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### **The City of Bristol Community Development Block Grant Program Supports Activities at Shepard Meadows Equestrian Center**

(BRISTOL, CT November 15, 2021) – The City of Bristol, through its Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, has been able to support many activities at Shepard Meadows Equestrian Center. These programs have been a lifeline for many Bristol residents, especially during the pandemic.

This year, Shepard Meadows received a \$10,000 CDBG award to support programming to bring students from West Bristol Extended Learning Program to the farm for weekly sessions on horsemanship skills, which help to promote emotional and social well-being in young people as they interact with the animals. With supplemental funds through the CARES Act, an additional \$20,000 grant was made to provide safe, supportive outdoor experiences to Bristol residents during the pandemic.

In the past year Shepard Meadows had 2,000 visits overall with 500 visits being supported by CDBG-CARES Act funds. Local agencies whose clients participated in the program included the Bristol Senior Center, Parks and Recreation, essential workers (Policemen, Firefighters, and EMTs), residential and day treatment programs, and youth at risk. Some private citizens and their families also participated in these visits – the ages of participants ranged from 4 to 70+. All participants were from very low, low, or moderate income households.

“Over the years, Shepard Meadows has enabled children with special needs and other residents to benefit from their interactions with the horses, and the City has been supportive of their work through the CDBG grant program,” Dawn Leger, Ph.D., CCMO, Grants Administrator for the City of Bristol. “With the Covid funds we received from the CARES Act, we were able to help Shepard Meadows extend their services to first responders and others in our community who were adversely impacted by the isolation and stress of the pandemic. Their programs have reached many more people because of the CDBG funding, and that is a positive for everyone in Bristol.”

“I was overwhelmed by what I saw and heard on my visit to Shepard Meadows – from the facility to the horses to the wonderful staff – Shepard Meadows is a hidden gem in Bristol! Being located on the ‘top of the mountain’ in such an idyllic location just adds to the therapeutic work being done by these folks. I was so impressed and proud that the City of Bristol, through the CDGB program, has been in a position to support this valuable program in Bristol,” stated Howard Schmelder, Vice Chair of the Economic & Community Development Board and Chair of the CDBG Policy Committee that makes the awards each year.

Equine-assisted therapy is known to promote improved mental health for participants, and offering the opportunity for outdoor activities in a safe and monitored environment has been a lifeline for many experiencing the negative effects of stress and isolation during the pandemic.

“Horses live in the moment; they don’t judge, and they are completely honest. As sentient beings, they know exactly how we are feeling, even if we lack awareness or complete understanding ourselves. They are natural, thoughtful and reflective teachers, who are willing, open-hearted, patient, instinctively nonjudgmental and responsive. They are honest communicators, living in the moment, and can provide wisdom and natural healing,” stated Shelly Whitlock-Pope, Ed.D., Executive Director of Shepard Meadows Equestrian Center, Inc.

One of the newest programs offered at Shepard Meadows is the Veterans Horsemanship Program which is provided at no cost to veterans and their families, for up to 24 weeks (8 weeks in the spring, 4 weeks in the summer, 8 weeks in the fall, and 4 weeks in the winter). Shepard Meadows provides both mounted and unmounted horsemanship programs for physical, emotional, social, recreational, and educational gains.

For more information about all the programs and services offered at Shepard Meadows Equestrian Center, visit their website at <https://www.shepardmeadows.org>.

Photo Attached:



From left to right: Shelly Whitlock-Pope, Ed.D., Executive Director of Shepard Meadows Equestrian Center, Inc.; Dawn Leger, Ph.D., CCMO, Grants Administrator for the City of Bristol; and Howard Schmelder, Vice Chair of the Economic & Community Development Board and Chair of the CDGB Policy Committee, and George, one of the therapy horses at the farm.