

## **WELCOME TO CHENNY TROUPE, INC.**

### **Who are we?**

Chenny Troupe is a network of dedicated volunteers and their certified therapy dogs who offer rehabilitative therapy to people with physical and emotional challenges. Working with medical professionals, our volunteers provide interactive exercises designed to restore health and hope to thousands of clients every year.

### **Overview**

Chenny Troupe was launched in 1991 with a group of sixteen dogs and their owners after its founders, Catherine Lawler and Frances Ann Rohlen, studied other AAT programs. The first program served clients at the Abraham Lincoln Centre, a day program for individuals with physical and emotional challenges, located on Chicago's south side. Since then, each of our programs has been carefully designed to meet the requirements of the special needs population to be served. Chenny Troupe clients are recovering from a wide variety of traumas. Many clients suffer from chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, or are victims of stroke, head trauma, spinal cord injury and other body shattering accidents. Many are victims of violence. Some suffer from depression or other forms of mental illness; some are young men and women in substance abuse recovery programs. Thousands of individuals have benefited from Chenny Troupe programs since we began our creative and innovative work. At any given time, as much as 75% of Chenny Troupe's client base consists of members of the medically underserved population in Chicago and more than half are children.

One of Chenny Troupe's most unique programs was developed for use in residential substance abuse rehabilitation programs for teen-aged girls and boys, some as young as thirteen. A group of up to ten clients work in pairs with the dogs and their human volunteers, following a carefully crafted eight week curriculum with key learning objectives and goals that will help the clients gain confidence and self-esteem while learning new, more positive ways of communication and interacting with their peers. The course culminates with a "test" and a graduation ceremony. For some of the clients, Chenny Troupe dog handling program is the first program of any sort they have been able to successfully complete. In addition, the clients report that the ongoing commitment of the volunteers, week after week, is instrumental to their recovery. These programs were the subject of a research study which confirmed that the Chenny Troupe program improves self esteem, communication skills and helps participants continue their recovery. The results of the study will assist Chenny Troupe in its preparation of a teaching model for the use of animal-assisted therapy in various therapeutic settings.

A similar program has been launched at the Rice Center, a residential home for children, ages 9 -14 years, who have been removed from their homes because of abuse and/or neglect, or who have behavioral disorders beyond their families' capacity to care for them. Chenny Troupe has also developed a program at La Rabida Children's Hospital and Research Center in Chicago working with children who have cerebral palsy, sensory processing difficulties, Down's syndrome and communication disorders. These conditions may be caused by either illness or traumatic injury. The facility is a center for the long-term treatment of chronic diseases and disabilities, and will provide Chenny Troupe with the opportunity to study the benefits of AAT over a course of treatment that may last several years.

Chenny Troupe volunteers work at an intermediate care residential facility for the mentally ill, helping the residents improve communication and social skills as well as problem solving abilities. People who find it difficult to form attachments to people have had great success at relating to Chenny Troupe dogs, and through them, to the volunteers. The staff at this facility has in the past reported great improvements in otherwise withdrawn residents.

Chenny Troupe volunteers also work in more traditional hospital settings. At Grant Hospital, volunteers and their dogs work with many stroke victims and amputees, helping them to regain the use of their voices and increase their mobility through performing simple commands and exercises. The population is generally older men and women, many of whom are cheered and motivated by the reminder of pets they may have had at another time in their lives. At the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, volunteers and their companion dogs work with patients of all ages who have suffered strokes, head trauma, spinal cord injuries and other body shattering accidents. Using games and agility equipment, patients at RIC relearn motor and speech skills, and gain the strength needed to resume productive lives. More than 50% of the patient population is comprised of children and young adults. At Schwab Rehabilitation Hospital, the patient population is comprised of children and adults recovering from head or spinal cord injuries, many of which are a result of acts of violence. Volunteers at the Illinois Center for Rehabilitation and Education (ICRE) work with children and young adults dealing with multiple physical and emotional disabilities. Many of the residents are wards of the state, requiring around the clock attention. The program helps the residents face the challenge of their every day lives, and helps them learn to manage anger and frustration. The clients work on gross motor skills and verbalization. Several of the current program participants at ICRE worked with Chenny Troupe dogs at Schwab Rehabilitation Hospital when they were treated for their injuries, and are delighted to see the dogs at their present home. At RIC, Schwab and ICRE, Chenny Troupe dogs have worked with some of Chicago's youngest, high profile crime victims. Chenny Troupe's human and canine volunteers create a safe, pleasant and nurturing environment for what can otherwise be very difficult therapeutic treatment.

### **How Chenny Troupe Works**

Many Chenny Troupe clients cannot be reached by traditional forms of therapy, or have lost the requisite motivation to continue their rehabilitation. By fostering the unique animal-human bond in a healing environment, Chenny Troupe programs effect positive change by motivating participants to attain their goals of improved physical and mental health, emotional growth and personal dignity. A corps of close to one hundred dedicated human volunteers and their highly skilled therapy dogs encourage and motivate clients to achieve their goals through innovative exercises, using state-of-the-art equipment and games to strengthen mobility and self-esteem in a relaxing and stimulating environment. The dogs also provide companionship and unconditional love for patients who are clinically depressed or recovering from illness, injury or substance addiction.

Chenny Troupe develops a site-specific program with the assistance of the physicians, psychotherapists, counselors, and rehabilitation therapists on staff so that each program is responsive to the needs of the patient population in the therapeutic environment. Programs are administered by a volunteer leader, who supervises the human volunteers/handlers and their trained and tested animal companions. A therapist from the site works regularly with the program leader to be sure that the particular needs of each client are carefully considered and therapeutic goals are met.

The substance abuse programs are more structured, and follow lesson plans designed to teach the young people about animal care, health, training and responsible pet ownership. The participant must develop a relationship with the dog in order to get the dog to perform a variety of obedience commands as well as to complete an agility course. Each lesson has a goal relating to the animal, but the objectives relate to life skills.

Chenny Troupe leaders have designed and implemented an examination for canine candidates that is more rigorous than the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizenship Test. If a dog passes the test, its human companion will attend an orientation program and then will be placed in a mutually agreed upon Chenny Troupe program. Some programs are ongoing; others require a specific 7 or 8-week commitment.

### **Chenny Troupe Goals**

Our goals are to:

- Enlarge our volunteer pool and donor base to permit us to respond to the myriad of requests we receive for Chenny Troupe animal-assisted therapy programs.
- Continue to provide animal-assisted therapy programs free of charge.
- Collect and analyze sufficient empirical data from ongoing programs to prove the successes of current programs and to improve acceptance of animal-assisted therapy in the scientific community.
- Develop standardized program models allowing Chenny Troupe to share our expertise with other organizations across the country and throughout the world.

### **Would you like to be a Chenny Trouper?**

After more than a decade of service and thousands of hours of free therapy, we are justifiably proud of the quality programs we continue to provide. Chenny Troupe's work is made possible through the generous support of our volunteers, other committed individuals, and foundation and corporate gifts. We would be delighted to count you among our friends. Watch for our new "Support A Chenny Troupe Dog" campaign, and "adopt" a certified therapy dog. Become a Chenny Trouper, with or without a canine companion. Volunteers are needed to help in the office with administrative tasks, publicity, *TroupeTalk*, the quarterly newsletter and fundraising events, including our annual spring benefit, as well as in Chenny Troupe therapy programs, both with and without a canine companion. Donations in honor of or in memory of a special person or pet are always appreciated.

For additional information, please call us at 773.404.6467.