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Four-Legged Approach to Behavioral Health Care at Community Health Center's School-Based Health Center

New Britain, CT (December 19, 2013): Cooper, a 6 year old black Labrador Retriever, is the newest staff member at the school-based health center at Roosevelt School in New Britain. Cooper is a Pet Partners® registered therapy dog working with Lauren Crowley, a therapist and social worker with Community Health Center's school-based health services program.

The pair work together two days per week in the school, meeting with behavioral health patients as part of an Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) program. AAT uses trained animals to enhance an individual's physical, emotional and social well-being, thus improving self-esteem, reducing anxiety and facilitating healing. Children are generally attracted to animals and can often express themselves better than with other children or adults. Dogs and cats are often used to calm children who have experienced physical or mental trauma.

Crowley says that Cooper has helped her identify children who could benefit from animal assisted therapy to cope with stressful situations in their lives. "Animal assisted therapy is effective because dogs are always happy and willing to be with people. They are non-judgmental and their love is unconditional," she explains. "Having Cooper at school with me has enabled me to reach out to some clients that I may not have been able to reach before. I am working with several new clients who refused therapy in the past, but enjoy their sessions with Cooper."

Cooper has been working as a therapy dog for four years and his resume includes monthly visits at an assisted living facility and a children's psychiatric hospital, study breaks for students at SCSU, and numerous charity walks, including New Britain's Race in the Park. He most recently participated in Newtown Kindness' Therapy/Comfort Dog Walk-a-thon, the official launch of Charlotte's Litter Program, named after Charlotte Bacon, one of the souls lost on December 14, 2012. Charlotte's Litter advocates for animal assisted activity with Therapy/Comfort Dogs and their roles as supportive friends and trusted companions.

In February of 2013, Lauren testified at the State Capitol (on behalf of Cooper) for a bill to facilitate the development and implementation of a state-wide assisted therapy program (SB 654). The bill was passed, making it the first of its kind in any state.

About Community Health Center, Inc.

Since 1972, Community Health Center, Inc. has been one of the leading healthcare providers in the state of Connecticut, building a world-class primary health care system committed to caring for uninsured and underserved populations. CHC is focused on improving health outcomes for its more than 130,000 patients as well as building healthy communities. Recognized as both a Level 3 Patient-Centered Medical Home by the National Committee for Quality Assurance and a Primary Care Medical Home by The Joint Commission, CHC delivers service in more than 200 locations statewide, offering primary care in medical, dental and behavioral health services. For more information, visit www.chc1.com.

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