

## Meet Mabel – Assistance Dog & Co-Therapist

The Phoenix Center partnered with service dog school Canine Companions for Independence to acquire a facility or assistance dog specifically trained to work in an agency with children who have experienced trauma.

Mabel will assist during therapy sessions, encouraging communication and providing comfort. Therapy dogs have been shown to improve symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder by helping children regulate stress arousal systems, commonly referred to as the fight, flight, or freeze response.

Assistance Dogs help create a calming and regulating environment that assists children in overcoming the effects of trauma. **One study on the effect of dogs with patients suffering from PTSD, showed an 82% reduction in symptoms.**

Canine Companions service dogs go through a **rigorous and multi-step 2 year training process before placement with an organization such as the Phoenix Center.** If successful, the dogs graduate and are either matched with organizations or people with disabilities.

**What is even more special about Mabel** is that she is part of the first class to graduate from the brand new Canine Companions training center in Irving, Texas. The Irving center is the first Canine Companions training facility in Texas and the first in the nation to be connected with a health care system. Baylor Scott & Health collaborated with Canine Companions to construct the Irving facility.

**The Phoenix Center went through an extensive year-and-a-half long process to be matched with Mabel.** After applying for a facility / assistance dog, Sarah Garrett was interviewed twice over the phone and once in person. A home study was completed and a selection review committee accepted the application. After more than a year on the waiting list for a dog, the Phoenix Center was notified in October that it would be matched with a dog in early November. Garrett spent 10 days training with Mabel in Irving before returning to Marble Falls.

**A multitude of research indicates that trauma therapy is more effective when combined with animal-assisted therapy.** The Phoenix Center has utilized equine therapy to help children who have experienced trauma at its therapeutic summer camp program - Camp Phoenix - for several years. Now, the organization will have the capability to provide animal-assisted therapy in all of its programs, year-round, with its canine co-therapist.

Additionally, **Mabel will serve as an official “Courthouse Dog,” which means she is permitted to accompany a victim of child abuse into the courthouse.** A “Courthouse Dog” is present throughout the criminal justice process – calming and comforting the child when he/she faces their alleged perpetrator in the courtroom. Courthouse dogs are highly trained by accredited service dog schools. There are fewer than 100 courthouse dogs nationwide. Phoenix Center has partnered with Courthouse Dogs Foundation to make the dream of a Courthouse Dog a reality.