

Opening Doors

Comfort dog newest police recruit

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At eight months old, the UNH Police Department's newest recruit will be by far the youngest member of the force. She's also the only one with four legs. A rescue lab from Pennsylvania, Charlee was brought on board by Chief Paul Dean to support his team's work with students. With research showing the positive and therapeutic impact animals have on humans, Dean says it was a no-brainer.

"I just sat back one day and was thinking about the number of our students who suffer from anxiety and mental health related issues. And I said to myself, 'there has to be more we can do when we are responding to students in crisis.' Adding a comfort dog was my answer," Dean says.

After 35 years on the force, Dean's passion for students is what drove his decision to invest in Charlee. In situations when he or a colleague are called to support a student in crisis, Dean says it's crucial to be able to place the student in a comfortable and safe emotional environment.

"I'll be with Charlee and the next thing I know we're surrounded by students, and I'm being pushed out of the way."

"No matter how comforting or trained police officers are, interacting with the police can be unnerving for a victim of a mental health crisis," Dean says. "I'm hoping Charlee will make that a little less scary."

Although she's still in training, Charlee, who was named by the kids at the UNH Child Study and Development Center, has already accompanied officers on foot patrols. Plans are for her to venture in and out of classrooms, visit dorm residents, the library and other locations around campus. She also will support members of the [Sexual Harassment & Rape Prevention Program \(SHAARP\)](#) in their work.

"The dogs are like a key," says Laura Barker, founder of [Hero Pups](#), the organization that trained Charlee. "They open up doors that maybe Chief Dean can't because he's a police officer and it's intimidating."

With more than 15,000 students enrolled on the Durham campus, UNH has several established resources for students to take care of their mental health. [Psychological and Counseling Services](#) offers individual counseling sessions as well as group support. Health and Wellness provides massage therapy, acupuncture reiki and support groups. Their [Paws and Relax](#) program is a weekly opportunity to visit therapy pets in the Hamel Recreation Center. And the staff at Dimond Library brings in therapy dogs during exams as part of their Frazzle Free Finals stress breakers.

"I believe with my entire heart that this is going to be a game changer," Dean says. "I'll be with Charlee and the next thing I know we're surrounded by students, and I'm being pushed out of the way. It changes their mood. It changes everything."

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CAMPUS LIFE



University of New Hampshire

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