

Paula Abdul Supports Dogs in Women's Shelters

The singer has teamed up with American Humane to promote the PAWS program.

Posted: December 15, 2008, 5 a.m. EST

The American Humane Association and award-winning recording artist 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 a judge for the top-rated "American Idol" reality TV show, 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 various other media and public appearances.

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 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. By welcoming Abdul to help the program gain recognition, 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 YouTube channel 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," she said. "She is sensitive to these issues."

"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," Abdul said in a statement. "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."