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Amherst Caring Coalition Expands Community Wellness Efforts with Sheriff's Wellness Room

Amherst, VA –Following October's World Mental Health Day, Horizon Behavioral Health and the Amherst Caring Coalition are celebrating their ongoing partnership with local agencies to create wellness spaces and promote trauma-informed practices across Amherst County — including the recent opening of a new wellness room at the Amherst County Sheriff's Office.

Funded through a \$10,000 Trauma-Informed Care Grant from the Virginia Department of Social Services' Office of Trauma and Resiliency, the Amherst Caring Coalition has used these funds to create calming wellness spaces throughout the community. These rooms provide safe, supportive environments where employees and residents can relax, regulate, and recharge in the face of daily stressors.

The initiative has led to the creation of wellness rooms at the Amherst County Courthouse, the Amherst Department of Social Services, the Amherst County Fire and EMS Building, and the Amherst County Sheriff's Department. The coalition also funded supplies for BEST Labs (Behavior Education Support Transition Labs) in five Amherst County Public Schools, providing students and staff with tools for emotional regulation and behavioral support. Current BEST Lab locations include:

- Monelison Middle School
- Madison Heights Elementary
- Amelon Elementary
- Central Elementary
- Amherst Education Center

Additionally, the coalition coordinated trauma and resilience training for school personnel, public safety professionals, and law enforcement officers—reinforcing the importance of emotional wellness and community support across multiple sectors.

The wellness room at the Amherst County Sheriff's Office was designed by coalition members featuring a western-inspired aesthetic, dimmable lighting, soothing artwork, and a massage chair. It serves as a sanctuary for law enforcement professionals seeking a moment of calm during demanding workdays.

“The wellness room that they put together for our staff is nothing like I have ever seen. The massaging chair, along with the gorgeous artwork and dimmable lighting, makes it a relaxing sanctuary for our staff members,” said Major James Begley, Chief Deputy of the Amherst County Sheriff's Office. “To have a designated place where our colleagues can



relax and decompress is very important and necessary, given the stressors of our occupation as law enforcement professionals. The room has been a hit with our staff, and we are so appreciative.”

The coalition’s work is part of Virginia’s broader Trauma-Informed Community Network (TICN), which aims to foster a culture of understanding, resilience, and recovery across the county through multi-sector coalitions.

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Horizon Behavioral Health has been the primary public behavioral healthcare provider in the Central Virginia region for more than 56 years. Horizon provides services to adults and children, addressing challenges with mental health, substance use and intellectual disabilities. Horizon is accredited by CARF International. This represents the highest level of accreditation that can be given to a behavioral health organization.

The Amherst Caring Coalition brings together community partners, service providers, and volunteers to strengthen wellness, resilience, and connection throughout Amherst County. Guided by trauma-informed principles, the coalition focuses on supporting children, families, first responders, and educators through collaboration and care.