



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 21, 2022

Area Law Enforcement Officers Boost Crisis Response Skills

WILKESBORO, NORTH CAROLINA – Officers from five northwestern North Carolina law enforcement agencies are better equipped to respond to people experiencing a behavioral health crisis following a 40-hour training in Wilkes County.

Eighteen participants completed Vaya Health's Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training from Feb. 14-18 at Wilkes Community College. Graduates were:

- **Lenoir Police Department:** Matt Bonestell
- **North Wilkesboro Police Department:** Brian Baity, Jacob McCoy, Jordan Walsh, and Rocky Whitley
- **Watauga County Sheriff's Office:** Gracie Brown, Tanner Mathis, James Parker, and Matt Richardson
- **Wilkes County Sheriff's Office:** Joshua Bare, Dakota Barecca, Samuel Hill, Donald Thorton, and Harrison Tilley
- **Wilkesboro Police Department:** Bradley Dancy, Chris Handy, Matthew Osborne, and Preston Parsons

Sgt. Steven Russell with the Wilkes County Sheriff's Office served as the law enforcement co-facilitator. CIT training partners included the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Wilkes Community College, Dr. Greg Minton, Daymark Recovery Services, Resources for Resilience, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), RHA Health Services, Buncombe County, Oasis Recovery Center, the Brain Injury Association of America, Synergy Recovery, Wilkes Vocational Services, and the NC Department of Public Safety (DPS).

More than 1,300 law enforcement officers, first responders, and other professionals in North Carolina have completed Vaya's CIT program. The training helps participants better communicate with people with mental health issues, substance use disorders, or intellectual/developmental disabilities and can increase both citizen and officer safety, help people get treatment, and reduce arrests.

Vaya, an Asheville-based public managed care organization, provided the training at no cost to participating agencies. Topics included mental health and substance use disorders, veterans' issues, trauma, suicide prevention, services for people who are deaf, and skills to de-escalate potentially dangerous situations. Graduates also participated in role-playing activities and local agency site visits.

Between 25 and 40 percent of Americans with mental illness will pass through the criminal justice system at some point, according to NAMI. The first CIT program – a collaborative effort among law enforcement, advocates, and mental health communities – was established in 1988 in Memphis, Tennessee.

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About Vaya Health

Vaya Health is a specialty managed care organization that oversees publicly funded behavioral health and intellectual/developmental disability services across a 31-county region of North Carolina. Vaya manages Medicaid, federal, state, and local funding to meet member and community needs while advancing whole-person health. Together with our members, provider network, and local partners, we're moving forward to a healthier North Carolina. Access to care and crisis assistance are available 24/7 at 1-800-849-6127. Learn more at vayahealth.com.