

# MTSU Center for Health and Human Services Newsletter



*Advancing the health and well-being of Tennesseans through collaborative research and outreach projects, addressing health disparities, and promoting healthy communities*



## VISION

**"VISION WITH ACTION CAN CHANGE THE WORLD."**

– J.A. Baker, English author

CHHS has kicked off spring with a lot of activity and so much to share. The center is in its final and fifth year of its first strategic plan since Cynthia Chafin became director in 2018. The team has been participating in a strategic planning process these last few months, focusing on revisiting the center’s mission and vision and developing a preliminary workplan for the next five years. Lytle House is being renovated to include five new workstations to accommodate the rapid growth of the center. The CHHS team is excited about what’s to come. Thank you to all who have supported our journey and continue to support our work.

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**SPRING OVERVIEW** *continued from page 1*

Since the last quarterly newsletter, CHHS:



Cynthia Chafin, Ph.D.,  
MCHES® CHHS director

- Learned that three of five proposals CHHS submitted to the Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council totaling **\$9,181,073** were approved for funding. The projects are each three-year

projects and will support respite housing for those seeking opioid use disorder (OUD) treatment, expansion of recovery services, and infrastructure support for expansion of CHHS' **Office of Prevention Science and Recovery** to



Office of Prevention  
Science and Recovery

support additional OUD work across the state. We will share more on these potentially life-saving projects and the grant awards very soon.

- Began activities of the recently awarded Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant, totaling **\$2,921,726**, which supports the expansion of medication assisted treatment (MAT) for those impacted by substance use disorder in a service area spanning six rural Tennessee counties. This project launched Sept. 30, 2023, and will go through Sept. 29, 2025. A mobile unit will be delivered in early May to our service partner, Cedar Recovery, with treatment services to begin soon thereafter in each of the service areas. The CHHS MAT Access Team has already been on the road with scheduled lunch-and-learn sessions introducing the communities to the grant and services that will be available in their areas. To learn more about this project, take a look at the **Summer 2023** and **Fall/Winter 2023** newsletters, as well as the feature included in this publication.



- Began office renovations with office space for up to five new staff members as part of the center's continuing growth.
- Successfully implemented activities and completed multiple deliverables of other research and outreach projects of the center, which are highlighted in this newsletter.

The center continues to seek funding and opportunities that support the health and well-being of Tennesseans and that address Tennessee's most pressing public health priorities. Thank you to all on and off campus who support the center's work and vision. We could not do this without the support of many, including our University administration, who continue to see value in our work and who continuously put their faith in our vision.

*continued on page 3*



**SPRING OVERVIEW** *continued from page 2*

CHHS continues to identify collaborators and partners both on and off campus to be involved in CHHS projects, programs, and research.

To learn more about the center and its work to promote better health and well-being for all through its existing projects, programs, and research with local, state, and national reach, take a look at our [website](#), read more throughout this newsletter and previous editions posted on the website's [publications tab](#), and follow us on social media.

**Current Research, Projects, and Programs:**

- Rural Communities Opioid Response Program Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Access
- MTSU Office of Prevention Science and Recovery
- Blue Raiders Drink Up: Healthy Choices for Healthy Students 2.0
- Infant Death Scene Investigation/Safe Sleep
- MTSU Mental Health First Aid
- Rural Communities Opioid Response Program Implementation Grant

- Safe Stars Evaluation
- Expansion of the MTSU Office of Prevention Science and Recovery, Recovery Respite Housing, and Recovery Infrastructure Support from Tennessee Opioid Abatement Funding – *coming July 1, 2024!*

With our current and recent portfolio of research, projects, and programs that focus on substance use disorders, obesity and diabetes prevention, mental health, injury prevention, and workforce development, we again express gratitude to our many partners who make our work possible as we make a difference in the lives of Tennesseans and others throughout the nation. 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 available and include featured research, projects, and programs, with additional information posted on the website.

## 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](https://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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# Project Spotlight: Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Access Program

The Center for Health and Human Services is excited to shine the spotlight on a new project that will impact six rural Tennessee communities—and maybe even save lives. CHHS in partnership with Cedar Recovery received a \$2.92 million three-year grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as part of the Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP). RCORP is a multiyear HRSA initiative aimed at reducing the morbidity and mortality of substance use disorder (SUD), including opioid use disorder (OUD), in rural communities. The CHHS and Cedar Recovery project started in October 2023 with the project team off to a busy launch.

The grant awarded to CHHS will improve health care in rural areas by establishing new medication assisted treatment (MAT) access points and increasing the capacity for sustainable MAT service provision in six rural Tennessee counties. This project was submitted for funding following the completion of an 18-month HRSA-funded RCORP planning grant, as well as a subsequent three-year implementation grant (nearing completion) to address the opioid epidemic in

Wilson County communities. Cedar Recovery has served as an invaluable partner in the implementation grant, helping to strengthen the partnership between MTSU CHHS and Cedar Recovery in the pursuit of this access grant. MTSU’s RCORP-MAT Access grant will advance RCORP’s overall goal of improving access to quality MAT and supportive services provided by Cedar Recovery in Giles, Hickman, Lawrence, Franklin, and Marshall counties. These counties will be serviced by a mobile unit with a proposed addition of methadone treatment in Year 2 or 3 of the grant and with a planned live treatment site in Claiborne County.



“The mobile unit arrived in February and is currently being customized. We are eager to reveal the final product when it

is complete and to begin services in the identified rural service areas. Cedar Recovery is dedicated to providing quality patient care and saving lives through an evidence-based approach to addiction recovery that combines Medication-Assisted Treatment, behavioral therapy, care coordination, and peer recovery support. We are so grateful to HRSA for this funding and for our partnership with MTSU CHHS.”

—Paul Trivette, Chief Strategy Officer,  
Cedar Recovery

**PROJECT SPOTLIGHT** continued from page 4

## What Is Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT)?

Medication assisted treatment combines medication with counseling and behavioral therapies to provide a “whole patient” approach to the treatment of substance use disorders (SAMHSA, 2024). It has been proven that a combination of medication and therapy is effective in treating substance use disorders and also in sustaining recovery.

Research demonstrates that this treatment approach, with a goal of full recovery, has been shown to:

- Improve patient survival
- Increase retention in treatment
- Decrease illicit opioid use and other criminal activity among people with substance use disorders
- Increase patients’ ability to gain and maintain employment
- Improve birth outcomes among women who have substance use disorders and are pregnant

Medications used are approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA, 2023), are clinically driven, and are tailored to each patient. Currently, there are three drugs approved by the FDA for treatment of opioid dependence: buprenorphine, methadone, and naltrexone. Patients may need to be on these treatments indefinitely, though there is no maximum recommended duration of treatment. Reducing stigma that is associated with MAT is important to be able to help more people with opioid use disorder (OUD).

For more information on medication assisted treatment, visit:

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):  
[Medications for Substance Use Disorders | SAMHSA](#)
- Food and Drug Administration:  
[Information about Medication-Assisted Treatment \(MAT\) | FDA](#)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:  
[hhs.gov/opioids/treatment/index.html](https://hhs.gov/opioids/treatment/index.html)

Sources:

*Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2023). Information about Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT). Retrieved 3/24/24 from [hhs.gov/opioids/treatment/index.html](https://hhs.gov/opioids/treatment/index.html)*

*Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 2024. Medications for Substance Use Disorder. Retrieved 3/24/24 from [samhsa.gov/medications-substance-use-disorders](https://samhsa.gov/medications-substance-use-disorders)*



# CHHS Project Directors Speak Out

## Cynthia Chafin



I am so excited that CHHS has the opportunity to work on the RCORP MAT Access project, which may potentially save lives. Having lost two loved ones to substance use disorder, it means a lot to me that our work

may potentially save lives. I am also proud of the project team we have assembled to carry out the important work ahead. This project requires the efforts of many and includes eight individuals on the project team from MTSU and Cedar Recovery, along with the health care providers providing services and several others at MTSU providing administrative and faculty support. We have the dream team, and I anticipate great success with this project. The grant and project management expertise, community engagement and outreach efforts, evaluation and research services, and education and training facilitation provided by CHHS with support from others on campus, including the Data Science Institute, is a great complement to the clinical services provided by Cedar Recovery. Let's get to work!

## Christina Byrd



Working on the RCORP MAT Access Project as a co-director is an opportunity to really make an impact in six rural counties on the well-being of Tennesseans affected by a very serious and alarming public health

concern—opioid use disorder (OUD). Too many of our family members, friends, neighbors, and others are affected by OUD and other substance use disorders (SUD), with many losing their lives. While the project involves providing services directly to individuals with OUD, it also requires community engagement and education, particularly around stigma and OUD, including stigma toward MAT. Coming from a public health and health education background, I know the importance of health education and of involving the community in decisions that impact them directly. Education and engagement are critical to being able to successfully offer OUD MAT services, and I am honored to be a part of the early efforts to move this project forward where we can start changing—and even saving—lives.

## Community Partner Spotlight: Cedar Recovery

Cedar Recovery ([cedarrecovery.com](http://cedarrecovery.com)) is a leading addiction treatment company that specializes in treating opioid use disorder (OUD) with medications such as buprenorphine and/or naltrexone. With a widespread presence throughout Tennessee and Virginia, Cedar operates 14 physical locations and a robust telemedicine platform (Studio Health), enabling them to provide care to over 2,500 patients each month. Cedar's current physical locations include Nashville, Lebanon, Columbia, Shelbyville, Cookeville, Athens, East Knoxville, South Knoxville, Clarksville, Ooltewah, Clinton, Athens, Mount Juliet, and Bristol, VA. Cedar accepts Medicaid (TennCare), Medicare, Medicare Advantage, and most commercial insurance plans while also being the humble recipient of grants made available by the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse and HRSA.

Under the leadership of Dr. Stephen Loyd, Chief Medical Officer of Cedar Recovery, and Clinical Director Mai Ferrell, LCSW, Cedar

Recovery delivers an integrated model of care that combines medication and therapeutic interventions. By combining counseling, therapy, and case management services, medication assisted treatment (MAT) has been shown to improve outcomes by reducing mortality; increasing treatment retention and compliance; and suppressing cravings and withdrawal symptoms, allowing for a greater focus on therapy to address the root cause(s) of an individual's substance use disorder(s). Cedar is honored to partner with MTSU CHHS on this RCORP Medication Assisted Treatment Access grant to drive the company's mission of "solving the opioid crisis and repairing the communities [Cedar] serves by providing addiction treatment that works®."

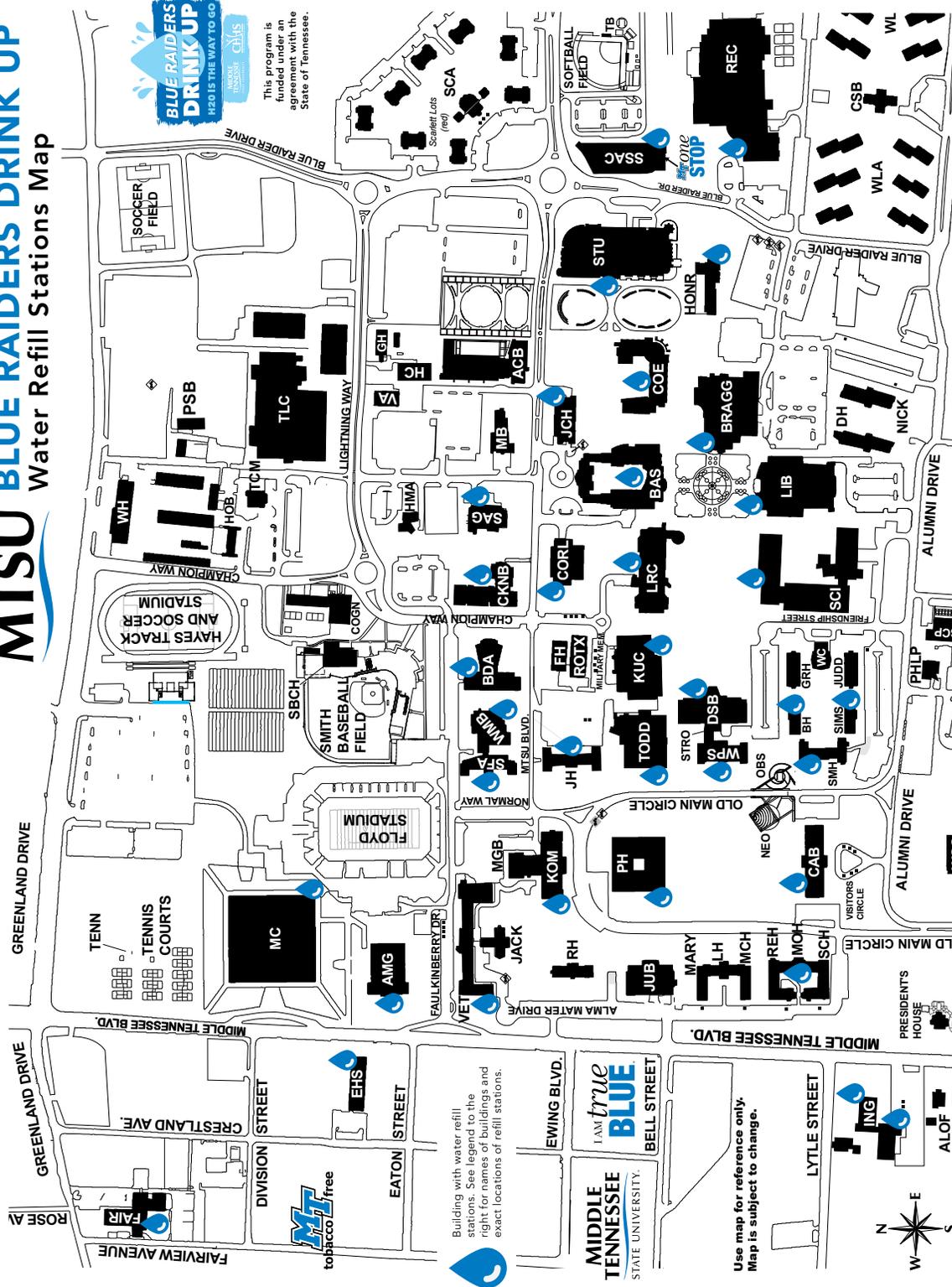


***"The path from dreams to success does exist.  
May you have the vision to find it, the courage to get  
on to it, and the perseverance to follow it."***

**—Kalpana Chawla, American astronaut and aerospace engineer,  
first woman of Indian origin to fly to space**

# Trying to drink more water? Here's a map of water refill stations on campus!

## MTSU BLUE RAIDERS DRINK UP Water Refill Stations Map



CHHS installed 18 water refill stations across campus since 2019 and through Spring 2024 and distributed 8,288 water bottles to students. There were 163,796 water bottles saved to date. Water bottles will continue to be provided during 2022-2025.

# MTSU BLUE RAIDERS DRINK UP

## Water Refill Stations Map

\*funded by Blue Raiders Up



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

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

I AM **trueBLUE**

0324.41 / Middle Tennessee State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, age, disability, age, status as a protected veteran, or any other category protected by law. See our full policy at mtsu.edu/ec.

<b>AMG</b>	Alumni Memorial Gym 1-First Floor, 3-Second Floor*	<b>LRC</b>	Ned McWherter Learning Resources Center 1-First Floor*
<b>BAS</b>	Business and Aerospace Building 1-First Floor, 2-Second Floor*, 2-Third Floor*, 1-Fourth Floor*	<b>MC</b>	Murphy Center 4-First Floor*
<b>BDA</b>	Boutwell Dramatic Arts Building 1-First Floor, 1-Second Floor	<b>MOH</b>	Monohan Hall 1-First Floor*
<b>BH</b>	Beasley Hall 1-First Floor*	<b>PH</b>	Peck Hall 1-Second Floor
<b>BRAGG</b>	John Bragg Media and Entertainment Building 1-Second Floor	<b>REC</b>	Health, Wellness, and Recreation Center 1-First Floor, 1-Second Floor
<b>CAB</b>	Cope Administration Building 1-First Floor, 1-Second Floor	<b>SAG</b>	Stark Agriculture Center 1-First Floor
<b>CKNB</b>	Cason-Kennedy Nursing Building 2-First Floor*, 1-Second Floor*	<b>SCI</b>	Science Building 1-Second Floor
<b>COE</b>	College of Education Building 1-First Floor	<b>SFA</b>	Saunders Fine Arts Building 1-Second Floor, 1-Third Floor*
<b>COR</b>	Corlew Hall 1-First Floor*	<b>SIMS</b>	Sims Hall 1-First Floor*
<b>DSB</b>	Davis Science Building 2-First Floor	<b>SMH</b>	Smith Hall 1-First Floor*
<b>EHS</b>	Ellington Human Sciences Building 1-First Floor	<b>SSAC</b>	Student Services and Admissions Center 1-First Floor, 1-Second Floor
<b>FAIR</b>	Fairview Building 1-First Floor	<b>STU</b>	Student Union Building 1-Second Floor
<b>HONR</b>	Paul W. Martin Sr. Honors Building 1-Second Floor	<b>TODD</b>	Andrew L. Todd Hall 1-First Floor*, 1-Second Floor
<b>ING</b>	Sam H. Ingram Building 1-Garage Level, 1-First Floor	<b>VET</b>	Voorhies Engineering Technology 1-First Floor
<b>JCH</b>	Jim Cummings Hall 1-First Floor*	<b>WMB</b>	Wright Music Building 1-First Floor, 2-Second Floor*
<b>JH</b>	Jones Hall 1-First Floor, 1-Second Floor*	<b>WPS</b>	Wiser-Patten Science Hall 1-First Floor
<b>KOM</b>	Kirksey Old Main 1-First Floor		
<b>KUC</b>	Keathley University Center 1-Second Floor		
<b>LIB</b>	James E. Walker Library 1-First Floor, 1-Second Floor		

Follow us on our social media,  
[@mtsu\\_chhs](#) on Instagram and  
[@mtsu.chhs](#) on Facebook for events.

## Whom Do We Serve?

The Center for Health and Human Services at MTSU facilitates, through strategic partnerships, collaborative public health research and outreach projects throughout Tennessee to address health disparities and promote healthy communities. 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, MTSU Dietetics graduates and former CHHS staff.*

## CHHS Campus Resources



### MTSU Mental Health First Aid

CHHS is offering MHFA training **FREE** to the campus community as part of a recently awarded grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Visit our [MTSU Mental Health First Aid website](#) to learn more.

More than 300 campus community members were trained in Mental Health First Aid in 2023 and another 150 as of March 2024. We look forward to serving many more in 2024! In 2018–21, more than 1,100 were trained through MHFA. We will continue to serve the campus community with this evidence-based national program.

CHHS is currently unable to offer an MHFA self-pay option to those not affiliated with our campus or another university. Community partners and outside organizations can find trainings available in their area (or virtual options) at the Mental Health First Aid website. For non-university partners wishing to have a training session just for their group, it may be worthwhile to use that tool and reach out to trainers in your area. [mentalhealthfirstaid.org/take-a-course/find-a-course/](https://mentalhealthfirstaid.org/take-a-course/find-a-course/)

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# CHHS' Office of Prevention Science and Recovery



Office of Prevention Science and Recovery

Since the inception of the Office of Prevention Science and Recovery (OPSR) in fall 2023, OPSR has educated over 50 local individuals on the [Rutherford County Opioid Settlement Funding Application](#) and seen measurable increases in community awareness of accessing the grant application. OPSR has been tracking outcomes on all nine local grantees within the county and was able to publish a [2023 local impact report](#) of these funds. In addition to local work, OPSR has formed relationships with 15 counties across Tennessee to share best practices and provide

technical assistance on local opioid abatement grant processes. Future directions for OPSR include engaging MTSU Data Science Institute faculty on mapping local overdose hotspots alongside mapping of service areas impacted by Rutherford Opioid Board (ROB) grant funded projects.



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## RUTHERFORD OPIOID BOARD GRANT WRITING WORKSHOP

**April 12th and May 3rd at 10:30am**

**GRANT FUNDING IS AVAILABLE FOR ORGANIZATIONS THAT SERVE INDIVIDUALS OR FAMILY MEMBERS IMPACTED BY OPIOID USE DISORDER**

## REGISTER NOW

**May 3rd at  
10:30am**  
*Virtual on Zoom*



HOSTED BY:




*continued on page 12*

# Wilson County RCORP Grant Update



**The CHHS Rural Communities Opioid Response Program** (RCORP) Implementation Grant funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is well into its third and final year, with the grant wrapping up at the end of August 2024. The MTSU CHHS RCORP Implementation III team returned from Washington, D.C., after a reverse site visit hosted by HRSA in March for all RCORP grantees across the nation. Currently, the team is wrapping up the last deliverables in the three-year work plan in conjunction with Wilson County community partners and stakeholders, which includes introducing prevention curriculum in the Wilson County schools, launching an overdose data dashboard, and hosting lunch and learns with multidisciplinary stakeholders in Wilson County about opioid use disorder and treatment.

As part of the three-year workplan, MTSU CHHS partners with the Wilson County PIC Center (also known as a diversion center and stands for Preventing Incarceration in Communities) where there are currently **49 people active in the program, 77 graduates of the program, and a 75% success rate.** RCORP transportation

funds are being used to give rides to and from treatment appointments in the rural areas of Wilson County, where it can be difficult getting to a treatment facility. So far, 20 individuals have participated in transportation options available through the grant, allowing them to access treatment that they otherwise may not have been able to receive.

During the summer, the MTSU RCORP team built upon the [2023 RCORP Wilson County Provider and Community Stigma Report](#) by completing additional surveys at the Tennessee State Fair in Lebanon from August 17–26, with 435 individuals completing a survey, a 19.7% response rate. A shoutout to Dr. Kahler Stone and Health and Human Performance students for coordinating the 2023 stigma data collection efforts and for finalizing the Year 2 – 2023 RCORP Wilson County Provider and Community Stigma Report. A third and final data collection will take place in summer 2024 with a Year 3 stigma report. The Year 2 report is included in this newsletter. To view the Year 1 report or to download a copy of either report, visit [mtsu.edu/chhs/publications.php](https://mtsu.edu/chhs/publications.php).

The MTSU RCORP Implementation III team will soon complete the third part of a three-part sustainability plan that supports continuation of the work that began under the HRSA grant and the great progress made in core prevention, treatment, and recovery activities surrounding opioid use disorder, as well as other activities such as the overdose data dashboard, improving health access and outcomes, and data collection for meaningful evaluation.

Lead author of this report: co-PI and project data coordinator, Dr. Kahler Stone, Health and Human Performance (HHP) faculty, in consultation with other members of the MTSU RCORP Implementation III Team



# Middle Tennessee 2023 Community Stigma Report



In 2023, the RCORP Wilson County Project, along with DrugFree WilCo, the MTSU Center for Health and Human Services, and the Public Health Program, surveyed community attitudes toward drug users at the Wilson County and Tennessee State Fair. Most participants in the survey were from Middle Tennessee, with Wilson County contributing the largest proportion.

## 2023 Highlights



**Minimal change in perceptions of a drug user's profile from 2022 to 2023.**



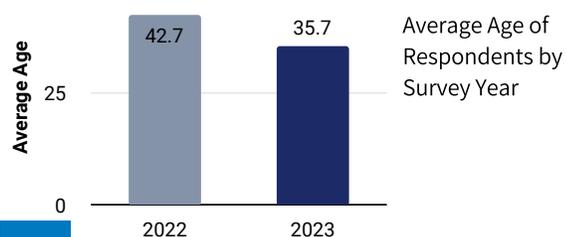
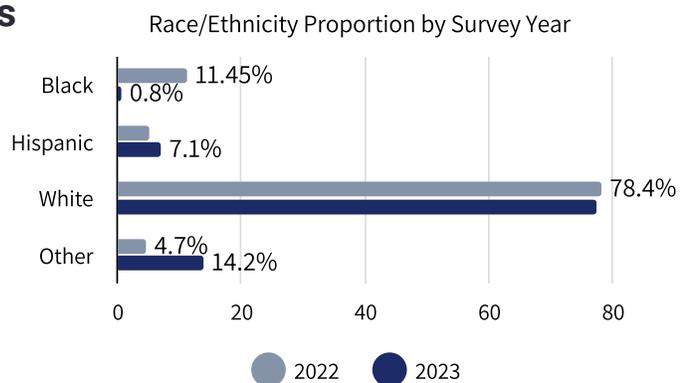
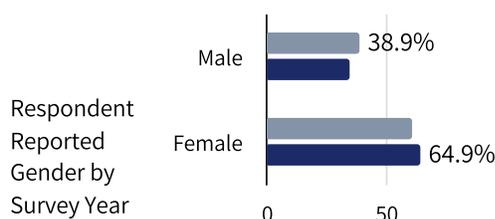
**Wilson County saw social distance stigma fall, and acceptance of treatment and understanding of drug use improved.**



**Individuals with affected loved ones exhibit lower drug stigma and greater belief in treatment effectiveness.**

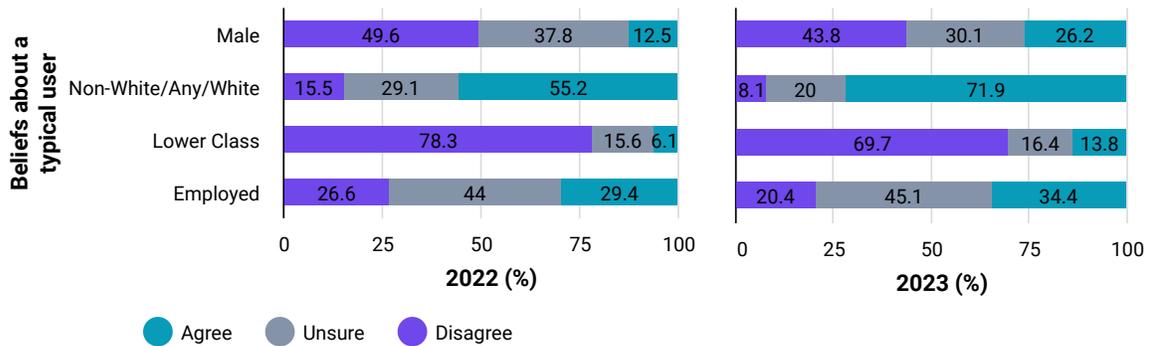
## Data Collection / Demographics

At the fair, RCORP staff and MTSU student volunteers, using a questionnaire that included a new query about personal connections to substance use disorder, assessed perceptions of drug use and the visibility of Drug Free WilCo billboards. They engaged adults, offering both digital and paper survey options. The 2023 survey revealed a younger average age of 35.7, a higher female participation, stable white representation, fewer black respondents, and an increase in non-disclosures on race from under 5% to 15.2%.



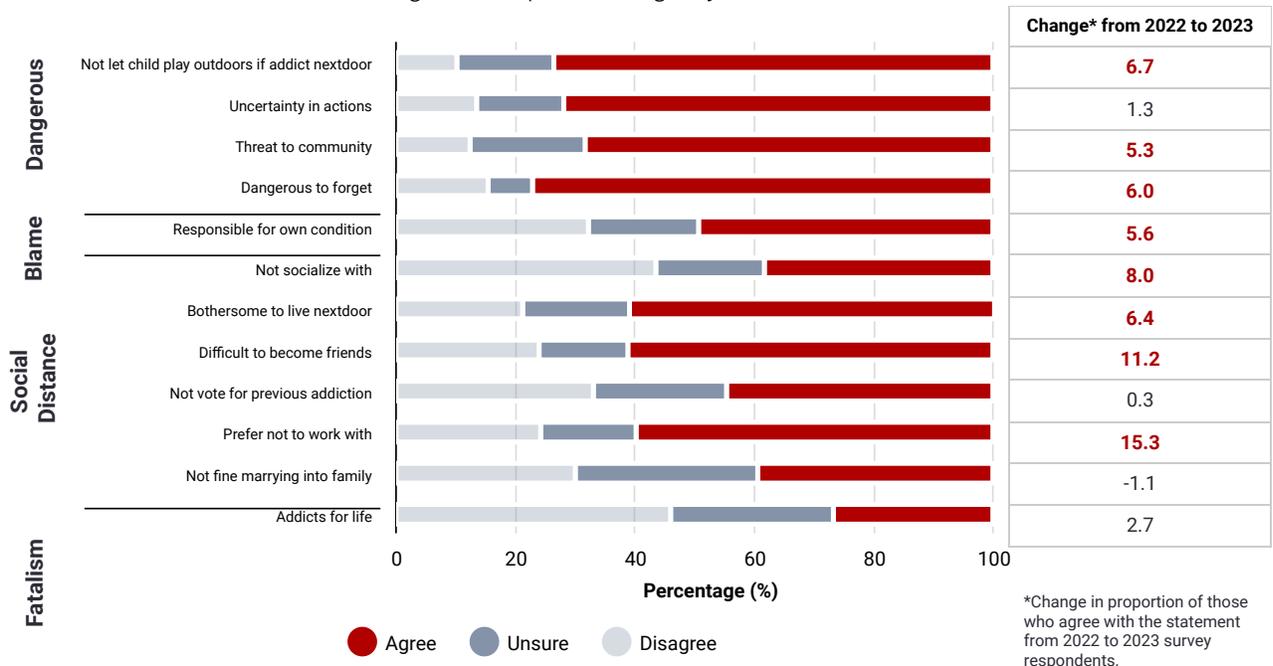
Our survey inquired about participants' views regarding the typical profile of a drug user, focusing on attributes such as gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and employment status. Our findings show that the variation in these perceptions is marginal from 2022 to 2023 within our sample.

Beliefs (gender, race, socioeconomic status, employment) About a Typical Drug User by Survey Year

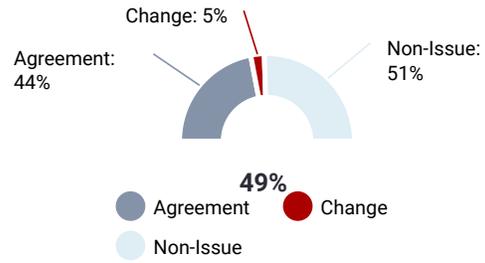
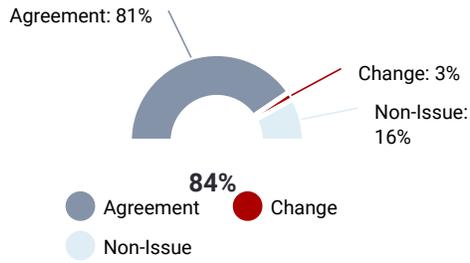


Upon examining stigma domains toward individuals who use drugs—specifically views on dangerousness, blame, social distance, and fatalism—our data indicated a relative increase in stigmatizing attitudes compared to the previous year. Notably, there was a significant uptick in the number of respondents who expressed reluctance to befriend or work with drug users. However, when comparing the responses of Wilson County residents to those living elsewhere, there was no significant escalation in stigma concerning dangerousness, blame, or fatalism. Additionally, our analysis showed a modest yet significant decrease in the stigma related to social distance among Wilson County participants, along with a marked improvement in the acceptance of Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) effectiveness and the recognition of drug abuse as a disease (page 3).

Stigma Item-Specific Changes by Year and Across Domains

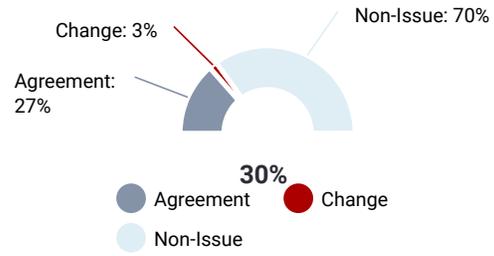
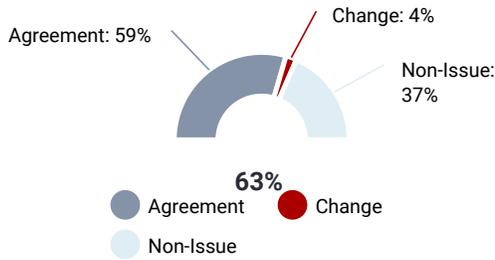


**Stigma Domain Changes from 2022 to 2023**



**Dangerous**

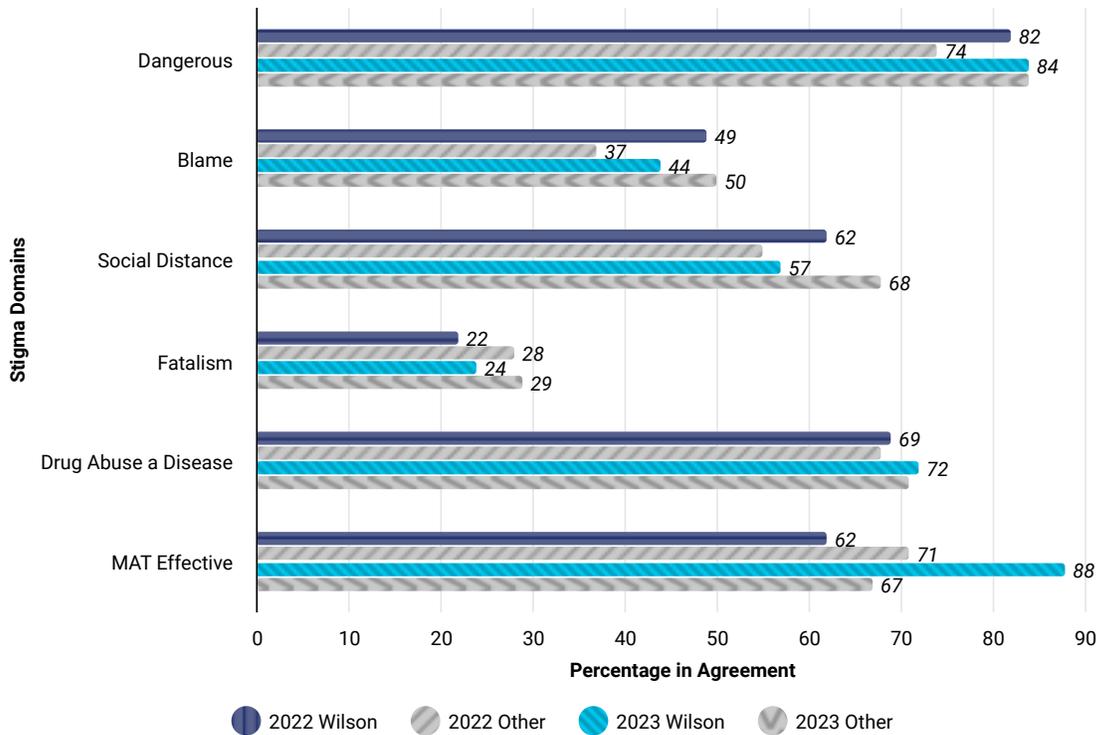
**Blame**



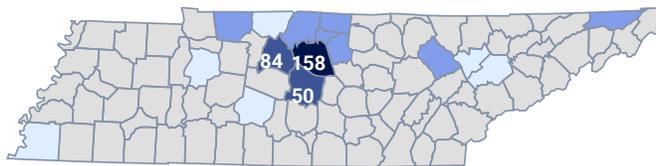
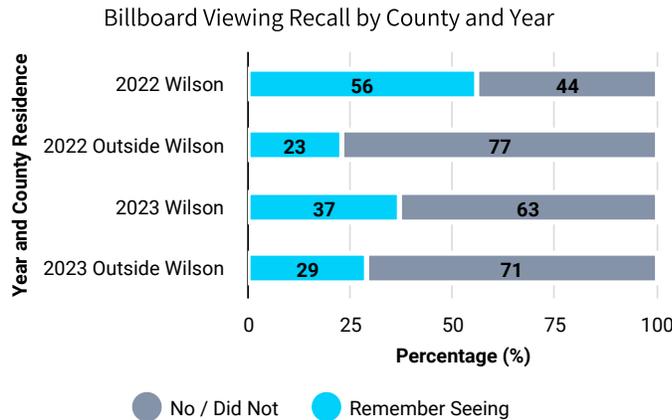
**Social Distance**

**Fatalism**

Stigma Domain Changes from 2022 to 2023 by Wilson County Resident Status



A billboard campaign aimed at reducing stigma towards individuals using drugs and promoting recovery and treatment efforts ran from [start month] to [end month] 2022. We surveyed respondents in August 2022 and again over a year later in August 2023 to see if they remembered seeing any of the billboards. As anticipated, Wilson County residents showed better recall in both years, with 37% still remembering the billboards after more than a year. Notably, there was an increase in recall among respondents from outside the county.



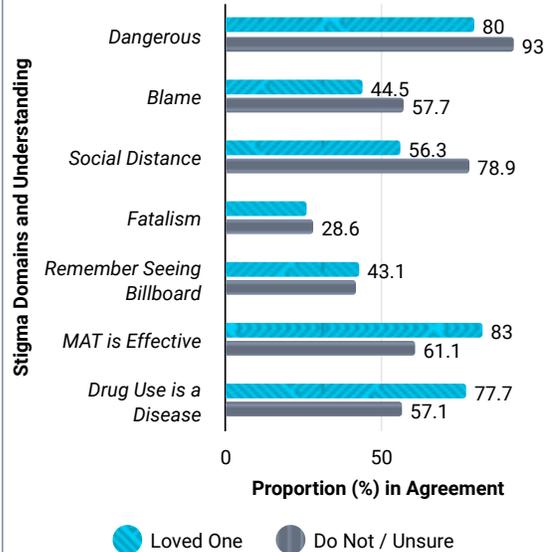
Map of Where Respondents Reside, 2023

- < 5
- 5 - 49
- 50 - 100
- > 100

Throughout five days of data collection, a total of 2,250 recruitment cards were distributed. On three of those days, paper surveys were additionally offered. In total, 407 surveys were completed online and 28 on paper, amounting to 435 surveys. Surveys that were mostly incomplete, lacked informed consent, or were missing significant sections were excluded from the final analysis. After meticulous data cleaning, we had 387 complete and usable responses. Analysis was conducted using Stata Version 17 (College Station, TX) and QGIS 3.26 (Boston, MA).

Closer examination revealed that a significant portion of these respondents were those who had a loved one or friend affected by substances. Overall, the data indicates that individuals with a close friend or family member involved in drug use tend to have lower levels of stigma across all domains, and are more likely to believe in the effectiveness of Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) and recognize drug abuse as a disease.

Stigma Domain Level by Affected Loved One Status



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## Safe Stars

**Safe Stars** is a collaboration between the **Tennessee Department of Health (TDH)** and the Program for Injury Prevention in Youth Sports at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt. Safe Stars' goal is to provide resources and opportunities for every youth sports league to enhance their safety standards. The criteria for achieving recognition as a Safe Stars league has been developed by a committee of health professionals dedicated to reducing sports-related injuries among youth.

Beginning February 15, 2023, MTSU Center for Health and Human Services has contracted with the TDH to evaluate the Safe Stars program. By the end of the project, CHHS will provide the state's Safe Stars team with expert recommendations based on survey findings, to facilitate improvements in reducing barriers to sports leagues' submitting applications to the program as well as recommendations on program feasibility.

In the first year of the program, CHHS developed and successfully disseminated two Institutional Review Board-approved surveys as a collaborative effort between the MTSU Safe Stars team and the TDH: one for Safe Stars participating organizations to measure barriers and facilitators

to achieving Safe Stars designation and a second targeting non-Safe Stars organizations to assess familiarity with Safe Stars, barriers keeping leagues/schools from applying, commonalities among organizations that are not designated, and how the TDH can help. Data collection for both participating and non-participating organizations is ongoing.

So far in 2024, CHHS has provided preliminary results of the surveys to the state's Safe Stars team as an aid in its reporting to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cynthia Chafin also had the opportunity to present on the evaluation program to the Tennessee Injury Prevention Coalition in January. As a result of that presentation, Dr. Alex Diamond, D.O., M.P.H., will be paying CHHS a visit in April to meet the team and learn more about their activities and how CHHS is contributing to the Safe Stars program. Diamond is an associate professor of orthopaedics and pediatrics at Vanderbilt University; a team physician for Vanderbilt University, the Nashville Predators, and the Nashville Sounds; director of the Youth Sports Health Center at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt; and co-founder of the Safe Stars program.

***"Vision is the ability to see potential in what others overlook."***

**—Rick Warren, American Baptist evangelical Christian pastor and author**

# Blue Raiders Drink Up



**Blue Raiders Drink Up (BRDU)** has slowly but surely become ingrained as a part of the MTSU culture as the program matures into its fifth year, thanks to additional

funding through the Tennessee Department of Health’s Project Diabetes Initiative. Approximately **3,226 MTSU students** have been reached by BRDU 2.0, which began July 1, 2022. This program aims to educate students on healthy lifestyles through free cooking classes, free counseling with a registered dietitian and health coach, as well as 24 educational events per year. Walking around campus, you can spot several water bottles, insulated lunch bags, and T-shirts that are all branded with the BRDU water droplet logo.

Blue Raiders Drink Up continues to install a minimum of three water refill stations per fiscal year, with this year’s focus on the residence halls. The new refill stations for this fiscal year will be in Sims Hall, Smith Hall, and Beasley Hall. In addition to the water stations in the residence halls, BRDU staff have begun to implement “Wellness Wednesdays” in Cummings Hall. Every third Wednesday of the month, you can catch the BRDU ambassadors doing a cooking demonstration partnered with an educational topic. Residents can stop by to eat free food, gain knowledge on healthy lifestyles, and get some swag!

Corlew Hall has officially received its very first mobile kitchen cart via BRDU that is stocked with kitchen utensils, cookware, bakeware, and more, ready for checkout at the RA desk. With this new addition, Cummings, Corlew, and Monohan halls

are stocked with items to ready check out so residents can make a healthy meal for themselves or others.

The Healthy Vending Machine Task Force received 455 responses to our survey asking MTSU students, faculty, and staff their opinions of our vending machines on campus. In the coming months, we will use the information from the survey to draft and present a policy recommendation to MTSU administration. By developing a policy surrounding vending machines, we seek to increase the selection of healthy choices offered and improve access to healthy foods for all MTSU students. We sincerely thank you for your input!

**COOKING  
UTENSILS, POTS,  
PANS, AND MORE**

AVAILABLE AT:  
**THE CORLEW FRONT DESK**  
JUST ASK YOUR HOUSING STAFF

Cooking instruments are provided by the Blue Raiders Drink Up program, funded by the State of Tennessee.

# Free Cooking Classes!

Join us for a 4-week cooking class series hosted by Blue Raiders Drink Up! Learn to cook healthy food on a budget and participate in a grocery store tour guided by a registered dietitian.



Each participant that attends 3 out of 4 classes will receive a BRDU t-shirt, lots of kitchen utensils, giveaways and a **\$100 Kroger gift card.**



**Stay tuned!**  
Fall 2024 dates will be announced early next semester.

Stay up to date with the latest news and information by following us on social media!



@mtsu\_chhs

@mtsu.chhs



Managing health & wellness can  
be hard...



Schedule a **FREE**  
one-on-one session with  
BRDU's Health Coach or Dietitian!



**Health Coach: Becky Figueroa**

Fill out this short form or send an email to  
[Becky.Figueroa@mtsu.edu](mailto:Becky.Figueroa@mtsu.edu)

**Registered Dietitian: Sarah Nicolette**

Fill out this short form or send an email to  
[Sarah.Nicolette@mtsu.edu](mailto:Sarah.Nicolette@mtsu.edu)





## True Blue Mental Health Awareness - MTSU Mental Health First Aid

Our True Blue Mental Health Awareness team has been busy this academic year! By the end of the Spring 2024

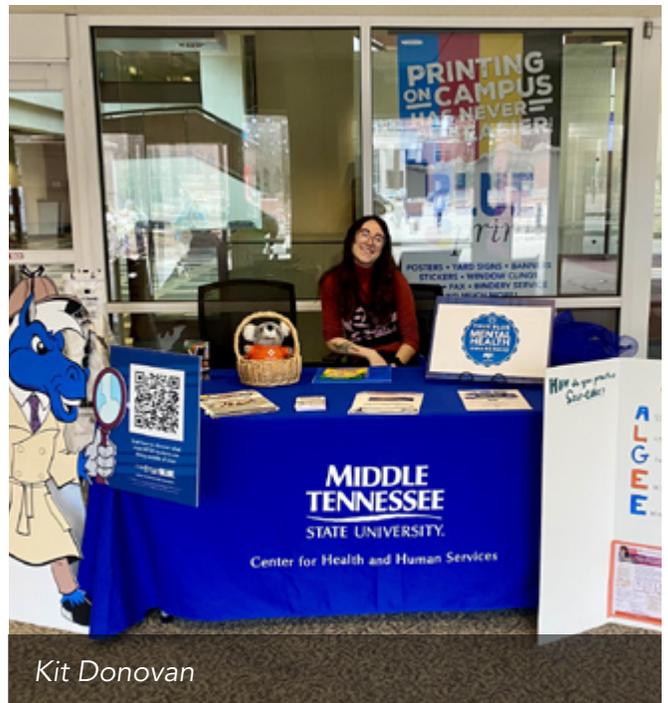
semester, over 150 people will have been trained in Mental Health First Aid this year thanks to a 4-year grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). In addition, previously trained individuals have reported referring 118 people to mental health resources in the first three months of the year using the skills they learned in their Mental Health First Aid training.

Through a partnership with the Coalition for Healthy and Safe Campus Communities (CHASCo), we have had the opportunity to collaborate with leaders at other institutions who value the importance of mental health. These relationships keep the conversation open to help us learn what other campuses in Tennessee are doing to support the mental health of their campus communities, and we can offer a Mental Health First Aid training for their campuses.

You may have seen our Mental Health First Aid ambassadors, Kit Donovan and Chloe Keating, popping up around campus elevating True Blue Mental Health Awareness. They attend tabling events to share information and are eager to help you register for any upcoming trainings. The ambassadors host peer-led student-only sessions. You can sign up for this training and search for future training dates at [mtsu.edu/chhs/MentalHealthFirstAid.php](https://mtsu.edu/chhs/MentalHealthFirstAid.php). We are constantly adding trainings to our website, or we are happy to schedule a selected date for your group, department, or class. Contact [jill.thomas@mtsu.edu](mailto:jill.thomas@mtsu.edu).



Chloe Keating



Kit Donovan

## CHHS Staff Spotlight

### Sarah Nicolette

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

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

**SN:** I've been with CHHS since fall 2023, so not even a full year yet! I work as the dietitian for Blue Raiders Drink Up over in Health Services. I provide free one-on-one nutrition counseling to help develop nutrition plans and empower students to make positive nutrition changes. My goal is to help instill students with a little bit of the passion I hold for food. Also, to help students understand what it means to eat a balanced, healthy diet for healthy living.

**CHHS: What is your favorite aspect of the job?**

**SN:** My favorite part of the job is working directly with students and watching how much they transform over the course of the semester. I love to watch how students evolve from "just making changes" to implementing and understanding how those changes work to improve their quality of life. I feel like the lasting result comes from that change in mindset, and I'm happy to be a support system for them as they work on meeting their goals.

**CHHS: If you could learn to do one thing, what would that be?**

**SN:** I'm not the most creative person by nature, but I do find joy in creating (even if it's not very good). I'd love to be able to play an instrument with some level of proficiency! I played the flute for a couple of years and loved it. I know that sometime in the future, I'll probably try and pick it back up just for fun!



**CHHS: What do you do in your free time? Hobbies?**

**SN:** My free time is usually for decompression, and I value my alone time. I love reading, and I'm trying to explore genres I don't typically read, i.e., nonfiction. With the weather warming up, I'm working on being outside more often with my sister. I'm also trying to integrate exercise as a new hobby, with mixed results, and focusing on moving each day!

**CHHS: What advice do you have for incoming MTSU freshmen?**

**SN:** Don't forget to eat! I know how overwhelming adapting to your first year can be, but try to not let your needs fall to the wayside for an online discussion post. Ha! Easier said than done, right?

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**CHHS STAFF SPOTLIGHT** *continued from page 22*

You can't expect to perform at your best when you have no fuel in the tank.

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

**SN:** One of the most valuable pieces of advice I've ever received comes from a former boss. The advice was, "You can't grow without making mistakes first." For many of us who tend to overthink things, it can be challenging to move forward due to the fear of making the

"wrong" decision. It's okay to feel this way, but it's important to remind ourselves that this indecisiveness can hold us back from taking risks or making progress. What may seem "wrong" to some may be the "right" choice for you. Remember, the only constant thing in life is change, so live on your terms!



## Introducing Spring 2024 Student Intern Faith Ziegler

Hello, Blue Raiders! My name is Faith Ziegler, and I am in my final semester of the Community and Public Health undergraduate program in the Health and Human Performance Department here at Middle Tennessee State University. I am working toward my Bachelor of Science in Community and Public Health. I am working with the Center for Health and Human Services as the spring 2024 intern. I work with Christina Byrd on a variety of programs such as Blue Raiders Drink Up, Medication Assisted Treatment, and Death Scene Investigation; however, my focus is mostly on Blue Raiders Drink Up!

My favorite aspect of the Blue Raiders Drink Up program is the dedication of everyone involved. Throughout my time working with this program, I have seen the Blue Raiders Drink Up student ambassadors and Christina try various things to help educate as many people as possible about being healthier regarding their drinking habits, eating habits, and exercise habits. For example, I worked with the ambassadors on hosting more educational events in the dormitory buildings, and a lot of students participate in those events and enjoy attending them.

When I am not working on something health related, I can be found reading, listening to music or a podcast, watching a true crime show or documentary, playing video games, or spending time with my friends and family. I read a variety of different things including manga and mystery novels. When listening to music, I like to listen to K-pop and J-pop as well as Taylor Swift, and I like to listen to the Scared to Death podcast that talks about different supernatural stories.



I watch true crime documentaries; I find the psychology of crime very interesting, and shows like *Evil Lives Here* provide an interesting point of view from family members of the criminal. I also enjoy playing video games such as Minecraft and Stardew Valley. Those games provide a calming atmosphere that helps me to relax and take a break when I need one. When I am not doing any of the above things, I am spending time with my friends and family. With my friends, I play Dungeons and Dragons, watch movies and TV shows, go out to eat, and more. Most of my family lives in Pennsylvania, so I mostly call and Facetime with them, talking about what everyone has going on and plans for the future.

I am extremely passionate about helping people. Basically, all my life I have wanted to help people in some capacity. At first, I wanted to become a nurse, but after seeing how little time they actually spend with patients, I looked for a new path, and that is when I found public health. So

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**CHHS STAFF SPOTLIGHT** *continued from page 24*

far, I have had several opportunities to work with people in the community in several different areas of health. I have helped educate people on the importance of emotional health, sleep, exercise, nutrition, mental health, food resources around campus, and more. I hope to continue to help educate people and help to connect them to all the resources that we have available to them.

Right now, I am most passionate about mental health and helping to connect people with services that are available to them. I am passionate about mental health because I have struggled with mental health for most of my life and being able to get the help I needed was life changing in both my personal and professional life. I am passionate about connecting people to services because there are so many amazing programs out there that people don't know about. For example, here at Middle Tennessee State University, we have a free health coach and dietitian, part of the Blue Raiders Drink Up grant, and a lot of my friends did not know we had those services available. I think it is very important to ensure that the public knows about and can take advantage of various health-related programs that are available to them.

I became interested in public health after I decided that I no longer wanted to be a nurse. I always knew that I wanted to help people, and I thought the best way to do that was through nursing; however, after clinicals I realized that becoming a nurse was not my calling. That is when I discovered the world of public health and how in that profession, I can reach more people and work more closely with the public.

My favorite quote comes from the manga Fruits Basket. This quote is from Volume 1, Chapter 8 of the collector's edition: "If a person's greatest

quality is like a pickled plum in a rice ball . . . that 'plum' might be stuck on the back side. All over the world, on everyone's backs are pickled plums of various forms, colors, and flavors, but because each one is on a person's back those tasty plums may go unnoticed. 'I have nothing. I'm just plain rice.' Even though it isn't true. Even though everyone has a fine pickled plum on their back. Maybe people get jealous because they can clearly see the plums on others' backs. Even now someone might be envious of another. They might be longing for something without realizing they already have it." This quote was spoken by Tohru Honda, and the manga was written by Natsuki Takaya.

My three traits that define me are caring, reliable, and intelligent. I believe that I am caring because I often put others before myself to ensure that they are happy and healthy. Additionally, I spend a lot of time caring for my friends and making sure that they are doing well mentally. I believe that I am reliable because people can always count on me to accomplish my tasks or help them whenever needed. I always tell my friends that if they need something that they shouldn't hesitate to message me, and I will do my best to help. I believe I am intelligent because I have my school career to reflect that. Throughout my high school and college career, I have maintained at least a 3.5 GPA, and I have received mostly A's in regard to the letter grade.

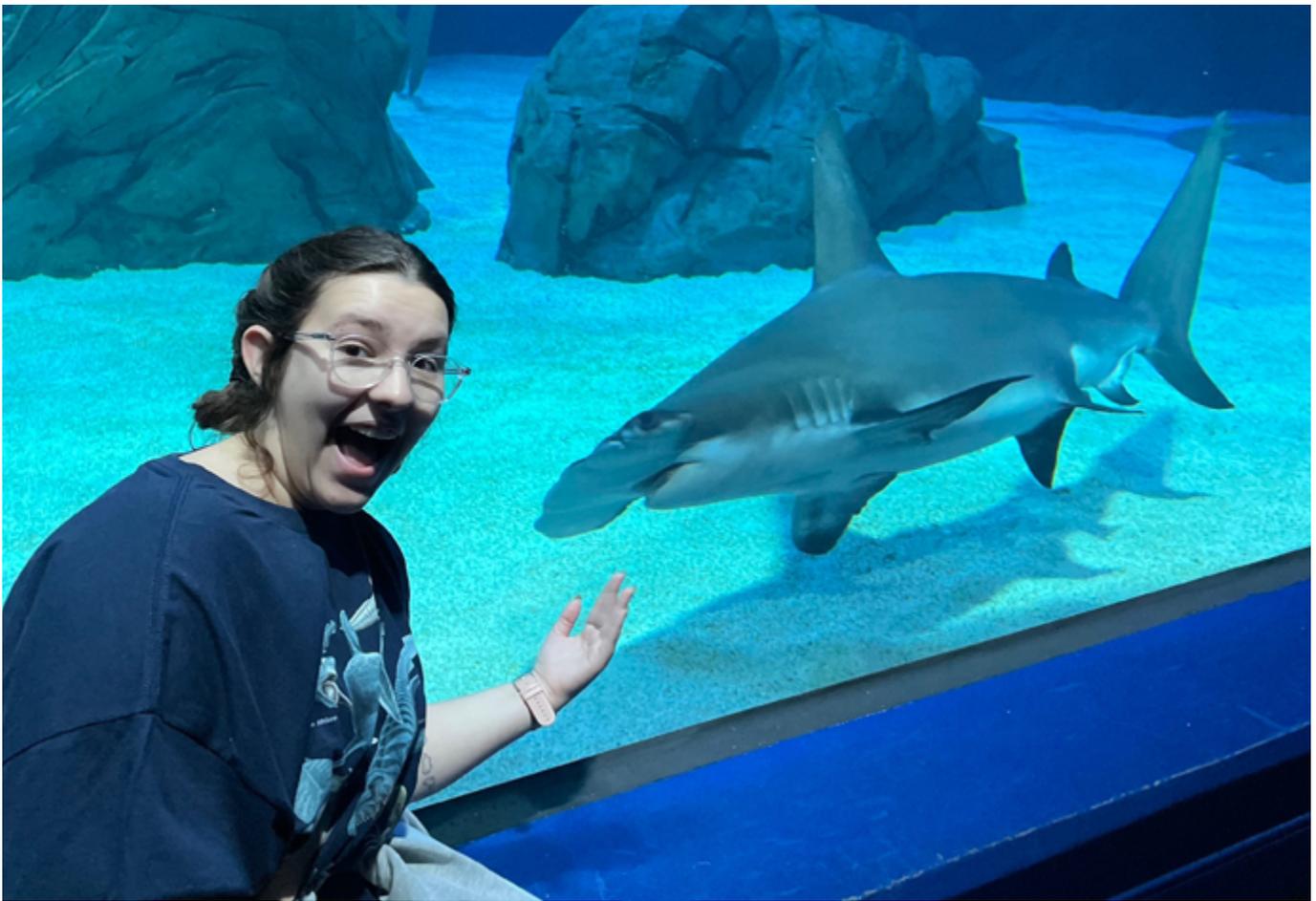
My advice for incoming freshman would be to figure out a way to stay organized. Being organized helps you to manage a busy class schedule, assignments, and any extracurriculars or work you have. Time management is an excellent skill to have while being a student

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**CHHS STAFF SPOTLIGHT** *continued from page 25*

and in the future. To graduating seniors, I will share some advice that I have received from Sarah Gwinn while at the Center for Health and Human Services: "Don't be discouraged when you hear a no. Take a no as an opportunity to learn and grow." To new employees, I would tell you to be patient. No matter what area you are in, you are going to be working with or dealing with other people that may not be as efficient or passionate as you, so have patience with them. I would also advise you to listen to students if they have questions or concerns. I have seen too many situations where students are dismissed and then they no longer want to work with you. Treat students as a valuable asset to the team instead of a problem.

Lastly, I would like to add my answer to an interview question that I have asked all the staff at CHHS. I asked them, "While you are at work, what type of animal are you?" My answer is that I would be a blacktip shark. I would choose this because these sharks are inquisitive, and they only become aggressive around speared fish, and I like to think that I only become aggressive if one of my friends or family is injured. They are also usually found in small groups, especially when hunting, and my friend groups are also relatively small. Additionally, these sharks are generally shy and easily frightened, and I am like this when I am in a new situation. Once they get more comfortable, they are more open in their personality, and that is exactly how I am.



# CHHS Staff Shoutout

## Sarah Gwinn – Bringing the Vision to Life



CHHS has experienced rapid growth over the last six years. Part of that growth can be attributed to the efforts of Sarah Gwinn, who started with CHHS as a grant coordinator in 2018 as one

of only two CHHS employees. She currently serves as CHHS Pre-Award Grants Coordinator and Outreach Specialist, the first to have this position in the center and a position to which she was promoted last year. With Gwinn’s expertise and

exemplary grant writing skills, she has successfully turned CHHS leadership’s vision into funded projects through dedication, commitment, long hours, and professionally written and meticulously worded proposals. While it takes a team effort to create a vision, build partnerships, identify resources, and complete other critical tasks, it also takes a quality grant submission, which requires a lot of behind-the-scenes effort and which doesn’t often get the spotlight but should!

Prior to coming to CHHS, Gwinn had three years of grant writing experience with funded projects totaling \$305,000, and now has nine years of experience with a portfolio of \$17,459,000. In her current position she is now doing full-scale project development, which includes not only grant writing, but multiple other tasks as well with an emphasis on community collaboration and partnership building. CHHS is grateful to have Gwinn’s talent and dedication and is so proud she is part of the CHHS team.

“I truly enjoy what I get to do in my role with CHHS. I love helping to take an idea on addressing a public health issue and translating it into a funding proposal. It is a collaborative process where I learn from subject matter experts, discover ways that our center can support the growth of on-campus and off-campus partners, and further our mission to improve the health and well-being of our communities. While the nature of the grant profession is that you typically receive more funder rejections than awards, the successful award announcements always make the countless rejections worth the effort. Especially if you can learn, revise, and grow from those rejections.

“I started this profession with no knowledge or experience, but I was given a chance and learned that this was my calling. I truly believe that anyone can be successful with grant writing regardless of education or experience; it just takes time, persistence, and a willingness to keep trying even when it seems like all you hear is ‘no’ from funders. Eventually, you will get that ‘yes’ and that momentum will help you keep moving forward.”

—Sarah Gwinn, CHHS Pre-Award Grants Coordinator and Outreach Specialist

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***“If you don’t have a vision, nothing happens.”***

**—Christopher Reeve, American actor,  
film director, author, and activist**

**MIDDLE  
TENNESSEE**  
STATE UNIVERSITY.

I AM *true* **BLUE**.

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