



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WNC mental health advocate receives lifetime achievement award

June 14, 2017 – A 99-year-old Macon County advocate for individuals with behavioral health and developmental disability needs has received statewide honors for her lifetime of service to some of North Carolina’s most vulnerable residents.

The N.C. Council of Community Programs recognized Dorothy R. Crawford on June 5 in Raleigh for her work to improve care for individuals with mental health, substance use disorder and intellectual or developmental disability (IDD) needs. Crawford accepted the 2017 Lifetime Career Leadership Award in person from Brian Ingraham, CEO of Vaya Health, a regional public managed care organization.

Crawford is a former long-time member of the Board of Directors for Vaya, previously known as Smoky Mountain Center. Vaya manages public funds for behavioral health and IDD services in 23 western N.C. counties.

“Dorothy has been a consistent voice of reason and an advocate for people who can’t advocate for themselves,” Ingraham said. He highlighted Crawford’s decades-long dedication to helping local residents improve their lives, particularly those in need of the greatest care. “You were, and still are, a trailblazer whose passion for doing the right thing has touched the lives of thousands of people,” he told Crawford.

Those who know Crawford describe her as a pioneer whose advocacy spans more than six decades. “She was ahead of her time in understanding that all health begins with mental health,” said Ronnie Beale, a Macon County commissioner and Vaya board member. “These days, we take that as a given. But back then, people just didn’t talk about mental health and substance use in the same way. It was not a ‘proper’ subject. It was sort of a forgotten group.”

Crawford incorporated behavioral health into all aspects of her work, Beale said, including efforts to improve services for aging adults and to train Meals on Wheels volunteers to look for signs of mental illness and substance use in older adults.

Crawford began her career with the Macon County Department of Social Services, where she served as director for 25 years. After her retirement in 1985, she and her husband, John, continued their tireless advocacy for an array of health and social services needs at both the local and state levels. Although her work often took her statewide, Crawford remained active in her home community, organizing forums on Medicare and Medicaid to keep residents informed and working to improve the quality of life for local residents.

Crawford is credited with establishing a number of programs and services that care for older adults in Macon County, many of which remain in place today. In recognition of her and her husband's service, the county's senior center is now named the Dorothy R. and John L. Crawford Senior Center. Her efforts to improve access to quality mental health care for all residents continue today.

"Miss Dorothy is an incredibly valuable asset to the community and to our state in general," Beale said. "Long after she is gone, the seeds that she has planted will continue to grow."

About Vaya Health

Vaya Health manages public funds for mental health, substance use disorder and intellectual or developmental disability services in 23 North Carolina counties: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey. Access to services and crisis help are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-800-849-6127. Learn more at www.vayahealth.com.

About the N.C. Council of Community Programs

The N.C. Council of Community Programs is the state association for local management entities/managed care organizations (LME/MCOs) that manage publicly funded behavioral health and IDD services for more than 325,000 North Carolinians every year. The council seeks to work collaboratively with all stakeholders with the goal of improving care and services system-wide.

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