



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Area Law Enforcement Officers Boost Crisis Response Skills

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

Six participants completed Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training, coordinated by Vaya Health, from April 4-8 at Blue Ridge Community College. Graduates were:

- **Blue Ridge Community College Police and Public Safety Department:** Christopher Sellers
- **Fletcher Police Department:** Michael Elizondo
- **Henderson County Sheriff's Office:** Jimmy Burgess and Antonio Soriano
- **Lake Lure Police Department:** Caleb Oates
- **Transylvania County Sheriff's Office:** Micah Bagwell

Detective Pete Laite with the Hendersonville Police Department served as the law enforcement co-facilitator.

CIT training partners included the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Blue Ridge Community College, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), RHA Health Services, the NC Department of Public Safety (DPS), Liberty Corner Enterprises, the Autism Society, the Brain Injury Association of America, Resources for Resilience, Buncombe County, Blue Ridge Health, Crossnore Communities For Children, The Free Clinics, the Henderson County Wellness Clinic, Vocational Solutions of Henderson County, Thrive, and Hinds Feet Farm.

More than 1,500 law enforcement officers, first responders, and other professionals in North Carolina have completed CIT training coordinated by Vaya. 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, coordinated the training at no cost to participating agencies. Topics included behavioral health disorders, veterans' issues, trauma, suicide prevention, services for people who are deaf, officer wellness, 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.

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.

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