DALTON, Ga. (January 6, 2019) – Hamilton Health Care System’s Anna Shaw Children’s Institute (ASCI) has helped more than 400 children with developmental delays and their families since opening last April. There have been approximately 3,800 patient visits.

“We have had an amazing beginning,” said Terri Woodruff, executive director.

Most of the patients are Georgia residents, however some patients have come from Tennessee and Florida.

Dedicated to the memory of longtime Whitfield County resident Anna Sue Shaw, the Institute is a regional leader of and advocate for the care of children who are experiencing the challenges of autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, ADHD/ADD, down syndrome, spina bifida, Apert syndrome, cri du chat syndrome, Lennox Gastaut syndrome, hydrocephalus, spinal cord injury, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy or developmental delays.

“There is a high volume of children with complex conditions in our area who need services,” said Woodruff. “We are getting to know the needs of the children and families in our community and beyond, and we’re so excited to be able to partner with parents and caregivers to provide state-of-the-art, evidence-based care for their children.”

Providers who specialize in the care of children include: a psychologist, developmental behavioral pediatricians, neurodevelopmental pediatrician, social worker, speech-language pathologists, physical therapists, behavior analysts, music therapist, occupational therapists, care navigator and others.

“Our team is phenomenal,” said Woodruff. “Everyone has a passion for children. The coordination of all care services under one roof has benefited the providers, the children and the families. Collaboration among all caregivers has streamlined services and been such a convenience for families.”

ASCI has initiated free programs since opening, including Arts in the Treetops (music events designed to introduce people to music therapy), Classes to Help, Advise & Motivate Parents (CHAMP, educational classes on the first Tuesday of the month), parent support group (second Tuesday of the month) and Reading around the Tree (story time for children).

With design elements inspired by the style of a tree house, the Anna Shaw Children’s Institute was designed to be considerate of children’s differing abilities to tolerate light, sound and texture. The Institute provides a unique environment with the overall goal to blend calming color and fun play for children of all abilities.

The room designs include forest animals, birds or butterflies. Each of the rooms has dimmable lights. Some unique areas for care include the Swan Room, an aquatic therapy room for children with a swim tank. The Oriole room is used for occupational therapy. Feeding therapy can take place in the Finch
or Falcon rooms in a booth that mimics dining out. Children can participate in speech therapy in the Sparrow or the Seagull rooms. To emphasize the woodland theme, local artists have painted or designed an artistic piece for each room, featuring the animal assigned to the specific room.

Children can receive physical or occupational therapy in the Tree House Gym, a large 2,900-square-foot gym with colorful patterns on the floor, an adaptive climbing wall, an indoor slide and a fun track in the middle of the room. During pleasant weather, therapy can be enjoyed outside in the Treehouse Terrace, an outdoor therapy area with a roller slide, a spinning chair, adaptive pull up bars, a sensory wave and a fun set of tympani drums.

A unique gift shop, Treetop Treasures, features sensory friendly toys, weighted blankets, puzzles, books and other items specifically for children receiving care at the Institute.

The Children’s Institute plans to expand support as it grows.

“We want to provide a focus on what children can do rather than their limitations,” said Woodruff. “We plan to create a literacy rich environment by giving children books and promoting reading to children, support families so they can meet their child’s needs, advocate for families with insurance companies, medical equipment companies and community resources, and continue to provide free classes for families to advance their understanding of caring for their child.”

A large number of families are impacted by developmental delays in this area. Currently Whitfield, Murray, Gordon and Catoosa counties, there are 27,500 plus children who are diagnosed with a developmental disability. According to the CDC, one in 59 children in the United States are impacted by autism.

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**Photo:** Pictured are Anna Shaw Children’s Institute representatives.