

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



CHANGING LIVES

"HOW WONDERFUL IT IS THAT NOBODY NEED WAIT A SINGLE MOMENT BEFORE STARTING TO IMPROVE THE WORLD."

— Anne Frank, Jewish Diarist and Holocaust Victim

CHHS has had a busy fall semester as always. As we wrap up year five of the first CHHS five-year plan, we continue to changes lives and make a difference in advancing the health and well-being of Tennesseans. Lytle House renovations are now complete with five new workstations to accommodate rapid growth, freshly painted walls with MT Blue and customized to CHHS, technology upgrades, and construction of an external storage facility.

What a way to launch into the next 5-year plan for FY 2026. There is so much more work to do

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and opportunities to continue to advance the health and well-being of Tennesseans.

When contemplating a focus word or phrase for this edition of the newsletter, it made sense to carry forward that of the earlier edition, **“changing lives.”** Those words continue to be so fitting and articulate the “zone” where the CHHS team continues to find itself, and where reminders of that continue to surface.

In August, CHHS wrapped up work on a **\$1.2 million 4.5-year Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP)** grant that provided direct support and treatment to Wilson County residents impacted by opioid use disorder (OUD). In compiling a final report, it was noted that **40 Tennesseans** received life-changing – perhaps life-saving – treatment, transportation, and wrap-around services because of the grant.



Derrell Seigler,
PIC Center Director

Another **108 Tennesseans** were served through the Preventing Incarceration in Communities (PIC) Center, which was partially supported through this grant, and successfully graduated from the program which promotes treatment over incarceration

for those struggling with opioid and substance used disorder. There are **71 active participants** in the program as of September, and its director, Derrell Seigler stated that “PIC gives those who normally don’t have a second chance ... a second chance. PIC wouldn’t be possible without collaboration from partners like MTSU and the grant funding that has helped support its creation, sustainability, and continuation.”

Read more about the MTSU RCORP Wilson County project later in this newsletter, which

In Case You Missed It!

The CHHS team is eager to keep the momentum going with important work that is changing lives and, in some cases, literally saving lives.

The [Spring 2024 MTSU Research Magazine](#) featured CHHS’ Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) grant awarded by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and its impact on those in Wilson County (the grant service area) including Leeanne Harris who was featured in the write-up, and who “is convinced that the grant saved her life.” Harris had lost battle after battle against meth and heroin and tried rehab several times without success. **Because of the MTSU HRSA RCORP grant**, she was able to get the treatment she needed and at press time of the feature story was on her way towards two years clean and sober. It is stories like Harris’ that are great reminders to the CHHS team and to our supporters that the work we do is impactful, and that give a face to the many reports and data that are compiled.



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includes a shout-out to external and internal partners who made the project so successful, and plans to share our research findings which might inform and support the work of others across the globe who are committed to being part of the solution to the opioid crisis. MTSU CHHS is making a difference and changing lives!

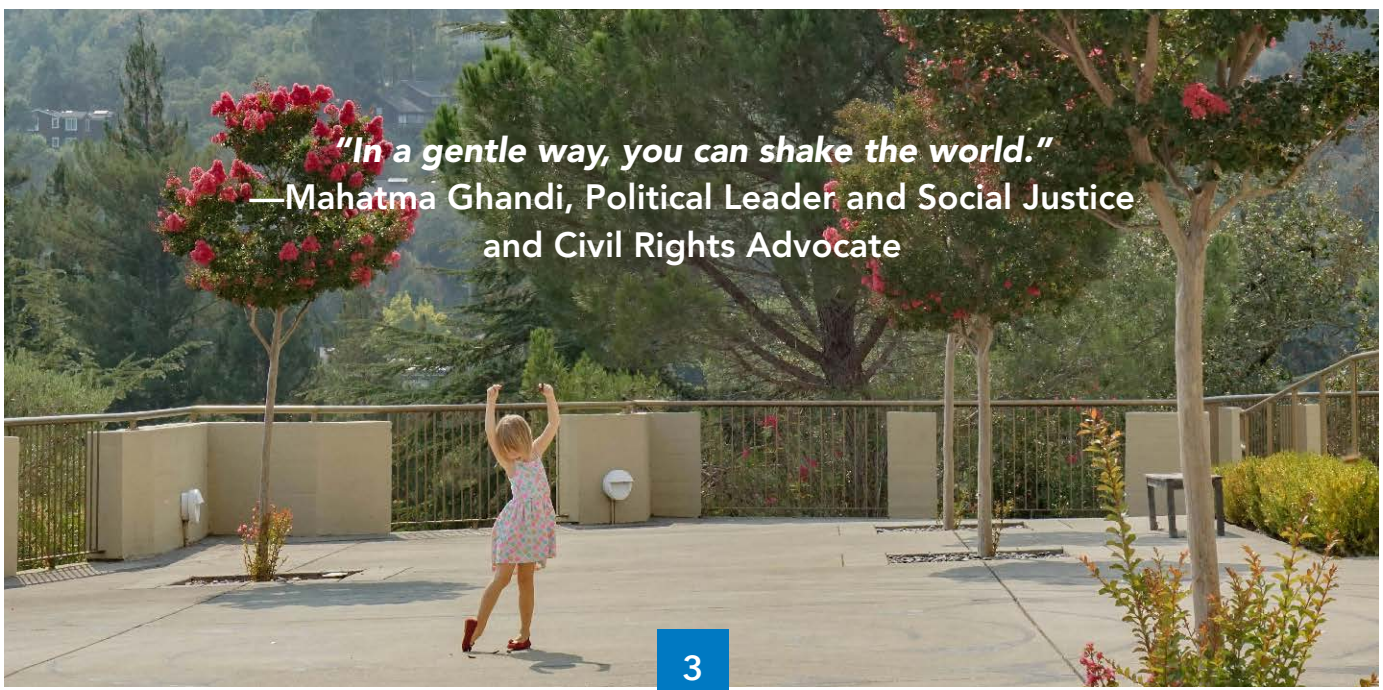


Awards given to Wilson County partners: (L to R: Derrell Seigler, Captain Scott Moore, Tammy Grow, Tim Diffenderfer. Not pictured: Mayor Randall Hutto, General Jason Lawson, Paul Trivette, Michael Ayalon.

Recent CHHS updates include:

- CHHS has continued to promote mental health awareness through its **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) grant** which provides funding to offer the evidence-based **Mental Health First Aid** program at no cost to the MTSU campus community. Mid-August, we received SAMHSA's approval to offer **QPR, an evidence-based suicide prevention program**, in addition to Mental Health First Aid. Plans are to add this program early 2025 and we look forward to serving the MTSU community with two programs. We continue to offer Mental Health First Aid training at six other institutions across the state to include Belmont University, Cumberland University, Columbia State Community College, Rhodes College, Cleveland State Community College, and University of Tennessee Southern as part of the SAMHSA grant. Training for the MTSU community and other academic institutions continues to be offered through December 2026 as part of this grant. Details are provided later in this

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"In a gentle way, you can shake the world."
—Mahatma Gandhi, Political Leader and Social Justice and Civil Rights Advocate

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newsletter on how to request departmental training programs or to sign up for already scheduled trainings.

- Two new full-time staff have been hired to support work of the three applications CHHS submitted to the **Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council** totaling **\$9,181,073** which were approved for funding. The projects are each 3-year projects and will support respite housing for those seeking OUD treatment, expansion of recovery services, and infrastructure support for expansion of CHHS' [Office of Prevention Science and Recovery](#) to support additional OUD work across the state. **89% of the dollars will go towards direct services for those impacted by opioid use disorder.** Read more about the individuals serving in these important roles later in the newsletter.
- The MTSU and **Cedar Recovery** mobile treatment unit is now in motion! This “clinic on wheels” provides medication assisted treatment for substance use disorder in a 5-county rural service area with community partner Cedar Recovery as part of a recently awarded **Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)** grant, totaling **\$2,921,726 million dollars.** This project launched on 9/30/23 and will go through 8/31/26. The MTSU CHHS Mat Access Team administers all aspects of the grant to support Cedar Recovery’s clinical services including procurement needs, reporting, personnel, evaluation, and community outreach and education. To learn more about this project, please see the Summer 2023, Fall/Winter 2023, and Spring and Summer 2024 newsletters, as well as the project updates provided later in this newsletter.

- CHHS had a successful site visit early November from the **Tennessee Department of Health Project Diabetes** program staff who were able to observe activities funded under a grant that supports the CHHS **Blue Raiders Drink Up (BRDU): Healthy Choices for Healthy Students** project which is now in its sixth year. BRDU has served **507 students** in the first quarter of the 2024-2025 grant year, which included one-on-one sessions with a dietitian, health coach, and cooking classes. With an ever-changing student body, the need for these services continues as new students enroll each year. CHHS is currently seeking funding opportunities to continue this project beyond the 2024/2026 year.
- 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 shaping a healthier future and that advance the health and well-being of Tennesseans while addressing Tennessee’s most pressing public health priorities. Our gratitude is extended to all on and off campus who support the Center’s work and vision, including our university administration who have been so incredibly supportive. Thank you ALL.

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 research, projects, and programs 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.

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Current Research, Projects, and Programs:

- Blue Raiders Drink Up: Healthy Choices for Healthy Students 2.0
- Expansion of the MTSU Office of Prevention Science and Recovery, Recovery Respite Housing, and Recovery Infrastructure Support from Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council
- Infant Death Scene Investigation/Safe Sleep
- MTSU Mental Health Awareness Training (Mental Health First Aid and QPR)
- Rural Communities Opioid Response Program Implementation Grant
- Rural Communities Opioid Response Program Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Access
- Rutherford, Williamson, and Cannon Counties Opioid Abatement Services—Office of Prevention Science and Recovery
- Safe Stars, Pediatric mTBI, Return to Learn Return to Play Evaluation

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, we again express gratitude to our many partners who make our work possible as we make a difference in the lives of Tennesseans in initiatives that have 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 and continues to identify collaborators and partners on and off campus to be involved in CHHS projects, programs, and research. Look for more updates via this quarterly CHHS newsletter, the CHHS website, and social media.

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 spotlighted 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 and vision of advancing the health and wellbeing of Tennesseans, 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 chhs.mtsu.edu, 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: Safe Stars

CHHS is pleased to shine the spotlight on the **Safe Stars** that the Center is evaluating for the **Tennessee Department of Health**. 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 Star’s goal is to provide resources and opportunities for every youth sports league to enhance their safety standards through this free and voluntary program. 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 with three levels of recognition – gold, silver, and bronze.

The success of the Safe Stars Initiative helped inform the passage of the [Safe Stars Act](#) in 2021. This act established health and safety requirements for school youth athletic activities, ensuring that all public and charter schools in Tennessee adhere to high safety standards and is cited as a “Success Story: Tennessee” on the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) website.

Why was the Safe Stars Act created? According to the CDC, about 283,000 children under the age of 18 go to emergency departments each year for a sports or recreation-related traumatic brain injury (TBI) in the United States, with TBIs from contact sports making up approximately 45% of these visits. Other data from the Tennessee Department of Health shows that over 1,000 Tennessee youth under the age of 25 experienced a TBI in 2022,

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PROJECT SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 6*

with 222 being under the age of 10. The CDC notes that children may experience changes in their health, thinking, and behavior because of a TBI and that any brain injury can disrupt their development and limit their ability to participate in school and other activities, like sports (CDC, 2024).

Are YOU involved with youth sports? Find out if your league is a Safe Stars organization and if not, encourage leaders to take a look at the Safe Stars [website](#).

CHHS Project Updates:

- Beginning this fiscal year, alongside modifying and continuing the evaluation of **Safe Stars**, CHHS will also be evaluating utilization of the **CDC Pediatric mTBI (mild Traumatic Brain Injury) Guidelines** and the **Return to Learn/Return to Play** protocols.
- The **mTBI** evaluation will involve surveying a minimum of 500 healthcare providers per year, analyzing and reporting the results, disseminating data to stakeholders, and developing new strategies to present that data. Data collection for this component of the project will begin soon pending IRB approval.
- The **Return to Learn/Return to Play** evaluation involves a quantitative survey of a minimum of 500 school athletic professionals, as well as a focus group. Data collection will begin soon pending IRB approval.

CHHS is pleased to support Safe Stars which positively impacts the lives of Tennesseans. By assisting in program evaluation and providing recommendations based on findings, CHHS contributes to the health and well-being of young athletes and the policies that keep them safe through concussion education, weather safety, and injury prevention.

Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (April 2024). [Facts About TBI](#).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (May 2024). Core State Injury Prevention Program (Core SIPP). [Success Story: Tennessee](#).

“One person can and does make a difference.”

**—Albert Schweitzer, Humanitarian,
Physician, and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate**

Community Partner Spotlight: The Papillion Center



The Center for Health and Human Services is pleased to shine the spotlight on

[The Papillion Center](#) based

in Gallatin, Tennessee in Sumner County.

The Papillion Center is a faith-based nonprofit counseling and therapy center, specializing in wraparound service provision for kids and families.

CHHS recently partnered with Papillion Center on a Health Resources and Services (HRSA) - Supporting Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

Screening & Intervention grant application which would focus on states that have high occurrence and risk rates of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and create a regional training center that would serve medical practices in a multi-state service area. The majority of training would take place in the high-risk states identified, including a focus on rural communities and medically underserved areas. While our first collaborative grant application was not funded, we will try again and are continuing to look at other funding opportunities.

More about The Papillion Center:



S. Chris Troutt, LMFT, co-founded the Papillion Center

in 2010. She and her late husband, Burt, are parents to twelve children and have twenty-five grandchildren. Chris

is a biological mother, an adoptive mother, a stepmother, and a foster mother. She brings both education and personal perspective into the therapy session.

Chris has a **Master's Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from Trevecca Nazarene University in Nashville, Tennessee.** She is a Trust Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) practitioner through the Texas Christian University Institute of Child Development. She specializes in Trauma, Attachment Disorders and Prenatal Exposure to Alcohol and Drugs. Chris is licensed in Tennessee and Illinois, USA. In addition to her role as therapist, Chris serves as the Papillion Center's CEO.



Tim Diffenderfer

is a results-focused professional having extensive experience as a successful development director and nonprofit executive and currently serves as **Director of**

Development for Papillion Center. He is known regionally for working with communities linking positive connections and resources that contribute to healthy outcomes for individuals and families.

In addition, he has been a founding member of several community coalitions, health councils, and new initiatives. He is a prevention expert with demonstrated skills in evidence-based practices and approaches at the local, state and national level. Tim has been an ordained minister for over 40 years and served many years in bi-vocational roles. Prior to the Papillion Center for FASD, Tim served with the TN Department of Health as the County Health Director for Trousdale and Wilson Counties. In addition, he served as a Senior

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 8*

Executive with STARS Nashville for many years and was instrumental coordinating the successful National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP) application for STARS inclusion on the distinguished list for Student Assistance Programs.

Tim is married to Tracy and they have two children and six grandchildren. Their daughter Ashley Ogle, is an MTSU Alumni.

Thank you, Papillion Center for all that you do to support better health and well-being of all Tennesseans and for working with CHHS as a partner on a grant application that would positively impact the healthcare workforce and those that they serve in a multi-state area.

Together we are Better: MTSU CHHS & Papillion Center



MTSU Center for Health and Human Services has been pleased to partner with **Papillion Center** on a grant application in response to the **recent Health Resources and Services Administration**

(HRSA) Supporting Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Screening and Intervention, funding opportunity, which would support a regional training center for primary care providers on FASD.

The proposed partnership with Papillion Center is a great example of how when working together, we are better. CHHS wrote the grant application with active involvement from Papillion Center, freeing staff time to continue to serve others in their daily work. CHHS, as the grant applicant, if funded, would serve vital roles including evaluation and oversight and management of all grant activities including reporting, representing the project at funder-required meetings and

calls, fiscal management, oversight of all deliverables and coordination of activities in the work plan including community engagement, and personnel management, freeing Papillion Center to contribute the extensive expertise and experience with FASD, families, and providers and to provide needed services to those served by the grant. Leveraging the decades-long successful track record of CHHS with grant funding and implementation, and the resources and reputation of the university, with Papillion's expertise and demonstrated excellence with long-standing service to Tennesseans – and Kentuckians - in need, it's a win-win for MTSU and for Papillion Center.

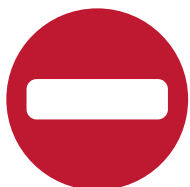
The competition for this funding was competitive and while we did not get approved for funding, we are not giving up! We look forward to continuing the search for other funding opportunities that would support this important work.

— **Cynthia Chafin, Ph.D., MCHES®, NBC-HWC**

Director, MTSU Center for Health and Human Services

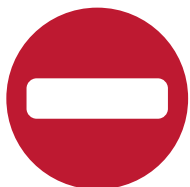
How is **FASD** Recognized in **Tennessee?**

FASD stands for fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, a range of disabilities caused by prenatal alcohol exposure (PAE). As many as 1 in 20 children in the United States have an FASD. To learn more, visit FASDUnited.org



FASD is not recognized by the State Department of Health.

Information about FASD is not available on the Tennessee Department of Health website.



The state does not include FASD in its definition of Developmental Disability.



People with FASD may qualify for waiver services through the State.

Although FASD is not a named condition, a person with FASD may still qualify. There may be an IQ cutoff for waiver services, and individuals have to be diagnosed prior to age 18 or 22, depending on the waiver.



FASD is not recognized by name in the state for Special Education services.

FASD is not specifically listed as a condition to qualify for Special Education.



The state tracks rates of alcohol-exposed pregnancies.

Questions about prenatal alcohol use are asked in the state's PRAMS survey.

How Are Alcohol-Free Pregnancies Supported in Tennessee?



The state requires a warning sign for alcohol sales.

Warning signs about the risks associated with prenatal alcohol exposure are required for alcohol sales.

Tenn. Code Ann. § 57-1-211



15% of people binge drink.

Binge drinking is especially risky, whether or not someone is pregnant. Reducing alcohol use can improve health outcomes.



49% of pregnancies are unintended.

Prenatal alcohol exposure can happen before pregnancy is confirmed. When pregnancy is unintended, this may take at least 4-6 weeks, and many people continue drinking during this time.



13.5% of pregnancies are exposed to alcohol.

Effects are lifelong and can include mental health conditions, learning disabilities, sensory issues, and physical manifestations such as heart defects, hearing and visual impairments, and more.

Sources:

- May, PA, Chambers, CD, Kalberg, WO, Zellner, J, Feldman, H, Buckley, D, et al. (2018) Prevalence of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders in 4 US communities. *JAMA*. 319(5):474–82.
- Gosdin LK, Deputy NP, Kim SY, Dang EP, Denny CH. Alcohol Consumption and Binge Drinking During Pregnancy Among Adults Aged 18–49 Years — United States, 2018–2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2022;71:10–13.
- Alcohol Policy Information System. (2023) Warning Signs: Drinking During Pregnancy. <https://alcoholpolicy.niaaa.nih.gov/apis-policy-topics/warning-signs-drinking-during-pregnancy/24>
- Centers for Disease Control. (2024). BRFSS Prevalence & Trends Data. <https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/brfssprevalence/>
- Tennessee Department of Health. (2020). Annual Summary Report: 2020. <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/documents/PRAMS-Summary-Report-2020.pdf>

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Local Resource on FASD:



1054 31st Street NW #204 Washington, DC 20007 (202) 785-4585 www.FASDUnited.org

Campus Partner Spotlight: Health and Human Performance, Public Health Program



Public Health

MTSU Center for Health and Human Services has worked collaboratively with the **Department of Health and Human Performance (HHP) Public Health Program**

for decades. HHP Public Health has shared its students with the Center as part of the CHHS internship program which has been in place since 2010, engaged faculty as evaluators on CHHS externally funded projects, and provided opportunities for the CHHS team to collaborate with faculty on presentations, posters, and other scholarly activities. As of 2020, CHHS welcomed public health faculty **Dr. Kahler Stone as its first HHP co-PI** on an externally funded CHHS project. Dr. Stone has faithfully served as co-PI



Dr. Kahler Stone

on the **Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Rural Communities Opioid Response grant** awarded to CHHS over the 4.5-year period of the grant which is currently wrapping up. Dr. Stone's contributions to the project have been

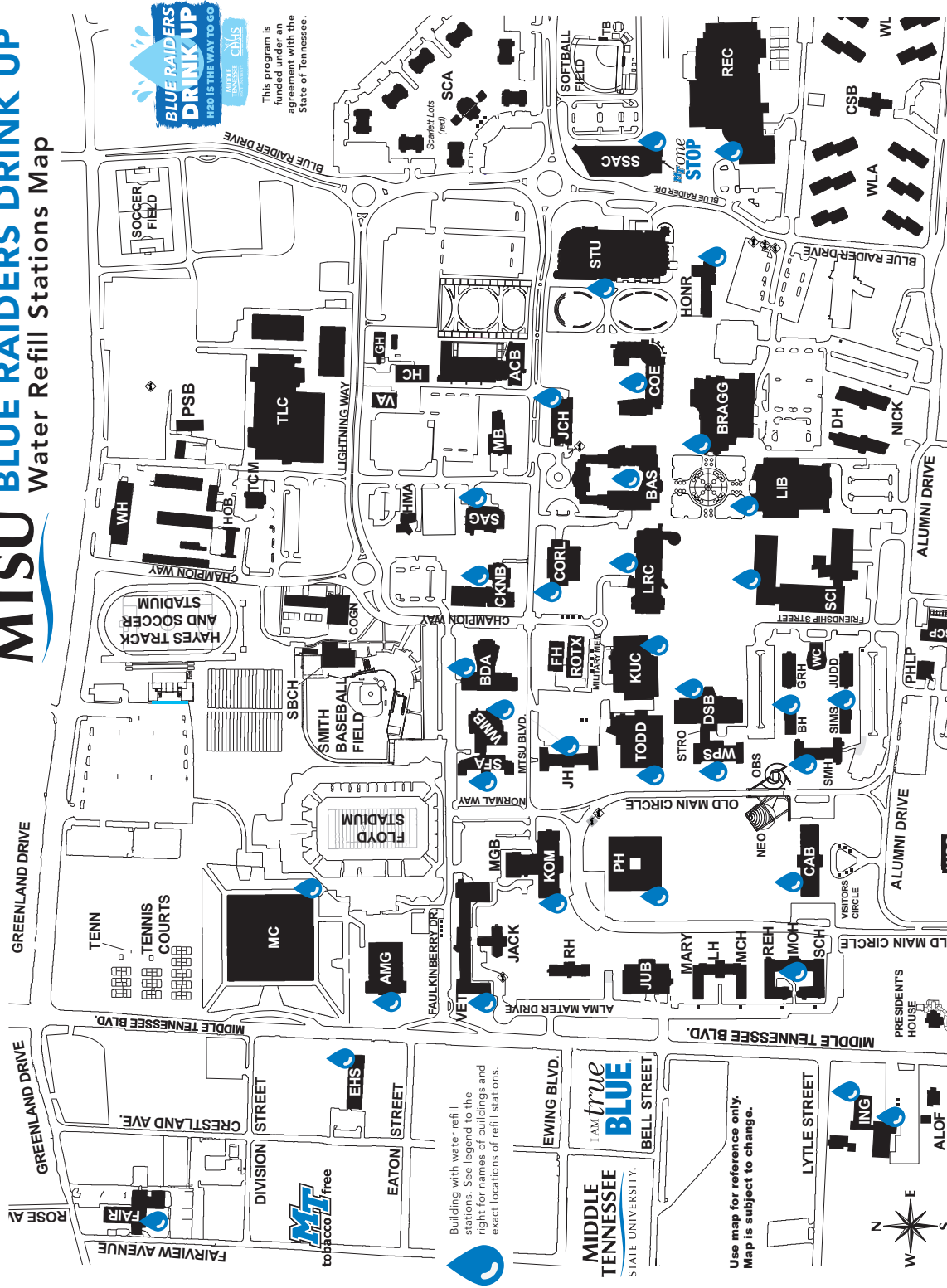
numerous, including organizing and leading teams of public health students to assist with data collection specific to stigma surrounding opioid and substance use disorder the last three years of the Wilson County-Tennessee State Fair. These student teams provided needed assistance for the stigma research of this project while the students were provided with a valuable learning experience. Read more about the **RCORP Wilson County project** updates in this newsletter.



Dr. Kahler Stone and students at the Wilson County – Tennessee State Fair collecting data for the HRSA RCORP Wilson County project

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 June 2024 and distributed 8,681 water bottles to students. There were 190,411 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



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



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**

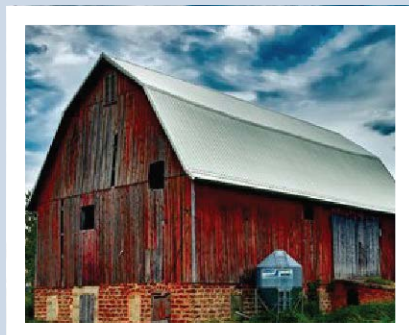
0324.41 / Middle Tennessee State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, color, religion, disability, age, status as a protected veteran, or any other category protected by law. See our full policy at mtsu.edu/ec.

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 and QPR Suicide Prevention Training (coming 2025)



Mental Health
FIRST AID

from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR
MENTAL WELLBEING

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

Since 2023, more than 750 campus community members have been trained in Mental Health First Aid as part of our second grant award. In 2018-2021, more than 1,100 were trained through the first MHFA grant. We will continue to serve the campus community with this evidence-based national program. We also have provided training to six college campuses across the state through this grant: Belmont University, Cumberland University, Columbia State Community College, Rhodes College, Cleveland State Community College, and University of Tennessee Southern.

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

**QPR Suicide Prevention Training
Coming Early 2025!**

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Project Update: Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Access Program

The MTSU Center for Health and Human Services' **Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Access grant** funded by the **Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)** and in partnership with [Cedar Recovery](#) has now hit the road with its customized mobile unit, which serves five rural Tennessee communities and delivers quality patient care through an evidence-based approach to addiction recovery that combines Medication-Assisted Treatment, behavioral therapy, care coordination, and recovery support. Counties served include Giles, Hickman, Lawrence, Franklin, and Marshall Counties. Services also will be provided in Claiborne County as a sixth site, for justice-involved individuals. The addition of methadone treatment for mobile unit services in Years 2 and 3 of the project.

Making communities aware of these services is critical to reaching those most in need. The MTSU team has been busy scheduling and participating in community outreach events and activities in multiple service delivery areas.



Updates include:

- The project is experiencing incredible momentum as we move into year two. The mobile unit has been fully operational since returning from renovations on July 30, 2024. Beginning August 1, 2024, the mobile unit has been visiting Lawrence, Giles, and Hickman counties once a week.



- The project team is excited to announce that service delivery will soon begin inside of the Claiborne County Jail with contracts nearing completion as of the time of this publication. Two peer recovery specialists have been successfully hired and are ready to contribute to this important initiative.
- Marketing and promotion of the unit are in full swing, highlighted by a feature on the front page of the Hickman County Times and a radio presence in Giles County.
- The MAT team has been actively engaged in grassroots outreach and promotion to raise

PROJECT UPDATE *continued from page 16*

awareness about our unit and the services provided through this grant. In July and August, the team visited Giles and Marshall counties, stopping by the mayor's office, Sutton Family Pharmacy, Giles County Jail, and Southern Regional Hospital to introduce community leaders to this valuable grant program.

- Community awareness events in November included the Marshall County Recovery Fest that was rescheduled from October, with additional lunch and learn workshops in Franklin and Giles Counties.

"Medication-assisted treatment saves lives while increasing the chances a person will remain in treatment and learn the skills and build the networks necessary for long-term recovery"

— Michael Botticelli, Director of National Drug Control Policy

The MTSU MAT Access Team is pleased to be part of this potentially life-saving project in partnership with Cedar Recovery.



Office of Prevention
Science and Recovery

CHHS' Office of Prevention Science and Recovery

Updates from the CHHS Office of Prevention Science and Recovery include:

- The **Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council** approved funding in the amount of **\$9,181,073** for CHHS OPRS to provide technical assistance and support to prospective and recently awarded abatement grantees and local governments, as well as to fund two recovery-focused projects with community partner **HUSTLE Recovery**. Early project start-up activities are taking place as contracts are being put into place.
- CHHS OPRS began work this fiscal year with the **Williamson County Opioid Taskforce** and the **Cannon County Opioid Abatement Taskforce**. For Williamson County, OPRS developed an application and scoring rubric for prospective local abatement funding applicants and convened a panel of experts to review **15 applications** submitted for local funding. Funding decisions will be shared as available.
- CHHS OPRS continues to work with the **Rutherford Opioid Board (ROB)** with a second-year contract. Rutherford County recently changed the application process from monthly rolling requests to three application periods in May, July & September. This change, plus enhanced pre-application technical support will, hopefully, result in higher quality proposals that result in more funding awards to meet the needs of our community. The Rutherford Opioid Board (ROB) funded **17 projects** in the 2023-2024 fiscal year allocating **\$927,953** towards them. The ROB has over **\$2,165,621** in funds to allocate for fiscal year 2024-2025 projects in Rutherford County.
- In fiscal year 2023-2024 the Office of Prevention Science and Recovery trained over **60 individuals** in how to apply for local grant funds and provided technical assistance to include evidence-based practices in local proposals.

Wilson County RCORP Grant Update



The CHHS Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) Implementation Grant funded by the **Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)** just finished its third and final year of project activities and will continue to provide funds for additional patient care and treatment costs through August 2026. Recently the team wrapped up the last deliverables in the 3-year work plan, which included introducing prevention curriculum in the Wilson County schools, launching an overdose data dashboard

(OD Map), and hosting lunch and learns with multidisciplinary stakeholders in Wilson County about opioid use disorder and treatment, and supporting the work of the Preventing Incarceration in Communities (PIC) Center.

Publications and Presentations:

- As the CHHS Rural Communities Opioid Response Program 3-year grant comes to an end, the MTSU RCORP team is pleased to share findings from their work, led by Dr. Kahler Stone, HHP Public Health Program, specific to stigma and drug use. The paper, A cross-sectional study of stigma towards opioid users among rural law enforcement and community members in tennessee is available in the [Harm Reduction Journal](#).
- The MTSU Wilson County RCORP project was accepted for presentations at the **Tennessee Public Health Association's (TPHA)** 2024 annual meeting as well as the **American Public Health Association's (APHA)** 2024 annual meeting.

MTSU RCORP TEAM



Lead PI & Project Director:
Cynthia Chafin, PhD, MCHES[®],
Director, Center for Health and Human Services



Co-PI & Project Director:
Kahler Stone, DrPH, MPH,
Associate Professor, Dept. of Health and Human Performance, Public Health Program



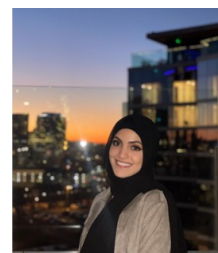
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Master of Public Service, Program Coordinator, Center for Health and Human Services



Data Analyst:
Keith Gamble,
Director, Data Science Institute, Professor Economics and Finance



Project Assistant:
Chipper Smith, MPH



Project Assistant:
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GRANT UPDATE *continued from page 18*

“For the past three years, MTSU’s Public Health Program and CHHS have collected data at the Wilson County and Tennessee State Fair, focusing on understanding community perceptions and stigma toward individuals who use drugs. Our collaboration with partners like the Drug-Free WilCo Coalition and Cedar Recovery has been instrumental in these efforts. The data collected informs community reports that aim to track stigma over time and shape education and anti-stigma initiatives. This initiative underscores our ongoing commitment to preventing drug overdoses and supporting recovery efforts in the community.”

— Dr. Stone



Dr. Kahler Stone,
Co-PI, MTSU CHHS
RCORP Project

Student Engagement:

Each year, students have played a crucial role in these data collection efforts, gaining hands-on experience in community outreach and public health research. In 2024, we had **six exceptional volunteers** as part of the 2024 Student RCORP Data Collection Team:

- **Augustine Afriyie**
(Ph.D., Human Performance–Health Concentration)
- **Tess Swastek**
(M.P.H., Community Health)
- **Fnu Pragya**
(M.P.H., Community Health)
- **Xaviera Gladden**
(M.P.H., Community Health)
- **Anakarina Lorenzana-DeWitt**
(B.S., Public Health)
- **Benjamin Antwi**
(M.P.H., Community Health)

Dr. Stone adds, “These students dedicated their time and skills to engage with fairgoers, collecting invaluable data to guide future public health efforts in reducing stigma and supporting needy individuals. Their efforts have contributed to research and resulted in several presentations and posters, along with a master’s thesis and scientific journal publication.

I am incredibly proud of these students for their commitment and passion for addressing stigma and contributing to public health. They have exemplified the values of the MPH program, and I believe this hands-on experience will continue to shape their careers in meaningful ways.”



PROJECT SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 19*

Here's What Students are Saying:

Students were asked to share about their experiences collecting data to support the CHHS RCORP project by answering one or more of these questions:

- **What was the most rewarding part of your experience collecting data at the fair?**
- **How has this project influenced your understanding of public health?**
- **What skills or knowledge did you gain from participating in this project?**
- **Why is collecting data on stigma toward those who use drugs a public health issue that deserves resources and attention?**
- **How has this experience shaped your perspective on serving the community?**

Afriyie: "I think the most rewarding bit was having to get some participants despite the challenges getting there. It was welcoming and fulfilling meeting parents of alumni and students in the school open up and express interest in the project.

Also, I believe this project warrants support and attention as it hopefully may reveal how stigma deters drug users from seeking care, thus decreasing health outcome amongst them. Such a study will inform the general public of the negative impacts of stigma on such individuals."

Pragya: "One of the parts of gathering information at the fair was interacting with individuals from different backgrounds and listening to their unique perspectives. It provided a chance to gather insights that may not have been accessible otherwise. Moreover observing how enthusiastic people were to engage once they found out we were students, from MTSU and exchanged stories made the task feel more impactful as it became evident that the data gathered could lead to change."

Swastek: "Being able to get the field experience and being on the ground was super interesting. It was interesting to directly see how people responded, their level of interest, and some of the honest thoughts. There were some surprising opinions shared and things that may not have made it into the surveys. While these are not things that can be use as data, it helps to provided emotion to how the public views this topic and the work.

Trying to ask people to take a survey is not the most appealing work, but without it, we miss out a lot. Being able to have involvement on all levels of research, from identifying a hypothesis to the publication of results is important to really understand the work that goes into it and how each part of the process plays a role."

MT-Public Health Student RCORP Data Collection Team

Participating Students 2022-2024:

Augustine Afriyie

Patience Akanwogba

Benjamin Antwi (3 years)

Gabrielle Chesak

Maimoonah Dabshee

Anakarina Lorenzana De Witt

Xaviera Gladden

Sherry Jernigan

Kira King

Abigail Kwarteng

Fnu Pragya

Jocelyn Rajkowski

Chipper Smith

Tess Swastek

Imuwahen Uzzi

Blue Raiders Drink Up



Blue Raiders Drink Up (BRDU): Healthy Choices for Healthy Students program funded through the **Tennessee Department of Health's Project Diabetes Initiative** is entering

its final year of its second three-year grant cycle. CHHS will be seeking funding to continue this campus-wide initiative while making this last year count. This program aims to educate students on healthy lifestyles, through free cooking classes, free counseling with a registered dietitian and health coach, 24-educational events per year, the installation of water refill stations across campus, and the development of a Healthy Vending Machine Taskforce.

Updates for Blue Raiders Drink Up: Healthy Choices for Healthy Students include:

- This fall, we're thrilled to announce that our on-campus tabling events are ramping up in collaboration with **MTSU Health Promotion**. Each month, we have an exciting lineup of events where students can discover the valuable free resources offered by Blue Raiders Drink Up. If you spot us on campus, don't hesitate to stop by and say hello! We can't wait to connect with you.
- Thanks to the water refill stations installed throughout MTSU's campus courtesy of BRDU 1.0 and 2.0, we've saved an incredible **210,837 plastic bottles!** Join us in making a positive impact on our environment—every refill counts!
- **November is Diabetes Awareness Month**, and we launched a powerful series on our social media that highlights impactful lifestyle changes you can make to support diabetes management. Scroll back through our social media for practical tips and insights to carry forward into the holiday season and into the new year.

- Join us for an informative webinar featuring BRDU Program Coordinator Christina Byrd and Registered Dietitian Sarah Nicolette on **Tuesday, December 10th, from 12-1 PM**. The topic will be "Thriving Through the Holidays: Nourishing Your Body with Healthy Eating." Attendees will gain valuable insights into how CHHS and the grant-funded "Blue Raiders Drink Up" program have fostered health-oriented initiatives on the MTSU campus. Following this, we'll share practical tips and tricks for maintaining a balanced diet during the festive season while still enjoying the delights of holiday eating. Don't miss this opportunity to enhance your holiday experience! This webinar is sponsored and hosted by the **MTSU Alumni Association**.
- Thanks to our eager MTSU students, both Fall 2024 BRDU cooking classes filled up in under 24 hours! Participants have enjoyed hands-on practice with a variety of recipes while building lasting connections with their peers. If you or someone you know wants to join us next time, stay tuned to our social media for announcements about Spring 2025 dates.

Fall 2024 Cooking Classes are now full!

We want to thank all the MTSU students and faculty who have made the Blue Raiders Drink Up cooking class series so highly successful!



So far, 58 students have completed the Fall and Spring series this year.

Out of 34 Spring 2024 cooking class participants, 76% now check nutritional labels before purchasing food, a significant increase from the 60% who did so prior to taking the class.



We're looking forward to another great semester of cooking and learning!

Follow us on social media, where the Spring 2025 cooking class dates will be announced early next semester!



@mtsu_chhs
@mtsu.chhs





True Blue Mental Health Awareness— MTSU Mental Health First Aid

MTSU **Mental Health First Aid**, offered at no cost to our campus community as part of our mental health awareness

training grant CHHS received from the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**, continues to provide opportunities to change lives through reducing stigma towards mental health and connecting members of our campus community with needed resources.

Updates and outcomes for True Blue MTSU Mental Health Awareness Training include:

- **Over 700** people have been trained as Mental Health First Aid First Aiders since the beginning of the grant in 2023, and **almost 450** just this year!
- During 2023 there were **236 referrals** made to mental health services by individuals trained as part of the MTSU Mental Health First Aid training program. Throughout 2024, **443 referrals** have been made during the first three quarters of the year.
- To date, **72.23%** of those participating in MTSU Mental Health First Aid training in 2024 completing pre- and post-tests demonstrated improvements in mental health knowledge, attitudes, and biases.
- We will engage and promote our True Blue Mental Health Awareness initiative and Mental Health First Aid trainings at various MTSU events and individual tablings. Keep an eye out for Kit, Chloe, and Rin!
- Through our consortium, we are working with several State Institutions to train college communities in Tennessee as Mental Health

First Aiders in 2024. Those institutions include Belmont University, Cumberland University, Columbia State Community College, Rhodes College, Cleveland State Community College, University of Tennessee Southern, and Vanderbilt.

Studies have shown that MHFA training reduces stigma, improves knowledge, and increases first aid actions toward people experiencing mental health and substance use challenges. Training sessions for 2024 are wrapping up with a few sessions remaining, though spring semester training dates are being determined and will be posted in the coming weeks.

Sign up for training and search for other trainings at We are constantly adding additional trainings to our website or are happy to schedule a selected date for your group, department or class. Contact us at chhs@mtsu.edu for questions or to discuss a group training. Please include "MHFA Training" in the subject line.

Coming soon in 2025 – The evidence-based QPR Suicide Prevention

Training. CHHS is able to offer at no cost **QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) training** to our campus community.

QPR is a suicide prevention training for participants to be able to recognize the warning signs of suicide and question, persuade, and refer people at risk for suicide for help. SAMSHA gave approval in August 2024 for CHHS to add this training program to its mental health awareness training offerings as part of the MHAT grant awarded to the Center. Stay tuned for more details!

CHHS Staff Spotlight: Michelle Sterlingshires

This quarter CHHS is pleased to shine the spotlight on Michelle Sterlingshires. Our interview with Michelle is below.

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

MS: I started at CHHS in January of 2020 as the project assistant for **the first Mental Health First Aid** grant. What a time to start a position, especially for a grant that, at the time, dealt exclusively with in-person training sessions. As the project assistant, I assisted in data verification needs, social media, and moving our processes to online formats to accommodate how the next couple of years changed.

At the conclusion of that grant in 2021, I joined the **USDA** grant team to help with **STEMsational Ag: The Virtual Farm** and became a PDF expert. Need to make a PDF *actually accessible*? I'm your gal! I assisted with other technical needs for things such as getting the course on D2L, as well as marketing the Virtual Farm via social media and traveling to expos with the Project Coordinator, Jill. That grant, too, had to come to an end.

I was lucky enough to become the post-award grants coordinator for CHHS in March of 2023. My hope was to implement some process improvement in addition to the regular duties. Results were mixed, ha! A year ago, CHHS finally got its' grant evaluator position, and my application was accepted. I now am the evaluator for **Blue Raiders Drink Up, Mental Health First Aid**, and **RCORP-MAT**, as well as the project coordinator for the **Safe Stars** evaluation grant.

CHHS: What is your favorite aspect of the job?

I get to be a part of so many things where the goal is to help people, and that lets me stay in the loop with everyone here. The CHHS team is just a stellar group of people who are driven to do good and



passionate about their work. It's wonderful to be around when so much of the world can be so dark.

CHHS: What would a movie or book about your life be titled?

MS: *What on Earth Happened Here?!*

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

MS: I'm a nerd. It's anime and "vidya" games all the way down, y'all. I would like to get back to doing art, though. When I was young, I liked to draw and paint.

CHHS: What advice do you have for incoming MTSU freshmen? Graduating Seniors? Or New Employees?

MS: Think outside of the box when you can and get to know people wherever you are. People do fundamentally like to help others, so help when you can, but also learn to accept help.

CHHS: What is the most important skill you have right now? Hope to have in 5 years?

MS: My most important skill right now is adaptability (yes, I consider it a skill). You might be able to tell from my history with CHHS, but I try my best to adapt to the situation I'm given, and it's been crucial for me. I wasn't always as flexible as I am now; it took doing things that scared me to get here. In 5 years, I hope I have more writing skills.

CHHS: If you could add one thing to the CHHS office, what would that be?

MS: NAP PODS

CHHS is so grateful to have Michelle as a long-time team member who brings great value to our work and who is also a lot of fun!

New Team Members

Ron Cail, M.H.A. Post-Award Grants Coordinator



Greetings Blue Raider Nation!!! To say I am excited to be a part of the CHHS team is a big understatement. I joined the Team on April 8 as the Post-Award Grant Coordinator. My journey to MTSU has been winding

and varied. While starting my career as a high school teacher, most of my career has been in academic healthcare institutions focused primarily in finance and supply chain while also working at Tulane School of Public Health & Tropical Medicine as the Senior Department Administrator in the Department of Tropical Medicine involved in both pre- and post- grant work along with administrative work establishing foreign laboratory bases for malaria research. I even ventured to Maui, Hawaii for a few years to launch my own business.

I grew up in Old Hickory, TN and attended The University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Memphis State University and Washington University in St. Louis for my Master's. I love to travel and have been on 6 continents and 48 countries with more to follow. I also love and appreciate good food; I would rather eat than cook!!

I am so blessed and honored to join such an amazing team here at CHHS and look forward to many years of contributing and giving back to MTSU, the community and our great state.

Rin Kochenderfer, B.S. Project Assistant, MTSU Mental Health First Aid



Hi everybody! My name is Rin and I am the Project Assistant for the Mental Health First Aid project funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA) Administration. I recently graduated from MTSU in

August 2024 with my Bachelor's in Psychology and minors in Mental Health Services and Criminology.

During my undergraduate degree, I partook in many community services opportunities and clubs which made me earn my first President's Volunteer Service Award for over 300 community service hours. I found a passion in giving back to the community and helping amplify voices of underrepresented individuals. Also during this time, I found a passion in victimology resources and legal services through my criminal investigations class. This led me to advancing my education at Arizona State University where I am currently studying Forensic Psychology and Law. I hope to eventually obtain a doctorate in Psychology and use it for victim advocacy and consulting! Mental Health First Aid is incredibly important to me as I've seen what wrongful stigma and a lack of knowledge of resources can cause a person to do. I'm incredibly thankful that MTSU has this resource and encourage everyone to take a training.

If I'm not studying or sleeping, I'm in a theatre, watching really bad reality TV, scrolling on Pinterest, or hanging out with my friends. I'm happy to be at CHHS where I've found people passionate about helping others.

NEW TEAM MEMBERS *continued from page 24*

Gabiral Cathey, B.S. **Senior Project Coordinator –** **Office of Prevention Science and** **Recovery Statewide Projects**



Gabiral Cathey is a Rutherford County native that continues to pour her love into the community she has grown up in. Gabiral received her Bachelor of Science in Public Health from MTSU's Department of Health and Human Performance in 2020.

After graduating during the height of COVID, she took a role with the Prevention Coalition for Success (PC4S) as a Prevention Specialist in September 2021. Since starting her time with PC4S, she has obtained her Certified Prevention

Specialist Certification, graduated from the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America's (CADCA) National Coalition Academy, and was in the first graduating class of the Prevention Alliance of Tennessee's (PAT) Coalition Business Academy. During this time, she has also assisted with growing the PC4S Youth Coalition, #teens4success, planning the inaugural Teen Wellness Fest, and participating in the Tennessee Teen Institute. Gabiral is also a local Rutherford County tnAchieves mentor that helps high school seniors navigate enrollment for their post-secondary education. In a part time capacity, she works for the Cannon County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition providing technical assistance and growing their youth group by working with their school sponsors and county health educators.

Outside of work, Gabiral recently got married and is building a house, while finding the time to spend with her 4 dogs.

Promotions

Jill Thomas, M.Ed.



Jill mostly recently served as project coordinator for CHHS' second Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA) Mental Health Awareness Training grant which launched in January 2023, and prior to that in 2021 the Center's

USDA STEMsational Ag: The Virtual Farm project. She was promoted in September to Project Coordinator-Office of Prevention Science and Recovery HUSTLE Recovery Respite Housing & Infrastructure Projects, one of CHHS' new projects, and CHHS' largest project to date, funded by Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council. Jill has

previous experience with substance use through several CHHS tobacco-focused grants which she managed as a project coordinator from 2007-2013. During her time away from the Center, she was an elementary school educator as well as a full-time professor in the MTSU's College of Education. Jill received her master's degree in Elementary Education from MTSU and her Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish with a minor in Biology from the University of Minnesota. Her experience in the Tennessee public schools as well as her work as a professor in the College of Education and experience with substance use programming has been a valuable addition to the Center.

promotions continued from page 25

Sarah Gwinn, B.A.



Sarah most recently served as the CHHS Pre-Award Grant Coordinator and Outreach Specialist and has been with CHHS since 2018. She has recently been promoted to Senior Project Coordinator – Office of Prevention Science and

Recovery, Rutherford County.

Sarah has served in an interim Senior Project Coordinator position since 7/31/2024 taking on tasks that allowed CHHS to stay on track with the project work plan and in compliance with contractual obligations while giving her first-hand experience in the duties of the position. Her involvement during this three-month period of staff vacancy was critical to deliverables being met. She has 6 years of program design of federal and state grant programs that address substance use and misuse.

Over the last year, she has assisted with the creation of the Rutherford Opioid Board (ROB) Request for Proposals and Scoring Rubric, served as a trainer and presenter for grant seekers for ROB, and served as an evaluator for funding requests. Her completion of a Master's of Public Administration degree (anticipated Spring 2025) prepares her for the challenges of operating a grant within the rules and regulations of state and local government.

Team Member Shout Out

Congratulations to Sarah Gwinn for being selected as the **Volunteer of the Month for October** by the staff of the United Way of South Central Tennessee.

Sarah was nominated because of her leadership and volunteer spirit as the Communities of Care Board Chair and was recognized at the November Board Meeting.

Congratulations, Sarah!



CHHS Staff and Faculty Partners

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

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“Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do.”

**—Steve Jobs, American businessman,
inventor, and investor**

**MIDDLE
TENNESSEE**
STATE UNIVERSITY.

I AM *true* **BLUE.**

THOSE WHO TOUCH THE BLUE HORSESHOE
WILL BE GRANTED GOOD LUCK.

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Guidance, installation and support provided by
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Dedicated October 23, 2005