



# Finding safety together

Cats Protection is making a better life for cats and their families, even in the toughest circumstances

Words by: Joanna Stass

**Trigger warning:** This article contains subject matter relating to domestic abuse and animal abuse

**Someone fleeing domestic abuse often has no choice but to leave everything behind, including their beloved pets. Most refuges for domestic abuse survivors can't accept companion animals, and so for many, this means leaving their feline friend in danger. Sadly, it's common for perpetrators to target cats and kittens, so some cat owners will stay and remain at risk of abuse to protect their pets.**

This was the case for Kerry\*. "I had to leave my ex-husband after being married for many years," said Kerry. "During our marriage I experienced all sorts of abuse, both to me and my children, so I knew I had to leave. For a while I tried to live in the same house as him, but the abuse was constant. He was always trying to check on me, to see who I was with and what I was doing.

"He never liked animals and he didn't care for our cats. He made me feel guilty for taking them to the vets when they needed to go. At one point we had a litter of kittens but they disappeared suddenly, and I later found out that he had killed them. I can't even imagine how someone could do this to a newborn kitten.

"I knew I needed to keep us all safe, and that my children needed to come first. When I left him, we needed to stay in emergency accommodation, but it meant I had no other choice but to leave my cats at home. We could only take a few things with us, and we had to keep moving between hotels. I had to keep going back home to the cats to make sure they had what they need, but this was dangerous for me.

"I was too scared to mention my cats to anyone, I was scared that they wouldn't help us with housing if we had pets, and I didn't want anyone to take them away from me. In the end it was our school who mentioned there might be a charity who could help, and that night I searched online and found Cats Protection."

## **“It’s not just about looking after cats, it’s about saving lives.”**

Kerry discovered Cats Protection Lifeline, our specialist service that helps cats and their families get away from abuse by providing a temporary loving home for cats. We look after cats until their owners are able to take them back safely, giving them the chance to get back on their feet, knowing they’ll be together again soon. This free and confidential service is run by an experienced and compassionate team, who arrange care for the cats through our network of dedicated volunteer Lifeline fosterers.

“I contacted Cats Protection Lifeline straight away and from this moment everything changed for me,” said Kerry. “Cats Protection gave me so much hope. While my cats were in foster care, they had everything they needed. They were cared for, well fed, neutered and they looked so healthy.

“My cats are everything to me, not only to me but to my children too. They are part of our family. When my children do drawings of our family at school, they always include the cats. They are a comfort for my children, I believe they feel when we are scared or stressed as they come to comfort us. This is mutual, they come to us for comfort, and we go to them. They are our babies.

“When we were reunited, we were looking forward to this day for so long. We were so happy. My children were so happy. Being able to tell my children that we would all be together was so memorable.

“Our lives are so much better now. I don’t have the words to thank Cats Protection for what they have done for us. It’s not just about looking after cats, it’s about saving lives. When people experience domestic abuse, their only worry isn’t just the pets as there are often a hundred more problems, but the pets are still so important. You are not only helping cats but helping people too. Helping them through the trauma and giving them the kind of reassurance that money can’t pay for.”

## **“It feels so rewarding to foster cats in need.”**

We couldn't provide our vital Lifeline service without the wonderful fosterers who look after these cats until they can be reunited with their owners. We provide the fosterers with all the support and equipment they need to keep the cats healthy and well fed, and they provide the safe and loving home they deserve, along with updates for the owner so they can see how their cat is getting on. To keep everything confidential, any communications go through the Lifeline team, and they arrange the delivery and collection of the cats to ensure everyone's safety.

“We thought it was such a lovely idea to look after cats that were in need of a home until they could be reunited with their owners again, so we were more than happy to sign up!” said Luke, a Lifeline fosterer.

“When our first foster cat arrived, they delivered everything we needed to help them settle in, there is no cost involved, just love and care needed for the cats. They offer food, litter, toys and screens for doors or windows during the summer, so the endless amount of supplies are always on hand. Anything we wanted to know about or needed help with, they were always just a phone call or email away.

“It feels so rewarding to foster cats in need, but it's an even nicer feeling to be able to help the cats settle as if they were still at home with their owners. Hopefully their owners have some pressure taken off, knowing that their pets are being cared for and safe until they can meet again.

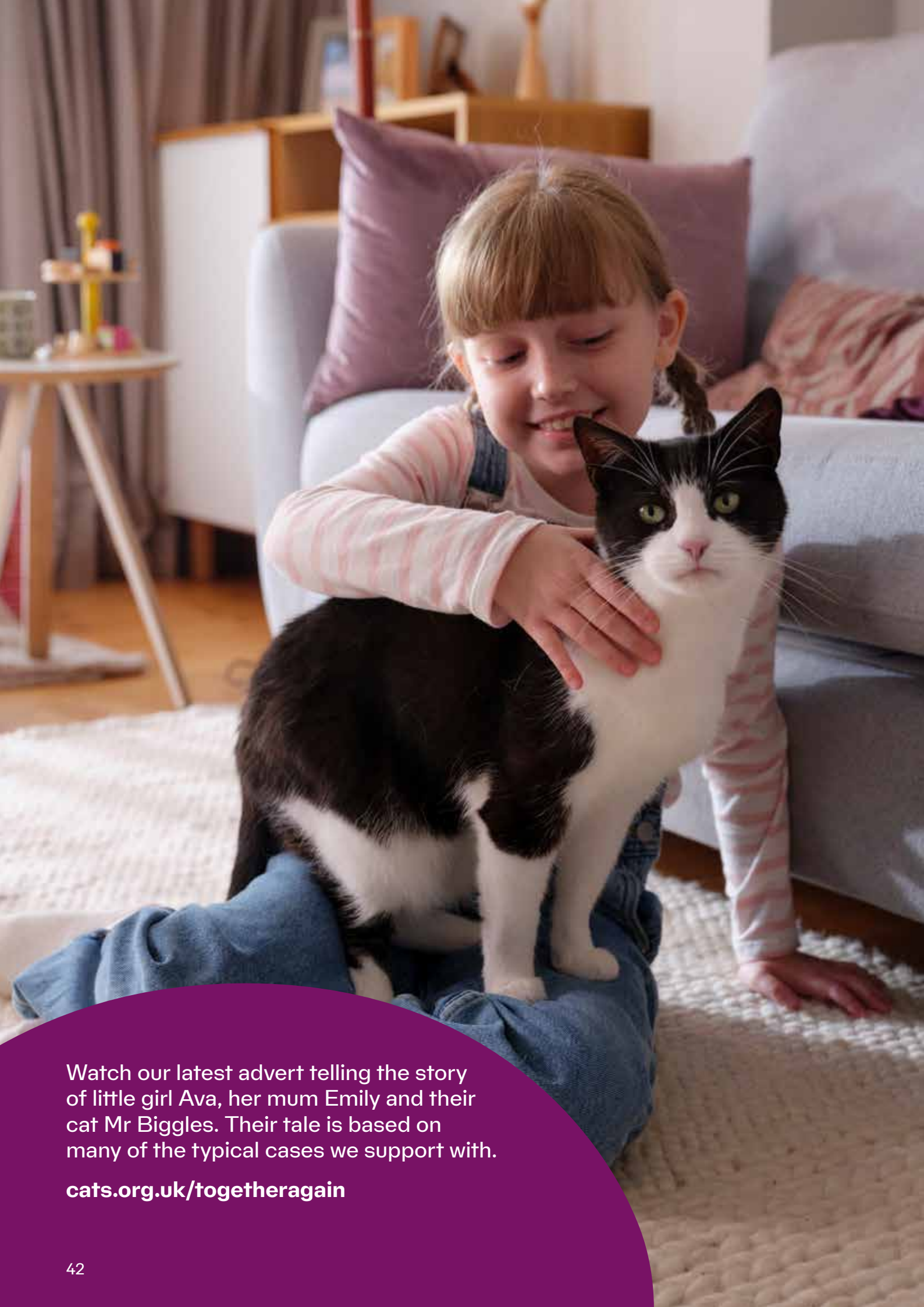
“I would encourage anyone to get involved as it's a brilliant and rewarding scheme, and if you love cats like we do, it's great to foster!”

Lifeline fosterer Michelle added: “The best things about volunteering for Lifeline are having a cat snoring on my desk while I work, hearing little paws coming down the stairs and being greeted by a friendly, furry face each morning.

“It's also nice to know that we're helping a cat during a difficult time for them by giving them all the love, cuddles and enrichment we can. We know that people sometimes stay in abusive relationships because there is no one who can look after their pets when they escape domestic abuse, so it's great knowing that we can do a little something to support someone to build a new life.

“We definitely benefit from having a cat in our life and it's lovely that we can provide a safe and loving home for them until they can be reunited with their family.”





Watch our latest advert telling the story of little girl Ava, her mum Emily and their cat Mr Biggles. Their tale is based on many of the typical cases we support with.

[cats.org.uk/togetheragain](https://cats.org.uk/togetheragain)

**89% of domestic abuse professionals said that there is a need for a specialist cat fostering service for survivors of domestic abuse in their area**

**97% of domestic abuse professionals said that they believed being reunited with their pet once the victim-survivor is safe would have a positive impact on their recovery and wellbeing**

**78% of domestic abuse professionals have experienced cases where cats and kittens have been physically abused**

**90% of domestic abuse professionals have experienced a pet being a barrier to survivors getting to safety**

Source: Domestic Abuse and Cat Ownership – Professionals Survey, Cats Protection 2023.

Cats Protection Lifeline has supported over 140 cat owners fleeing domestic abuse between January and September 2023, but with your support we can help even more.

The service is currently available in the South East, Yorkshire, East Anglia and the Midlands, and will be expanding into Scotland and Wales in 2024.

We're looking to welcome more volunteer fosterers to the team in these regions as the more fosterers we have, the more cats and survivors we can help.

To find out how to volunteer, or donate funds to help us run this vital service, visit [cats.org.uk/togetheragain](https://cats.org.uk/togetheragain)

Cats Protection Lifeline is kindly supported by the Pets Foundation.

**For information and support on domestic abuse, contact the free 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247.**

\*Names and any other identifying details have been removed or changed to protect the identities of survivors.