effective solutions, like C.A.R.E.4Paws' Safe Haven program and the creation of a confidential, temporary refuge for dogs and cats that ensures people can leave an abusive situation without having to worry about the well-being of their companion animals.



Since 2020, Safe Haven has provided a lifeline for Central Coast pet families exposed to domestic violence by offering anonymous foster care or boarding for pets. Many survivors delay seeking help, return to their abuser or avoid seeking assistance altogether because they fear for their pets' safety. This fear is often well-founded, as 71% of survivors entering domestic violence shelters report that their abuser had harmed, threatened, tortured or killed their pets, according to data from Humane World for Animals.



Safe Haven, in partnership with agencies such as Domestic Violence Solutions for Santa Barbara County (DVS), provides a way for survivors to leave abusive homes without being forced to abandon their pets. Since 2020, Safe Haven has supported dozens of families, encouraged by evidence that return rates to abusive partners are significantly lower when survivors can keep their animals.

"For many survivors, pets are a source of comfort, stability and unconditional love, and abusers often exploit that bond, threatening to harm animals to control partners and other family members," says Isabelle Gullö, C.A.R.E.4Paws' Cofounder

and Executive Director. “Recognizing the deep connection between people and their pets is key to protecting both from harm and giving families a real chance to break free from abuse.”

To expand on the success of Safe Haven, C.A.R.E.4Paws is actively fundraising to build the region’s first anonymous Pet Refuge, a temporary boarding facility for pets of domestic violence survivors and, as space allows, for pets of individuals and families navigating other critical life events, including deportation, hospitalization, military deployment, or displacement from disasters, such as wildfires.



The Pet Refuge will house a prefabricated building with 10 spacious indoor/outdoor kennels for dogs, complemented by a 40,000-square-foot exercise yard where they can run, play and decompress. Cats will be cared for in a separate structure outfitted with home-like rooms to create a sense of normalcy and peace. During their stay, every pet will have access to veterinary services through C.A.R.E.4Paws’ mobile clinic team as well as grooming, enrichment and training onsite.

Unlike animal shelters or rescue groups, the goal is not adoption but reunification once families are safe and stable. The Pet Refuge will fill a critical gap at a time when foster placements and boarding options remain scarce—especially for larger dogs and multiple-pet households—and local shelters are crowded.

Tina Ballue, DVS’ Director of Development, shares her enthusiasm for the refuge, which will not only provide safe shelter for pets, but bring hope for survivors.

“At DVS, we know that healing begins with safety—and for many survivors, that includes their pets,” Ballue says. “C.A.R.E.4Paws’ Safe Haven program and the Pet Refuge are compassionate and critical resources that ensure no one has to choose between escaping violence and protecting a beloved companion. We’re proud to stand with C.A.R.E.4Paws in keeping families—human and animal—together through life’s most difficult transitions.”

Providing families with the reassurance that their pets are safe, cared for and loved makes a significant difference, Gullö says, who emphasizes that the creation of the Pet Refuge is only possible with the community’s support. “If we work together to make this happen, we can ensure that no family has to face a life crisis while also having to worry about their beloved animals.”



C.A.R.E.4Paws welcomes support in many forms, including refuge sponsorships with naming opportunities for kennels and the play yard; donations toward veterinary services, food, supplies, grooming, and dog training; volunteering; and in-kind contributions of fencing and construction materials. The organization is also seeking foster families to provide temporary homes for Safe Haven animals until the refuge opens and for pets who need an in-home environment to heal and thrive.

To donate, visit [care4paws.org/donate](https://care4paws.org/donate). To learn more about the Pet Refuge project, visit [care4paws.org/petrefuge](https://care4paws.org/petrefuge). Survivors seeking support can contact C.A.R.E.4Paws at 805-335-7524 or [safehaven@care4paws.org](mailto:safehaven@care4paws.org). Anyone in immediate danger should call 9-1-1.

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### **About C.A.R.E.4Paws**

C.A.R.E.4Paws—short for Community Awareness, Resources & Education—works to reduce pet overpopulation and improve pet family welfare. Its critical services include free and low-cost spays/neuters, veterinary care and vaccine events in C.A.R.E.4Paws' mobile veterinary clinics; distribution of pet food and supplies; support for pet families exposed to domestic violence through Safe Haven; and Paws Up For Pets humane education.

C.A.R.E.4Paws has worked in Santa Barbara County since 2009, and in 2022, the nonprofit expanded its mobile clinic services to San Luis Obispo County. To learn more or to make a contribution, visit [care4paws.org](https://care4paws.org). Follow us on Facebook at @care4paws, YouTube @care4paws, Instagram @care4pawsSB, and LinkedIn @care4paws-inc.