

MTSU Center for Health and Human Services Newsletter



*Better Health and Well-Being
for Tennesseans and That of the Nation*



PERSEVERANCE

**"MANY OF LIFE'S FAILURES ARE PEOPLE WHO DID NOT REALIZE
HOW CLOSE THEY WERE TO SUCCESS WHEN THEY GAVE UP."**

– Thomas A. Edison

Perseverance Pays Off Funding for Mental Health Activities Secured After Lengthy Search

The Center for Health and Human Services, as a primarily externally funded department on campus, knows what it means to persevere. There are never any guarantees with grants and sponsorships, and perseverance is essential for success. For every successfully funded grant application CHHS submits, there is a stack of others that are not funded. For CHHS, it is all

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What's Next?

We continue work on proposals for grant funding opportunities that address **substance use disorder (SUD)** and/or **opioid use disorder (OUD)**. We recently submitted and are actively working on federal grant proposals that would fund the expansion of **Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT)** for substance use and opioid use disorder in multiple Tennessee communities. Another recent proposal is in partnership with an African American church in one rural Tennessee community and would provide a **mobile unit for SUD/OUD education, outreach, harm reduction, and links to needed services**.

We are eagerly awaiting another funding opportunity to post that would allow us to conduct **opioid use disorder research** in two additional rural counties, similar to what is underway with our HRSA-funded Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) project. Also in the space of substance use and misuse, we are working on a proposal in partnership with MTSU's Physician Assistant program, Public Health program, and Social Work Department for an **interdisciplinary training program** to equip clinicians and practitioners with the skills to identify, treat, and support individuals in rural communities with **SUD/OUD**.

Other areas of research and activities include a collaboration between CHHS, the MTSU School of Nursing, and other community partners on a proposal (delayed but recently posted) that addresses current needs of the **health care workforce specific to long-term care facilities and nursing homes**. We have a "second chance" opportunity to expand upon the new Blue Raiders Drink Up 2.0 project, which would serve students eligible for SNAP benefits and would further support **fruit and vegetable**

consumption, healthy lifestyles, and chronic disease prevention; we are working on a second submission for this project. Work continues on a project we hope to be funded by the Department of Transportation that will support **transformative infrastructure projects** that serve disadvantaged communities. Components of this proposal include roads and bridges to connect people with needed health care services, employment, resources for healthy and productive living, and access to outdoor areas and a planned recreational mecca to promote active living and the reduction of chronic disease. While it is still early in the planning stages, progress has been made, and we continue to be excited about this project and are eager to form new partnerships on campus with nontraditional partners.

With our current and recent portfolio of research, projects, and programs that focus on substance use disorders, obesity and diabetes prevention, foods and agriculture, environmental health, and workforce development, our gratitude continues for our many partners who make our work possible as we make a difference in the lives of Tennesseans and others throughout the nation in these initiatives that have both state and national reach. CHHS looks forward to continuing to serve the public in these important areas as well as our campus community through our campus-focused grants.

For those who are not familiar with CHHS, please take an opportunity to visit the [center's website](#) to read more about our work. Previous editions of the CHHS newsletter are posted there, as is additional information on some of the many projects, programs, and research of the center. A few recent highlights are provided in the following pages.

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Recent CHHS Projects, Program, and Research Highlights

Blue Raiders Drink Up 2.0: Healthy Choices for Healthy Students

- **Blue Raiders Drink Up 2.0 (BRDU)** continues to be well received by the MTSU student body in its fourth year of implementation, thanks to continued funding by the **Tennessee Department of Health’s Project Diabetes Initiative**. Since “BRDU 2.0” began July 1, 2022, the program has been able to educate **over 1,178 MTSU students** through multiple on-campus tabling events, one-on-one health coaching and dietetic counseling, hands-on cooking classes, and healthy choices events located in select dormitories across campus.



A notable highlight from the first year of BRDU 2.0 is the assembly and implementation of the **MTSU Healthy Vending Machine Task Force**. A team of health-focused professionals has come together as an advisory body to help draft an MTSU-centric policy on healthy vending machine choices. Through research and collaboration, the task force will create and present a health vending policy recommendation to the administration.



The task force’s second meeting took place February 23, 2023, and in the coming months a survey will gather opinions of MTSU students, faculty, and staff on vending choices.

An exciting partnership made during the first year of BRDU 2.0 is with MTSU Housing and Residential Life. We have expanded our original program to focus on the on-campus dormitories through educational events, providing water refill stations and **mobile kitchen carts**. We are currently piloting our program in two dormitories on campus, Cummings and Monohan Hall. We have purchased, assembled, and delivered the mobile kitchen carts to both dorms. Students can now check out the cart at the Resident Assistant desk and utilize the cooking facilities in their dorm.

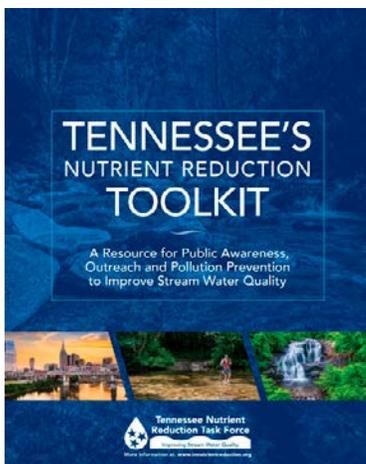
Lastly, five students have successfully completed the MTSU MyFit program, and another five students are in the process of completing their sessions. MyFit is an individualized program that helps students work toward overall wellness by setting goals relating to their current health and wellness, fitness, nutrition, and lifestyle. The BRDU program has partnered with Campus Rec to cover the costs; if you are an MTSU student and would like more information, contact Christina Byrd at christina.byrd@mtsu.edu.

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Environment and Water Quality Project

CHHS worked collaboratively with the [Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation \(TDEC\)](#) through a formal interagency contract to create a **robust public education campaign addressing water quality** from January 2021 through December 31, 2022. This campaign consisted of a variety of media platforms and included four priority populations: agriculture, K–12 education, wastewater treatment facilities, and the general public.



Throughout the contract period, CHHS collaborated with [MTSU Center for Environmental Education](#), [MTSU Department of Environmental Health and Safety Services](#), and the [MTSU School of Agriculture](#) to create a wide variety

of multimedia content. CHHS provided oversight and coordination of all activities required to fully complete contract deliverables as well as fiscal management of the contract. The program coordinator convened at least one contributor meeting per month, assigned deliverables with deadlines, and collaborated with MTSU Creative and Visual Services to create a cohesive visual aesthetic for all media. Once finished, the team compiled and organized all content into a 142-page digital toolkit for easy distribution.

The completed toolkit is available here: <https://mtsu.edu/chhs/docs/TennesseeNutrientReductionFinalToolkit.pdf>.



- **Opioid prevention works toward sustainability.** CHHS continues its work in Wilson County, where it is using a three-year, \$1 million grant to implement activities and secure needed resources to address the opioid epidemic in rural communities over a three-year period. This funding from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) follows an earlier HRSA planning grant, under which activities began in October 2020. A HRSA site visit took place in the fall, and the CHHS RCORP team, along with local partners, finalized part one of a three-part sustainability plan in preparation for the grant’s end date of August 2024.

We continue our work to address stigma and substance use. The [CHHS SPRING/Winter 2022 newsletter](#) featured a lengthy write-up on these activities. A copy of the [Wilson County RCORP Community and Provider Stigma Report 2023](#) is now available on the CHHS website. A second countywide billboard campaign is in the planning stages and will allow for continuing evaluation of efforts to reduce stigma in the community. Work also continues with the Preventing Incarceration in Communities (PIC) Center, which has been tremendously successful. We continue to

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provide transportation through this grant to individuals needing transportation to treatment appointments, as well as provide coverage for treatment services based on need.

CHHS, our campus partners, and Wilson County community partners represented by [DrugFree WilCo](#) look forward to continuing to fight the opioid epidemic and make a difference in the health and lives of Tennesseans. This project was also highlighted in the [Fall 2021 CHHS newsletter](#) for those who would like to read more about the project's history and early activities.

- **COVID-19 funded agriculture and STEM education project wraps up its southeast regional tour.** A grant opportunity that grew out of the COVID-19 pandemic is winding down. CHHS, in partnership with the [MTSU School of Agriculture](#) and Fermentation Science faculty, had received funding through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Rapid Response Research on COVID-19 program. Content for STEMsational Ag: The Virtual Farm is now complete with the incremental release over the last two years of 52 units of

agriculture, health, and STEM curriculum for teachers, parents at home placed in educator roles unexpectedly, and home-school families in an 11-state area for grades K–14. The free, online curriculum created by experts in their fields offers 12 modules with 52 units focusing on agriculture and STEM topics. **Over 1,000 registrants, including teachers, students, and parents,** have been exploring what the interactive curriculum has to offer, and that number keeps growing! The curriculum will be available for years to come.

The curriculum was created for K–14 learners, but anyone can explore the wide range of topics. There are units about nutrition and food science with the opportunity to prepare delicious, healthy recipes. The module titled “Farm Fashion” allows learners to discover the myriad of fantastic fibers, fabrics, and materials we use every day from the world of agriculture. If you want to learn about gardening, we have multiple units to exercise your green thumb. If applying your critical thinking and skills is something you enjoy, designing a garden space and engineering a chicken coop will be practical, hands-on learning

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Recently released units include:

- Cooking on a Budget
- The Honey Jar
- Natural Fabric Dyes
- From Grass to Steak
- Spicing Up Your Garden



The project has been invited to be included in two science magazines in the coming months, Tennessee Science Teachers Association (TSTA) and Ag Ed.

SPRING OVERVIEW *continued from page 6*

right at your fingertips. Are you interested in animal science? We have several modules and units that explore the anatomy, function, and care of various barnyard buddies. The units are engaging, fun, and free, and we have something for everyone!

If you're interested in learning more about the world of agriculture, check us out at STEMsationalAg.com and create a free account for years of exploring!

- **Infant Death Scene Investigation (DSI) and Safe Sleep project live training resumes.** Since 2004, more than 34,000 first responders have completed DSI training to meet training requirements mandated by the state of Tennessee in response to the Sudden Unexplained Child Death Act. As part of this training, responders also learn about sudden unexpected infant death (SUID) and safe sleep for infants. In 2020, the training transitioned to a virtual classroom format due to COVID-19, which was a challenge but ultimately successful with the support and hard work of MTSU's University College. For 2022–23, live training for first responders has returned.

Trainers and speakers including the state medical examiner, have historically provided interactive daylong training for first responders. Transitioning to a virtual format that in many cases was unfamiliar to the intended audience was quite the challenge, but it was successful and will continue as a model to complement live training sessions. There have been many benefits to having a virtual option, including accessibility for first responders across the state who may not be able to travel, increasing opportunities for participation.

Look at what some of our educators are saying about STEMsational Ag: The Virtual Farm:

"I am a second-grade teacher at a STEM school in TN. I heard about this resource at a STEM conference, and I'm super excited to be able to use this resource in my classroom!"

Teacher, Sumner County

"Being that we are building a STEM program for the first time this school year, having a curriculum like this with all of the technology features will truly support my vision for the class. The materials are easily accessible, teacher and student friendly, and aligned with other curriculum across other contents like ELS and science."

Principal, teacher, educator,
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

"The program + STEM materials are not only good for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math but culturally relevant for students who are learning about the environment, food, and where it comes from, especially in third world countries like Bolivia. This program not only brings together STEM, but also creates an awareness that is necessary in this day and age."

Teacher/Educator, American Cooperative School of La Paz, Bolivia

SPRING OVERVIEW *continued from page 6*

Safe Sleep and Child Fatality Review training for public health and social services staff is in the planning stages and will take place May 11–12. Over 1,800 public health and social services professionals have completed the training to date.

The project was featured in the [summer 2021 CHHS newsletter](#) for those who would like to learn more. The project has filled a gap for provider training within the first responder community and within health and social services fields.

• **Partnerships and collaborations continue.**

CHHS continues to identify collaborators and partners both on and off-campus for CHHS projects, programs, and research. Look for more updates via this quarterly CHHS newsletter, the CHHS website, and social media.



Want to donate to further the work of MTSU’s CHHS?

MTSU CHHS operates primarily through external funding. To continue our mission of promoting health and well-being for all Tennesseans and that of our nation, we need financial resources to continue our work. We operate from public and private grants as well as sponsorships and donations.

Please consider a donation of any size, which will go directly to CHHS.

Visit mtsu.edu/chhs, click on Donate Now, and specify that your donation is for CHHS. The site accepts MasterCard, VISA, and American Express.

mtsu.edu/chhs • **Follow us on social media**



Project Spotlight: MTSU Mental Health First Aid 2023–26



Members of the MTSU campus community soon will be trained in how to notice and respond to mental health and addiction challenges commonly experienced by youth in higher education settings. Thanks to a \$500,000 federal grant recently secured by the MTSU Center for Health and Human Services, students, faculty, and staff will have an opportunity to receive certification through Mental Health First Aid for Higher Education, an evidence-based curriculum that will train them to know how to handle a range of possibilities that commonly occur as a person experiences symptoms of mental illness.

Training, which was first provided to the campus community in 2019–21, will include topics such

as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideations, trauma, non-suicidal self-harm, psychosis, and substance use and misuse.

CHHS received funding to relaunch the certification effort for a four-year period, which began December 31, 2022. When the project is fully relaunched in April 2023, multiple workshops, providing two-year certifications, will take place each month with a goal of reaching 1,280 individuals over the four-year period. Approximately seven workshops will be offered per quarter for MTSU students, staff, and faculty, with an additional workshop for higher education institutions across the state.



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PROJECT SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 9*

Each workshop lasts eight hours and is free. MTSU CHHS previously piloted this project in 2019 through an earlier grant and successfully trained over 1,100 students, faculty, and staff, with more than 1,300 referrals made over a three-year period and “with demonstrated reduction of stigma for those participating in the program,” according to CHHS.

The 2019–21 pilot project was well received on campus. CHHS worked with multiple departments and groups on campus to deliver training, including several that require mental health awareness training in their degree programs or classroom activities—such as Psychology, Nursing, Liberal Arts, Child Development, and Nutrition/Dietetics.

Funding for the four-year grant comes from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. CHHS previously partnered with MTSU’s Counseling Services as well as the Center for Counseling and Psychological Services to deliver counseling services, and it plans to continue working with them on this project.

A new program coordinator, Jill Thomas, has been hired. Mental Health First Aid facilitators from the pilot project have been invited to continue leading sessions, and all have accepted. New facilitators will be hired along with two student ambassadors representing the military and veteran community as well as other underserved populations; they will promote activities and training opportunities within the student body and larger campus community. Facilitators have attended a one-week intensive certification conference to ensure fidelity to the curriculum. Local behavioral health providers who previously served as community partners were educated on Mental Health First Aid and will be asked again to participate in relevant data collection over the next four years.

Read the section later in this newsletter that shares more on partnerships and collaborations CHHS will have as part of this exciting new grant award.



Trying to drink more water?

Here's a map of water refill stations on campus!



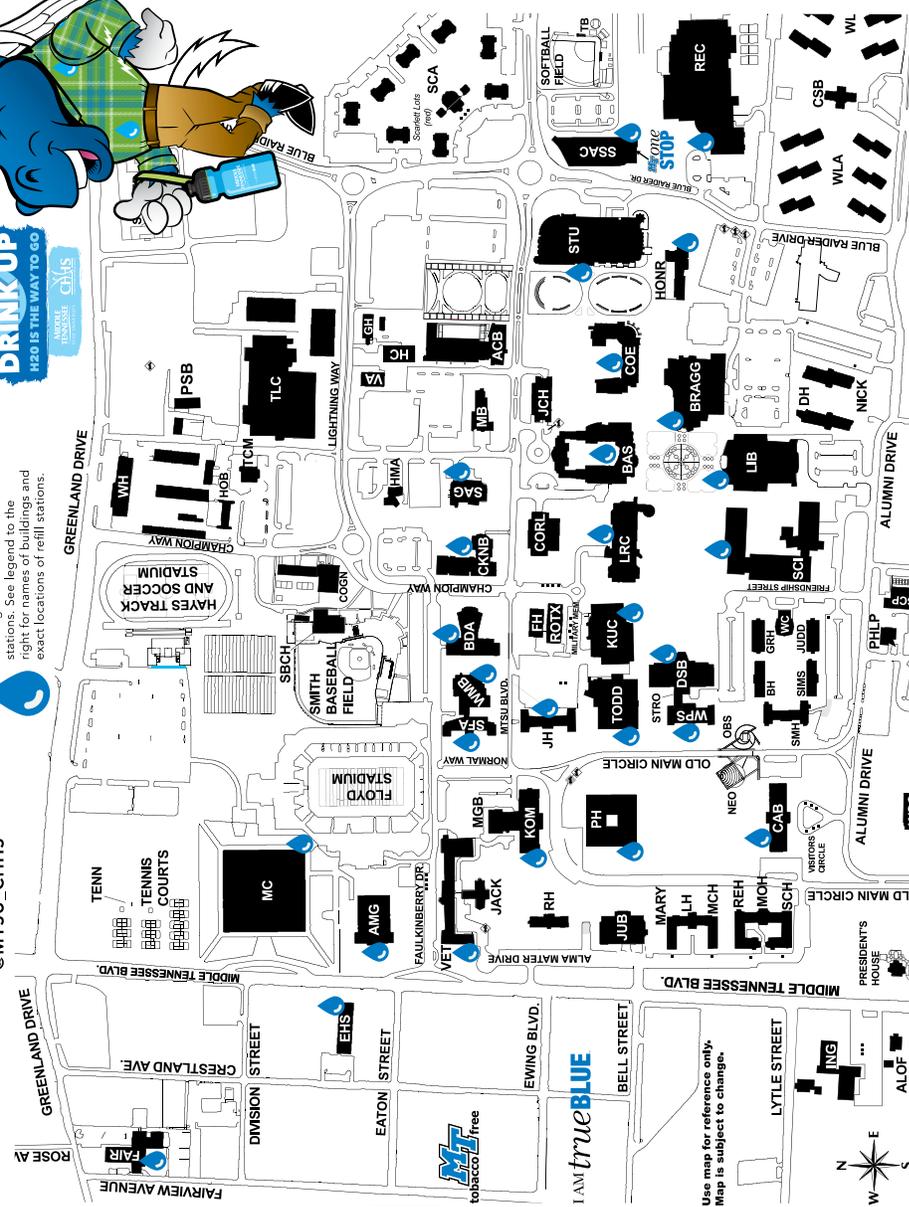
BLUE RAIDERS DRINK UP

Water Refill Stations Map

@MTSU_CHHS

Building with water refill stations. See legend to the right for names of buildings and exact locations of refill stations.







BLUE RAIDERS DRINK UP
WATER REFILL STATIONS
#H2O IS THE WAY TO GO

AMG Alumni Memorial Gym
1-First Floor, 3-Second Floor*

BAS Business and Aerospace Building
1-First Floor, 1-Second Floor, 1-Third Floor

BDA Bouxwell Dramatic Arts Building
1-First Floor, 1-Second Floor

BRAGG John Bragg Media and Entertainment Building
1-Second Floor

CAB Cape Administration Building
1-First Floor, 1-Second Floor

CKNB Carson-Kennedy Nursing Building
2-First Floor, 1-Second Floor*

COE College of Education Building
1-First Floor

DSB Davis Science Building
2-First Floor

EHS Ellington Human Sciences Building
1-First Floor

FAIR Fairview Building
1-First Floor

HONR Paul W. Martin Sr. Honors Building
1-Second Floor

JH Jones Hall
1-First Floor, 1-Third Floor*

KOM Kirksey Old Main
1-First Floor

KUC Keathley University Center
1-Second Floor

LIB James E. Walker Library
1-First Floor, 1-Second Floor

LRC Ned McWhirter Learning Resources Center
1-First Floor*

MC Murphy Center
4-First Floor*

PH Peck Hall
1-Second Floor

REC Health, Wellness, and Recreation Center
1-First Floor, 1-Second Floor

SAG Stark Agriculture Center
1-First Floor

SCI Science Building
1-First Floor

SFA Saunders Fine Arts Building
1-Second Floor, 1-Third Floor*

SSAC Student Services and Admissions Center
1-First Floor, 1-Second Floor

STU Student Union Building
1-Second Floor

TODD Andrew L. Todd Hall
1-First Floor, 1-Second Floor

VET Voochies Engineering Technology
1-First Floor

WMB Wright Music Building
1-First Floor, 2-Second Floor*

WPS Wise-Pates Science Hall
1-First Floor

This program is funded under an agreement with the State of Tennessee.

* Funded by Blue Raiders Drink Up

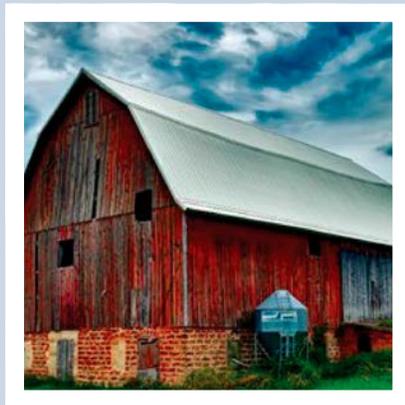
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CHHS installed nine water refill stations across campus over the last three years and distributed 1,493 water bottles to students. There were 26,526 refills made from these water stations. Water bottles will continue to be provided during 2022-2025.

Whom Do We Serve?

The Center for Health and Human Services collaborates with MTSU faculty and staff, and public and private organizations and partners, to develop and implement local, regional, and statewide programs, projects, and research activities designed to improve the health and well-being of Tennesseans and of the nation. Did you know that much of our work involves off-campus initiatives? One of the more

common misconceptions about CHHS is that we solely serve the campus community. While some of our efforts do focus on our campus, the majority of our work is done in communities across Tennessee, some of which serve as models for other states. Our projects have touched all 95 Tennessee counties, with some involving multistate partnerships and others having national impact.



Ash Abro and Rose Chilsen, recent Dietetics graduates and former CHHS staff.

CHHS Campus Resources

MTSU Mental Health First Aid



Mental Health FIRST AID

from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

CHHS is offering MHFA training **FREE** to those who are part of the campus community as part of a newly awarded grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Visit our **MTSU Mental Health First Aid** website to learn more. We continue to offer a self-pay program to interested groups off-campus. Over the 2019–2021 period, over 1,100 were trained through MTSU Mental Health First Aid. We look forward to serving the campus community again during the 2023–26 calendar years with this evidence-based national program.

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 [@mtsu_chhs](https://instagram.com/mtsu_chhs) instagram.com/mtsu_chhs/

CHHS Staff Spotlight

Laurie Necasek

This quarter CHHS is pleased to shine the spotlight on Laurie Necasek. Our interview with her is below.

CHHS: How long have you been with CHHS and what is your role?

LN: I am the accessibility specialist and content editor for the STEM-sational Ag: The Virtual Farm grant project that is funded by the USDA. The Center for Health and Human Services (CHHS) at MTSU was awarded the grant to provide education on the connection between STEM and agriculture. The course is free to the public and targets grades K–14. It can be utilized by students, parents, home-schoolers, and teachers. My role with the project was to assist with the online learning component. Specifically, I edited content that was submitted by the project's content contributors for quality, course consistency, and accessibility.

The Virtual Farm eLearning course is self-paced, which means that the content must be formatted in a way that the learner or teaching facilitator can learn or teach the content independently.

By following a learning module template created by the team, I loaded content into the course and formatted it accordingly. I always kept our learners and teaching facilitators in mind while working on the project. Creating a course that is logical and easy to follow lessens frustration for our learners, which is an important priority for the project.

In regard to accessibility, I worked with the team to ensure that all the content was accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities. One of our



goals for the course is to ensure equal access to all of the course content. We want all learners to have access to the amazing content in The Virtual Farm! I provided accessible solutions to the course that removed barriers to learning.

Here are some examples of accessible solutions that are included in the course:

- Verifying that all videos had accurate captions and transcripts
- Providing alternative text or image descriptions with all images
- Formatting hyperlinks properly
- Correcting any color contrast issues
- Remediating documents (i.e., Word and PDF documents)
- Providing accessible alternatives to course activities

When I joined the team, the project had already begun, and it was in the first year of the grant. I joined the team in October 2021 and jumped right in! I stayed on the project with the team to assist in completing the remainder of the online learning components. Together, we worked hard and published the final unit at the end of 2022. A huge accomplishment!

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STAFF SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 13*

Since the grant project ended, I stayed involved with CHHS by providing a skills-based workshop on accessibility to assist the team with their goals for the year. It was wonderful to share knowledge and skills around accessibility with them. CHHS Director, Cynthia Chafin was very supportive of the workshop. She wanted the team to learn more about accessibility and apply the skills to grant projects moving forward.

The workshop focused on how CHHS can win more grants with accessibility. I discussed ways to improve accessibility in the digital content created by the department, including grant applications, social media, the website, and documents. The workshop was held during the February staff meeting and was well received by the department overall.

I was also asked to serve as an accessibility specialist on another grant with CHHS. That application is currently in review, and we hope to hear back this spring or summer. I'm keeping my fingers crossed that it will be approved so I can work on another project with CHHS!

CHHS: What is your favorite aspect of the job?

LN: There are so many things I love about this job! There are two things that stand out.

First, working with the grant project team and the CHHS staff was such a wonderful experience. Everyone was so welcoming from the beginning to make me feel part of the team while I worked remotely for the entire project. Also, working with Jill and Michelle on a day-to-day basis was such a joy. They made it fun and enjoyable even when we had to work through challenges.

I was fortunate enough to meet Jill in person in Greenville, South Carolina, when we worked at

a home-school conference together to promote The Virtual Farm. Getting to meet her in person and spend time together was a highlight of the project for me. She is an absolute delight!

The other thing that I was not expecting with this project when I signed on was how much I would learn by being involved in it! The content in the online course includes a variety of agricultural information, such as growing your own food, making healthy foods at home, farm animals, where our food comes from, and so many more topics! Even though I'm not the target audience for the course, I still learned a great deal from it! I even started a small herb garden last spring based on what I learned from the unit on growing herbs at home! I really enjoyed the education I received while I helped build the course. A wonderful side effect of this project!

CHHS: What's next for you with the grant ending?

LN: Now that the grant has ended, I am moving on to new things. I started my own business called [All About Accessibility](#) (LLC). I am an accessibility consultant, and I bridge the gap between people with disabilities who are accessing online content and content creators who want to reach a wider audience.

Here's an analogy to help explain accessibility:

Think of digital content as your brand's building that you want your audience to enter and experience. Most people build stairs to the building. I build ramps.

Being an inclusive content creator sends a message to your audience that you value accessibility and embrace differences. This will make you stand out from the competition, and your audience will value you back.

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STAFF SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 14*

Make accessibility a priority, instead of an afterthought, and it will save you precious time, money, and resources. By working with me, I can help you build accessibility into your content creation process and provide you with accessible solutions for your digital content.

Take a look at the resources provided on page 17 of this newsletter to learn more about how to be more accessible, or take a look at the social media links available at [Allaboutaccessibility.com](https://www.allaboutaccessibility.com).

I'm really excited to spread awareness about accessibility out into the world and help others who want to be more accessible!

CHHS: How do you use your free time? Hobbies?

LN: Life is pretty busy lately. My husband and I have two toddlers (ages 2 and 3). But when I make time for myself, cooking for my family (I got an air fryer this Christmas and have been putting it to good use!), pampering myself at home with a face mask (my husband always thinks I look crazy when I do it, but I love it!), and doing outdoor activities. Lately we get to go to parks with the kids, but when I can I enjoy a good hike on a beautiful day. I love being out in nature!

CHHS: What three traits define you?

I would say: silly (I love to laugh and make others laugh too), dedicated (when I put my mind to something I give 110%), open-minded (I love to learn and experience new things).

CHHS: What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?

LN: Last year, someone said this to me, and it made a huge impact on my life, "You can do

hard things." It's my new mantra! It sounds so simple and obvious, but I never heard it said to me like that before. And what's more important is that I NEEDED to hear it. It was completely true, I accomplished difficult things in the past and overcame challenges. I can certainly continue to "do hard things" as I come across challenges in my life. I just need to have trust in myself and work at it.

CHHS: What is the most important skill you have right now? What skill do you hope to have in five years?

LN: When it comes to work, I am working on being very intentional about everything I do. Making plans instead of "winging it" makes a huge difference in my productivity. When I make intentional plans of how to accomplish something it helps me stay focused, and I'm more likely to complete the task at hand. This is especially helpful as a solo-business owner and mother of two. There are many day-to-day things to juggle, and having a plan of attack makes a big difference.

In five years, I hope to continue to learn from my mistakes so that I can grow overall as a person. As a perfectionist, the thought of making a mistake is dreadful! But I've learned in my journey that mistakes are necessary in the growth process. So, I guess in five years I hope to be more comfortable in making mistakes so that I can learn more skills!

Be an Inclusive Content Creator and Reach a Wider Audience with Accessibility

by Laurie Necasek, *STEMsational Ag: The Virtual Farm Content Editor and Accessibility Specialist*

Here's an important statistic: 1 in 4 adults live with a disability (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). That's 25% of the population! Disabilities impact daily life activities and overall human functioning. That includes thinking, moving, learning, and communicating.



One everyday activity that is very common in our modern society is accessing digital content. We are glued to our devices these days! It's our primary way of consuming information and accessing resources.

People with disabilities face daily challenges in accessing digital content. Not having access to content is very frustrating and isolating.

A recent report found that 97% of homepages contain digital barriers (WebAIM Million, 2022) with a disability! That's an overwhelming majority and means that many people are denied access. It's a huge problem that needs more attention.

To give this issue some perspective, imagine a time when you tried to access something online and it wouldn't open properly, or the link was broken. You can't get the information you need when you need it. You might be screaming in your head, "Why isn't this working?!" It's a frustrating experience, to say the least. This is a common experience for people with disabilities when accessing digital content.

Let's think about the aspects of digital content and how disabilities come into play:

- Digital content is mostly visual.
- Movement of the body is important to actively engage with digital content.
- Understanding what is being communicated in a video is important, especially as videos continue to grow in popularity.
- Cognitive processing of text and visuals is also necessary to successfully understand what is being communicated in digital content.

From this list, it's clear how people with disabilities are impacted when accessing digital content.

Have you considered that you could be building digital barriers in your content without even realizing it? And as a result, people in your audience are being left out.

So the question is, "How do I ensure that I reach everyone in my audience?"

The answer is to build digital content with accessibility in mind.

Accessibility allows for equal access to digital content and removes barriers for people with disabilities. If accessibility is not built into the content, then people in the audience will be left out.

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ACCESSIBILITY continued from page 16



Think about this analogy to understand accessibility:

Digital content is like a building that you want your audience to enter and experience what's inside. Most content creators put stairs in front of the building. Build a ramp instead for equal access to the building.

Here are some examples of how to provide equal access in digital content:

- Provide captions and transcripts with videos.
- Check for proper color contrast between the text and the background.
- Provide alternative text or image descriptions with all images.
- Use heading styles in documents and websites.
- Write descriptive hyperlinks.
- Use CamelCase when writing hashtags.

It's important for everyone to have awareness of disabilities and accessibility in this digital age. Understanding the challenges that exist for people with disabilities is valuable knowledge that can be applied to the content creation process.

Creating content with accessibility in mind is a proactive strategy for content creators. It allows one to reach a wider audience, and it will save precious resources in the long term. People also value inclusivity and diversity. Being an accessible content creator will set one apart from the competition, and the audience will value you back. And the best part is, it's never too late to be accessible! Start today!

If you would like to learn more, the following are additional resources for accessibility:

[Digital.gov](https://www.digit.gov/): An Official website of the U.S. General Services Administration.

[World Wide Web Consortium's Web Accessibility Initiative](https://www.w3.org/WAI/)

New Team Members

Spring 2023 Interns from the Health and Human Performance Public Health Program

Abby Kelly

CHHS is pleased to introduce Community and Public Health undergraduate student Abby Kelly as a part of the CHHS team! She is serving as the Blue Raiders Drink Up spring 2023 intern, focusing on marketing and health promotion. Welcome, Abby!

“Hello, Blue Raiders! Currently, I am in my last semester of the Community and Public Health undergraduate program here at MTSU. I’m so excited to graduate in May and take some time to work on sitting for the CHES exam to get my certification in October. This semester, I have the privilege of interning with the Blue Raiders Drink Up program that provides resources for a healthy lifestyle to thousands of students. I’m thrilled to make a real-world impact on others for the first time in my public health career and to be engaging with students just like me! My favorite aspect about this internship is that I get to tap into my creative side, which is something I have recently found that I greatly enjoy. Work isn’t work if you love what you do! Outside of the CHHS, I have a job as a barista at Dutch Bros. Coffee in Smyrna. Dutch Bros. is a company that strongly focuses on spreading positivity and creating relationships with others. It’s no coincidence that my second job doesn’t feel like work either!

“Outside of work, I enjoy traveling in the Pacific Northwest, specifically Washington and Montana. I have hopes to move to a town called Coeur



D’Alene in northern Idaho after graduation to start my public health career and eventually attend a graduate program. I’m so glad that I stumbled upon the Community and Public Health program after switching my major from Nursing as a fearful junior. I knew I was fascinated by health, but something wasn’t clicking when I was taking nursing courses. After completing an Introduction to Public Health course as part of my minor, I knew that public health was exactly where I wanted to be. I have one professor to thank for starting my journey: Casie Higginbotham. She has been an amazing mentor from the beginning, and I’m so grateful to have had her as my professor for many of my courses.

“One piece of advice that I would give to incoming freshmen and even upperclassmen is to enjoy the time it takes to really find your passion. Uncertainty can be scary, but that’s what it takes to figure it out. This brings me to my favorite saying, “What is paramount today is a footnote for tomorrow.” Every step you make is in the right direction, whether it may seem so or not! I’m excited to see where this internship takes me and I’m thankful to be in such a closely knit, uplifting environment at CHHS.”

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NEW TEAM MEMBERS *continued from page 18*

Jocelyn Rajkowski

It is CHHS' pleasure to introduce Jocelyn Rajkowski is an M.P.H. student, Public Health graduate assistant, and CHHS grant-writing intern. "I was attracted to Public Health to make a positive difference in myself and the world around me. Once finished with my graduate degree, I plan on working toward my Ph.D. in Epidemiology."



currently working with Sarah Gwinn on several projects, including a literature review that will hopefully reveal the necessity of interdisciplinary internships with Public Health, Social Work, and Physician Assistant students collaborating on case management and supportive services to help individuals with substance use disorder or opioid use disorder in clinical settings. The skills that

After getting her Ph.D., Rajkowski hopes to work in a clinical setting as an epidemiologist or similar function. The field of Public Health is advancing and changing every day with new technologies and a growing understanding of human nature and behaviors and how they impact health outcomes. Regarding her future research and study interests, Rajkowski said, "I have an interest in artificial intelligence perceptions in health care and refugee health outcomes."

Rajkowski brings to CHHS will help strengthen the National Institutes of Health (NIH) proposal to research the efficacy of interdisciplinary internships for opioid services.

As an intern at CHHS, Rajkowski has been exposed to the grant-writing process for public health programs and how much collaboration between various agencies is required. She is

When not at home, she enjoys hanging out with her fellow graduate students, eating food and talking public health. But of course, there isn't much time for relaxing between master's classes, graduate assistant work, internship tasks, and looking forward to graduation. Cuddles with her pets provide some much-needed "self-care" in this busy season of life.



"IF WE ALL DID THE THINGS WE ARE CAPABLE OF, WE WOULD LITERALLY ASTOUND OURSELVES."

Thomas Edison

Staff News

CHHS Team Members Get Promoted

Sarah Gwinn Promoted to CHHS Project Development Specialist

Sarah Gwinn has a new role with CHHS serving as the first CHHS outreach specialist/proposal development. Gwinn will work with CHHS leadership to foster relationships with new project partners, lead planning sessions, and participate in all phases of project and proposal development. She previously served as CHHS grants coordinator for five years.



Michelle Sterlingshires Promoted to CHHS Grants and Program Coordinator

Michelle Sterlingshires is stepping into the post-award grant coordinator role at CHHS. She hopes to leverage her technical skills to support the center



in her new position and looks forward to working with all the departments involved in fulfilling grant activities and keeping them compliant in the process. Sterlingshires will also continue to assist center grants in other ways, including as a data coordinator for Project Diabetes and Safe Stars.

“I have big shoes to fill by following Sarah Gwinn, but it’s exciting to be part of the remarkable growth at CHHS. It’s been amazing to be a small part of projects that do good things, and I get to do it in such a supportive environment. This office is a special place.”

ACT AS IF WHAT YOU DO MAKES A DIFFERENCE. IT DOES.”

William James, American Philosopher, Historian, and Psychologist

STAFF NEWS continued from page 20



Jill Thomas Transitions to MTSU Mental Health First Aid Program Coordinator

Jill Thomas, previously program coordinator for the USDA-funded grant project STEMsational Ag: The Virtual Farm, which is wrapping up, is now in the role of program coordinator for the new MTSU Mental Health First Aid for Higher Education project.



CHHS Director Appointed to Rural Health Association of Tennessee as New Board Member

CHHS Director Cynthia Chafin has been nominated and approved as a new board member of the Rural Health Association of Tennessee (RHA) for 2023–25. Much of CHHS’ work impacts rural counties and communities throughout Tennessee and beyond. Chafin and

CHHS have a lengthy history with RHA, both supporting the mission of the organization to “lead the way for a healthy tomorrow throughout rural Tennessee” through partnership, advocacy, education, and resources. Founded in 1995, the Rural Health Association of Tennessee is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit whose members include rural health care providers, school health professionals, mental and behavioral health providers, and others who are committed to the vision of becoming among the healthiest states in America.

CHHS Director Featured as \$5.0 Million Club Member in the Spring 2023 MTSU Research Magazine

The spring 2023 *MTSU Research* magazine introduces the \$5 Million Club, spotlighting seven



MTSU faculty and staff who have brought in over the course of their careers over \$5 million in external funding. CHHS relies primarily on external funding for staffing and to carry out the research, programs, and projects that are implemented through the center. Over the past five years, the center has increased its grant funding and annual operating budget from an average of \$403,000 annually to a current \$1.2 million annual operating budget, with growth expected to continue.

Project Spotlight and CHHS Campus Collaborations

Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center, MTSU Counseling Services, and the College of Liberal Arts

MTSU Center for Health and Human Services is pleased to partner with many on campus to implement the new MTSU Mental Health First Aid grant, which will run throughout the 2023–26 calendar years. We anticipate offering on average seven training sessions per quarter for our campus community, with another training session offered to other institutions of higher education each quarter for a total of eight training sessions per quarter. A few of our campus partnerships are highlighted below, but there are many more who are supportive of this much-needed project.



Jill Thomas, MTSU Mental Health Program Coordinator

opportunity to connect with these veterans and families. This is extremely important, as research indicates specific differences and needs between civilian students and their military-connected student counterparts with Severe Mental Illness (SMI) and Severe Emotional Disturbance (SED). We want to ensure we individualize and differentiate the support we give all of our students. By partnering with CHHS, we are able to do just that. This program allows us opportunities to engage our military-connected students in upcoming Mental Health First Aid training sessions and other campus activities over the next four years."

Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center

"The Daniels Center is so excited that the MTSU CHHS Mental Health First Aid programming is returning to campus. As a member of the advisory board for the pilot program, I saw firsthand the value it brought to our campus, not only to our veteran students and families, but to the entire campus community. Currently, we have 659 veterans and 370 dependents attending MTSU. The MTSU MHFA team will have an



Hilary Miller, Director,
Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans
and Military Family Center

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Reaching our Veterans and Their Families

While training activities will include all students, faculty, and staff on campus who wish to participate, targeted efforts will be made to reach student veterans and their families. Two student ambassadors will be hired through the grant CHHS received to implement the MTSU Mental Health First Aid program, with preference given to student veterans and those from groups who are underrepresented. MTSU MHFA student ambassadors will engage students in training opportunities as well as other activities on campus that support mental health and well-being, and they will be certified as Mental Health First Aid instructors.

Student-veterans surveyed nationally described high rates of hopelessness, difficulty functioning due to depression symptoms,

and suicidal thoughts. Twenty percent of student-veterans had made plans to commit suicide, and 7% had previously attempted suicide. (Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011)

An associating factor that can be comorbid to SMI and SED in students and student veterans is substance abuse. Among students and student veterans, binge-drinking behaviors have been seen as coping mechanisms for depression, anxiety, and PTSD, and are higher in student veterans than their student peers. (Barry, Whiteman, MacDiarmid Wadsworth, & Hitt, 2012).

CHHS looks forward to working with our student veterans and their families and is grateful for our partnership with the Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center. To learn more about the Daniels Center, visit mtsu.edu/military.

Counseling Services

“MTSU Counseling Services is proud to partner with MTSU CHHS on the recently awarded SAMHSA Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) grant.

This nationally recognized, evidence-based program

teaches participants how to identify, understand, and respond to someone who may be struggling with mental health or substance use. Education programs such as MHFA can reduce the stigma often associated with mental health and mental health conditions. Decreasing stigma not only increases the likelihood of people reaching out to help others access care, it also normalizes



seeking treatment in the same way one would seek treatment for their physical health. With the earlier pilot project, MTSU Counseling Services worked collaboratively with CHHS to promote MHFA trainings. The trainings were available free of charge to all students, faculty, and staff. In turn, CHHS promoted Counseling Services events and activities in their weekly Friday “Mental Health Check-Ups” and through their social media channels, promoting available resources and programs on campus as well as sharing positive mental health messaging. With the new grant award, we look forward to partnering again with CHHS.”

Mary Kaye Anderson, Director,
MTSU Counseling Services

To learn more about MTSU Counseling Services, visit mtsu.edu/counseling.

Creating a Culture of Mental Health Awareness, Reducing Stigma, and Improving Access to Mental Health Services

The MTSU CHHS Mental Health First Aid 2023–26 project seeks to create a culture in which mental health is talked about as openly as any other health condition or topic and without stigma. It also seeks to improve access to mental health services by increasing visibility of, and access to, mental health resources on campus, documented by a referral tracking system with an increasing number of referrals each year. The 2019–21 pilot project trained more than 1,100 students, faculty, and staff and resulted in over 1,300 individuals being referred to mental health services. In addition, there were demonstrated reductions in stigma among those participating in the training programs.

Mental Health Literacy, Stigma, and Referrals—Pilot Project Outcomes

Outcomes specific to mental health literacy, stigma, and referrals to needed resources from the 2019–21 MTSU CHHS Mental Health First Aid pilot project include:

- 1,108 individuals were trained in Mental Health First Aid on the MTSU campus.
- Using the Psychiatric Skepticism Scale (PSS) to assess participant attitudes toward legitimate forms of mental health care, we saw a 30% reduction in skepticism toward legitimate treatments from pre- to post-MHFA training. Likewise, we saw a 23% reduction in stigmatizing attitudes toward people with mental illness using an enacted stigma scale.
- Using a measure of literacy, we saw a 15% increase in knowledge of mental health topics.
- Referrals from lifetime of the grant (all three years):

Over the lifetime of the grant, our participants reported having made 1,325 referrals for mental health services. During year two alone, the year the COVID-19 pandemic began, there were 727 referrals (an average of two per day).



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PROJECTS AND COLLABORATIONS *continued from page 24*



College of Liberal Arts

The College of Liberal Arts (CLA) is excited to collaborate with the Center for Health and Human Services (CHHS) to bring two mental health events to MTSU students in 2023.

On April 11, CLA and CHHS, with help from the MTSU Mental Health First Aid grant, will again offer students the De-Stress for Success event.

Campus and community resources at the event will give students tips on how to use counseling, sleep, nutrition, exercise, art, music, and journaling to mitigate the stressors of college life. Attendance at this event will help us gather information for another exciting initiative in fall 2023: Healthy Mondays.

Healthy Mondays, also made possible by the MTSU Mental Health First Aid grant, will be five-week sessions, led by peer facilitators, that will guide students to identify the strengths they can set in motion when stress emerges. "Our goal in this partnership is to help students develop better mental health coping skills so that they can remain calm in times of stress. This will help them

"The College of Liberal Arts looks forward to having CHHS participate in its De-Stress for Success activities on April 11 and on Healthy Mondays coming up later this year. We look forward to this partnership and helping our students be their best selves. Mental health matters!"

Lucy Langworthy,
Assistant to Dean, Liberal Arts

function better and make good decisions—goals we have for all of our students as they move into their adult lives."

Thank you to our campus faculty and departments who offer MTSU CHHS Mental Health First Aid training as part of their course requirements and/or classroom activities:
Psychology • Nursing • Liberal Arts • Child Development • Nutrition/Dietetics

What is Stigma?

Stigma, Substance Use Disorder, and the MTSU Rural Communities Opioid Response Program's Efforts to Address this Challenge

By Maimoonah Dabshee, M.P.H. Student and CHHS Project Assistant, RCORP Project

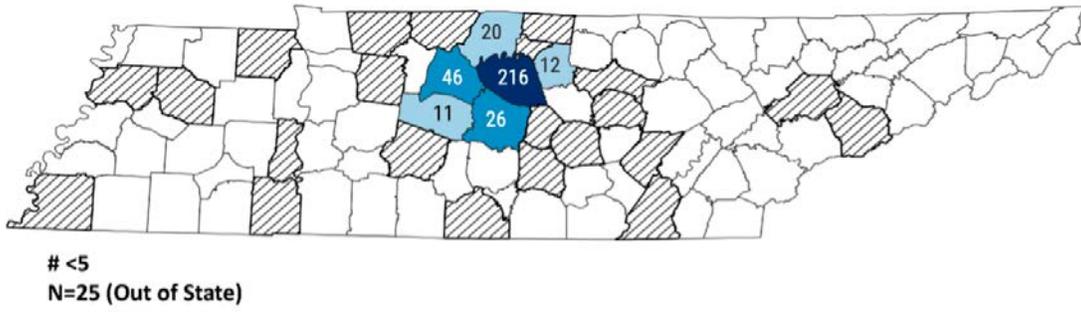
Have you ever been excluded or judged by others because they perceived you to be different from them? Perhaps you've faced discrimination? Or maybe you've felt misunderstood, embarrassed, alone, or even scared? This is what stigma feels like. Stigma is a set of negative attitudes, beliefs, and prejudices toward a group of people. People living with substance use disorder often face stigma and discrimination. The same can be true of individuals living with mental health conditions, or anything else that makes someone feel different. This can make them feel ashamed, hopeless, reluctant to get help or accept help, and like they are to blame for their disorder. To end stigma surrounding substance use, people need to understand and accept that substance use disorders and addiction are like any other health condition and need the right treatment.

The rise in overdose deaths and the accessibility of more dangerous opioids is a national crisis. In many cities and states, drug overdose deaths, particularly those involving opioids, can outweigh homicides, vehicle accidents, and suicides, among other causes of death. The Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) is a program of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). MTSU Center

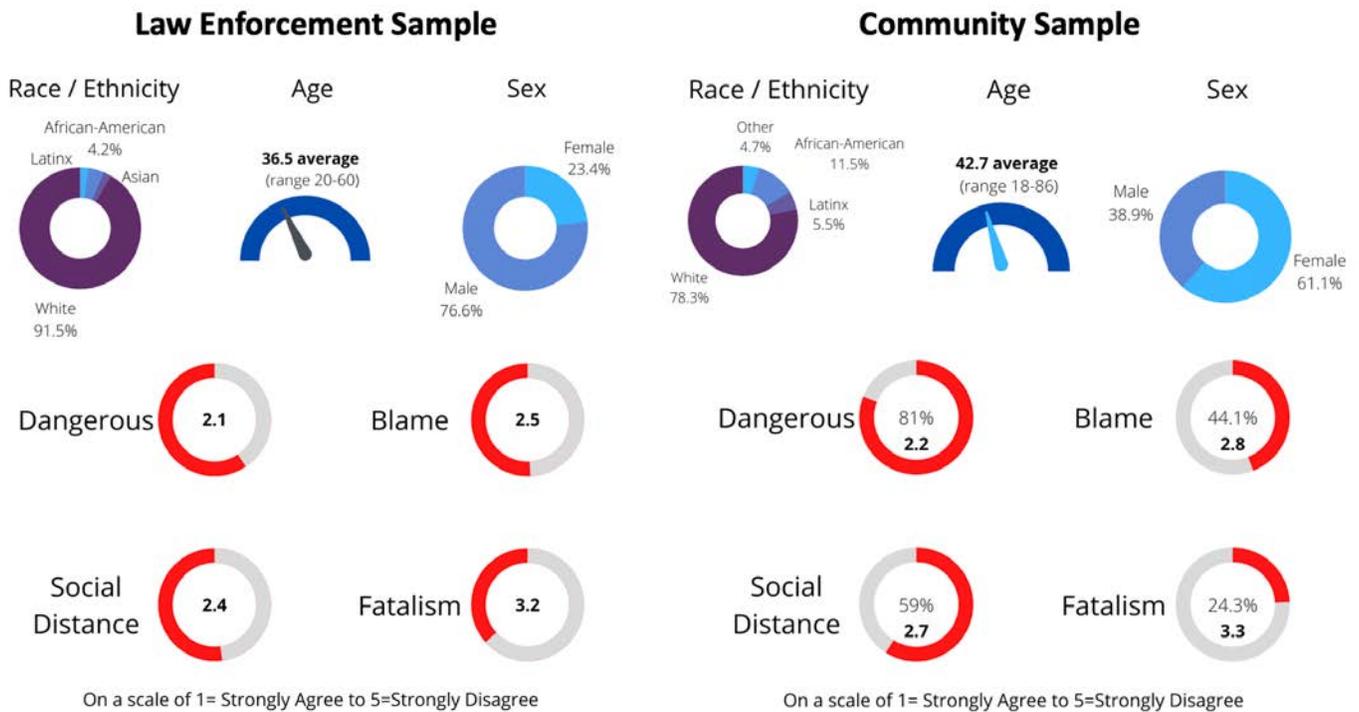
for Health and Human Services received \$1.2 million in grant funding through this program to address opioid use and misuse across Wilson County, Tennessee. The grant aims to reduce fatalities due to overdose and the associated economic burden related to misuse. Stigma reduction is a critical strategy of the RCORP MTSU Wilson County project. Through marketing and education focusing on the community and providers, an impact can be made in reducing stigma. It is important to assess the levels of stigma that exist in the service area and the contributions of various stigma reduction efforts to the overarching goal of stigma reduction.

To capture community thoughts and perceptions about those who use drugs, the MTSU RCORP team targeted a mass community event to survey residents, the 2022 Wilson County-Tennessee State Fair. On the page that follows are snapshots of some of the MTSU CHHS RCORP team's findings. To read more about stigma reduction efforts and findings from these activities, the RCORP Wilson County TN Provider and Community Survey Report is available at www.mtsu.edu/chhs/docs/RCORP_WilsonCountyTN_ProviderandCommunityStigmaReport2023.pdf.

Map of where respondents reside:



Side-by-side comparison of Law Enforcement and Community stigma:



Eliminating stigma is an important step toward creating a safer and healthier community. Progress has been made in educating Wilson County residents about substance use and misuse. These figures validate the vital work being done in Wilson County. While stigma is a widespread problem across the country, it is encouraging to see development in this area.

In Her Own Words

MTSU CHHS RCORP Project Assistant Talks about Stigma, Her Work with the MTSU CHHS RCORP Grant, and Her Experiences

Coming from a conservative background, I was taught that substance use disorder is not the same as any other health condition. As a student assistant working on the RCORP project, I have learned so much about substance use, addiction, and stigma. Everyone has an addiction; certain addictions are uncontrollable. Individuals suffering from a substance use disorder become focused on using the “substance,” to the point where they struggle with day-to-day functioning. They will continue to use substances even when they know it is causing or can cause harm. Substance use has a direct impact on the body and mind and can affect parts of the brain that control how you think, make decisions, learn, remember, and control your behavior. The work that is being done around stigma through RCORP will potentially lead to the treatment of substance use disorders and open the road to recovery. My experience working at CHHS has been amazing. I had the opportunity to participate in research, reports, papers, publications, etc. Participating in these projects gave me the opportunity to develop valuable skills. The CHHS team has made me feel valued, appreciated, and has treated me with respect. I am extremely thankful I had the opportunity to work with the CHHS team!

The stigma people experience often prevents them from getting help and support from family,



friends, and professionals. The sooner someone gets help, the better the outcome will be. So how can we reduce the stigma around substance use?

- First, think about your own feelings toward substance use disorders. Do you judge people?
- Second, be aware of stigmatizing language. Third, explore opportunities for relationships with people in your life who struggle with substance use and addiction.
- Lastly, learn more about substance use disorders.

Below is a list of resources to learn more about substance use disorder:

[Drug Abuse and Addiction](#)

[National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)

[Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services](#)

[The Tennessee REDLINE](#)

CHHS Staff and Faculty Partners

The CHHS reports to David L. Butler, Ph.D., Vice Provost for Research at Middle Tennessee State University.

Director:

Cynthia Chafin, M.Ed., MCHES®
cynthia.chafin@mtsu.edu

CHHS Grant and Program Coordinators:

Sarah Gwinn, B.A.
 CHHS Proposal Development Specialist
sarah.gwinn@mtsu.edu

Michelle Sterlingshires, M.S.
 CHHS Grant and Program Coordinator
 Data Coordinator—Safe Stars, Mental Health
 First Aid, Blue Raiders Drink Up 2.0
 Project Assistant—STEMsational Ag:
 The Virtual Farm
michelle.sterlingshires@mtsu.edu

Program and Project Coordinators:

Michael Ayalon, M.S.P.
 Rural Communities Opioid Response
 Program (RCORP)
michael.ayalon@mtsu.edu

Christina Byrd, M.P.H., CHES®
 Blue Raiders Drink Up: Healthy Choices for
 Healthy Students, Death Scene Investigation/
 Sudden Unexpected Infant Death, Safe Stars
ctb4f@mtmail.mtsu.edu
christina.byrd@mtsu.edu

Jill Thomas, M.Ed.
 Mental Health First Aid ,
 STEMsational Ag: The Virtual Farm
jill.thomas@mtsu.edu

Project and Student Assistants:

Taylor Armistead
 Blue Raiders Drink Up: Healthy Choices for
 Healthy Students 2.0
armistead1021@gmail.com

Domanique Richards
 Blue Raiders Drink Up: Healthy Choices for
 Healthy Students 2.0
ddr3c@mtmail.mtsu.edu

Chipper Smith
 Rural Communities Opioid Response Program
khs2z@mtmail.mtsu.edu

Maimoonah Dabshee
 Rural Communities Opioid Response Program
mkd3r@mtmail.mtsu.edu

Grant Support Staff:

Vacant
 Blue Raiders Drink Up Dietitian

Becky Figueroa, M.A., NBC-HWC
 Blue Raiders Drink Up and Student Health
 Services Health Coach
becky.figueroa@mtsu.edu

Laurie Necasek, M.S.W.
 STEMsational Ag: The Virtual Farm
 Content Editor and Accessibility Specialist
laurie.necasek@mtsu.edu

Lisa Sheehan-Smith, EDD, RD,LDN
 Blue Raiders Drink Up Cooking Class Dietitian
lisa.shepherd@mtsu.edu

Spring 2023 Student Interns:

Abby Kelly
Community and Public Health
agk3f@mtmail.mtsu.edu

Jocelyn Rajkowski
Master of Public Health
jmr2ai@mtmail.mtsu.edu

Project and Program Evaluators:

Andrew Owusu, Ph.D., OLY
Department of Health and Human Performance
andrew.owusu@mtsu.edu

Kahler W. Stone, Dr.P.H.
Department of Health and Human Performance
kahler.stone@mtsu.edu

Chandra R. Story, Ph.D., MCHES®
Department of Health and Human Performance
chandra.story@mtsu.edu

Angela Bowman, Ph.D.
Department of Health and Human Performance
angie.bowman@mtsu.edu

Ryan Otter, Ph.D.
Data Science Institute
ryan.otter@mtsu.edu

Sara Shirley, Ph.D.
Department of Economics and Finance,
and Data Science Institute
sara.shirley@mtsu.edu

Jeff Stark, Ph.D.
Department of Economics and Finance,
and Data Science Institute
jeff.stark@mtsu.edu

Campus and Faculty Partners:

Cynthia Allen
Environmental Health and Safety Services
cynthia.allen@mtsu.edu

John M. Burchfield, M.B.A.
University College
john.burchfield@mtsu.edu

Richard Chapman, M.B.A., M.S.H.A.
Student Health Services
richard.chapman@mtsu.edu

Kim Godwin, Ph.D.
University College
kim.godwin@mtsu.edu

Samuel Haruna, Ph.D.
School of Agriculture
samuel.haruna@mtsu.edu

Tony V. Johnston, Ph.D., M.S., M.P.H.
Fermentation Science, School of Agriculture
tony.johnston@mtsu.edu

Keely O'Brien, Ph.D., M.S.
Fermentation Science, School of Agriculture
keely.obrien@mtsu.edu

Kim Sadler, Ed.D.
Center for Environmental Education,
Department of Biology
kim.sadler@mtsu.edu

Lisa Schrader, M.P.H.
Health and Human Performance
lisa.schrader@mtsu.edu



MTSU Center for Health and Human Services, 1114 E. Lytle St., Murfreesboro, TN 37132
615-898-5493 • mtsu.edu/chhs • chhs@mtsu.edu

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