

Shelter helps abused puppy get back on all fours

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As a house full of children looked on, the young black pup now known as Tiny Tim was shot, beaten and kicked hard enough to shatter his rear right leg in two places. The perpetrator was neither stranger nor intruder; it was the children's father, who wanted to teach his wife and kids a lesson they wouldn't forget.

When the woman and children fled to a shelter to escape the man accused of abusing them and their dog, the 15-month-old Labrador retriever mix came under the protective care of Ahimsa House, Georgia's first and only refuge for the animal victims of domestic violence. Two weeks later, the safe if not physically sound puppy spends his days hobbling after rawhide toys as he awaits the reconstructive surgery he needs to save the useless limb.

"We found his leg had been repeatedly fractured in numerous places along with pellets from a pellet gun that had been shot into the same leg," said Rikki Osborne of Ahimsa House.

Veterinarian Melinda Merck said the force it would take to cause such a fracture is equal to that of being hit by a car.

Merck, co-author of the book "Investigation of Animal Cruelty: A Guide for Vets and Law Enforcement," is a veterinary forensics specialist at the Cat Clinic of Roswell, which conducted the initial exam.

"If he does not have this surgery, the only alternative is for the leg to be amputated," she said.

Unfortunately, Tiny Tim's situation is not unique. In one year, Ahimsa House has helped 57 abused pets, and 11 others cur-



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Veterinarian Melinda Merck evaluates the damage to Tiny Tim's leg as Ahimsa House founder Emily Christie stands by. While Merck donated her services on behalf of the long-abused pup, reconstructive surgery to save his limb is expected to cost \$3,500.

rently in its care include a cat with significant medical needs. They can stay for up to 65 days, until they can be safely reunited with their families or are found new homes. At the secret location, pets' names are changed for witness-protection style anonymity.

"Abusers want to show the family you don't step out of line because it could be any of you, even the dog," said Emily Christie, Ahimsa House founder and a domestic violence survivor. "If you're seeing an animal who's maltreated, odds are extremely high that people in that household are being mistreated as well."

Ahimsa House is working with victim advocates, lawyers and the family to have criminal charges filed against Tiny

Tim's tormentor, with the goal of keeping him locked far from the people and pet he abused.

"This is a typical cycle of violence," said attorney Claudine Wilkins of Georgia Legal Professionals for Animals. "The abuser starts with the pet in the home and it leads to people in the home, so prosecutors and law enforcement need to really focus in on any animal abuse that they see."

Surgery to repair Tiny Tim's leg is expected to cost \$3,500—nothing to bark at for a group that relies entirely on public contributions to survive. To make a donation to help Tiny Tim or others cared for by Ahimsa House, call 404/518-5516 or visit www.ahimsahouse.org.