

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318399496>

Animal Hoarding

Chapter · May 2017

DOI: 10.1057/978-1-137-43183-7_6

CITATIONS

6

READS

1,777

4 authors, including:



Arnold Arluke

Northeastern University

154 PUBLICATIONS 2,543 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



Randall Lockwood

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

52 PUBLICATIONS 1,184 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Facilitators and Barriers to Diffusing Responsible Guardianship [View project](#)



Bats, Cats, and Other Animals in the Work of Edward Gorey [View project](#)

Animal Hoarding

Arnold Arluke, Gary Patronek, Randall Lockwood
and Allison Cardona

Introduction

In the winter of 1875, the *New York Sun* published a profile of Rosalia Goodman, a woman living with over 80 cats in a dilapidated tenement on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. According to the article, she made up her mind to ‘take care of all the cats I could when people turned them out in the cold to starve.’ (Anonymous 1875, p. 4). The description of her home sounds like contemporary cases:

A. Arluke (✉)

Department of Sociology, Northeastern University, Boston, MA USA
e-mail: aarluke@gmail.com

G. Patronek

Independent Consultant; Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, Tufts University, MA, USA
e-mail: gary.patronek@tufts.edu

R. Lockwood

Forensic Sciences and Anti-Cruelty Projects, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animal, New York, NY, USA
e-mail: randall.lockwood@aspca.org

A. Cardona

Cruelty Intervention Advocacy (CIA) Program, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animal, New York, NY, USA
e-mail: allison.cardona@aspca.org

... cats are perceptible on every hand... cats with eyes, without eyes, earless and cats of every description skulk in the black nooks or rush out and disappear in sudden panic. And all the time, from sunrise to sunrise, an aromatic and voluminous cloud of feline exhalation is rafted down the stairs into the street (Anonymous 1875, p. 4).

Such accounts occur in modern media on an almost daily basis (Arluke et al. 2002) yet the impact of the accumulation of large numbers of animals on human health and animal welfare has only recently been recognized as a serious concern. The issue was first described in the scientific/medical literature by Worth and Beck (1981), who characterized it as ‘multiple animal ownership’ in describing 31 case histories of problems presented to the New York City Department of Health and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). Such individuals were later characterized as ‘animal collectors’ in publications aimed at animal welfare professionals (Lockwood and Cassidy 1988) and veterinarians (Lockwood 1994). Patronek (1999) and the Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium (HARC) introduced the term ‘animal hoarding’ as a designation that was more consistent with existing medical, psychological and psychiatric nomenclature since the term ‘collecting’ more appropriately described accumulations associated with benign hobbies (Frost et al. 2000; Nordsletten and Mataix-Cols 2012). Animal hoarding was formally defined by the following criteria (Patronek 1999; HARC 2002):

- Having more than the typical number of companion animals.
- Failing to provide even minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation, shelter and veterinary care, with this neglect often resulting in illness and death from starvation, spread of infectious disease, and untreated injury or medical condition.
- Denial of the inability to provide this minimum care and the impact of that failure on the animals, the household and human occupants of the dwelling.
- Persistence, despite this failure, in accumulating and controlling animals.

Subsequently, there was increased attention from other professional disciplines to the widespread problems caused by animal hoarding. These problems have been addressed by lawyers (Patronek 2001), social workers (Fleury 2007), adult protective service workers (Boat and Knight 2001; Lockwood 2002), firefighters (Merrill 2012) and others.

Nature of the Problem

Prevalence

There is currently no centralized record keeping for animal cruelty cases in the USA (Lockwood 2008). In 2015 the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) added animal cruelty to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) which tracks incidence of severe animal neglect, including animal hoarding—but it is anticipated that it will require at least five years for useful data to be collected for analysis. Animal hoarding cases were once considered rare. The American Psychiatric Association (2013) indicates that hoarding disorder may affect 2–5 % of the adult population, a minimum of five million individuals in the USA (based on 2 % of adult US Census). Since about 68 % of US households have pets, that suggests a potential population of 3.4 million individuals with hoarding disorder who have close access to animals; how many of these live with multiple pets is unknown. Estimates based on actual caseloads handled by animal protection authorities are significantly lower. Original estimates suggested 2,000 to 3,000 new animal hoarding cases per year in the USA (Patronek 1999, 2006; Patronek and Nathanson 2009).

A survey of health officers in Massachusetts queried about reported cases of all types of hoarding (object and animal) estimated the five-year prevalence rate of 5.3 per 100,000 per year (Frost et al. 2000). The authors reported that animals were hoarded in roughly a third of these cases, which suggest about 1.75 cases per 100,000 per year that involved animals, although the authors indicated under-reporting was likely. Nevertheless, this figure, if extrapolated to the entire US population, would indicate a minimum of 5,100 reported cases per year. Presuming an average of 50 animals per case, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that nearly a quarter million animals are subjected to this form of abuse each year.

Another estimate can be based on informal inquiries of animal care and control agencies. Of the 13,000 animal sheltering organizations in the USA, approximately 2,500 have the responsibility to investigate reports of animal abuse or neglect. At animal hoarding workshops at national conferences for animal welfare or animal care and control agencies (including National Animal Care and Control Association and Animal Care Expo) one of us (RL) has regularly asked how many attendees have responded to an animal hoarding case in the last year. Virtually all agencies with investigation authority report that they have responded to at least one case and some report responding to 10 or more cases in the last year. This would suggest that the minimum of 5,100 cases

per year calculated above is of the right order of magnitude, although it is possible that the actual number of cases is significantly higher.

Animal hoarding is not limited to any one culture or country. Reports have been published regarding cases in Alberta, Canada (Avery 2005); Manitoba, Canada (Refinish 2009); New South Wales, Australia (Joffe et al. 2014); Victoria, Australia (Ockenden et al. 2014); Belgrade, Serbia (Marijana and Dimitrijevic 2007) and Spain (Calvo et al. 2014).¹

Severity

Animal cruelty in general has increasingly been viewed as a serious problem as evidenced by stronger anti-cruelty laws, increasing prosecutions and growing concern about the connection between some animal cruelty offenses and the potential for other forms of criminal activity and interpersonal violence (Phillips and Lockwood 2013). Animal hoarding is increasingly viewed as a serious problem by law enforcement and animal protection professionals. The first concern is the large number of animals involved. Cases involving hundreds of companion animals are common.

Another concern is the duration of suffering to which animals in hoarding situations may be exposed. Many live a life where their basic needs for food, water, shelter, a sanitary environment, safety, social interaction and veterinary care are rarely or inconsistently met, causing extended suffering before they eventually die a slow and lingering death from starvation or disease.

Hoarding can also have long-term behavioral effects on animals even after they are removed from the situation and placed in loving homes. McMillan (2013) surveyed 388 adopters of dogs from hoarding cases using the Canine Behavioral Assessment and Research Questionnaire (CBARQ) that had been used in earlier studies of rescued puppy mill dogs. (McMillan et al. 2011). At the time of removal from the hoarding environment, 88 % of the dogs were characterized as having behavioral, emotional or psychological problems. Upon follow-up several months later, 44 % were still reported to have moderate to severe behavior problems.

Yet another concern about animal hoarding cases is the enormous cost associated with responding. Housing, treating and caring for animals rescued from hoarding situations can be extremely expensive, particularly if they must be held as 'evidence' for a prolonged period (Bernstein and Wolf 2005).

¹ Although there are many press reports from the UK, the authors are unaware of any similar UK case summaries in the literature.

There are unique human problems associated with animal hoarding cases as well. In some animal-hoarding situations minor children, dependent elderly persons, or disabled adults are present and are also victims of this behavior. Serious unmet human health needs are commonly observed, and the conditions often meet the criteria for adult self-neglect, child neglect, or elder abuse (Nathanson 2009). Animal hoarding also creates risk of injury or zoonotic disease transmission to occupants of the property, as well as responders.

Demographics

Animal hoarders come from varied backgrounds, somewhat consistent with the stereotype of the neighborhood ‘cat lady’ who is pictured as an older, single female, living alone. However, hoarding among men and younger women, as well as couples, is also often encountered. Worth and Beck (1981) reported that 70 % of the sample of 31 hoarders were unmarried women who had cats, while in another study (Patronek 1999) 76 % of the sample were women, 46 % were over 60 years of age, most were single, divorced, or widowed and cats were most commonly involved. In another study (HARC 2002), 83 % were women, with a median age of 55 years, and nearly three-quarters of the sample were single, widowed or divorced. In the review of animal hoarders in Australia (Joffe et al. 2014), most were female (72.4 %) and 79 % were 40–64 years of age at their first offence.

Animal hoarding behaviour cuts across all demographic and socio-economic boundaries. Hoarding behavior has been discovered among doctors, nurses, public officials, teachers, college professors, social workers and veterinarians, as well as among a broad spectrum of socio-economically disadvantaged individuals (Patronek et al. 2006).

Animals and Objects

Cats and dogs are the most commonly hoarded species, but wildlife, exotic animals and farm animals have been involved. One study of 71 animal hoarders (HARC 2002) found that approximately 82 % of the cases involved cats, 55 % dogs, 17 % birds, 6 % reptiles, 11 % small mammals, 6 % horses and 6 % cattle, sheep or goats. A review of 56 cases of animal hoarding involving prosecution of the hoarder noted that 46 % of cases involved dogs, 34 % involved cats, with the remainder of the cases evenly divided between birds, farm animals, rabbits and horses. The lower incidence of cat hoarding in this

review suggests that cases involving dogs are more likely to attract prosecutorial attention, particularly if dead animals are found at the scene (Berry et al. 2005).

Animal hoarding frequently co-occurs with the hoarding of objects. Case reports indicate that between 31 % and 100 % of individuals who hoard animals also hoard inanimate possessions (Steketee et al. 2011). There are some notable differences between object and animal hoarding. Most animal-hoarding cases involved squalid living conditions, while only a minority of object-hoarding cases did so (Rasmussen et al. 2014). Men and women are evenly represented in cases of object hoarding, whereas animal hoarders are predominantly female (Steketee and Frost 2014). Although both conditions are characterized by poor insight, responding to animal hoarding cases is often complicated by animal hoarders' delusional beliefs about special abilities to communicate with, understand and/or provide care for animals (Frost and Steketee 2014).

Types of Hoarders

Animal hoarding appears to be more complex than object hoarding in the forms it can take and the range of underlying motivations. Several useful categories have been identified that go beyond the original basic definition (Frost et al. 2015; Patronek 1999; Patronek et al. 2006).

The *overwhelmed caregiver* minimizes rather than denies animal care problems that result from economic, social, medical or domestic changes, such as loss of job or health, but cannot remedy these problems. Despite their strong attachment to animals, the overwhelmed caregiver's compromised situation gradually leads to a deterioration of animal care.

The *rescue hoarder* often presents the largest and most costly problem to law enforcement and animal control agencies. Such cases often involve large numbers of animals, sometimes in excess of 500 cats or dogs. Virtually all of the large-scale animal hoarding cases responded to by the ASPCA involve 'rescue' situations. The rescue hoarder has a missionary zeal to save all animals. They also actively seek to acquire animals because they feel that only they can provide adequate care and because they oppose euthanasia. They view legitimate animal care and control agencies as the enemy and often disparage conventional veterinary medicine and make use of unconventional and ineffective approaches to medical care—if any. Several qualities differentiate rescue hoarders from individuals involved in legitimate animal rescue efforts (Lockwood 2011) including the failure of rescue hoarders to keep good records, have stable staff and dedicated veterinary services, and their failure to refuse new intake if overcrowded.

Finally, the *exploiter hoarder* is the most challenging type to manage. Considered to be sociopaths and/or to have severe personality disorders, their lack of empathy for people or animals means they are indifferent to harm they cause them. They may be motivated by financial gain from soliciting funds that are not used for animal care. Exploiter hoarders can be charismatic and articulate, presenting an appearance that suggests competence to the public, the media, officials and even the courts.

Diagnosis and Etiology

In the last 20 years, animal hoarding has gone from being largely ignored by mental health professionals to being considered a complex and potentially serious mental disorder. The DSM-5 added 'Hoarding Disorder (HD)' as an official diagnosis in 2013. Because animals are legally considered property the hoarding of animals would appear to qualify as HD, although this question is not yet resolved in the psychiatric literature (Frost et al. 2015). Since diagnosis of animal hoarding in the DSM is *descriptive* and does not account for etiology, we will explore various models that have been suggested for the development and expression of this behavior.

Addiction Models

When animal hoarding was first recognized as a problem for the animal welfare community, it was noted that parallels with addiction seem to fit the thinking and behavior of many hoarders (Lockwood 1994). Hoarders are preoccupied with animals, are in denial over their problems, have many excuses for their situation, may be socially isolated, claim to be persecuted and neglect themselves and their surroundings. Other evidence consistent with the addictions model is the similarity of hoarders to people suffering from impulse control problems, such as compulsive shopping (Frost 1998), compulsive gambling (Meagher et al. 1999) and significantly higher levels of smoking (Raines et al. 2014). Philip Flores, in his book *Addiction as an Attachment Disorder*, provides suggestions of how the addiction model is easily reconciled with attachment theory (discussed below).

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Hoarding was initially conceptualized as a variant of obsessive-compulsive disorder. However, additional research suggested a more complex pattern of overlap with attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder, organic brain disease,

depression, anxiety and personality disorders, eventually leading to the designation of Hoarding Disorder as a distinct malady in DSM-5 (Bloch et al. 2014; Mataix et al. 2010; Pertusa et al. 2010; Tolin 2011; Tolin et al. 2011).

Attachment Theory

Animal hoarding is, by definition, associated with pathologically strong attachments to animals and is usually accompanied by a history of disordered or inadequate attachments to people. Refining what has been learned, Patronek and Nathanson (2009) and Nathanson and Patronek (2011) have woven these disparate models and approaches together, and rather than applying diagnostic labels to animal hoarders, have suggested that the problem is better understood by focusing on the thoughts and actions exhibited by hoarders. Animal hoarders often manifest traits such as suspiciousness, mistrust, fear of abandonment leading to unstable and intense interpersonal relationships, feelings of emptiness, difficulty with anger, and occasional paranoia. People having these traits often come from families where they had a history of unresolved grief due to tragic, untimely deaths or losses and emotional or physical abuse (Cassidy and Mohr 2001; Lyons-Ruth et al. 2006). Absence of nurturing relationships in childhood cause these people to have a deep sense of aloneness in adulthood that can never be filled.

Preliminary research (HARC 2002) suggested that hoarders grew up in households with inconsistent parenting, in which animals may have been the only stable feature. The vast majority report feelings of insecurity and disruptive experiences in early life, including frequent relocations, parental separation and divorce and isolation from peers.

Self-Psychology

Animal hoarders rely heavily on their connection to animals for their definition of self and self-worth, thus insights from the theoretical framework that focuses on that process can be helpful in understanding the disordered cognitive mechanisms that allow hoarding to rise to extreme levels of animal neglect coupled with lack of insight into the conditions by the hoarder. The process by which disordered attachments to people can develop into hoarding behavior in general and animal hoarding in particular is consistent with psychodynamic concepts such as self-psychology (Brown 2011).

Brown (2011) notes that animals can provide an ideal resource for building a strong, idealized but ultimately erroneous self-image. They cannot

disagree with a human's interpretation of how they feel or what they want but the hoarder can believe that animals feel and think exactly like them and want what they want, whether or not they actually do.

Other Factors

Genetics

Family studies show that object hoarding is more common among first-degree relatives of people with hoarding when compared with non-hoarding controls. Pedigree and twin studies suggest that hoarding has a strong genetic component and complex pattern of inheritance. However, most of these studies have involved subjects with OCD or other disorders in addition to hoarding symptoms. Currently, there is a lack of replication of previous genetic studies (Hirschtritt and Mathews 2014). There have been no studies to date specifically looking at possible genetic contributors specific to animal hoarding.

Neurophysiology

Pathological hoarding behavior potentially involves disruption of brain mechanisms associated with decision-making, general cognitive function, impulsivity, assignment of emotional significance to possessions and anxiety associated with decision-making or separation from such objects or animals. The earliest studies of brain function in hoarding patients (Saxena et al. 2004) found that, compared to non-hoarding OCD patients, OCD patients with compulsive hoarding had significantly lower glucose metabolism in the dorsal anterior and posterior cingulate gyrus. Contemporary studies continue to elucidate other brain regions associated with hoarding symptoms, (Slyne and Tollin 2014), but there have, as yet, been no analyses specific to animal hoarding. Recent work has demonstrated how the pro-social hormone oxytocin increases in both dogs and people with certain forms of contact, so it is possible that there may eventually be a neurophysiological explanation for animal hoarding (Beetz et al. 2012; Nagasawa et al. 2015).

Infectious Disease/ Parasites

There have been periodic media reports drawing a potential connection between hoarding behavior and infection with the protozoan parasite *Toxoplasma gondii* commonly associated with cats and cat feces (Gibson 2015). The specific

association of *Toxoplasmosis* with animal hoarding is questionable. The definitive hosts of *T. gondii*, and the only animals capable of spreading the parasite to humans or other warm-blooded animals are felines. However, many hoarding cases involve non-feline or non-mammalian species (for example dogs, birds, reptiles). It has been difficult to demonstrate *T. gondii* in the brain of patients with mental disorders, particularly schizophrenia, perhaps because the effect of the parasite, if real, is likely to be early in life at the neurodevelopmental stage rather than at the age of actual illness onset (Fekadu et al. 2010). To date, there have been no specific studies of *T. gondii* seroprevalence levels in animal hoarders.

Societal Factors

In many parts of America, abandoned and stray animals remain a big problem in part due to irresponsible breeding of pets that produces millions of unwanted animals (Benniston 2015). Euthanasia practiced by open-admission shelters became a way to manage this overpopulation problem, since not all of these unwanted animals could be adopted or kept indefinitely in their cages. However, there has been growing pressure to adopt a 'no-kill' philosophy which has contributed to the growing number of 'rescue hoarder' cases that are investigated (Benniston 2015).

People in the community, knowing the hoarder's reputation for wanting any animals, may drop off unwanted pets at the hoarder's home, thereby feeding their ever-growing collection. In this way, the neighborhood 'cat lady' or 'dog lady' serve as a convenient, impromptu shelter where there will be no guilt imparted by staff members for dropping off unwanted animals (Frommer and Arluke 1999) and no risk of euthanasia.

The many factors that can be associated with animal hoarding are not mutually exclusive. Genetic predisposition and/or neurological impairment may interact with disrupted childhood attachments, abuse, trauma or other triggers which, coupled with societal reinforcement and reliance on interactions with animals to create a positive self-image, creates conditions conducive to animal hoarding.

Responses to Animal Hoarding

Discovery, Investigation and Documentation

The complex nature of hoarding cases makes them difficult to investigate and to resolve. Jurisdiction for these cases in the USA cross many state and local agencies and departments, including mental health, police, humane law

enforcement, zoning, sanitation, fish and wildlife, child welfare, adult protective services, animal control, public health, building safety and social services.

Cases typically come to the attention of authorities because of complaints from neighbours or visitors. The primary problems reported about hoarders are unsanitary conditions, 'strong,' 'obnoxious' odours or 'stench,' and occasionally nuisance problems such as 'barking loudly' or observations of stray animals around the property. In the case of rescue hoarders, complaints often come from volunteers or local animal control organizations who may have been asked to transfer animals to the 'rescue' and become aware of deteriorating conditions (Lockwood and Eyre 2011).

Hoarders rarely voluntarily allow animal control or law enforcement officials to enter their premises and often take precautions to conceal conditions by covering windows with newspapers or foil. It is important to document such actions since it speaks to the hoarder's awareness that conditions were unacceptable and needed to be hidden. Several agencies have adopted checklists that allow a variety of professionals to flag hoarding problems involving animals and the environment (for example, NYC Mayor's Alliance 2014).

The response to a hoarding situation should involve representatives from the various agencies mentioned above. In addition, veterinarians can play key roles in the investigation, documentation and prosecution of an animal hoarding case. A veterinarian may be called upon to provide triage decisions at the scene of a hoarding situation, deciding which animals require immediate treatment or euthanasia for humane reasons and which may be treated later. The veterinarian will play a central role in working with humane and law enforcement agents to document and testify to the condition of the animals, the nature and extent of illness and/or injury of each (Sinclair et al. 2006).

Seizing animals in hoarding cases is a complicated, expensive, labour intensive and emotionally upsetting process and potentially dangerous. The cost of managing these cases, including the seizure itself, can run into the tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars. If the animals are not immediately surrendered to a responding agency, there are a variety of proceedings that might take place to minimize the amount of time they need to be held prior to disposition including custody hearings or other civil procedures, guardianship or appointment of a 'special master' and posting of surety bonds. The common defense argument that animals should be held 'as evidence' until the case is resolved should be vigorously challenged. Any legal case will focus on the condition of the animals at the time of seizure. With proper care, both the physical and behavioral condition of animals rescued from a hoarding environment

will change dramatically within days of removal. It should be argued that the detailed medical and behavioral evidence recorded regarding the initial conditions of the animals at the time of rescue can be reviewed by defense experts and that the condition of animals held for more than several weeks is of limited evidentiary value.

Alternatives to Prosecution

One therapeutic model that could serve as an alternative to prosecution is *relapse prevention*, a cognitive-behavioral approach with the goal of identifying and preventing high-risk situations that has generally been applied to substance abuse, obsessive-compulsive behavior and sexual offending (Witkiewitz and Marlatt 2004). However, animal hoarding presents significant challenges to this approach. In an analysis of relapse episodes obtained from clients with a variety of addictive behavior problems, three high-risk situations were associated with most of the relapses reported (Marlatt and Gordon 1985). They were negative emotional states, interpersonal conflict and social pressure, as well as cognitive distortions such as denial and rationalization. All of these obstacles are commonly encountered in dealing with animal hoarders.

Another intervention model that can be an appropriate response to animal hoarding cases is *harm reduction*, a range of policies designed to reduce the harmful consequences associated with various human behaviors, both legal and illegal. This approach accepts the fact that it may not be possible to stop the 'risky' behavior and instead attempts to prevent harm through close monitoring and 'wraparound' support services. In the case of animal hoarding, this would include frequent interaction with the client, spay/neuter assistance, veterinary care, environmental clean-up and connection to various social services, a model already used by many humane agencies.

Many communities have recognized the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to these situations and have established hoarding task forces that also include animal welfare professionals. Cooperation of a broad spectrum of municipal agencies and social service organizations can optimize the resolution of hoarding cases. Desirable members of such a task force would include representatives from animal control, public health and mental health agencies, child welfare and adult protective services, zoning and fire prevention officials, and veterinarians (Patronek 2001). This can be a very important step to overcome potential conflicts of interest and concerns about

confidentiality (Clancy 2014; Patronek et al. 2006; Steketee et al. 2011). Over 85 hoarding task forces have been established in communities large and small, urban and rural in the USA, Canada, Australia and Europe (Bratiotis and Woody 2014).

In New York City, there has been a concerted effort to provide a coordinated response to hoarding cases. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) has instituted a Cruelty Intervention Advocacy program that combines the talents of social workers, veterinary professionals, animal behaviorists, law enforcement agents, and others to work with a wide array of human and animal service agencies to respond to cases at the earliest possible stage and monitor them on a regular basis. In addition to the ASPCA, agencies involved in this collective effort have included the New York City Health Department, Animal Control, Environmental Affairs, Agriculture Department, Humane Law Enforcement, Mental Health Services, Child Protection, Adult Protective Services, Housing Authority, Department of Homeless Services, Human Resources Administration, Community Affairs Bureau, and many other social service agencies. Between 2010 and 2013 the ASPCA, working with these partners, handled more than 100 hoarding cases. Of these, 67% involved women while 24% involved male owners and 9% were couples. Cats comprised 76% of the cases while 13% involved dogs (Colangelo 2013). This approach has proven to be an effective tool to respond to many hoarding cases without invoking the criminal justice system. The program employs a holistic approach to working with animal hoarders, engaging clients to build trust and voluntarily agree to services and/or relinquishment as appropriate. It also furthers the recognition that animal hoarding is a human welfare, animal welfare and community problem—not just an animal control issue.

Legal Actions

The goals of legal intervention into animal hoarding cases are to remove animals and dependent humans from harmful environments and provide treatment, to take steps that will reduce the likelihood of a recurrence of the problem, and to hold those responsible accountable for their actions and, where possible, seek restitution.

A major advantage of prosecution is that the criminal justice system may provide the leverage necessary to broker a wide variety of solutions, including

those that do not involve conviction. However, this approach does not allow intervention before a provable crime has occurred, and until such evidence becomes available, the hoarding behavior may continue unabated (Patronek and Ayers 2014). Unlike child protection, there are currently no mechanisms in place to intervene at the earliest indications that caregiving may be deteriorating. Constitutional protections against unreasonable search and seizure often prevent intervention until environmental conditions and animal suffering are extreme.

The frustrations and difficulty of taking serious legal action against animal hoarders has led some jurisdictions to pass laws specifically creating the 'crime' of animal hoarding, based primarily on the definition used by HARC. Currently Hawaii and Illinois are the only states with such specific anti-hoarding laws, although similar legislation has been introduced in other states. There has been little support for such legislation among mental health and animal welfare advocates who see such laws as unnecessary and even counterproductive, given existing animal cruelty laws. In addition, such laws are viewed as criminalizing a mental health diagnosis. In reviewing the issue, Schwalm (2009) notes that such statutes employ arcane, subjective language that would likely be found unconstitutionally vague.

Many of the problems associated with hoarding may not rise to the level of criminal animal cruelty offenses but may be actionable as violations of local ordinances including sanitation codes, limits on animal ownership, licensing and vaccination requirements and housing codes. However, addressing only these superficial violations cannot accomplish the objectives of intervention and do nothing about the underlying mental health issues that may have initiated the problem. By definition, animal hoarding cases involve animal neglect thus almost always will include potential violations of misdemeanor animal cruelty laws. More serious felony level charges, which can carry significant fines, probation, and potential incarceration, usually require the presence of intent to cause harm or to torture (Arkow and Lockwood 2013). Animal hoarders almost always assert that they did not mean to harm the animals. Such purported lack of intent can make it hard to seek felony-level penalties, even if many animals have suffered or died. However, the presence of dead animals can increase the likelihood that felony charges may be filed (Berry et al. 2005). In cases involving rescue hoarders posing as legitimate charities or exploitative hoarders seeking to defraud people into providing money that never goes to animal care, the prosecution may use the financial aspects of these cases to add additional charges such as failure to pay taxes, misuse of funds or fraud (Sylvester and Baranyk 2011a, 2011b).

The recent inclusion of Hoarding Disorder in the DSM-5 may lead to greater use of ‘mental health’ or ‘problem solving’ courts to address the animal hoarding rather than conventional animal cruelty criminal proceedings. Such courts maintain a specialized docket established for defendants with mental illness that substitutes a problem-solving approach for the traditional adversarial criminal court processing. Participants are identified through mental health screening and assessments and voluntarily participate in a judicially supervised treatment plan developed jointly by a team of court staff and mental health professionals. This approach may be useful for some animal hoarding cases (Muller-Harris 2010), however, a therapeutically-oriented intervention or negotiation may not work with certain types of hoarders who are exploitative, irrational or uncooperative.

Sentencing

Animal protection and mental health professionals should advise the courts on the desired components of sentencing in animal hoarding cases. Without such guidance, some judges are inclined to make naïve recommendations, such as requiring a convicted hoarder to do community service at an animal shelter. A more egregious lapse in judgement is to order any apparently healthy animals returned to the offender, presumably under the assumption that because those animals have not yet shown obvious signs of physical harm, they are not suffering or at risk.

The first objective is to ensure that animals are safe and receive any needed medical or behavioral treatment, which is usually accomplished by removing animals from the harmful conditions in which they have been found, if this has not already been accomplished by a voluntary surrender or other pre-conviction court orders. Often courts will also issue a ‘no-contact’ order prohibiting the convicted hoarder from owning, possessing or being in proximity to animals for the duration of probation. It may be desirable to allow the hoarder to keep a small number of neutered animals that are subject to periodic inspection by animal control authorities. In the case of rescue hoarders posing as a formal organization, the courts may require the dissolution of the organization in addition to the surrender of the animals. Since hoarding cases places a great financial burden on responding agencies, it is desirable for courts to order reasonable restitution for these costs. However, even when ordered, such restitution is rarely paid (Berry et al. 2005).

Several dozen states have legislated mandatory or discretionary psychological evaluation of persons convicted of animal maltreatment, including animal hoarding (Phillips and Lockwood 2013). In principle, this seems to be a worthwhile step. In reality, although courts may order evaluation or counseling for animal hoarders, the goals of such an evaluation are not specified, and no validated therapy for animal-hoarding disorder is currently available. Furthermore, it is unknown what qualifications and skills the therapist or evaluator would need to have, what the expected outcomes of the process would be (for example, is a 'cure' even possible), how long the process might take, what should be done with the animal victims while a convicted offender would be in treatment, and whether convicted offenders could ever be trusted to provide a safe environment for animals in the future.

In addition, most individuals who have been adjudicated for animal hoarding are reluctant to participate in therapy and resistant to change, making this strategy difficult to enforce even if treatment were available (Frost et al. 2000; Nathanson 2009). This seems to be a case where laws are vague and far ahead of clinical mental health practice. Even if hoarders visit therapists, their cognitive distortions can complicate treatment and frustrate practitioners. A common characteristic of animal hoarders is their use of denial or other methods of justification for their situation and the refusal to acknowledge that a problem exists (Nathanson 2009; Patronek 1999). Vaca-Guzman and Arluke (2005) identified three types of justifications, including total denial, being a Good Samaritan, and being 'victims of the system.' In particular, saving animals from death is a recurrent theme used by hoarders to justify their behavior. Most cannot accept the concept of 'a life not worth living' even if that involves prolonged pain and suffering. This is a major philosophical divide between animal hoarders and conventional animal welfare and sheltering professionals who view euthanasia as an acceptable tool for the alleviation of suffering. This divide often leads animal hoarders to claim that officials and/or animal groups intervening in cases had personal vendettas against them, and that the whole 'system' was against them.

Since many studies of animal hoarding report extremely high rates of recidivism (McKay 2008), it is essential that an emphasis be placed on taking steps to limit the frequency with which people reacquire multiple animals after having animals legally removed (Steketee et al. 2011). Although progress continues to be made, object hoarding is still considered a very treatment-resistant condition requiring an experienced therapist. So any notion of a quick-fix for animal hoarding should be viewed with some skepticism.

As a widespread, severe and complex form of animal cruelty, there are no easy solutions to animal hoarding. Despite continued barriers to effective community coalitions to address hoarding there are many steps that can be taken to overcome these obstacles (Patronek et al. 2006). In addition, society's view of animal hoarding continues to evolve; it is promising that it is increasingly seen as a serious human and animal welfare issue that requires entire communities to respond effectively. Hopefully, the future will bring more information on the genetic, environmental, demographic, neurocognitive and neural substrates of animal hoarding leading to better informed interventions for the benefit of all involved—both human and non-human (Patronek and Ayers 2014).

References

- American Psychiatric Association (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.
- Anonymous (1875, February 12). A home for indigent cats. Eight mousers quartered in an east side tenement. *New York Sun*.
- Arkow, P., & Lockwood, R. (2013). Defining animal cruelty. In C. L. Reyes & M. Brewster (Eds.), *Animal cruelty: a multidisciplinary approach to understanding* (pp. 3–24). Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- Arluke, A., Frost, R., Steketee, G., Patronek, G., Luke, C., Messner, E., et al. (2002). Press reports of animal hoarding. *Society and Animals*, 10, 113–135.
- Avery, L. (2005). From helping to hoarding to hurting: when the acts of 'good Samaritans' become felony animal cruelty. *Valparaiso University Law Review*, 39(4), 815–858.
- Beetz A., Uvnäs-Moberg, K., Julius, H., & Kotrschal, K. (2012, July 9). Psychosocial and psychophysiological effects of human-animal interactions: the possible role of oxytocin. *Front Psychology*, 3, 234. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00234. eCollection 2012.
- Benniston, G. (2015, July 29). The state of sheltering. *Forth Worth Magazine*.
- Bernstein, M., & Wolf, B. M. (2005). Time to feed the evidence: what to do with seized animals. *Environmental Law Reporter*, 35(10), 10679.
- Berry, C., Patronek, G. J., & Lockwood, R. (2005). Animal hoarding: a study of 56 case outcomes. *Animal Law*, 11, 167–194.
- Boat, B. W., & Knight, J. C. (2001). Experiences and needs of adult protective services case managers when assisting clients who have companion animals. *Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect*, 12(3–4), 145–155.
- Bloch, M. H., Bartley, C. A., Zipperer, L., Jakubovski, E., Landeros-Weisenberger, A., Pittenger, C., et al. (2014). Meta-analysis: hoarding symptoms associated

- with poor treatment outcome in obsessive–compulsive disorder. *Molecular Psychiatry*, 19(9), 1025–1030.
- Bratiotis, C., & Woody, S. (2014). Community interventions. In R. O. Frost & G. Steketee (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of hoarding and acquiring* (p. 316). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, S. E. (2011). Theoretical concepts from self psychology applied to animal hoarding. *Society and Animals*, 19, 175–193.
- Calvo, P., Duarte, C., Bowen, J., Bulbena, A., & Fatjó, J. (2014). Characteristics of 24 cases of animal hoarding in Spain. *Animal Welfare*, 23(2), 199–208.
- Cassidy, J., & Mohr, J. (2001). Unsolvable fear, trauma, psychopathology: theory, research, and clinical considerations related to disorganized attachment across the lifespan. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 8, 275–298.
- Clancy, E. (2014). Animals as community stakeholders: inclusion of pets in social policy and practice (occasional essay). *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 95(4), 285–289.
- Colangelo, L. (2013, April 14). Intervention program helps pull animal hoarders from a downward spiral. *New York Daily News*.
- Fekadu, A., Shibre, T., & Cleare, A. J. (2010). Toxoplasmosis as a cause for behaviour disorders—overview of evidence and mechanisms. *Folia Parasitologica (Praha)*, 57(2), 105–113.
- Fleury, A. M. (2007). An overview of animal hoarding. *Praxis*, 7, 58.
- Frommer, S. S., & Arluke, A. (1999). Loving them to death: blame-displacing strategies of animal shelter workers and surrenderers. *Society and Animals*, 7(1), 1–16.
- Frost, R. O. (1998). Hoarding, compulsive buying and reasons for saving. *Behavioral Research and Therapy*, 36, 657–664.
- Frost, R. O., Patronek, G., Arluke, A., & Steketee, G. (2015). The hoarding of animals: an update. *Psychiatric Times*. <http://www.psychiatrictimes.com/addiction/hoarding-animals-update>. Accessed 5 May 2015.
- Frost, R. O., Steketee, G., & Williams, L. (2000). Hoarding: a community health problem. *Health Soc Care Community*, 8, 229–234.
- Frost, R. O., & Steketee, G. (Eds.). (2014). *The Oxford handbook of hoarding and acquiring*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gibson, M. (2015). *How Your Cat Could Make You Mentally Ill*. Retrieved June 1, 2015 from <http://time.com/3912258/cats-parasite-mental-illness/>
- HARC (2002). Health implications of animal hoarding. *Health and Social Work*, 27, 125–131.
- Hirschtitt, M. E., & Mathews, C. A. (2014). Genetics and family models of hoarding disorder. In R. O. Frost & G. Steketee (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of hoarding and acquiring* (p. 159). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Joffe, M., O'Shannessy, D., Dhand, N., Westman, M., & Fawcett, A. (2014). Characteristics of persons convicted for offences relating to animal hoarding in New South Wales. *Australian Veterinary Journal*, 92, 369–375.

- Lockwood, R. (1994). The psychology of animal collectors. *American Animal Hospital Association Trends Magazine*, 9, 18–21.
- Lockwood, R. (2002). Making the connection between animal cruelty and abuse and neglect of vulnerable adults. *The Latham Letter*, 23(1), 10–11.
- Lockwood, R. (2008). Counting cruelty: challenges and opportunities in assessing animal abuse and neglect in America. In Frank R. Ascione (Ed.), *International handbook of theory and research on animal abuse and cruelty* (pp. 87–110). W. Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.
- Lockwood, R. (2011, November 3). Recognizing and responding to ‘Rescue Hoarders’. *South Carolina Animal Care and Control Association*. Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.
- Lockwood, R. & Cassidy, B. (1988). Killing with kindness? *The Humane Society News*, Summer, 1–5.
- Lockwood, R., & Eyre, J. (2011, May 5). Recognizing and responding to ‘rescue hoarders’. Paper presented at Animal Care Expo, Orlando, FL.
- Lyons-Ruth, K., Dutra, L., Schuder, M., & Bianchi, I. (2006). From infant attachment disorganization to adult dissociation: relational adaptations or traumatic experiences? *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 29, 63–86.
- Marijana, V., & Dimitrijevic, I. (2007). Body condition and physical care scales in three cases of dog hoarding from Belgrade. *Acta Veterinaria (Beograd)*, 57(5–6), 553–561.
- Marlatt, G. A., & Gordon, J. R. (Eds.). (1985). *Relapse prevention: maintenance strategies in the treatment of addictive behaviors*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Mataix-Cols, D., Frost, R. O., Pertusa, A., Clark, L. A., Saxena, S., Leckman, J. F., et al. (2010). Hoarding disorder: a new diagnosis for DSM-V? *Depression and Anxiety*, 27(6), 556–572.
- McKay, B. (2008). Animal hoarding: beyond the crazy cat lady. *Journal of Agricultural and Food Information*, 9(4), 374–381.
- McMillan, F. D. (2013). Long term effects of hoarding and puppy mills on dogs. Paper presented at *International Veterinary Forensic Sciences Association*, Orlando, FL, 13 May 2013.
- McMillan, F. D., Duffy, D. L., & Serpell, J. A. (2011). Mental health of dogs formerly used as ‘breeding stock’ in commercial breeding establishments. *Applied Animal Behaviour science*, 135(1), 86–94.
- Meagher, E., Frost, R., & Riskind, J. (1999, November). Compulsive lottery, scratch ticket, and keno gambling: Its relation to OCD, hoarding, impulsivity, and the urge to buy. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy, Toronto.
- Merrill, L. (2012, February 19). Firefighters train for hoarder homes. *Arizona Republic*.
- Muller-Harris, D. L. (2010). Animal violence court: a therapeutic jurisprudence-based problem-solving court for the adjudication of animal cruelty cases involving juvenile offenders and animal hoarders. *Animal Law*, 17, 313.

- Nagasawa, M., Mitsui, S., En, S., Ohtani, N., Ohta, M., Sakuma, Y., et al. (2015, April 17). Social evolution. Oxytocin-gaze positive loop and the coevolution of human-dog bonds. *Science*, *348*(6232), 333–336. doi:10.1126/science.1261022. Epub 16 April 2015.
- Nathanson, J. N. (2009). Animal hoarding: slipping into the darkness of comorbid animal and self-neglect. *Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect*, *21*(4), 307–324.
- Nathanson, J., & Patronek, G. (2011). Animal hoarding: how the semblance of a benevolent mission becomes actualized as egoism and cruelty. In B. Oakley, A. Knafo, G. Madhavan, & D. Wilson (Eds.), *Pathological Altruism*, (pp.107–115). New York: Oxford University Press.
- New York City Mayor's Alliance (2014). *Tips and tools: helping pets and people in crisis*. <http://www.helpingpetsandpeoplenyc.org/animal-hoarding/>. Accessed 3 June 2014.
- Nordsletten, A. E., & Mataix-Cols, D. (2012). Hoarding versus collecting: where does pathology diverge from play? *Clinical Psychology Review*, *32*(3), 165–176.
- Ockenden, E. M., De Groef, B., & Marston, L. (2014). Animal hoarding in Victoria, Australia: an exploratory study. *Anthrozoos*, *27*(1), 33–47.
- Patronek, G. (1999). Hoarding of animals: an under-recognized public health problem in a difficult to study population. *Public Health Reports*, *114*, 82–87.
- Patronek, G. (2001). The problem of animal hoarding. *Municipal Lawyer*, *42*, 6–19.
- Patronek, G. (2006). Animal hoarding: its roots and recognition. *Veterinary Medicine*, *101*(8), 520.
- Patronek, G. J., & Ayers, C. R. (2014). Animal hoarding. In R. O. Frost & G. Steketee (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of hoarding and acquiring*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Patronek, G., Loar, L., & Nathanson, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Animal hoarding: structuring interdisciplinary responses to help people, animals and communities at risk*. Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium. <http://www.tufts.edu/vet/hoarding/pubs/AngellReport.pdf>.
- Patronek, G. J., & Nathanson, J. N. (2009). A theoretical perspective to inform assessment and treatment strategies for animal hoarders. *Clinical Psychology Review*, *29*(3), 274–281.
- Pertusa, A., Frost, R. O., Fullana, M. A., Samuels, J., Steketee, G., Tolin, D., ... & Mataix-Cols, D. (2010). Refining the diagnostic boundaries of compulsive hoarding: a critical review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, *30*(4), 371–386.
- Phillips, A., & Lockwood, R. (2013). *Investigating and prosecuting animal abuse: a guidebook on safer communities, safer families and being an effective voice for animal victims*. Alexandria, VA: National District Attorneys Association.
- Raines, A. M., Unruh, A. S., Zvolensky, M. J., & Schmidt, N. B. (2014). An initial investigation of the relationships between hoarding and smoking. *Psychiatry Research*, *215*(3), 668–674.
- Rasmussen, J. L., Steketee, G., Frost, R. O., Tolin, D. F., & Brown, T. A. (2014). Assessing squalor in hoarding: the home environment index. *Community Mental Health Journal*, *50*(5), 591–596.

- Saxena, S., Brody, A. L., Maidment, K. M., Smith, E. C., Zohrabi, N., Katz, E., et al. (2004). Cerebral glucose metabolism in obsessive compulsive hoarding. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *161*, 1038–1048.
- Schwalm, J. (2009). Animal cruelty by another name: the redundancy of animal hoarding laws. *The Journal of Animal and Environmental Law*, *1*(1), 32–60.
- Sinclair, L., Merck, M., & R. Lockwood. (2006). *Forensic investigation of animal cruelty: a guide for veterinary and law enforcement professionals*. Washington, DC: Humane Society Press.
- Slyne, K., & Tolin, D. F. (2014). The neurobiology of hoarding disorder. In R. O. Frost & G. Steketee (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of hoarding and acquiring* (p. 177). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Steketee, G., & Frost, R. (2010). *Stuff: compulsive hoarding and the meaning of things*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Steketee, G., – Frost, R. O. (2014). Phenomenology of hoarding. In R. O. Frost & G. Steketee (Eds.), *Handbook of hoarding and acquiring* (pp.19–32). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Steketee, G., Gibson, A., Frost, R. O., Alabiso, J., Arluke, A., & Patronek, G. (2011). Characteristics and antecedents of people who hoard animals: an exploratory comparative interview study. *Review of General Psychology*, *15*(2), 114.
- Sylvester, S., & Baranyk, C. (2011a). When animal hoarding is warehousing for profit/part 1. *Tales of Justice*, *1*(2), 1–3.
- Sylvester, S., & Baranyk, C. (2011b). When animal hoarding is warehousing for profit/part 2. *Tales of Justice*, *1*(3), 1–4.
- Tolin, D. F. (2011). Understanding and treating hoarding: a biopsychosocial perspective. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *67*(5), 517–526.
- Tolin, D. F., Villavicencio, A., Umbach, A., & Kurtz, M. M. (2011). Neuropsychological functioning in hoarding disorder. *Psychiatry research*, *189* (3), 413–418.
- Vaca-Guzman, M., & Arluke, A. (2005). Normalizing passive cruelty: the excuses and justifications of animal hoarders. *Anthrozoos*, *18*, 338–357.
- Witkiewitz, K., & Marlatt, G. A. (2004). Relapse prevention for alcohol and drug problems. *American Psychologist*, *59*(4), 224–235.
- Worth, C., & Beck, A. (1981). Multiple ownership of animals in New York City. *Transactions and Studies of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, *3*, 280–300

Arnold Arluke, Ph.D. is Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Northeastern University, Vice President and Director of Research at Forensic Veterinary Investigations and a Visiting Scholar at the International Fund for Animal Welfare. His research examines conflicts and contradictions in human-animal relationships. He has published over 100 articles and 12 books, including *Regarding Animals*, *Brute Force*, *Just a Dog*, *The Sacrifice*, *Between the Species*, *The Photographed Cat*, and *Beauty and the Beast*. His research has received awards from

the American Sociological Association, the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction, the International Association for Human-Animal Interaction Organizations, and the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Dr Gary Patronek is a veterinarian and epidemiologist. He currently works as an independent consultant and is also Adjunct Professor at the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts. He founded the Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium (HARC), a multidisciplinary group of investigators who conducted much of the initial research concerning animal hoarding. The work of HARC was instrumental in the mention of animal hoarding in the new hoarding disorder included in DSM-5 in 2013. He has also been a shelter director, Vice President for Animal Welfare at the Animal Rescue League of Boston, and was formerly Director of the Tufts Center for Animals and Public Policy. Dr Patronek has published over 50 peer-reviewed papers and textbook chapters, many of which deal with animal welfare and shelter issues. He was one of the authors and editors of the *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters* put forth under the auspices of the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, and is one of three co-editors for the new book *Animal Maltreatment: Forensic Mental Health Issues and Evaluations* published by Oxford University Press in October 2015.

Randall Lockwood has degrees in psychology and biology from Wesleyan University in Connecticut and a doctorate in psychology from Washington University in St. Louis. In 2005 he joined the staff of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals where he is currently Senior Vice President for Forensic Sciences and Anti-Cruelty Projects. For over 30 years he has worked with law-enforcement agencies serving as an expert on the interactions between people and animals. He has testified in dozens of trials involving cruelty to animals or the treatment of animals in the context of other crimes, including dogfighting, child abuse, domestic violence and homicide. In 2008 he received a Public Service Award from the United State's Attorneys Office for his assistance in the Michael Vick dogfighting case. In 2014 he received an award from the American Academy of Forensic Sciences for outstanding contribution to forensic science.

He is co-author of *Cruelty to Animals and Interpersonal Violence* (1998), *Forensic Investigation of Animal Cruelty: A Guide for Veterinary and Law Enforcement Professionals*, (2006) and *Animal Cruelty and Freedom of Speech: When Worlds Collide* (2014). He is author of *Prosecuting Animal Cruelty Cases: Opportunities for Early Response to Crime and Interpersonal Violence* (2006) and *Dogfighting Toolkit for Law Enforcement* (2011).

Allison Cardona joined the ASPCA in 2003 and is currently the senior director of the organisation's Cruelty Intervention Advocacy (CIA) programme. The CIA programme, which launched in April 2010, aims to prevent animal cruelty in

New York City before it happens by addressing the root causes of animal suffering and providing long-term, sustainable change. To date, through this initiative, thousands of animals have been assisted that would likely have otherwise been at risk of neglect or ended up in a shelter. In 2014, the CIA programme expanded to also offer services on the West Coast, with a 'safety net' programme in Los Angeles that works to keep pets in their homes and out of shelters by providing services to low-income pet owners in need of resources.

Cardona was named Senior Director of the CIA programme in December 2012. In this role, Cardona oversees all facets of the CIA operation, focusing on continuing to build capacity to help many more animals in jeopardy of becoming cruelty victims through outreach, education and provision of vital services such as emergency veterinary care, spay/neuter and removal of and rehoming of hoarded animals. Cardona also oversees the ASPCA and Urban Resource Institute partnership in support of URIPALS, NYC's first-ever programme to house domestic violence victims with their pets.

Cardona is a member of the New York Women's Foundation Grants Advisory Committee and a volunteer mentor with Big Brothers Big Sisters of NYC. She received her Bachelor's degree of Science in Public Affairs from Empire State College and is currently enrolled in the National Urban Fellows Executive Leadership and Coaching Programme. She lives in Brooklyn, NY.