



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Local nonprofit honors Vaya Health CEO

ASHEVILLE, N.C. – A North Carolina association that helps people with disabilities thrive and connect to paid employment is honoring Vaya Health CEO Brian Ingraham for his leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Hendersonville-based Marketing Association for Rehabilitation Centers (MARC) presented Ingraham with its 2020 Director's Award virtually on Tuesday. The award recognizes people or organizations whose work, action or advocacy has made a lasting impact upon the economic and social quality of life for people with a disability or other disadvantage.

The pandemic has disproportionately disrupted the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), including through high risk of illness, loss of in-person services and increased isolation. Nationwide and in North Carolina, many providers of IDD services and supports have experienced financial challenges and even job losses, said MARC Board of Directors Chairman Michael Maybee.

"Vaya's efforts over the past year have helped sustain essential services for western North Carolina residents with disabilities," Maybee said. "Under Ingraham's leadership, Vaya has supported providers by offering hardship payments, service flexibilities and other considerations during very challenging times. The network and infrastructure are in place for when people return."

Vaya manages Medicaid and other government funding for mental health, substance use disorder and IDD services in 22 counties in western North Carolina.

"I'm humbled to accept the Director's Award on behalf of Vaya and our staff, who are dedicated to supporting people with disabilities despite the challenges of COVID-19," Ingraham said. "I'm very pleased that the measures we put in place to support the needs of our members during the pandemic, by taking care of our providers, have worked. MARC member agencies are valuable partners in helping people throughout western North Carolina receive quality vocational training and find employment in our local communities."

Maybee is president and CEO of Watauga Opportunities, Inc., a Boone manufacturing company that also operates a nonprofit community rehabilitation and job training program. In 2020, the manufacturing division began producing millions of vials every month for use in COVID-19 test kits. Many community services continue to be delivered through telehealth, including daily "Zoom Zumba" and other health and wellness activities that keep participants engaged with their peers and services.

The telehealth sessions help participants develop interpersonal skills, acquire COVID safety skills, learn to cope with loneliness and reduce pandemic anxieties, connect with others and learn how to use virtual services, Maybee said. In-person services are preferred, he said, but in the meantime, parents have said it's the highlight of their child's day.

MARC's mission is to serve as a catalyst for innovations that improve the economic and social quality of life for people with disabilities and disadvantages. The nonprofit association's member service area includes 27 primarily rural counties of North Carolina, including most of the 22 counties in Vaya's region. For more information, visit www.marcinc.com.

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.

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