

MTSU Center for Health and Human Services Newsletter

**MIDDLE
TENNESSEE**
STATE UNIVERSITY

**BETTER HEALTH AND WELL-BEING FOR
TENNESSEANS AND THAT OF THE NATION**



CHHS staff (l-r): Linda Williams, mental health first aid program coordinator; Christina Byrd, program coordinator and special projects; Cynthia Chafin, associate director for community programs; Sarah Gwinn, grants coordinator; and Angela Mueller, mental health first aid trainer

Resiliency. Rolling with the punches. Bouncing back. We've had all of that and then some. So much has happened since the inaugural CHHS newsletter was published mid-March. Who would have thought we would be living in what seems to be at times a completely different reality? Some of our CHHS team were personally impacted by the recent tornadoes that tore through Tennessee in early March, with 300 injured, another 25 people losing their lives, and 70,000 people without electricity along the 60-mile-long path of the tornado through Davidson, Wilson, Putnam, and Benton counties according to local news. And, of course, COVID-19 shortly thereafter, which still continues and would take more pages than this newsletter has to even begin to describe the impact that has touched us all.

Then came the May storms, where the National Weather Service clocked a wind gust at 72 mph, the fifth-highest officially measured in Nashville, that left 130,000 without power for days. And, throughout all of that, our team had the usual, mundane challenges of life that are just part of living on this planet and will never make headlines. All of that, yet, we are still here! And so are YOU—the students, faculty, staff, and administrators on this campus, as well as the many CHHS community partners throughout Tennessee. The CHHS team is proud to be part of such a resilient state and campus of extraordinary people who have risen to the occasion time after time after time. The first half of 2020 has certainly put the resiliency of all to the test, and it looks like we continue to ace that test day after day.

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Due to COVID-19 in particular, CHHS—like most of campus—has had to make significant adjustments to the work that we do. As a primarily externally funded unit on campus, we are accountable to our funding agencies and with or without COVID are expected to meet our annual goals. With a lot of brainstorming, refocusing, and implementing new approaches to meeting those goals, we are continuing to move forward

with the externally funded public health projects facilitated through CHHS. While it's not "business as usual," we are certainly "in business" and so very pleased with progress thus far in work that supports better health and well-being for all Tennesseans. In today's world, "better health and well-being" is more important than ever! We look forward to sharing more about our work in this and future editions of our newsletter.

Resilience

WE ARE TRUE BLUE!

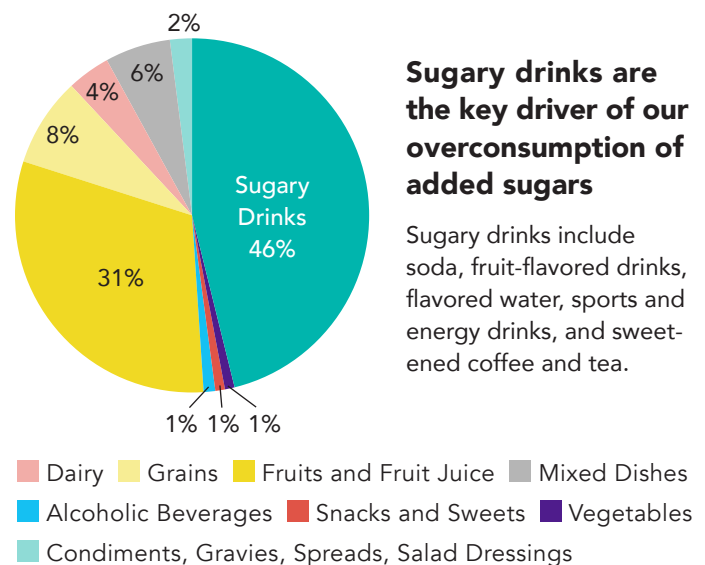
Featured CHHS Project Blue Raiders Drink Up: Healthy Choices for Healthy Students

Do you drink too much sugar? Drinking sugary drinks can lead to weight gain, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, tooth decay, and more. Many Americans drink at least one sugary drink per day. While the sales of sugary sodas are down, other beverages like sports drinks, energy drinks, teas, and coffee are on the rise, many of which contain sugar.

According to some research, when drinking your calories, instead of consuming them in the form of solid foods (with the exact same calorie content), your body may feel less satisfied. When sugar is consumed in liquid form, it bypasses the body's natural defense against taking in too many calories. When the body is not satiated, it seeks out more food.

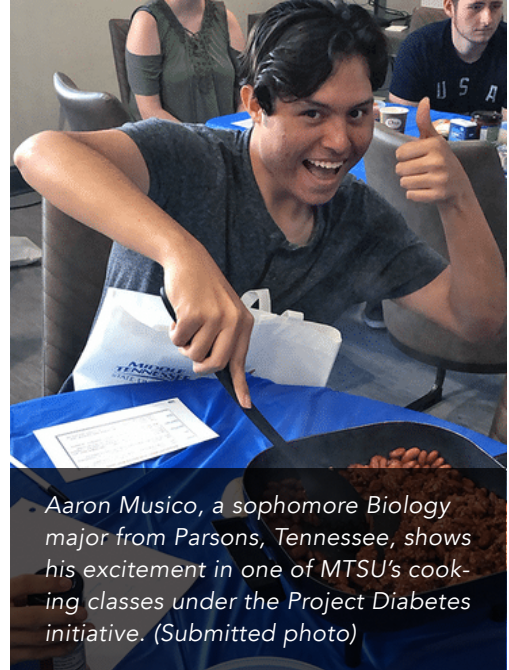
Blue Raiders Drink Up: Healthy Choices for Healthy Students is sponsored by CHHS and funded with a three-year grant provided by the Tennessee Department of Health as part

of the Project Diabetes initiative. The project, featured throughout this newsletter, seeks to help reduce excess weight and obesity as risk factors for the development of diabetes. What better way to start than choosing water or even fruit-infused, sugarless water!

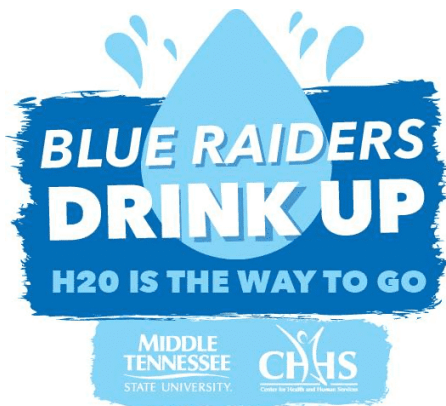


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Following the launch last July 1, MTSU's CHHS hosted its first Blue Raiders Drink Up cooking class series in September. The classes were modeled after the evidence-based national Cooking Matters program and led by registered dietitians along with staff from MTSU and the University of Tennessee Extension Office. This project teaches students how to plan tasty meals and make healthy recipes on a budget, plus emphasizes beverage choice and the importance of drinking water. The program is promoted to students living off campus who do not have meal plans and are more likely to eat off campus, though classes are available to all students. Two additional cooking class series, each with four weekly sessions, were offered during the Spring 2020 semester and were a huge success. The final series was held virtually and already had a full list within a week of the class being announced.



Aaron Musico, a sophomore Biology major from Parsons, Tennessee, shows his excitement in one of MTSU's cooking classes under the Project Diabetes initiative. (Submitted photo)



Program note: Modified activities are continuing with Blue Raiders Drink Up during changes associated with the current COVID-19 pandemic. Much of what is shared in this newsletter has been modified to virtual and online formats to ensure the health and safety of all involved. We are determined to thrive and continue on with the great work being done that promotes better health!

Staff Spotlight

Christina Byrd, Program Coordinator and Special Projects



Christina Byrd began her career with CHHS in January 2017 as an intern, working on the bi-annual SURVIVORville convention with Women Survivors Alliance, an MTSU CHHS partner, and Cynthia Chafin, CHHS associate director of community programs. Byrd loved

the experience so much that she officially joined the CHHS team as program coordinator after obtaining her undergraduate degree in Community and Public Health from MTSU in May 2017. She has been heavily involved in multiple programs, the most recent being Blue Raiders Drink Up. Her enthusiasm is contagious, and she loves working with the CHHS team. "Working with these ladies has been such a dream, time has flown by," she said.

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Byrd, who was born and raised in Nashville, is very close to obtaining her Master of Public Health from MTSU. Her roots run deep here, which is why she is so passionate when it comes to the health of Tennesseans. "This is my home and I want to see the people in my community healthy, knowledgeable, and happy," she said. Byrd's empathy knows no bounds.

She describes her most important skill today as "resilience." "I've received a lot of 'no's' in my lifetime, and there were many times I wanted to give up because of it," Byrd said. "Once I did some self-reflection and inner work, I knew I could not let someone else gauge my worth. . . . Being able to bounce back in times of adversity is extremely important, and I wouldn't be where I am without it!" She believes many could benefit from this advice, as well as "Don't compare yourself to others!"

"Our society makes you feel like you need to have everything figured out at a certain age." Byrd added. "We are human and progress is organic; we may go through periods of little

progress, followed by periods that contain lightning-fast progress. Everyone's journey is different, and you must trust that everything will work out just the way it is supposed to. Don't compare yourself to others."

Byrd is a loyal, determined young lady with a bright future. Her sage words of wisdom should be posted in everyone's home, journal, workplace, etc., as a daily reminder. She has a goal to learn a second language and become fluently bilingual. There is no doubt she will accomplish this and so much more.



CHHS Campus Collaborations

As part of the Tennessee Department of Health's ongoing Project Diabetes initiative, the agency has awarded more than \$444,000 to MTSU's Center for Health and Human Services to implement Blue Raiders Drink Up: Healthy Choices for Healthy Students. The program's purpose is to reduce overweight and obesity as risk factors for the development of diabetes using interventions prior to onset of the disease. Through this initiative, students are learning the importance of reducing consumption of sugary beverages, preparing healthy meals on a budget, and the many benefits of exercise. Planned activities include participation in cooking classes (which are shared and illustrated throughout this

newsletter), counseling with a registered dietitian and health coach, and other educational events held routinely on campus, including some done virtually through Facebook Live and watch parties, Twitter chats, Instagram stories, and more. Another wonderful benefit is a scholarship to fund personal training sessions! The grant also will fund nine water refill stations on campus.

MTSU's Student Health Services, Division of Student Affairs, and departments of Health and Human Performance and Human Sciences are campus partners in Blue Raiders Drink Up. Off-campus partners include the Tennessee Clean Water Network, the University of Tennessee Extension Office and others.

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Carla Bush, who holds a Master of Vocational-Technical Education from MTSU, is an extension agent for the UT Extension Office and has been instrumental in this collaboration with CHHS. She has a passion for educating people on improving their quality of life through nutrition and leading healthier lives. “UT Extension family and consumer sciences works across Tennessee to promote healthy eating and positive lifestyles,” Bush said. “Our Rutherford County Extension Office is thrilled to partner with MTSU toward creating healthy families and healthy communities.” She has been working closely with our student ambassadors, Rose Chilsen and Ashik Abro. These Dietetics students were selected from MTSU’s Human Sciences Department to assist with this program, including facilitation of the cooking classes.

“We’ve introduced some of these young adults to basic cooking skills,” Bush said. “Students have had limited experience in the kitchen, while others are comfortable preparing meals from scratch. The master meat sauce has been a hit, where students cook once and have five meal options. This was a new concept from some students.”

And the student ambassadors are just as excited and passionate about this project as the facilitators. “As student ambassadors, Ash and I have begun to develop a campus-wide discussion on water and sweetened beverage consumption with fellow MTSU students,” Chilsen said. “Our cooking classes, however, are where we have found the most inspiration so far. Students are engaged, asking questions, and learning new techniques and recipes. The last class is always our favorite piece of the four-part series. As we lead students on a grocery store tour, they can use their new skills including reading nutrition labels, planning out their pantry staples, and buying produce on a budget. As aspiring dietitians, working alongside Lisa Shepherd [one of the registered dietitians on this project] has proven particularly valuable, and we are so grateful for this opportunity to gain experience in nutrition outreach and education.”



Carla Bush, M.V.T.E.



Ashik Abro and Rose Chilsen



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After attending a cooking class or stopping by one of the information tables, you can't help but be inspired by this amazing and talented group of educators. They absolutely love this program, and their enthusiasm is contagious. Abro is on a mission. "Tennessee's current obesity rates in high school students is second in the nation. This, also being a risk factor for diabetes, continues into college," he said. "Rose and I work on campus to educate and teach students about simple healthy habits that can be implemented to reverse these trends. We use social media to share information about signing up for our cooking classes and where we will be for events giving away items to students like water bottles, T-shirts, phone wallets, and Frisbees. We share the importance of seeing a dietitian and inform students this is a resource available to students for free.

"The overall message we deliver is to drink more water and less sugary beverages, and we are in the process of making water more available through increasing the number of water bottle refill stations on campus. However, we promote other healthy habits besides just water consumption and the cooking classes; we provide Rec Center fitness scholarships as well. Being a Dietetics student, it's a dream come true to work with the Center for Health and Human Services, dietitians, and my fellow students," Abro added.

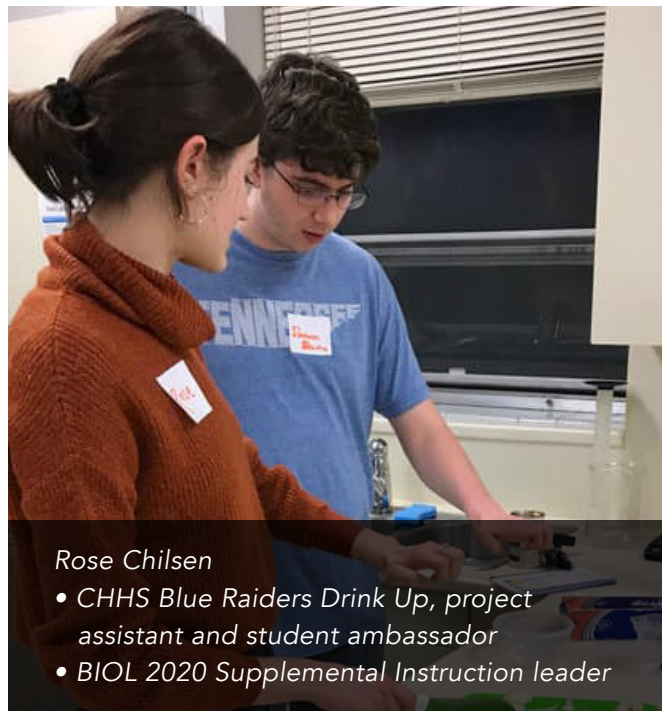
CHHS is honored to have Human Sciences faculty Janet Colson and Elizabeth Smith collaborating on this endeavor. "The Nutrition and Food Science Dietetics concentration is truly fortunate to have very strong, intelligent, and passionate students," Smith said. "When we as a staff learned of the project, we brainstormed and came up with a list of possible students who would thrive in this environment. We have been so pleased that Ash and Rose have been a perfect fit for this work. They love the cooking classes and the interest and impact they are making on the students participating."

The future of our health looks so much brighter when you stop and consider how these students, gaining invaluable knowledge and experience from this wonderful group of experts, will be the driving force for generations to come. So, let's all drink up (H2O)!!!



Ashik Abro

- *STAND president-elect*
- *Food Science Association of MTSU, secretary*
- *Blue Raiders Drink Up, project assistant and student ambassador*



Rose Chilsen

- *CHHS Blue Raiders Drink Up, project assistant and student ambassador*
- *BIOL 2020 Supplemental Instruction leader*

CHHS Internship Program

The Center for Health and Human Services is pleased to offer an internship program which pairs students in health and human services disciplines with meaningful learning opportunities. Students are connected to research, programs, and projects administered through the CHHS as well as with internship opportunities with our community partners. Internships require commitments of 360–400 hours depending on the program of study. The internship must be coordinated through an academic unit, and students must be enrolled for credit in that unit. Internships are unpaid and are offered year-round. It's a great opportunity to:

- 1) Gain hands-on experience that may be useful for future employment or volunteer opportunities
- 2) Practice what is learned in the classroom in a real-world setting
- 3) Learn new skills

- 4) Meet professionals in a field of study
- 5) Engage with an assigned mentor who will help students learn and grow professionally
- 6) Receive a letter of recommendation for future employers

Students interested in the CHHS internship program should complete and submit an application form and student agreement, along with a current résumé or curriculum vitae, to cynthia.chafin@mtsu.edu. Please note that submission of an application does not guarantee that a student will be successfully placed in an internship with CHHS. We frequently have more students than available projects, and the selection process is competitive. Students are encouraged to apply early (i.e., early in the semester before an internship is desired) if possible. Applications are accepted year-round. Interested students, please check our website for more details: mtsu.edu/chhs.

First CHHS Master of Public Health (M.P.H.) Graduate Intern: Andrea Jones

"As the first Master of Public Health graduate intern for CHHS, I was both nervous and intrigued by the job. I had previously been in several graduate classes with both Cynthia "Cindy" Chafin, associate director, and Christina Byrd, program coordinator. Knowing I would be working with and learning from these amazing women put me at ease right away. My advisor, Bethany Wrye, was instrumental in designing the internship that blazed a path for future graduate interns.

"This entire experience has truly broadened my résumé and taken me beyond borders I had set for myself. When Cindy asked me to create a quarterly publication outlining what CHHS does, who they collaborate with, and more, as part of

a larger CHHS communications plan, I doubted my abilities and worried I would let her and the wonderful CHHS team down. So I researched every imaginable type of publication ever designed and over the weeks began to develop skills that will be useful throughout the course of my career. I researched articles from nearly every program CHHS was—and still is—involved with, leaving me with a newfound respect for this organization. This internship connected the dots from all the information received in the classroom and left me with a complete picture. What an amazing feeling of taking everything learned from our instructors and putting it into play in the real world! For those of you reading these

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newsletters, please make sure to read the staff spotlight segments. These ladies are fascinating, and I enjoyed writing about them more than they will ever know.

“The communications plan really came full circle and was brought to life when Cindy asked me to pull together a CHHS portfolio of articles, news releases, and everything they have been involved with thus far to continue building

pieces of the CHHS communications plan. These articles came from research magazines, newspapers, websites, and beyond! Working with this team of professionals introduced me to relevant, real-world applications of community health programs, and I am forever grateful to everyone who made this possible. Thank you!”

—Andrea Jones

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.

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