

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

"LIFE'S MOST PERSISTENT AND URGENT QUESTION IS, 'WHAT ARE YOU DOING FOR OTHERS?'"

— Martin Luther King Jr.

CHHS is geared up for a busy spring and summer. We are enjoying the newly renovated and expanded Lytle House office space to accommodate staff expansion as we carry out work that supports advancing the health and well-being of Tennesseans. As we continue to address some of our state's most pressing public health needs, we do so in a world that is in a constant state of change and notably so for grant-funded research. What hasn't changed is our passion and commitment to a healthier Tennessee and to changing lives through research and service.

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OVERVIEW *continued from page 1*

- Our three-year Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Access grant was highlighted in Washington, D.C., in early March with five of our team present. Three of the team served on a panel to share with other grantees how to implement a similar initiative in their local areas. Providing life-changing and even life-saving treatment for those impacted by opioid use disorder is one way that CHHS and our project partner Cedar Recovery are making a positive impact in the lives of Tennesseans. While services have only recently begun, we are beginning to collect data to measure impact and outcomes and look forward to sharing more in the future.
- CHHS, in partnership with [University College](#), recently hosted a training at the beautiful Fall Creek Falls State Park for first responders to fulfill professional training requirements for infant death scene investigation training mandated by law and in response to the Sudden Unexplained Child Death Act. This project is funded by the [Tennessee Department of Health](#) (TDH) and includes infant safe sleep and first responder self-care as part of the training, which we have been conducting in conjunction with TDH and the [Office of the State Chief Medical Examiner](#) since 2004. As of last year, over 34,000 first responders have completed training since the project began, which also includes a year-round online training program, biannual train-the-trainer virtual classroom training, and conferences on infant safe sleep and child fatality training to public health and social and human services professionals, with over 2,100 trained to date. First responders and our public health and social services professional community play

important roles in the health and well-being of our communities, and we are able to better prepare the workforce through this important project. The project was featured in the [Summer 2024 CHHS newsletter](#) for those who would like to learn more.



MTSU/TN Department of Health, and First Responder Infant Death Scene Investigation Team.

- Due to staff promotions and growth, CHHS will soon be hiring again. Please consider sharing the MTSU job postings with anyone who may be interested when these positions post. We have a great team and are thrilled about expanding with quality and competent folks who want to be a part of moving our mission and vision forward through impactful and meaningful work.
- We are pleased to have our third intern from the MTSU Department of Social Work. While CHHS has had an internship program in place since 2010 and is approaching almost 100 interns completing internships with us, working with the Department of Social Work has been a relatively new and wonderful partnership. Read more in this newsletter about our Spring and Summer 2025 intern, Dannielle Tsang.

OVERVIEW *continued from page 2*

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. We also accept donations and are most appreciative.

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.



Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Access Team Members Are Panelists in D.C.



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 garnered national attention. HRSA invited the MTSU and Cedar Recovery MAT Access team to participate in a panel presentation at the 2025 grantee reverse site visit in Washington, D.C., in February. CHHS team members Christina Byrd and Michelle Sterlingshires, along with Paul Trivette, Cedar Recovery, presented "Using Mobile Services to Improve Rural Health Access" to share how others can launch a mobile treatment initiative in their communities, from the funding and acquisition of the mobile unit to engaging local communities and building partnerships to developing sustainability. Trivette also delivered an additional presentation for attendees, "Improving Access with Mobile Units."

The MTSU MAT Access project serves six rural Tennessee communities and delivers quality patient care provided by partner Cedar Recovery through an evidence-based approach to addiction recovery that combines medication-assisted treatment, behavioral therapy, care coordination, and recovery support. Counties served are Claiborne, Giles, Hickman, Lawrence, Franklin, and Marshall.

Read more about this project later in this newsletter and in previous editions of the [Center for Health and Human Services newsletters](#) and on the [CHHS website](#).



"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.

OVERVIEW *continued from page 4***Current Research, Projects, and Programs:**

- Blue Raiders Drink Up 2.0: Healthy Choices for Healthy Students
- 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
- 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 abuse, 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 both 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 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 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.

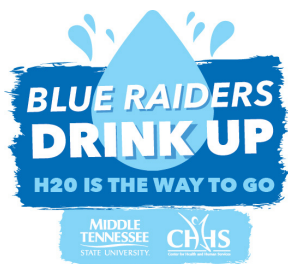
Please consider a donation of any size, which will go directly to CHHS.

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: Blue Raiders Drink Up



Blue Raiders Drink Up, now in its sixth year, was launched on campus after CHHS Director Cynthia Chafin attended a southeast regional meeting of 13 states

where it was noted that Tennessee had the highest rate of obesity for ages 10–17 in the nation. The diabetes rates were not much better.

“Once a student turns 18 and decides to head to MTSU, those statistics don’t instantly change. We have an opportunity to impact students at a critical point in their lives through activities associated with Blue Raiders Drink Up, including cooking classes led by a registered dietitian, individual counseling with a board-certified health coach or registered dietitian, personal training scholarships, campuswide educational activities and events, and the installation of water refill stations,” Chafin said. “Coming to campus, it may be the first time students are in charge of their meals and making other decisions on their own as young adults that impact their health. Thanks to the **Tennessee Department of Health’s Project Diabetes** funding, we have been able to demonstrate impact and create policy change that supports obesity and diabetes prevention efforts within our student population.”

While Blue Raiders Drink Up is focused on diabetes and obesity prevention through the promotion of water as a beverage of choice, it also has an environmental impact. By the time the second three-year funding cycle for this project is completed in June 2025, 18 water refill stations will have been installed on campus as a result of this grant. As of the time of this publication, 246,817 refills have been

counted from these stations, which represent that many plastic water bottles that may have been avoided.

Want to learn more about how water refill stations are good for the environment?

Check out these resources:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): The EPA has a section on its website that includes information on hydration refill stations in New York and New Jersey State Parks. These projects aim to reduce single-use plastic bottle pollution by installing reusable bottle refill water fountains.

U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI): The DOI has taken steps to phase out single-use plastic products and increase the availability of water bottle filling stations. Its website details efforts to reduce plastic pollution and highlights the benefits of using refill stations.

These resources provide valuable insights into how refill stations can help reduce plastic waste and promote environmental sustainability. The CHHS Blue Raiders Drink Up team is pleased that the project has not only impacted the health and well-being of our students, but also the environment.

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 6***Blue Raiders Drink Up Project Updates:**

- The Blue Raiders Drink Up (BRDU) team is continuing the momentum of our on-campus tabling events 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 **246,817 plastic bottles!** Join us in making a positive impact on our environment—every refill counts!
- The BRDU ambassadors will be hosting a table at the Walker Library spring Stress-Free Zone on Tuesday, April 29, from 6–8 p.m. This event will be similar to the fall Stress-Free event where students gathered on the first floor to enjoy free food, adorable therapy dogs, and a variety of stress-relief activities designed to help them recharge during a busy time of year—exam time. From calming furry friends to engaging activities and delicious snacks, the Stress-Free Zone provided a much-needed break for students to unwind and refresh. In the fall, we were grateful to have 350 MTSU students who joined us to learn more about the BRDU program—making this **the most attended event in BRDU history to date!**
- Cooking classes for Blue Raiders Drink Up remain popular! The second series of the Blue Raiders Drink Up Spring 2025 cooking classes was held March 24–April 14. Students who are interested in learning how to cook healthy food on a budget, meal planning, and about healthy

beverage choices, watch our social media for the next session of classes.

- Outcomes from the first three-year Blue Raiders Drink Up pilot project cooking classes will be shared soon with publication of a paper, *Influence of Culinary Interventions on Eating Habits in a Post-Secondary Educational Environment*, in the *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*. A “thank you” to Elizabeth Smith, associate professor in Nutrition and Food Science and director of the Didactic Program in Dietetics, and her students for taking the lead on this paper.
- CHHS is submitting an application to the Tennessee Department of Health to continue and expand on the successes of this program with a Blue Raiders Drink Up 3.0 proposal.

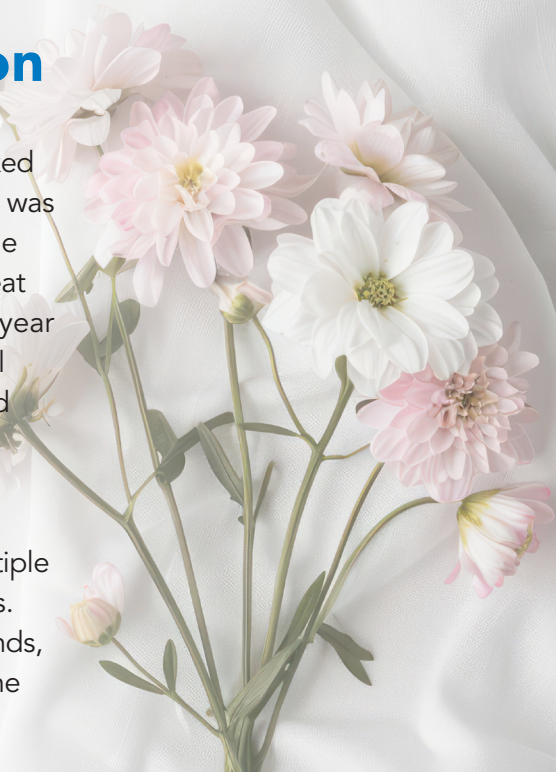
Team Member Shout Out

Thank you to Blue Raiders Drink Up Program Coordinator **Christina Byrd, MPH, CHES®**, for the successful launch of this initiative and for her commitment and faithfulness to the project over a six-year period. Her creativity and dedication to the health and well-being of our campus community is to be commended, as is her commitment to making Blue Raiders Drink Up a successful initiative on campus. Byrd has also served as a mentor to multiple Dietetics students who have served as Blue Raiders Drink Up student ambassadors and has been a role model of professionalism and public health service.

In Memory: Linda Hardymon



We were saddened to learn of the passing of Linda Hardymon, who worked in the Center for Energy Efficiency and was the manager of recycling for MTSU. She was a wonderful person who was a great champion for sustainability. In her 26-year career at MTSU, she was instrumental in implementing hundreds of green projects that promoted sustainability, improved energy efficiency, and saved utility costs. She worked with anyone and everyone on these important issues. The CHHS Blue Raiders Drink Up team is most grateful for her assistance with the installation of multiple water refill stations across campus over the past six years. While she will be missed by her MTSU colleagues and friends, the impact of her work will continue to bring benefits for the campus for years to come.



Community Partner Spotlight: Goldfinch Health



The Center for Health and Human Services is pleased to shine the spotlight on [Goldfinch Health](#) and its Billion Pill Pledge to increase

access to a better, opioid-minimizing approach to surgery and recovery. Through this pledge, billions of opioid pills can be eliminated from our medicine cabinets, homes, and communities. Goldfinch Health works with health care providers and systems, employers, and patients throughout the United States as part of the Billion Pill Pledge. As work advances on MTSU Center for Health and Human Services' opioid-related funded projects—present and future—we are pleased to collaborate with Goldfinch Health to provide resources to communities and individuals on minimizing opioids for those needing surgery.

More about Goldfinch Health:

In an ambitious effort to address one of the most pressing public health crises in the United States, Goldfinch Health has launched the Billion Pill Pledge, a groundbreaking initiative to improve pain management and reduce opioids used after surgery. By tackling this problem at its root, Goldfinch is driving significant change in health care practices, helping to mitigate addiction risks, and improving patient recovery outcomes.

The Billion Pill Pledge is a nationwide commitment to eliminate one billion unused opioid pills from the U.S. health care system. Goldfinch Health's approach centers on transforming surgical and pain management practices. Traditionally,



COMMUNITY PARTNER SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 8*

opioids have been the go-to prescription for managing post-surgical pain, often resulting in over-prescription and leaving millions of pills unused and vulnerable to misuse. Goldfinch Health seeks to change this narrative by promoting Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS) protocols, which include multimodal pain management techniques that minimize or eliminate the need for opioids.

The initiative enlists health care providers, employers, and surgery patients to adopt best practices in presurgical preparation, anesthesia, and recovery protocols. This includes reliance on clinically validated practices and non-opioid alternatives to pain management. By educating stakeholders and implementing evidence-based methods, the company aims to reduce opioid prescriptions without compromising pain relief or recovery quality.

The positive impact of this program is being seen across multiple states, with local benefits already occurring in Tennessee. Through coordinated efforts with institutions like MTSU's Center for Health and Human Services, the Billion Pill Pledge can enable successful and potentially opioid-free surgery to those in active recovery. It can help new mothers more effectively navigate their recovery after childbirth. One study showed maternal exposure to oxycodone during breastfeeding was associated with a 40x higher rate of central nervous system depression in infants.¹ The Billion Pill Pledge expands the equity of care by improving the quality of care and promoting health literacy and education—an imperative initiative when overcoming this epidemic, as 30% of opioid-naïve Medicaid patients become chronic opioid users after surgery.²

Health care providers, employers, and individuals are encouraged to join the pledge and become part of a transformative movement that could save countless lives and reshape the future of pain management in America. For more information, or to learn how you can bring this program to your community, visit Goldfinch Health's official website (goldfinchhealth.com) or contact Michael Doty (michael.doty@goldfinchhealth.com) and take the first step toward a safer, healthier future.

"Goldfinch Health's Billion Pill Pledge underscores the power of preventive action in combating a national epidemic. By addressing the root causes of opioid overprescription and misuse, the initiative is setting a new standard for surgical care and pain management."

— Brand Newland, CEO, Goldfinch Health

Thank you, Goldfinch Health for all that you do to support better health and well-being of all Tennesseans, and others across the nation, by educating stakeholders and implementing evidence-based methods to reduce opioid prescriptions through innovative practices.

REFERENCES

¹ Lam J, Kelly L, Ciszowski C, Landsmeer ML, Nauta M, Carleton BC, Hayden MR, Madadi P, Koren G. Central nervous system depression of neonates breastfed by mothers receiving oxycodone for postpartum analgesia. *J Pediatr*. 2012 Jan;160(1):33-7.e2. doi: 10.1016/j.jpeds.2011.06.050. Epub 2011 Aug 31. PMID: 21880331.

² Johnson DG, Ho VT, Hah JM, Humphreys K, Carroll I, Curtin C, Asch SM, Hernandez-Boussard T. Prescription quantity and duration predict progression from acute to chronic opioid use in opioid-naïve Medicaid patients. *PLOS Digit Health*. 2022;1(8):e0000075. doi: 10.1371/journal.pdig.0000075. Epub 2022 Aug 25. PMID: 36203857; PMCID: PMC9534483

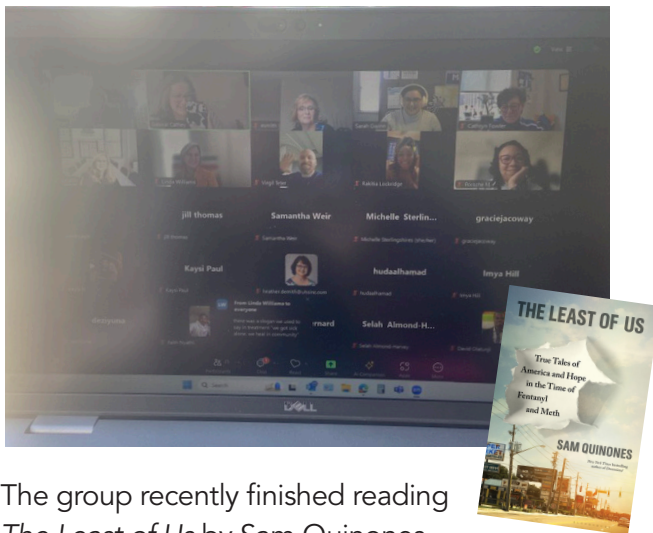
Campus Partner Spotlight: Health and Human Performance, Public Health Program



Public Health

The MTSU Center for Health and Human Services (CHHS) Office of Prevention Science and Recovery (OPSR) is pleased to partner with

Public Health faculty from the **Department of Health and Human Performance (HHP)** on a campuswide book club. The idea came from Chipper Smith, a member of the Public Health faculty, to engage students and the entire campus community in discussions about the opioid crisis facing our local communities, state, and nation, raising awareness and reducing stigma.



The group recently finished reading *The Least of Us* by Sam Quinones and met several times virtually throughout the spring semester. Meetings were facilitated by CHHS OPSR staff Gabiral Cathey and Sarah Gwinn, who both coordinate externally funded opioid-related projects at the center. Student texts for this book club were provided through funding from the Rutherford Opioid Board as part of its outreach to campus. Author Quinones visited campus on April 7 as part of the Distinguished Lecture Series, with



Chipper Smith



Gabiral Cathey



Sarah Gwinn

a meet-and-greet for the MTSU community and others off campus.

The reception to the book club has been overwhelmingly positive. Smith says, "This pressing public health issue is one that our students are interested in learning more about, and through my earlier work with CHHS OPSR, creating a book club and collaborating seemed like a novel way to educate not only students but our campus community on the opioid crisis in an engaging way." Reducing the stigma surrounding drug use is one goal of the book club. "When we talk openly about a topic, we can reduce stigma by normalizing the conversation, increasing awareness, and education which may dispel myths, stereotypes, and misconceptions, and fostering empathy," says Cathey, book club facilitator and senior project coordinator for Office of Prevention Science and Recovery statewide projects.

The OPSR team prepares eagerly for each book club meeting, including developing a list of conversation starting questions. Gwinn, book club facilitator and OPSR senior project coordinator, says, "It has been wonderful to see our students be curious about learning more about a topic that impacts so many of us. Either

CAMPUS PARTNER SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 10*

friends, family, classmates, or significant others, there is probably someone in each of our lives that has experienced some of what we read about in *The Least of Us*. The conversations that arise between students, faculty/staff, and Gabby and myself about the people and challenges in the book really highlight that we are all vulnerable to this epidemic. The opioid crisis has no boundaries, which is why these conversations are so important to bring awareness and then prevention and recovery for all our communities.”

CHHS OPSR extends appreciation to Smith and the Public Health program for this incredible opportunity to raise awareness of opioids and drug use and to reduce stigma within our own

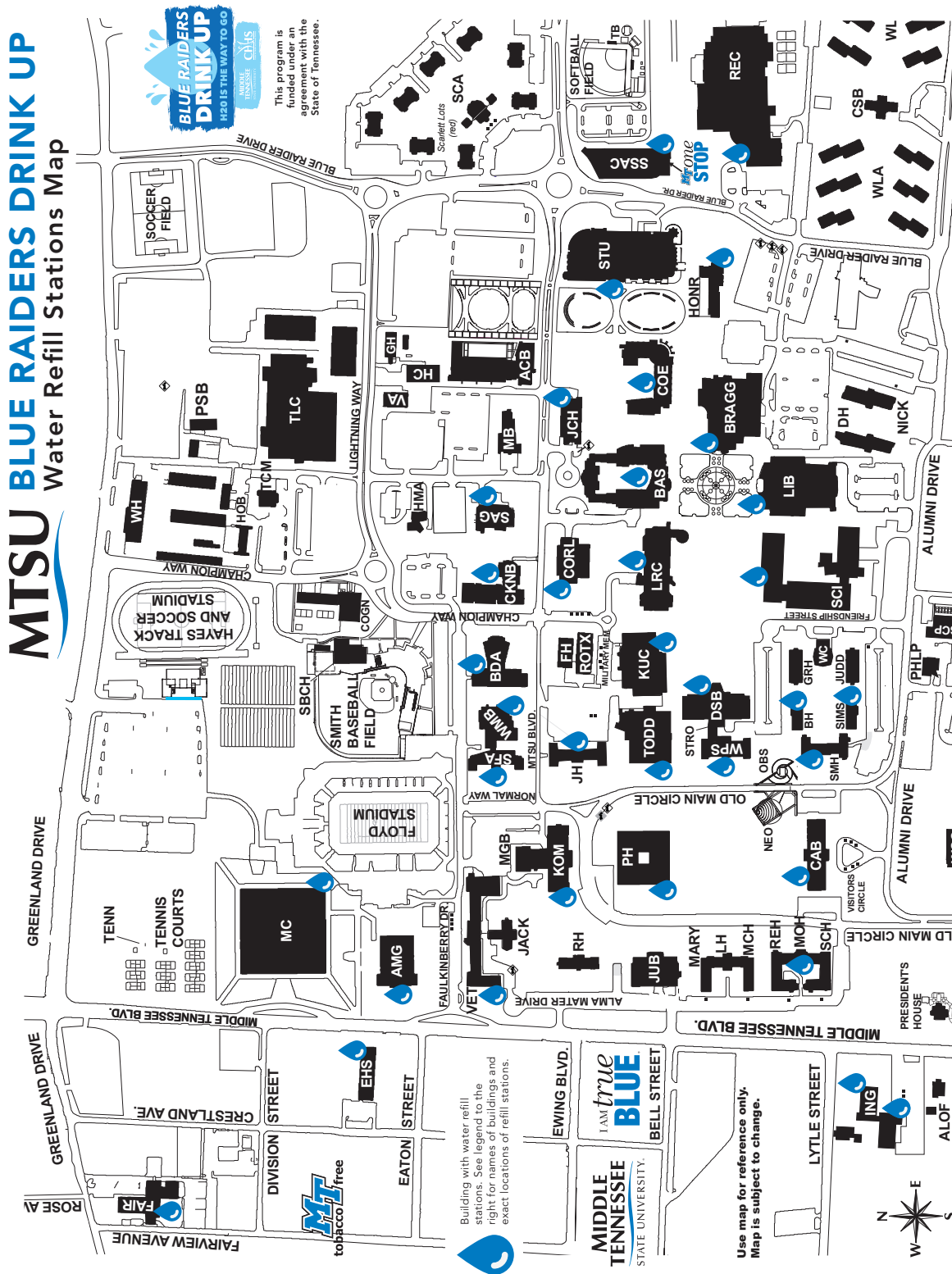
campus community. “Our center has been working diligently on multiple externally funded opioid-related projects in recent years which serve communities across the state. While our statewide efforts are crucial, having the chance to support stigma reduction and awareness within our own campus community is equally important and meaningful,” says CHHS Director Cynthia Chafin. “I am so grateful for this partnership with HHP and the OPSR team’s efforts. Chipper, Gabiral, and Sarah have really made the book club and this partnership a success.”

Stay tuned—there may be new book club meetings and series in the future.



Trying to drink more water?

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



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**

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@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

CHHS is now offering QPR training FREE to the campus community as part of a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Visit the CHHS website Mental Health Awareness Training tab to learn more.



Over 1,000 participants have been trained in Mental Health First Aid since CHHS launched the second multi-year grant in 2023, with 165 in the first six months of this grant year alone. As of mid-April, there have been 198 participants certified in QPR since its launch date of January 28, 2025. We will continue to share updates, and we'll continue to serve the campus community with these evidence-based programs. 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.



Mental Health
FIRST AID

from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR
MENTAL WELLBEING

CHHS is currently unable to offer a Mental Health Awareness Training self-pay option to those not affiliated with our campus or another university. Community partners and outside organizations can find trainings/instructors available in their area (or virtual options) at the Mental Health First Aid website or QPR websites. Non-university partners wishing to have a training session just for their group may find local training opportunities using search tools on the websites: • mentalhealthfirstaid.org/take-a-course/find-a-course • qprinstitute.com

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Office of Prevention
Science and Recovery

Project Update: CHHS' Office of Prevention Science and Recovery

The CHHS Office of Prevention Science and Recovery (OPSR) continues to be active as opioid abatement funded projects launch from local and state abatement funds.

CHHS Office of Prevention Science and Recovery updates include:

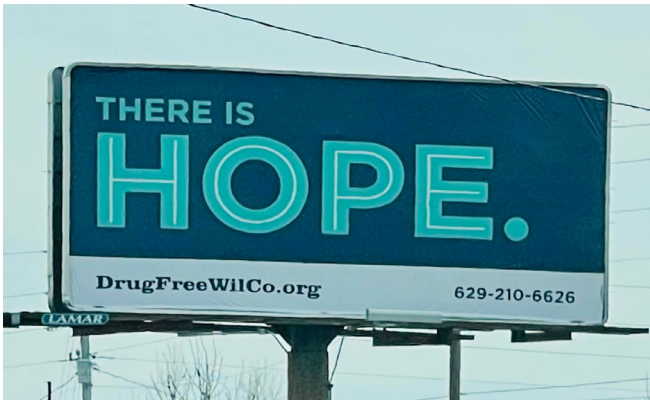
- OPSR partnered with campus faculty from the Department of Health and Human Performance Public Health program and Health Promotions to host a book club during the spring semester. Reading *The Least of Us* by Sam Quinones, the club drew participation from students, faculty/staff, and community members seeking to raise awareness and reduce stigma surrounding the ongoing opioid epidemic. The book club ended its time with a one-on-one meeting with the author, who was brought to campus as part of the Distinguished Lecture Series this spring. See the special spotlight feature on page 10 of this newsletter for more details.
- CHHS OPSR 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 April, July, and September. This change, plus enhanced pre-application technical support, is anticipated to result in higher quality proposals that result in more funding awards to meet the needs of our community. Application workshops will be hosted prior to each funding deadline, with schedule details on the OPSR-ROB website.
- In fiscal year 2024–2025, the Office of Prevention Science and Recovery has provided grant writing training through multiple presentations with the United Way of South Central Tennessee and the city of Murfreesboro. These presentations sought to elevate the skills of local nonprofits in their grant writing and program design efforts. Future grant development presentations are in the pipeline in partnership with the city of Murfreesboro and MTSU's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. These events will be targeting nonprofits and faculty to encourage pursuit of grant funding to support their missions and visions. Event information will be communicated through MTSU's subscriber list and Charity Tracker.
- CHHS OPSR's application was approved for funding from the **Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council** in the amount of **\$8,663,548** to support respite housing and wrap-around support services for those in recovery from OUD with treatment provider **H.U.S.T.L.E. Recovery**, an OPSR partner. The founder and CEO of H.U.S.T.L.E. Recovery, Troy Sandifer, piloted and created Respite Housing, the first of its kind in Tennessee, which provides immediate help to anyone who needs it. H.U.S.T.L.E. Recovery is excited to work with CHHS OPSR through this new partnership.
- The Rutherford Opioid Board is now open to receiving requests for funding from local nonprofit providers to help address the community-wide impacts related to the ongoing opioid epidemic. Cycle 1 applications are due April 15. Please visit our website for additional information about this and future funding opportunities.

PROJECT UPDATE *continued from page 15*

- MTSU CHHS Office of Prevention Science and Recovery has been working with three counties as well as connecting with organizations that have Tennessee Opioid Abatement funding. OPSR is currently working with two of the largest counties in Tennessee, Rutherford and Williamson, while also assisting Cannon County with its county funds. OPSR has been doing outreach work in several counties across the Midstate to share the resources we have in the office for county abatement funds and for organizations with state

abatement funds, while also attending events with community partners. Recent highlights included attending Day on the Hill with prevention coalitions across the state, where we heard a mock session by youth on several topics related to prevention and met with local representatives to advocate for continue prevention, treatment, and recovery support. We also saw the first Cannon County Recovery Court graduation; the court is funded by the Cannon County Opioid Abatement Council.

Wilson County RCORP Grant Update



It's a Wrap! The three-year HRSA-Funded CHHS Wilson County RCORP Project Ends

The CHHS Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) Implementation Grant funded by the **Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)** ended its third and final year in August 2024, but through a grant extension, the project has continued to cover the costs of treatment for patients with opioid use disorder as funds remain available. Over the course of the three-year grant and project extension, treatment costs totaling

\$375,810.98 have been covered under this grant for Tennesseans impacted by opioid use disorder.

The project was presented at the **Tennessee Public Health Association's (TPHA)** 2024 annual meeting as well as at the **American Public Health Association's (APHA)** annual meeting. A published 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 project has laid the foundation for the local community to continue its work through a multiyear sustainability plan to include activities along the opioid use continuum of prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery support.

Thank you to all who have made this project a success, including the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and our campus and community partners, with a special shout-out to DrugFree WilCo and treatment provider Cedar Recovery, the MTSU Data Science Institute, and the MTSU Health and Human Performance Public Health program.

PROJECT UPDATE *continued from page 16*

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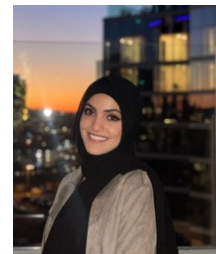
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True Blue Mental Health Awareness– MTSU QPR Suicide Prevention Training and Mental Health First Aid

MTSU Mental Health First Aid and QPR Suicide Prevention training,

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)**, continue to provide opportunities to change lives through reducing stigma toward mental health and connecting members of our campus community with needed resources.

True Blue MTSU Mental Health Awareness Training updates include:

- We have launched QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Suicide Prevention training! Since the soft launch of QPR Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper training on Jan. 28, 2025, **198 participants** have been trained.

- **Over 1,000** participants have been trained in Mental Health First Aid since CHHS launched the second multi-year grant in 2023, with **165** in the first six months of this grant year alone.
- During 2023, **236 referrals** were made to mental health services by individuals trained as part of the MTSU Mental Health First Aid program. In 2024, **443 referrals** were made during the first three quarters of the year. Data for 2024 Q4 and the 2025 year to date have not yet been finalized.
- Preliminary data indicate that **71.47%** of participants in MTSU Mental Health First Aid training in 2024 who completed pre- and post-tests demonstrated improvements in mental health knowledge, attitudes, and biases.

PROJECT UPDATE *continued from page 17*

- We will engage and promote our True Blue Mental Health Awareness initiative and Mental Health First Aid and QPR trainings at various MTSU events and tabling activities on campus. Look for Kit and Rin on campus as they share information on our programs and resources.
- On campus, MHFA and QPR have provided training to the following groups: College of Media and Entertainment; CHHS staff; World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures Department; Residential Life; Campus Recreation; and MTSU flight school staff.
- Through our consortium, we are working with several state institutions to train college communities in Tennessee in Mental Health First Aid. Those institutions include Belmont University in Nashville and Rhodes College in Memphis.

Our MTSU Mental Health Awareness Training programs are evidence-based. Studies have shown that QPR training significantly improves participants' knowledge and skills in identifying and responding to individuals at risk of suicide.

For example, after state-mandated training in Tennessee, over 42% of participants identified at least one at-risk youth and intervened within six months.¹ Studies have shown that MHFA training reduces stigma, improves knowledge, and increases first aid actions toward people experiencing mental health and substance use challenges.²

Sign up for MHFA or QPR training and search for other trainings at chhs.mtsu.edu/MentalHealthFirstAid. We are continually 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" or "QPR Training" in the subject line.

SOURCES

¹QPR Institute (2025).
Research and Theory.
<https://qprinstitute.com/research-theory>

²National Council for Mental Health Wellbeing (2025).
Mental Health First Aid.
<https://mentalhealthfirstaid.org>

It's here! 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 at-risk people for help. SAMHSA gave approval in August 2024 for CHHS to add this training program to its Mental Health Awareness Training (MHAT) offerings as part of the MHAT grant awarded to the center. Visit our website to learn more about the program and to see when training is offered.

chhs.mtsu.edu/mentalhealthfirstaid



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 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 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) website. Why was the [Safe Stars Act](#) created? According to the CDC, about 283,000 children under age 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 age 25 experienced a TBI in 2022, with 222 being under age 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](#).



Safe Stars project updates:

- Preliminary data from the Safe Stars evaluation suggests that Safe Stars Initiative certified organizations feel that their designation has increased safety policies and procedures overall.
- Beginning in 2024, alongside modifying and continuing the evaluation of Safe Stars, CHHS is facilitating the evaluation of utilization of the 2024 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 health care 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 began in February 2025.

PROJECT UPDATE *continued from page 19*

- 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.
- The CHHS Safe Stars project team has been invited to speak at the Vanderbilt Youth Sports Conference in June 2025.
- The project has been presented to the Tennessee Injury Prevention Coalition, in January 2024 and October 2024.
- A manuscript is being developed by the project team and will be submitted for publication next year.
- A social media campaign and e-blast messaging are under development and informed by

evaluation outcomes to promote each of the three programs to targeted audiences.

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.

<https://www.cdc.gov/traumatic-brain-injury/data-research/facts-stats/index.html>

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

<https://www.cdc.gov/injury-core-sipp/php/story/tennessee.html>



CHHS Staff Spotlight: Audrey Waite and Hanan Baba

This quarter CHHS is pleased to shine the spotlight on Audrey Waite and Hanan Baba, Blue Raiders Drink Up student ambassadors. Interviews for both of these talented CHHS team members are shared below.



Audrey Waite

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

AW: I have been with the CHHS for two years as a student ambassador for the Blue Raiders Drink Up

grant project. My role involves organizing wellness-focused events, teaching cooking classes, tabling all across campus, and making educational social media content.

CHHS: What is your favorite aspect of the job?

AW: Our cooking classes! I love seeing students get excited about cooking and nutrition, and it's always wonderful to meet so many new people. When I started at MTSU, I never imagined I would end up feeling so connected to the True Blue community.

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

AW: I would learn how to play piano. It's such a beautiful and complicated instrument, and I've always been in awe of pianists.

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

AW: When I have time to relax, I usually spend it reading with my cats. I find it difficult to finish a book before picking up another, so I am usually

reading at least three books at a time. I really enjoy fashion and spend a lot of time thrifting and coming up with creative ways to wear my questionable thrift store finds. I also love figuring out how things work, and I am always trying to fix random stuff around my house.

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

AW: The ability to do effective research. I believe that critical thinking is the key to freedom, and being able to find, understand, and interpret information is hands down the most important skill I've learned in college. The sheer volume of information available to us is utterly overwhelming, and being able to discern what is accurate and worth paying attention to requires skill. Five years from now, I hope to be a better writer.

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

AW: A zipline that takes you straight to the Ellington Human Sciences building. It would save so much time.



Hanan Baba

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

HB: I have been an MTSU Blue Raiders Drink Up student ambassador and project assistant for two years now! My fellow ambassador and I encourage healthier dietary and beverage choices to combat student obesity and diabetes risk. We create and share educational content on social media, organize and host interactive "Healthy Eating" dorm events, assist in the teaching of our dietitian-led cooking classes, and engage with community members at our year-round tabling events about their sugary beverage habits.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 21*

CHHS: What is your favorite aspect of the job?

HB: I love working on campus and the opportunities it creates for meeting new people at our tabling events and cooking classes. I have developed an enthusiasm for providing nutrition education to my campus community, and the countless memories and conversations I have had with others have been invaluable.

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

HB: More commuter student parking needs to be added near the CHHS. We need it in order to come to work!

CHHS: How do you use your free time?

HB: In my free time, I enjoy challenging myself to learn new skills, create, garden, reflect, and spend time with family and friends. I am all about personal growth, so I'm constantly taking advantage of the trainings, courses, and events free to MTSU students!

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

HB: I am very grateful for my ability to think critically. It has served me well in keeping organized as a working student, during event planning, and in daily tasks and conversation. In the coming years, I will work towards gaining more confidence in my field as I continue my education.

New Team Member

Linda Williams, M.A.

Senior Project Coordinator, Mental Health Awareness Training



A hearty "welcome back" to Linda Williams! She joined the team at the Center for Health and Human Services at MTSU in 2018 to serve as program coordinator for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Mental Health Awareness Training grant. After a three-year break, she was able to return to that role in November 2024.

Williams began her career in the 1980s, as an ASL interpreter at Dallas Baptist University and project coordinator for Deaf Action Center

in Dallas. After graduating, she moved to Memphis, to work with adolescents who were not able to live at home and their families. She then moved to middle Tennessee and owned a small business while raising her three children. When the time was right, Williams completed her graduate degree in Mental Health Counseling and began her second career in behavioral and public health. She has worked with adults with substance use disorders and trauma, and has served as front line counselor, clinical director and, finally, executive director at several in-patient behavioral health facilities.

The mission of improving the health and well-being of Tennesseans is near to her heart. Data shows us that young adults benefit from better mental health support, and this grant has great potential for moving the needle of the mental health experience for college students, here at MTSU and at the universities who have joined us in this mission.

Spring and Summer 2025 Student Intern

Dannielle Tsang



Hello! My name is Dannielle Tsang, and I'm currently pursuing my master's degree in Social Work here at MTSU. I also have the privilege of interning at the Center for Health and Human Services (CHHS) working

on the Safe Stars grant, focusing on evaluation and research. I graduated from the University of Redlands in Southern California with a double major in Sociology and Cultural Anthropology.

After graduating, I went a different direction and built a 15-year career in business and sales. But over time, I felt called to merge my professional experience with my passion for social justice and welfare. As an intern at CHHS, I am excited to deepen my understanding of grant research and evaluation, program funding, and utilizing evidence-based practices to effectively strengthen and uplift our community.

In my free time, you will likely find me and my husband cheering on one of my three kids at their sporting events. I also really enjoy snuggling up by the fireplace with my mini schnauzer reading a historical fiction novel.

Team Member News and Shout-Outs

Cynthia Chafin



Congratulations to Dr. Cynthia Chafin for receiving the **Rural Health Association of Tennessee 2024 President's Award**. This prestigious recognition is given to individuals

or organizations that have made significant contributions to rural health in Tennessee. This award highlights exceptional leadership, dedication, and impact in improving health outcomes and access to health care services in rural communities. Recipients are typically those who have demonstrated outstanding commitment to advancing rural health through service, education, advocacy, or innovative practices.

Through Chafin's CHHS leadership, the center has facilitated numerous externally funded research

projects and programs that support rural health throughout Tennessee. Those include the current Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Access grant serving six rural communities through the MAT in Tennessee project, which provides mobile treatment services to those impacted by opioid use disorder; the statewide opioid abatement capacity project funded through the Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council; and the statewide Infant Death Scene Investigation project that serves all 95 counties and provides workforce development and training to first responders and public health and social service professionals in infant death investigation and safe sleep practices.

Chafin is serving her second year as a Rural Health Association of Tennessee board member and is a longstanding member of the organization. She is grateful for the many opportunities throughout her career to support rural health in Tennessee through meaningful and impactful work.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 23*

Christina Byrd, M.P.H, CHES®



We are proud to share that Christina Byrd earned her Personal Trainer Certification from the National Academy of Sports Medicine in January 2025. "Health and wellness is my passion, and this certification allows me to bring even more expertise and personalized guidance to help others reach their fitness goals. I'm looking forward to using the knowledge I've gained to make a positive impact on those I work with," Byrd says.

We have no doubt that you will continue to make a positive impact on others, Christina!



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

—Apple "Think Different" Campaign, 1997

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I AM *true***BLUE**.

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

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Idea created by the MTSU Student Association.
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