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**For Immediate Release**

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**Charlotte Behavioral Health Care Introduces Mental Health First Aid to Charlotte County**

***Charlotte County Joins National Initiative to Increase Mental Health Literacy***

Punta Gorda, FL – Charlotte Behavioral Health Care has piloted the first Mental Health First Aid program in Charlotte County. A certified trainer from the agency will train 20 local members of the public to improve mental health literacy – helping them identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness. Individuals from Charlotte County Homeless Coalition, Mission Unity, Jesus Loves You Ministry, Inc., and Pretrial Services will be participating in the first Mental Health First Aid Training from June 12th-June 14th.

“We are thrilled to bring Mental Health First Aid to our community,” said Jay Glynn, CEO “This important educational effort goes a lot further than emergency intervention; it really helps people understand the shroud of fear and misjudgment facing individuals and families who experience mental illnesses and addiction. It will help rid this community of the associated stigma and move more and more people toward recovery.”

Mental Health First Aid is a 12-hour training certification course which teaches participants a five-step action plan to assess a situation, select and implement interventions and secure appropriate care for the individual, the certification program introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems, builds understanding of their impact and overviews common treatments. Thorough evaluations in randomized controlled trials and a quantitative study have proved the CPR-like program effective in improving trainees’ knowledge of mental disorders, reducing stigma and increasing the amount of help provided to others.

“We welcome CBHC’s involvement and enthusiasm in the Mental Health First Aid community,” says Linda Rosenberg, MSW, president and CEO of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, the organization who brought Mental Health First Aid to the United States in 2008. “We know they will have a great impact on the mental health communities throughout Charlotte County, and will be key players in improving mental health literacy nationwide.”

In its pilot year, the program was introduced in nearly twenty states and more than 40 communities nationwide. The National Council certified Charlotte Behavioral Health Care to provide the Mental Health First Aid program in February, 2013, through an instructor certification course in Orlando and Texas. Charlotte Behavioral Health Care and all the sites across the nation that replicate this program maintain strict fidelity to the original, proven program.

For more information or to participate in a Mental Health First Aid training in Charlotte County visit [www.cbhcfl.org](http://www.cbhcfl.org) or call Megan Burkard at (941) 639-8300.

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