



# NEWS RELEASE

**Media contact:** Allison Inman  
Executive Director, Office of Communications  
allison.inman@vayahealth.com  
828-225-2785, ext. 5364

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Feb. 17, 2021**

## **Vaya Health and Access Family Services develop specialized foster homes for youth with autism**

ASHEVILLE, N.C. – Vaya Health and Access Family Services (AFS), a subsidiary of Pathways Health and Community Support, LLC, have joined forces to develop specialized foster homes for children and adolescents with autism.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) affects about one in every 54 children nationally, with varying severity of developmental disabilities in the areas of social interaction, communication and repetitive/restricted behaviors, according to Autism Society of North Carolina.

“This program developed when we saw the outcomes for numerous children with autism being placed in high levels of residential treatment,” said Donald Reuss, senior vice president of provider network operations at Vaya. “We saw a cycle of these children moving in and out of programs, and this instability in the child’s life contributed to additional trauma and reduced the likelihood of a positive family reunification. We knew the most therapeutic environment for these children to receive treatment was in a family setting using research-based behavioral health treatment. We partnered with one of our providers, Access Family Services, that provides both services, and we are excited to see the impact this program has on children and families.”

Vaya’s partnership with AFS combines a family setting with the best course of treatment as a new, innovative approach to working with children with ASD. When children enter the foster care system, they are automatically enrolled in Medicaid. Vaya, an Asheville-based managed care organization, oversees public funding (Medicaid, federal, state and local) for mental health, substance use and intellectual and/or developmental disability services in 22 western North Carolina counties.

Foster parents create a nurturing environment for youth to call home while they heal, learn and grow. The parents must be physically, emotionally and financially stable and willing to help a child cope with trauma, separation and grief with the support of a member of a professional team. But for as much as a foster parent gives, they receive much more in return. While parents make a difference in the life of a child, AFS provides them with professional, 24/7 support from credentialed staff, extensive training, restorative breaks and case management.

“We recognize that each child is unique, and their needs vary,” said Myca Jeter, foster care director at Access Family Services. “That’s why Access Family Services provides individualized training and support throughout the child’s placement. We want potential foster parents to be aware of the varying realities of the autism spectrum and both the constant challenges and joys of parenting a child with autism.”

Access Family Services provides an array of foster care and specialized family treatment through licensed foster care settings, including family and therapeutic foster care, intensive alternative treatment and crisis overnight respite.

According to the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, children come into foster care because of abuse, neglect or dependency. They are placed into foster care when the county Department of Social Services determines that the child cannot be cared for safely by their birth family. A January 2018 study published in the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders found that children with autism are 2.4 times more likely to enter foster care, possibly because of the difficulty of managing the condition effectively and the lack of skills and resources to do so.

For those interested in opening their heart and home by becoming a licensed professional foster parent to a child with autism, contact Myca Jeter at 919-886-0222 or [myca.jeter@accessfamilyservices.com](mailto:myca.jeter@accessfamilyservices.com). Or, visit The Access Family Services website at <https://tinyurl.com/2q8yx7dg>.

### **About Vaya Health**

Based in Asheville, N.C., Vaya Health manages public funds for mental health, substance use disorder and intellectual or developmental disability services in 22 western North Carolina counties: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey. Access to care and crisis assistance are available 24/7 at 1-800-849-6127. Learn more at [www.vayahealth.com](http://www.vayahealth.com).

###