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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GHA Autism Supports Announces Dee Pankey Thompson as New Chief Executive Officer

Albemarle, NC — August 10, 2026 — GHA Autism Supports is pleased to announce that Dee Pankey Thompson has been named the organization's next Chief Executive Officer, effective August 23, 2026.

Thompson will become only the third Chief Executive Officer in GHA Autism Supports' 48-year history, succeeding current CEO Dawn Allen, who has led the organization for 45 years. Allen announced her plans to retire after an extraordinary career of service and leadership with GHA.

Thompson's appointment represents a significant milestone for GHA and reflects the organization's commitment to strong, experienced leadership and continuity of its mission. A native of Stanly County, Thompson joined GHA Autism Supports 29 years ago as a direct care support staff member. Over the course of her career, she has served in a variety of leadership and operational roles, including Community Service Coordinator, Qualified Professional, Residential Director, Chief Operations Officer, Chief Strategy Officer, and, most recently, Executive Vice President and Chief Quality Officer, a position she has held since July 2023.

"I am deeply grateful to the GHA Autism Supports Board of Directors for their confidence in me and in my ability to lead this organization into its next chapter," said Thompson. "I am honored by this opportunity and incredibly excited to continue the work we have been doing for nearly five decades to provide quality care, support, and opportunities for individuals with autism and their families. GHA has been such an important part of my life for the past 29 years, and I look forward to building on the strong foundation established by those who have served this organization before me."

Thompson earned her bachelor's degree from Catawba College and her Master of Science in Leadership and Organizational Change from Pfeiffer University. Her nearly three decades of experience with GHA have provided her with a unique understanding of the

organization's mission, culture, programs, employees, individuals served, and families.

As part of the leadership transition, Dawn Allen will serve as a Legacy CEO, working closely alongside Thompson over the next year to support a smooth and thoughtful transition of leadership. Allen's 45 years of service have been instrumental in shaping GHA Autism Supports into the organization it is today, and her continued involvement during the transition will help ensure that her institutional knowledge and experience are carried forward.

"Dawn's leadership and dedication to GHA have been extraordinary," Thompson said. "I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to learn from her and to have her continued support as we move through this transition. Her legacy will always be an important part of GHA's story."

Founded in 1978 as a five-bed children's home in Albemarle, GHA Autism Supports has grown into a comprehensive organization serving individuals with autism and their families across multiple communities in North Carolina. Today, GHA operates more than 25 programs, employs more than 250 people, and serves more than 100 individuals with autism through residential, vocational, educational, community, and in-home services.

GHA Autism Supports looks forward to this next chapter under Thompson's leadership while remaining firmly grounded in its mission of supporting individuals with autism to build skills, gain independence, and experience lives filled with dignity, purpose, and opportunity.

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