

# 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 THROUGH RESEARCH AND SERVICE

**"IT IS NOT THE STRONGEST OF THE SPECIES THAT SURVIVE, NOR THE MOST INTELLIGENT, BUT THE ONE MOST RESPONSIVE TO CHANGE."**

— Leon Megginson, professor at Louisiana State University, summarizing the work of Charles Darwin, naturalist and scientist known for the theory of evolution

**The past quarter has been one of steady progress and new momentum for CHHS.** Even amid a shifting funding environment, we continue to adapt, innovate, and pursue new directions in support of our mission. As of July 2025, 12 grant and proposal efforts are in our active queue, with four already submitted, and others underway, including submissions to NIH and PCORI. Like many research centers, we face our share of proposal rejections, yet each one sharpens our approach and strengthens our resolve to keep moving forward.

*continued on page 2*

1

### IN THIS ISSUE

Overview .....	1
Project Spotlight and Community Partner .....	5-12
Project Updates .....	14-25
Campus Partner Spotlight.....	26
Blue Raiders Drink Up Water Refill Stations Map ...	28-29
Whom Do We Serve?.....	30
Featured Staff.....	32
Team Member News .....	33
CHHS Staff and Faculty Partners.....	34-35

**MTSU Center for Health and Human Services, 1114 E. Lytle St., Murfreesboro, TN 37132**  
**615-898-5493 • [chhs.mtsu.edu](http://chhs.mtsu.edu) • [chhs@mtsu.edu](mailto:chhs@mtsu.edu)**

The Center for Health and Human Services was founded by the Adams Chair of Excellence in Health Care Services in 1993 and has operated independently since 2015.

**OVERVIEW** *continued from page 1*

We also celebrate many successful awards, contributing to our first-ever annual operating budget approaching \$5 million, allowing us to serve more Tennesseans and address a broader range of public health challenges. Our existing external portfolio remains strong, and our team's commitment to advancing the health and well-being of Tennesseans through public health research and service has never been stronger. A few highlights follow.

- The **CHHS Office of Prevention Science and Recovery** recently published the 2025 Rutherford Opioid Board 2025 Year-End Report. This report is the culmination of the efforts funded in 2024–2025 for opioid abatement activities totaling \$1,103,893 in the county. Excerpts of this report developed by OPSR Project Coordinator Sarah Gwinn, and with thanks to the MTSU Data Science Institute for their contributions, are included later in this publication.
- CHHS recently co-facilitated the **2025 Tennessee Department of Health Safe Sleep Conference** as part of our ongoing Tennessee Department of Health grant supporting statewide Infant Death Scene Investigation training, education, capacity building, and practice improvement. Over 400 participants registered for the October conference, continuing a partnership with TDH that began in 2004 to strengthen statewide infant and child death review with a specific focus on Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) and promotion of safe sleep practices. We welcomed presenters from TDH's Division of Family Health and Wellness, along with colleagues from Metro Nashville and Knox County health departments and Tennessee State University. The conference was further strengthened by the National Center for Fatality Review and Prevention and featured insights from partners in Illinois, Nevada, and Minnesota, delivering a data-informed agenda

grounded in systems learning and shared prevention strategies.

- Our team along with **Tennessee Department of Health** partners presented preliminary research findings for the Safe Stars evaluation project to the Tennessee Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Advisory Council and the Committee on Pediatric Emergency Care (CoPEC) this fall. "Community feedback: A Status Update on Sports-Related Health and Safety Initiatives" was shared with these groups and previously with the Youth Sports Health and Safety Conference sponsored by the Vanderbilt Youth Sports Health Center at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt and Vanderbilt Sports Medicine earlier this summer.



Cynthia Chafin, Ph.D., MCHES®, NBC-HWC, CHHS Director

*continued on page 3*

**OVERVIEW** *continued from page 2*

- The **Blue Raiders Drink Up** project funded by Tennessee Department of Health's Project Diabetes Initiative may have come to an end with grant funding after six incredibly impactful years, but the impact remains. Read more in this publication about how sustainable components of this initiative will live on well after the grant ended and testimonials that make the data "real," changing students' lives.
- In addition to the earlier manuscript "Influence of Culinary Interventions on Eating Habits in a Post-Secondary Educational Environment" published in the "Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences" and led by Elizabeth Smith, associate professor of Nutrition and Food Science and director of the didactic program in Dietetics, and her students, a second manuscript writing team, led by CHHS Senior Project Coordinator Christina Byrd, is underway that focuses on Years 3–6 of the project.
- Our three-year **Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Access grant** with community partner **Cedar Recovery** continues to make positive impact in six rural communities. In August 2024, the mobile MAT unit began providing services delivered by Cedar Recovery. From **six** patients in August 2024 to **109** unique patients by September 2025, the mobile unit census has shown steady growth. This upward trend reflects increased community engagement, trust in mobile-based care, and strengthened local partnerships. Read more in this newsletter about how lives are being changed through the mobile unit and partnerships developed in these communities.

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. See how you can contribute to making a difference on page 4.

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.

### **CURRENT RESEARCH, PROJECTS, AND PROGRAMS:**

- Rural Communities Opioid Response Program Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Access
- Rutherford, Williamson, and Cannon Counties Opioid Abatement Technical Support – Office of Prevention Science and Recovery
- Infant Death Scene Investigation/Safe Sleep
- MTSU Mental Health Awareness Training
- Safe Stars, Pediatric mTBI, Return to Learn Return to Play Evaluation
- Expansion of the MTSU Office of Prevention Science and Recovery, Recovery Respite Housing, and Recovery Infrastructure Support from Tennessee Opioid Abatement Funding

### **RECENTLY COMPLETED:**

- Rural Communities Opioid Response Program Implementation Grant

### **IN PROGRESS:**

- 12 proposals are in progress as of the time of this publication focusing on areas to include rural health, workforce development, maternal child health, diabetes, older adults and social isolation,

*continued on page 4*



**OVERVIEW** *continued from page 3*

youth mental health, and substance use disorder.

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' work. 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

## Want to donate to further the work of MTSU's CHHS?

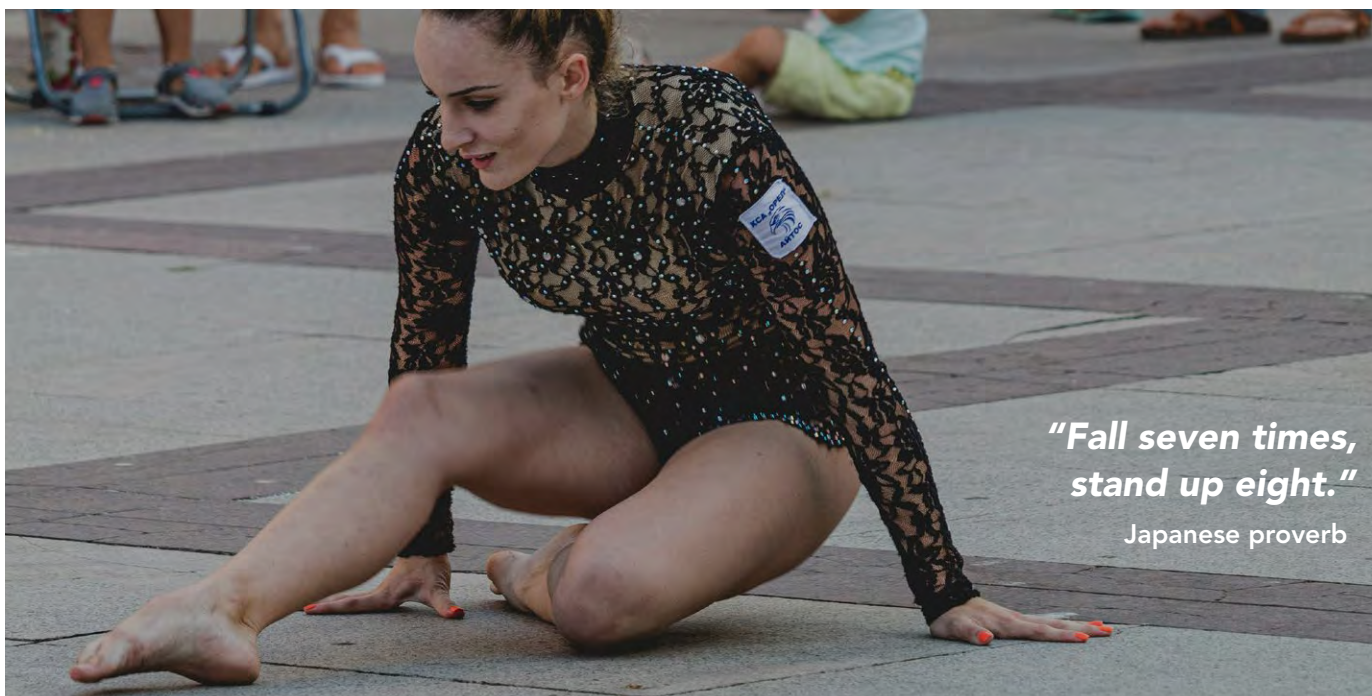
**MTSU CHHS operates primarily through external funding.**

To continue our mission and vision of advancing the health and well-being 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](https://chhs.mtsu.edu), click on Donate Now, and specify that your donation is for CHHS. The site accepts MasterCard, VISA, and American Express.

[chhs.mtsu.edu](https://chhs.mtsu.edu) • Follow us on social media



*"Fall seven times,  
stand up eight."*

Japanese proverb

## Project Spotlight and Community Partner: MTSU CHHS' Office of Prevention Science and Recovery Rutherford Opioid Board

For FY 2024–2025, the **MTSU Office of Prevention Science and Recovery (OPSR)** received a **\$100,900** Research Strategy Grant from the **Rutherford Opioid Board (ROB)** to support administration of the county's opioid abatement funding. OPSR was created in 2022 specifically to serve as the board's implementation and evaluation partner—assisting with grant application intake, coordinating subject-matter expert review, supporting grantee data collection, evaluating funded programs, and reporting findings back to the ROB to guide future investment. OPSR is a partnership between the MTSU Center for Health and Human Services and the Data Science Institute.

These efforts are part of Rutherford County's larger strategy to steward its share of Tennessee's opioid settlement resources wisely and transparently. The settlement stems from a **\$26 billion** national agreement involving pharmaceutical distributors and a manufacturer, with Tennessee receiving approximately **over a billion dollars** in payments between 2021 and 2038. Rutherford County is projected to receive nearly **\$4.5 million** between 2023 and 2026—dollars made available to community and governmental organizations on a rolling basis to support evidence-based prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery support.

The scale of this investment reflects both need and urgency: In 2022, Rutherford County reported 130 drug overdose fatalities—nearly 40% higher than the 2019 baseline. The ROB's charge—and OPSR's work—is to ensure those prevention dollars are directed toward strategies and interventions that are data-informed, accountable, and results-focused for the people and families most affected.

*"The Rutherford Opioid Board has been hard at work the past few years to reduce overdoses in our community. The partnership between the county and MTSU's Office of Prevention Science and Recovery has been instrumental in helping the board to make data-driven funding decisions based on the community's needs, enhancing the capacity of our nonprofit community to respond to the opioid crisis, and investing in personnel and technology in some of our county government departments. The support from OPSR is part of the success we are now seeing with fewer deaths and overdoses in Rutherford County over time. We are confident for future success in the battle of addiction with our partnership and shared vision."*

— Craig Harris, ROB Chairman



Craig Harris,  
ROB Chairman



Sarah Gwinn,  
MTSU OPSR Senior  
Project Coordinator

Please see excerpts from the **Rutherford Opioid Board 2025 Year-End Report** beginning on page 7.



**PROJECT SPOTLIGHT** *continued from page 5*

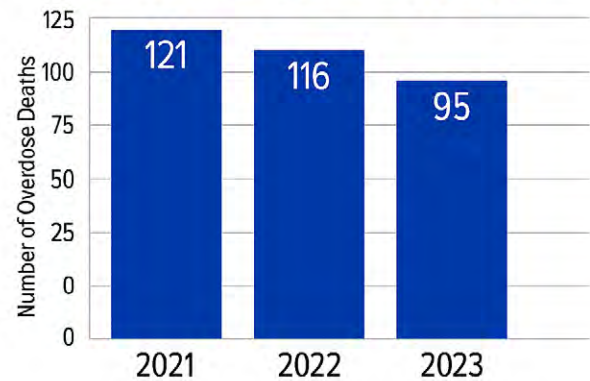
## A COMMUNITY MOBILIZED: OVERDOSE INDICATORS BEGIN TO DECLINE

Over the past several years, Rutherford County has witnessed encouraging improvements across multiple overdose indicators. Fatal opioid overdoses have begun to decline, and while no single factor can explain these shifts, the county's coordinated prevention and response efforts, including initiatives supported through the **Rutherford County Opioid Board**, have strengthened local capacity for education, treatment, harm reduction, and community engagement. Together, these collective efforts reflect a community mobilized and committed to saving lives.

## OPIOID OVERDOSE TRENDS IN RUTHERFORD COUNTY

From 2021 to 2023, Rutherford County experienced a steady decline in fatal opioid overdoses. Fatal opioid overdoses decreased from about 121 deaths in 2021 (33 per 100,000) to 116 in 2022 (31 per 100,000), and then to 95 in 2023 (25 per 100,000). This trend suggests progress in reducing opioid-related harm. For more detailed data, visit the **Tennessee Drug Overdose Dashboard**: <https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/pdo/pdo/data-dashboard.html>

### FATAL OPIOID OVERDOSES IN RUTHERFORD COUNTY



From 2021 through 2023, fatal opioid overdoses in Rutherford County declined each year. Counts fell from about 121 deaths in 2021 (33 per 100,000), to 116 in 2022 (31 per 100,000), and continued downward to 95 in 2023 (25 per 100,000).

Source: Tennessee Drug Overdose Dashboard



# Rutherford County Opioid Board

• 2025 YEAR-END REPORT •



MIDDLE  
TENNESSEE  
STATE UNIVERSITY.  
I AM *true*BLUE

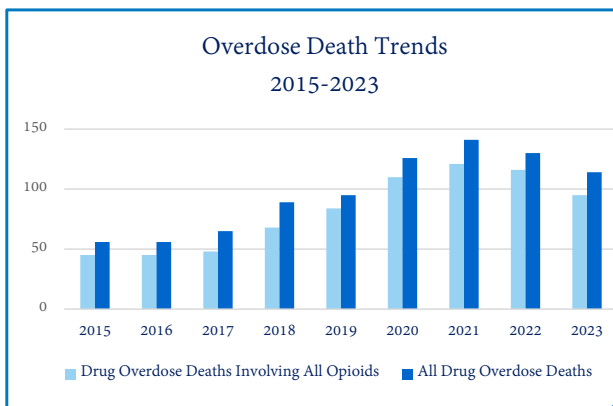


MTSU prohibits discrimination based on sex, race, color, national origin, or other protected categories. Report concerns to the Title VI/IX Coordinator. See the full policy at [mtsu.edu/icc](https://mtsu.edu/icc).

# Overdose Trends 2015-2023

Rutherford County experienced a tragic peak in overdose related deaths in 2021, which coincided with the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Overdose deaths peaked at 141 lives lost in that year with approximately 121 of those deaths being linked back to opioid misuse. The isolation and financial uncertainty during this time had negative impacts on many individuals' mental health and wellbeing. While these issues are not the cause of the opioid epidemic, they were a factor in how dangerous it became in this community.

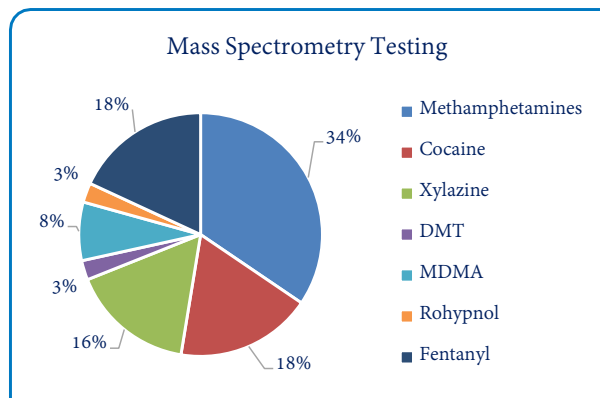
Since 2021, there has been concerted efforts to reduce overdose deaths, in particular opioid related overdoses, and these efforts are beginning to demonstrate positive outcomes in overall reductions of both fatal and non-fatal overdose numbers.



Overdose death rates are beginning to decrease down to pre-pandemic levels. Preliminary data for 2024 & 2025 is indicating a continuing trend of decreasing death rates and decreasing overdose rates. There are many factors in this reduction, one of which is the increased availability of naloxone, the overdose reversal medication. Another factor is the cumulative impact of the community funding disbursed by the Rutherford Opioid Board.

In efforts to monitor continuing substance misuse trends in the county, the ROB funded a mass spectrometry testing unit for the Rutherford County Sheriff's Office (RCSO). This allows ROB to make time-sensitive, data-driven funding decisions based on local needs and trends.

In the last six months, the unit has identified multiple substances that have made their way into the community. This helps RCSO & ROB identify the poly-substance trends and anticipate increased overdose risks and high-impact areas.



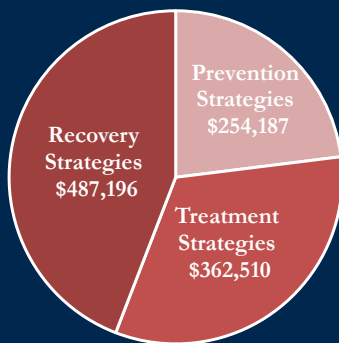


# Rutherford County Opioid Board

• 2025 YEAR-END REPORT •

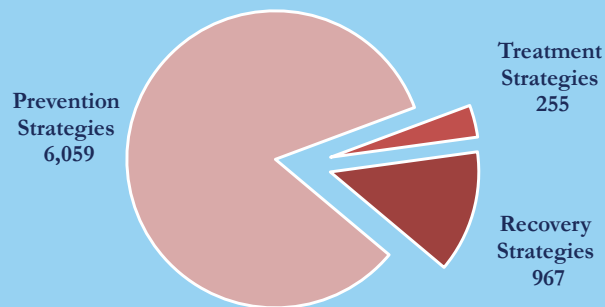
**ELEVEN** agencies were funded for Prevention, Treatment & Recovery Strategy activities.

Total Allocations: \$1,103,893

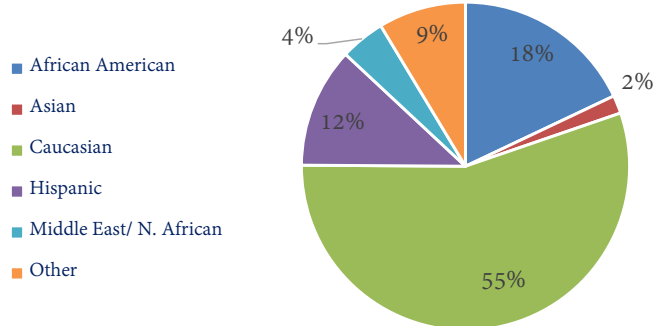


Of the **7,281** people served by ROB funds, Prevention activities touched the most lives with **6,059** being served.

Treatment activities served **255** people while Recovery activities served **967** people.



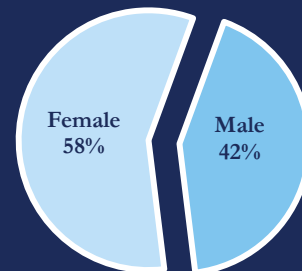
Racial/Ethnic Distribution of Services



**7,281** people were directly served by Rutherford Opioid Board funding through the various Prevention, Treatment & Recovery programs.

Gender demographic information was gathered for **3,765** people.

**Women** represent **58%** of all service recipients across the county.



## Rutherford County Opioid Board

• 2025 YEAR-END REPORT •

# Rutherford County Opioid Board

## • PREVENTION STRATEGIES •

**FOUR** organizations were funded for Prevention related activities across the county:

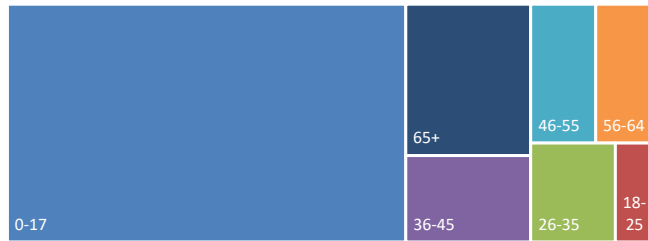
**Endure Athletics**  
\$106,118

**Interfaith Dental Clinic**  
\$78,411

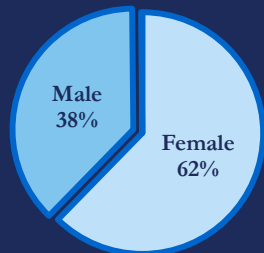
**Prevention Coalition for Success**  
\$53,043

**Rutherford County Schools**  
\$16,615

Age Distribution of Prevention Activities

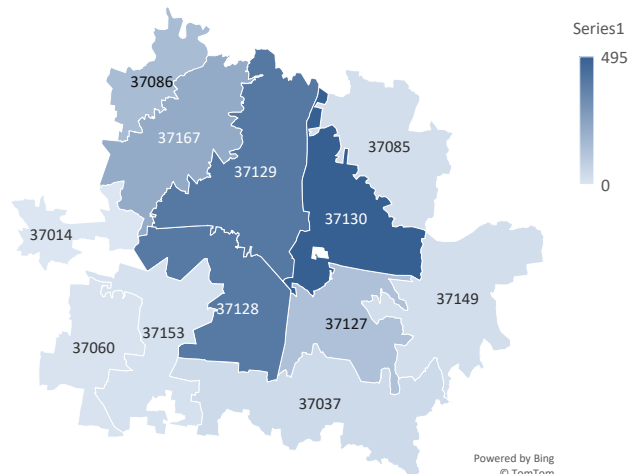


Of the 6,059 people served through these 4 Prevention Strategy programs, 3,442 were served through the Rutherford County School System's HOPE curriculum.



The majority of Prevention activities were received by women. Of the disclosed demographics, 54% of participants identified as white.

Prevention Services by Zip Code



\*\* Rutherford County Schools service data is not included in this service map. The pilot schools were distributed across the county and were not disclosed to ROB for privacy reasons.



**MIDDLE  
TENNESSEE**  
STATE UNIVERSITY.  
I AM *true*BLUE

**The Rutherford Opioid Board allocated \$254,187 for all Prevention Strategy programming across the county.**

MTSU prohibits discrimination based on sex, race, color, national origin, or other protected categories. Report concerns to the Title VI/IX Coordinator. See the full policy at [mtsu.edu/iee](https://mtsu.edu/iee).

## Rutherford County Opioid Board

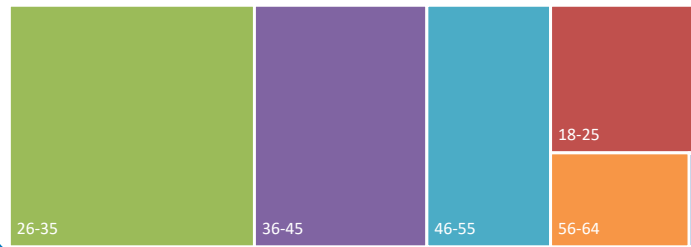
## • TREATMENT STRATEGIES •

**TWO** organizations were funded for Treatment related activities across the county:

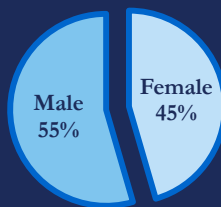
**H.U.S.T.L.E. Recovery**  
\$200,000

**Volunteer Behavioral Health Care**  
\$162,510

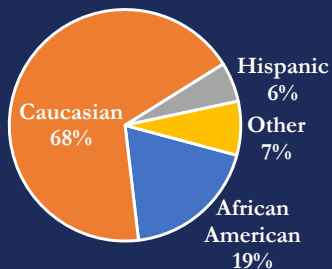
Age Distribution of Treatment Activities



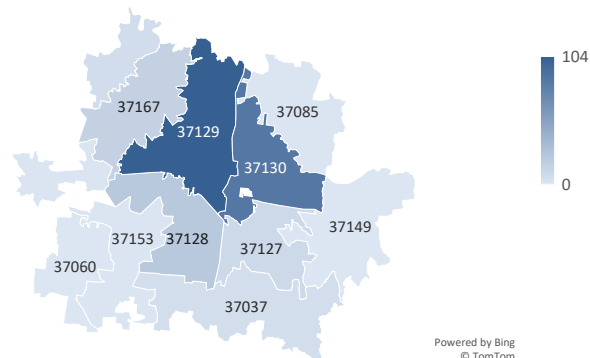
49% of all Treatment Services were provided to the “younger adult” population defined as 35 and younger. This same age group represents 53.9% of suspected overdoses at emergency departments in 2024.



Of the **255 individuals** served, **men** represent 139 of the total served.



Treatment Services by Zip Code



Individuals receiving Treatment Services primarily claimed residency from 37129 and 37130 zip code areas. These two zip codes represent 75% of all Treatment Services recipients.



**MIDDLE TENNESSEE**  
STATE UNIVERSITY.  
I AM *true*BLUE

The Rutherford Opioid Board allocated \$362,510 for all Treatment Strategy programming across the county.

MTSU prohibits discrimination based on sex, race, color, national origin, or other protected categories. Report concerns to the Title VI/IX Coordinator. See the full policy at [mtsu.edu/icc](https://mtsu.edu/icc).



## Rutherford County Opioid Board

## • RECOVERY STRATEGIES •

**FIVE** organizations were funded for **Recovery** related activities across the county:

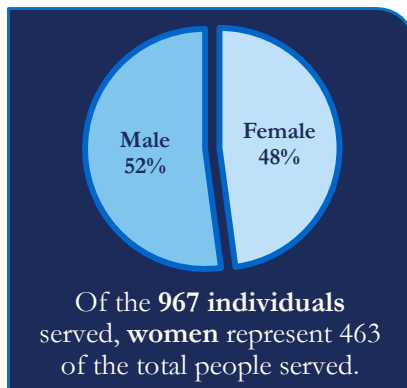
**Child Advocacy Center**  
\$76,978

**Doors of Hope**  
\$140,000

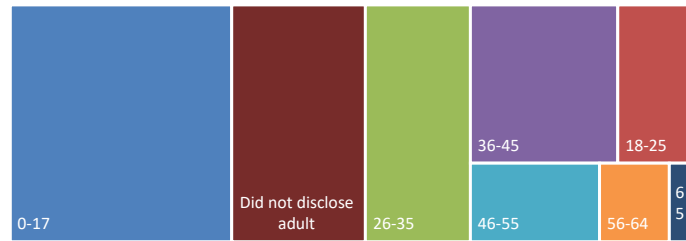
**Greenhouse Ministries**  
\$96,000

**Kymari House**  
\$95,268

**Rutherford County Probation & Recovery Services**  
\$78,950

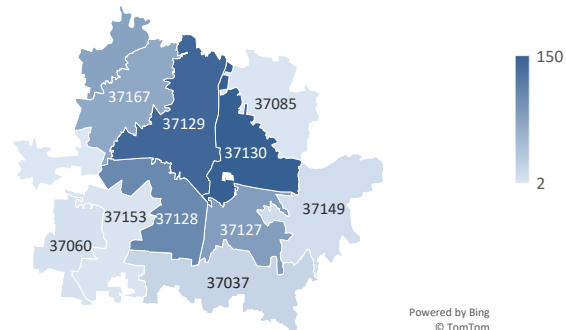


Age Distribution of Recovery Services



33% of Recovery Services were provided to minors, with 23% serving adults 35 and under. 20% of participants did not disclose age but were designated as “adults” for data collection purposes. Seniors 65+ represent the smallest population with only 1% engaging in these programs.

Recovery Services by Zip Code



Not included in this map are individuals who are unhoused (1 person) and individuals exiting incarceration (43 individuals). 40% of individuals & households claim residence in 37129 & 37130.

**MIDDLE  
TENNESSEE**  
STATE UNIVERSITY.  
I AM **trueBLUE**

**The Rutherford Opioid Board allocated \$487,196 for all Recovery Strategy programming across the county.**

MTSU prohibits discrimination based on sex, race, color, national origin, or other protected categories. Report concerns to the Title VI/IX Coordinator. See the full policy at [mtsu.edu/icc](https://mtsu.edu/icc).



***"Perseverance is not a  
long race; it is many short  
races one after another."***

Walter Elliot,  
Catholic Priest





## Project Update: H.U.S.T.L.E Recovery—Respite Housing and Capacity Building

These projects are funded under a grant contract with the Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council.

Middle Tennessee State University's **Office of Prevention Science and Recovery**, part of the **Center for Health and Human Services**, in partnership with **H.U.S.T.L.E. Recovery**, has partnered to expand respite housing capacity across the state to better support individuals who are seeking treatment but must wait for an available bed. A grant application was made to the **Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council**, which approved funding for this project, and we are now entering our second year of activities.

The period between a person's agreeing to enter treatment and actually being admitted is critical. Without a safe and supportive environment during this time, individuals are at considerable risk of returning to substance use, experiencing relapses, or even overdose. Waiting several days—or even a week—without adequate support can derail motivation, increase exposure to triggering environments, and ultimately jeopardize recovery.

This project addresses that gap by providing clean, trigger-free, short-term housing for individuals in transition. Respite housing offers a stable space where participants can begin engaging in recovery-oriented routines and maintain their commitment to treatment while they await placement in a formal program. To improve statewide accessibility, the proposal includes the expansion of respite facilities through the establishment of housing in each of Tennessee's three Grand Divisions: West, Middle,



Left to Right: Hustle Recovery staff John Hughes (Chief Operating Officer), Kimberly Ryan (Director of Operations), and Troy Sandifer (CEO)

and East. This builds upon the existing 10 respite beds already in operation and creates a more robust and geographically inclusive support system.

**With an anticipated 90% occupancy rate, these facilities are projected to serve approximately 2,245 individuals per year. Over the three-year project period, an estimated 6,700 individuals will benefit**

**from respite housing.** The project will also support the collection of **longitudinal data to evaluate the long-term impact of respite care on treatment engagement, retention, and overall recovery outcomes.**





PROJECT UPDATE *continued from page 14***RESPITE HOUSING**

- **Estimated Number of Individuals Impacted for 3-year Project: 6,700**
- **Expected Duration of Impact: 5+ years**

By bridging the gap between the decision to seek treatment and actual program admission, this initiative will significantly reduce the risk of relapses, overdose, and disengagement—providing vital support that can help save lives and promote sustained recovery.

In addition to the Respite Housing project, CHHS OPSR is partnering with Hustle Recovery on a second project that focuses on capacity building, specifically residential aftercare expansion. This six-month program offers more than just a place to stay—it provides a structured, supportive environment that includes access to **medication-assisted treatment (MAT)**, wraparound services, transportation, and workforce and employment support. Following the initial six months, participants continue to receive ongoing monitoring and follow-up care for an additional six to 12 months, helping to ensure long-term stability. Currently, Hustle Recovery's **Residential Aftercare Program** supports up to 80 individuals each year. With additional investment in staffing and infrastructure, the program's capacity could increase by 60 more individuals annually, allowing a total of 420 people to be served over the next three years.

The [Summer 2025 CHHS Newsletter](#) includes a comprehensive feature on Hustle Recovery and its programs. Highlights and updates are summarized on the following page.

**CAPACITY BUILDING:  
Residential Aftercare Program**

- **Estimated Number of Individuals Impacted: 420**
- **Expected Duration of Impact: 4 years**

**SUCCESS STORY**

My name is Jeremy. I am an alcoholic and a drug addict. After serving several months in jail, I entered Hustle Recovery's vocational rehabilitation program, which is the start of my journey in recovery.

I've thoroughly worked the 12 steps of AA with a sponsor, and made the decision to turn my will and my life over to God. As time passed with me being clean and sober, the pieces of my life began to fall into place. Today I am 11 months clean and sober. I am living a life I once thought was impossible.

I now have a driver's license, a checking account, and savings accounts, and I own my own car. I've rebuilt the relationship with my son and am surrounded by a loving, supportive family. I am a college student at SHU, and I work in recovery. I am active in my church and in full compliance with probation.

I am finally experiencing a new freedom and a new happiness. I do not regret my past, I no longer feel useless or pity myself. God is working in my life, and my entire attitude and outlook have changed. I have a real life today, a wonderful life, all without drugs and alcohol.

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 15*

- The **Respite House grand opening** in Nashville was in October. Respite Housing provides individuals a safe place to stay while starting their journey of recovery. Addiction respite housing is a form of temporary, safe, and supportive substance-free living environment designed to provide individuals a stabilizing bridge prior to being admitted to formal treatment.



- **Troy Sandifer**, founder of Hustle Recovery, spoke on a panel addressing Addiction and Overdoses in Central Appalachia, at the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Conference** in Bethesda, Maryland. He was a part of the critical conversation about solutions and hope in our communities. Troy and his team also participated

in workshops to help find a path forward for the state of Tennessee and SAMHSA to address these challenges we are facing.

- **Recovery Fest in Middle Tennessee was a success.** Recovery Fest is a series of community-focused events that celebrate recovery from mental health and substance use disorders. These free, family-friendly festivals offer a combination of live music, food, activities for kids, and opportunities to connect with local resource providers, speakers, and others on their journey of healing. The events aim to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and build a supportive community.
- **September is Recovery Month** and marks the time of year when **Tennessee Association of Alcohol, Drug, and Other Addiction Services (TAADAS)** hosts a dinner and awards night. TAADAS is a statewide association of professionals and organizations working in addiction treatment, prevention, and recovery in Tennessee. Their mission is to provide advocacy, education, and community support for addiction and recovery services throughout Tennessee. Troy Sandifer was the recipient of the TAADAS Volunteer of the Year award in 2024. He was presenter of the 2025 award to Tracey Levine from Healing Housing.



**Thank you, Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council, for supporting this important work!**

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

CHHS has partnered with [Cedar Recovery](#) the last two years to establish medication-assisted treatment (MAT) access points in six rural Tennessee counties. CHHS received a **\$2.9 million dollar grant** from Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as part of the Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP). The initiative is aimed at reducing morbidity and mortality of substance use disorders.

Cedar Recovery specializes in treating opioid use disorder with medications such as buprenorphine and/or naltrexone. Currently, there are 12 locations in Tennessee and Virginia as well as a robust telemedicine platform that provide care to approximately 4,000 patients each month.

While Cedar Recovery provides direct services, MTSU's Center for Health and Human Services provides coordination and support services throughout the life of the grant.

Currently, we are working to expand and enhance the MAT workforce in six rural Tennessee communities through professional development opportunities and support services and providing treatment for identified communities which include **Franklin, Lawrence, Marshall, Giles, and Hickman counties** through Tennessee's first mobile unit to solely offer medication assisted treatment. Additionally, a new on-site clinic in **Claiborne County** is part of the work plan. We want to build and/or strengthen the local drug prevention and addiction treatment coalitions in these target communities.

The MTSU MAT Access project serves these six rural Tennessee communities and delivers patient care through a mobile unit 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. Additional services are provided at a live site in Claiborne County.

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](#).

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

The project has continued the incredible momentum as we are halfway into year two of the grant. The mobile unit has been fully operational since returning from renovations on July 30, 2024.



**PROJECT UPDATE** *continued from page 17*

The MAT team has been deeply engaged in grassroots outreach and strategic promotion to raise awareness about our unit and the vital services funded through this grant. Over the past few months, co-Project Director Christina Byrd and Data Analyst Michelle Sterlingshires have made multiple visits to all six priority counties, actively participating in health council and prevention coalition meetings. Their efforts are fostering meaningful connections, expanding our reach, and ensuring that communities are aware of the critical resources available to them.

Beyond attending health council and prevention coalition meetings, the MAT team has launched the *Monthly Middle Tennessee MAT Mobile Message*, an email newsletter distributed to community stakeholders across our priority counties. This newsletter serves as a vital resource, offering essential information, support, and updates on upcoming events related to opioid use disorder awareness and recovery. Stay engaged and informed as we work together to support individuals, families, and communities affected by opioid use.

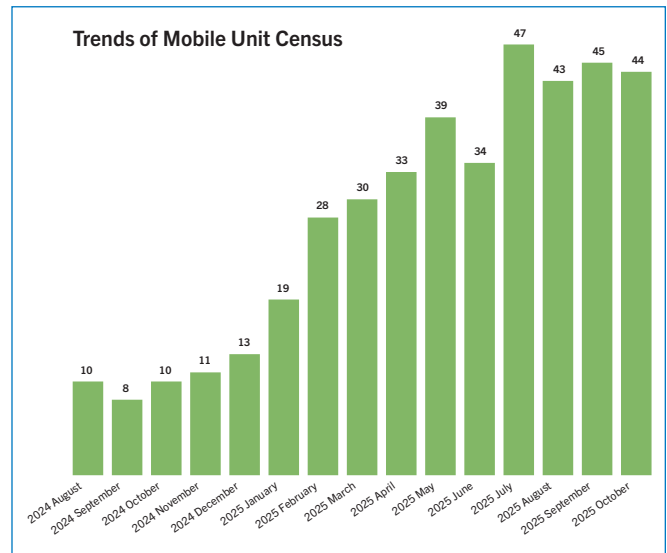
**Expanded Service Area**

As of October 2025, the mobile unit expanded into Marshall County, further extending treatment access and resources to individuals across Middle Tennessee.

**Mobile Unit Growth**

From six unique patient visits in August 2024 to a high of more than 40 as of mid-late 2025, we have served 109 patients to date as part of 414 unique visits with the mobile unit census showing steady growth. This upward trend reflects increased community engagement, trust in mobile-based care, and strengthened local partnerships.

This project is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$2,921,726 with 100% funded by HRSA/HHS and \$0 amount funded by nongovernment sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA/HHS, or the U.S. government. For more information, please visit [hrsa.gov](https://hrsa.gov).



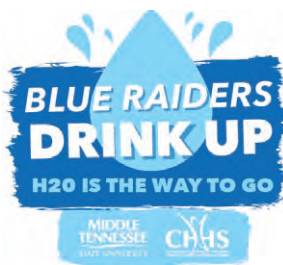
The table above displays the monthly patient visits to the mobile unit from August 2024 to October 2025. Additional data and insights will be shared as they become available.

**Breaking Stigma**

This month, the MAT program launched a powerful new billboard campaign to raise awareness about mobile addiction treatment services. Thirteen billboards were installed across five counties, each carrying the message: *“Recovery just got closer — Mobile addiction clinic accessible to all. Insurance not required.”* The campaign aims to break down barriers to care and remind communities that compassionate, accessible treatment is closer than they think. In conjunction with faculty from the MTSU Public Health program, the team is conducting stigma research through a targeted mailing effort—sending postcards with QR codes linking to a brief survey to better understand community perceptions around addiction and recovery.

This partnership is a clear example of how cross-sector collaboration, supported by the HRSA RCORP-MAT Access award, can create lasting systems change and directly improve health outcomes for rural Tennesseans.

## Project Update: Blue Raiders Drink Up



Over the course of six years, **Blue Raiders Drink Up** reached and educated 10,037 MTSU students through cooking classes, campus outreach events, and one-on-one

nutrition counseling or health coaching sessions, and personalized fitness programming. Whether it was learning to make healthy meals on a budget, connecting through campus wellness initiatives, or receiving personalized support, BRDU helped thousands of students build healthier habits that will last long beyond their time at MTSU.

Thanks to support from the Tennessee Department of Health's Project Diabetes Initiative, 20 new water refill stations were installed across campus over the past six years—making it easier than ever for students, faculty, and staff to stay healthy and hydrated while reducing plastic waste.

### WE'RE PUBLISHED!

Outcomes from the first three years' Blue Raiders Drink Up pilot project cooking classes have now been published, **"Influence of Culinary Interventions on Eating Habits in a Post-Secondary Educational Environment" in the *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*.**



Thank you to Elizabeth Smith, associate professor of Nutrition and Food Science and director of the didactic program in Dietetics, and her students for taking the lead on this paper.

Together, we've helped prevent an estimated 281,687 plastic water bottles from ending up in landfills. The figure also reflects thousands of decisions to choose water—often instead of a sugary beverage.

**SUSTAINABILITY:** Even after grant funding concluded, the initiative continues to thrive—BMI measurement remains ongoing (having begun as a policy change in the early days of the grant), and the campus dietitian position has been sustained by internal budgets after demonstrating an extraordinary response from students and is still in place. Through a continued collaboration between MT Dining and the MTSU Dietetics program, the BRDU cooking classes have been sustained, giving students ongoing opportunities to learn practical skills for healthy living.

Blue Raiders Drink Up's first manuscript was published on March 26, 2025, in the *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*. This article focused on Years 1–3, specifically highlighting measurable student outcomes within the cooking classes. A second publication is in progress, focused on Years 3–6 and emphasizing long-term sustainability and continued program success.

**SUCCESS STORY:** Beyond numbers, BRDU's success is seen in the lives it touches. Our amazing registered dietitian, Sarah Nicolette, helped two graduate students lower their A1C levels from the prediabetic range—all before graduation. Through personalized nutrition counseling and consistent support, they built healthy habits that will last long after their time on campus. Stories like these reflect BRDU's lasting influence on student health and wellness across MTSU.

*Blue Raiders Drink Up is funded by the Tennessee Department of Health, Project Diabetes Initiative.*



## Project Update: MTSU Mental Health First Aid and QPR

### QPR Suicide Prevention Training

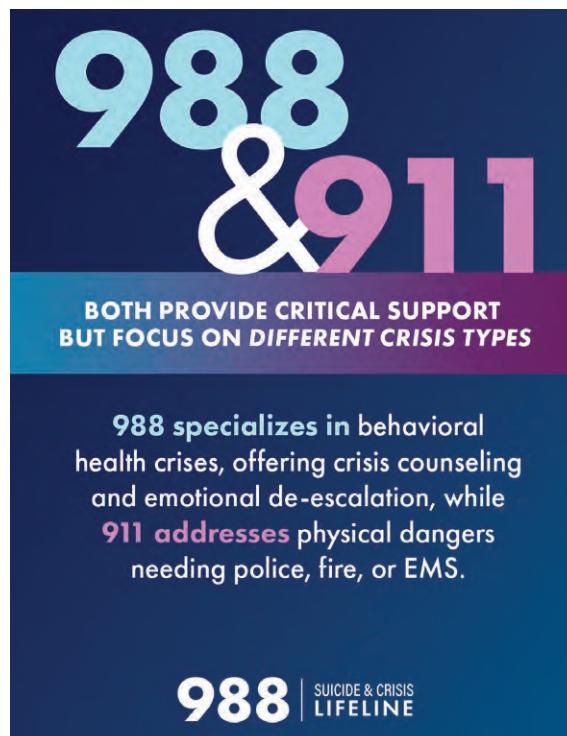
Since 2018, the Center for Health and Human Services at MTSU has provided

Mental Health Awareness training through grants awarded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The original offering, Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), was very popular on campus, particularly with faculty and advisors, who are often in contact with students experiencing periods of elevated life stressors. Over time, MHFA became a staple for several departments' programs for students achieving majors in their fields, either through requiring certification prior to mental health practicums or as extra credit in behavioral health related courses.

In the wake of the success of MHFA, the center determined the need for training that focused specifically on suicide prevention skills that could be delivered in less than 90 minutes. The shorter class time allows for the potential for greater numbers of people to be trained, especially learners who could not commit to an all-day training, like MHFA. So, in January 2025, CHHS began offering QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Suicide Prevention Training on campus.

### Campus Participation

Over 1,000 participants have been trained in the evidence-based Mental Health First Aid program since CHHS launched the second multiyear grant in 2023, with 165 in the first six months of this grant year alone. As of end of October, there have been 286 participants certified in QPR since its launch date of January 28, 2025. 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.

### Interested?

QPR Suicide Prevention Training is provided at no charge to participants; all costs related to the training are grant-funded by SAMHSA. If interested in providing QPR Suicide Prevention Training to your student group or department, please contact Linda Williams at [lindad.williams@mtsu.edu](mailto:lindad.williams@mtsu.edu).

For more information about QPR and other CHHS initiatives at MTSU, please visit [chhs.mtsu.edu](http://chhs.mtsu.edu).

For more information about the QPR Institute, please visit [qprinstitute.com](http://qprinstitute.com).

This project is supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$497,899 with 100% funded by SAMHSA/HHS and \$0 amount funded by nongovernment sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by SAMHSA/HHS, or the U.S. government. For more information, please visit [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov).





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 Statewide Updates Include:

- MTSU CHHS Office of Prevention Science and Recovery (OPSR) has been continuously working with three counties, **Cannon, Rutherford, and Williamson**. Please refer to **pages 6-12** of this newsletter for excerpts of the Rutherford County Opioid Board 2025 Year End Report which provides visuals of how the county awarded **11** agencies a total of **\$1,103,893** for prevention, treatment, recovery, and education services for the 2025 year. For Williamson County, FY 2026 funding decisions have been made with **11** grantees receiving approximately **\$1,006,117** to support prevention, treatment, recovery, and education services. Contracts will begin starting January 1, 2026. For Cannon County FY26 funding for their grantees was awarded in May of 2025. **8** agencies received funding to the tune of **\$185,204** for the county. Funding was focused on prevention, treatment, and recovery.

We will continue to support these ongoing efforts of these counties to get opioid settlement dollars into local communities by administering the grant application process, facilitating funding recommendations from content experts, guiding data collection of grantees, and conducting evaluation of the funded programs.

- CHHS Office of Prevention Science and Recovery expresses its gratitude to the Data Science Institute for its assistance in developing and tracking opioid abatement data for county



MTSU Office of Prevention Science and Recovery partners with University of Tennessee Smart Initiative to host grant writing workshop for county government officials and community partners from across the state on November 13th.

grantees. During FY 2025, their support was critical to the development of quarterly and mid-year reports.

- MTSU CHHS Office of Prevention Science and Recovery and the University of Tennessee SMART Initiative co-hosted an event for government officials responsible for their counties' opioid abatement programs; nonprofit agencies who are current recipients of county or state opioid abatement funds; and agencies interested in applying for state or county abatement funds. The November 13 event discussed challenges and strategies for nonprofits in pursuing these funding streams, as well as governments looking to strengthen their grant-making processes.

## Project Update: 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:

- The MTSU Safe Stars evaluation team is wrapping up work on a manuscript this fall—"A Collaborative Effort to Evaluate Programs, Practices, and Protocols Supporting Youth Sports Safety and Injury Prevention, Mild Traumatic Brain Injury, and Concussion Management"—that will be submitted by the end of the year to share evaluation outcomes specific to the Safe Stars program, the 2024 CDC Pediatric mTBI (mild Traumatic Brain Injury) Guidelines, and the Return to Learn/Return to Play protocols.

**The MTSU and TDH Evaluation Project Team**

**Cynthia Chafin, Ph.D., MCHES<sup>®</sup>**  
NBC-HWC MTSU CHHS Director,  
Project Director

**Michelle Sterlingshires**, MTSU  
CHHS Data Coordinator and  
Program Coordinator

**Christina Byrd, MPH, CHES**,  
MTSU CHHS Program  
Coordinator (project launch)

**Angela Bowman, Ph.D.**,  
MTSU Dept. of Health & Human  
Performance  
Faculty Consultant, Evaluation

**MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY**

**MT**  
Center for Health and Human Services

**TN Department of Health**

**The MTSU CHHS TDH Evaluation Project Team**

**Dannielle Tsang**  
MTSU Department of Social Work  
MSW Candidate  
Spring and Summer 2025 CHHS Intern

**Terrence R. Love, MS**  
Injury Prevention Director  
Tennessee Department of Health

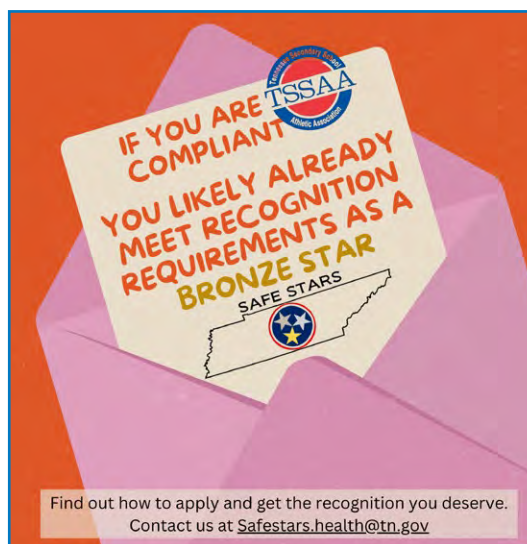
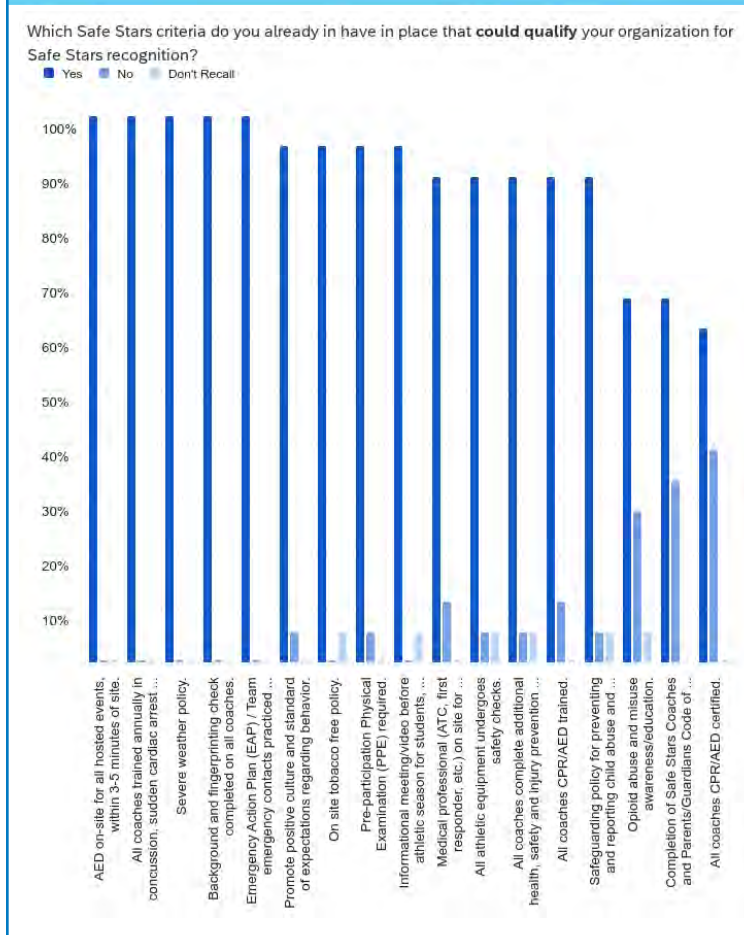
**MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY**

**MT**  
Center for Health and Human Services

**TN Department of Health**

**PROJECT UPDATE** *continued from page 22*

- CHHS and Director Cynthia Chafin and Tennessee Department of Health Injury Prevention Director Terrence Love recently presented **Community Feedback: A Status Update on Sports-Related Health and Safety Initiatives in Tennessee** at the **Tennessee Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Council** and the **Committee On Pediatric Emergency Care**. It was previously presented this summer at the Youth Sports Health and Safety Conference hosted by **Monroe Carroll Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt**.
- Preliminary findings from the Safe Stars evaluation team are shared below and suggest that Safe Stars Initiative certified organizations feel that their designation has increased safety policies and procedures overall. Additional data collection is set to take place this fiscal year.
- 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 and is ongoing.
- 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 was initiated by TDH in late March, with **165 completed surveys** so far.
- A social media campaign and e-blast messaging informed by evaluation outcomes to promote each of the three programs to targeted audiences were finalized and submitted to Tennessee Department of Health for dissemination.

**Safe Stars Surveys – Early Responses:**

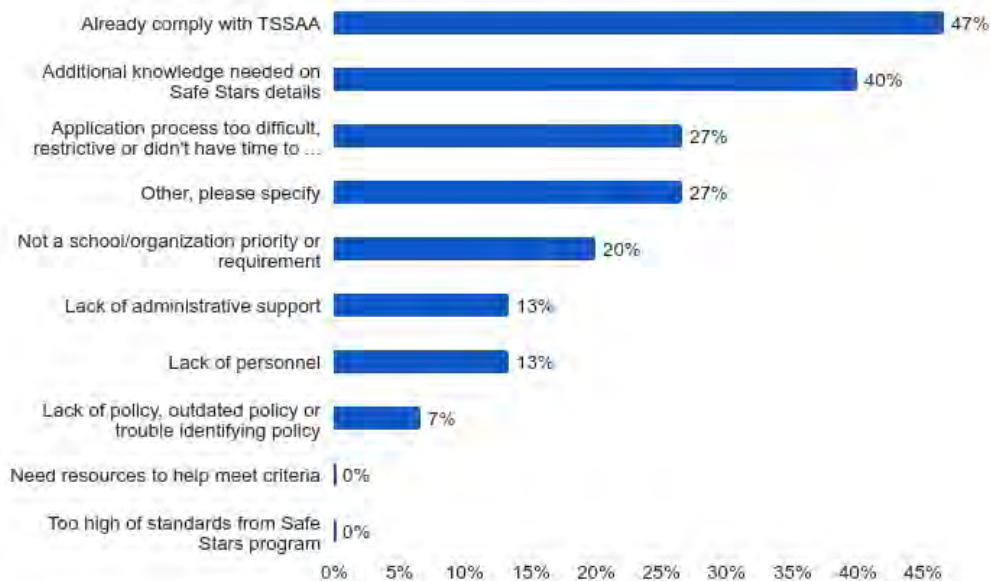
Example of an infographic created for the social media campaign.

*continued on page 24*

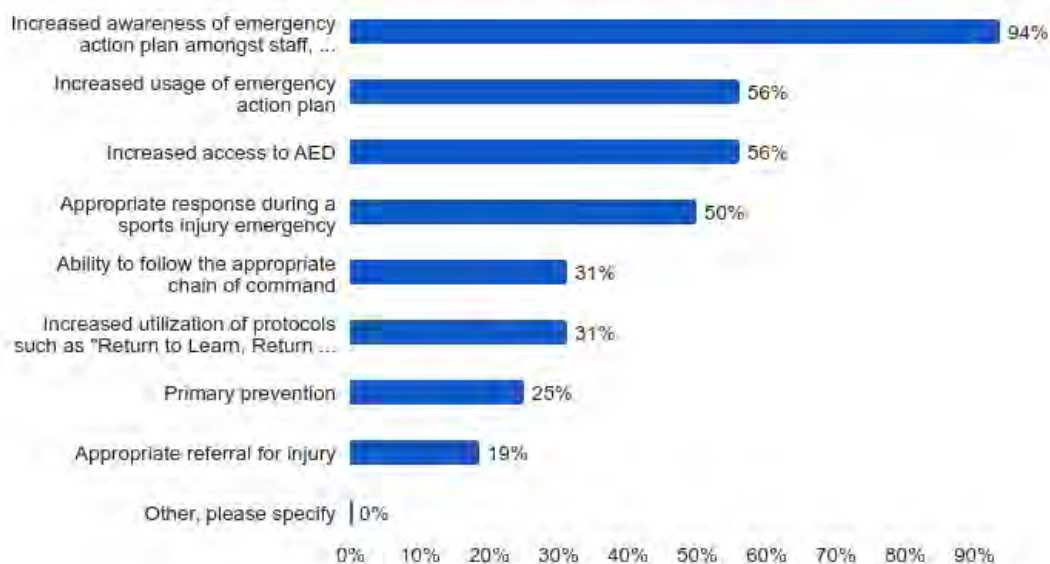


## Safe Stars Surveys – Early Responses:

What are potential barriers or challenges your organization may have to applying for Safe Stars recognition?



How Safe Stars has impacted the organizations' ability to handle sport injuries and emergencies?



**PROJECT UPDATE** *continued from page 24*

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.

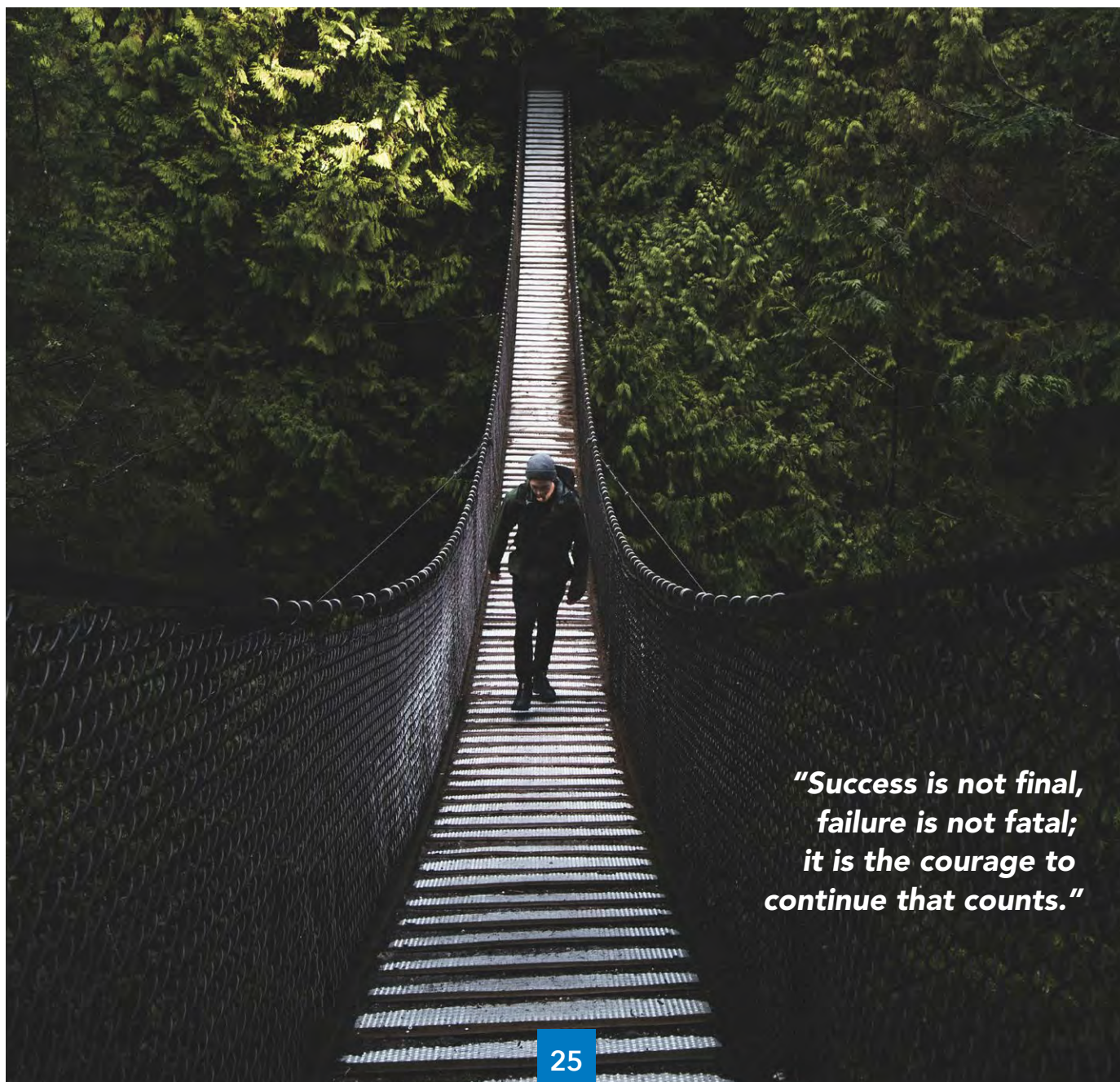
**SOURCES**

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>



***"Success is not final,  
failure is not fatal;  
it is the courage to  
continue that counts."***



## Campus Partner Spotlight: Elizabeth Smith, Nutrition and Food Science Program



Elizabeth “Liz” Smith, associate professor of Nutrition and Food Science and director of the didactic program in Dietetics, has been invaluable to CHHS’ Blue Raiders Drink Up program, which recently wrapped up its sixth and

final grant year on campus. Over the course of six years, Smith and colleagues identified and “shared” seven Dietetics students who worked year-round for CHHS as dedicated student ambassadors as part of the grant implementation team. The ambassadors were actively engaged in implementing Blue Raiders Drink Up, organizing and facilitating tabling and other educational events on campus every month, creating displays and educational materials, assisting with cooking classes, data collection and reporting, and even developing manuscripts. With Smith’s involvement, CHHS was able to provide real-world professional experiences for these dietetics students and to maximize campus student engagement in these campus-focused initiatives. Read more about the experiences of Hanan Baba and Audrey Waite, who recently graduated and were Blue Raiders Drink Up ambassadors the last two years, in the [Summer 2025 CHHS newsletter](#).

Smith took the lead on a manuscript that was recently published. Outcomes from the first three years’ Blue Raiders Drink Up pilot project cooking classes have now been published, [Influence of Culinary Interventions on Eating Habits in a Post-Secondary Educational Environment](#) in the *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*.

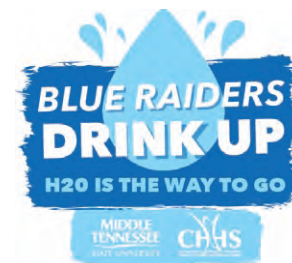
*Blue Raiders Drink Up was funded by a grant from the Tennessee Department of Health, Project Diabetes Initiative.*

*“I was honored to be invited to help select several of our outstanding dietetics students to serve as BRDU Ambassadors over the course of this six-year project. The experience these students gained in educating and engaging their peers on the importance of healthy hydration and nutrition was truly outstanding. It was a privilege to collaborate with Cindy, Christina, and the entire team at the Center for Health and Human Services. I look forward to continuing to partner on many more meaningful and impactful projects with this exceptional team.”*

— Elizabeth Smith

### DIETETICS STUDENTS WORKING ON THE GRANT IMPLEMENTATION TEAM AS STUDENT AMBASSADORS DURING 2019–2025 INCLUDE:

Ash Abro  
Rose Chilsen  
Aura Ganster  
James Taylor Armistead  
Domanique Richards  
Hanan Baba  
Audrey Waite



**Thank you, Liz Smith for being such a wonderful partner to CHHS and supporter of our research and other work!**





# BIG HYDRATION ON CAMPUS



Thanks to the Blue Raiders Drink Up program and support from the Tennessee Department of Health, Project Diabetes Initiative 20 brand-new water refill stations were installed across campus over the last six years!



These stations made it easier than ever for students, faculty, and staff to stay healthy and hydrated – while also reducing plastic waste.

Together, we've helped prevent an estimated **281,687** plastic water bottles from ending up in landfills. This figure also reflects thousands of decisions to choose water often instead of a sugary beverage. ♻️



Want to download the MTSU water refill station map? Scan this QR code!

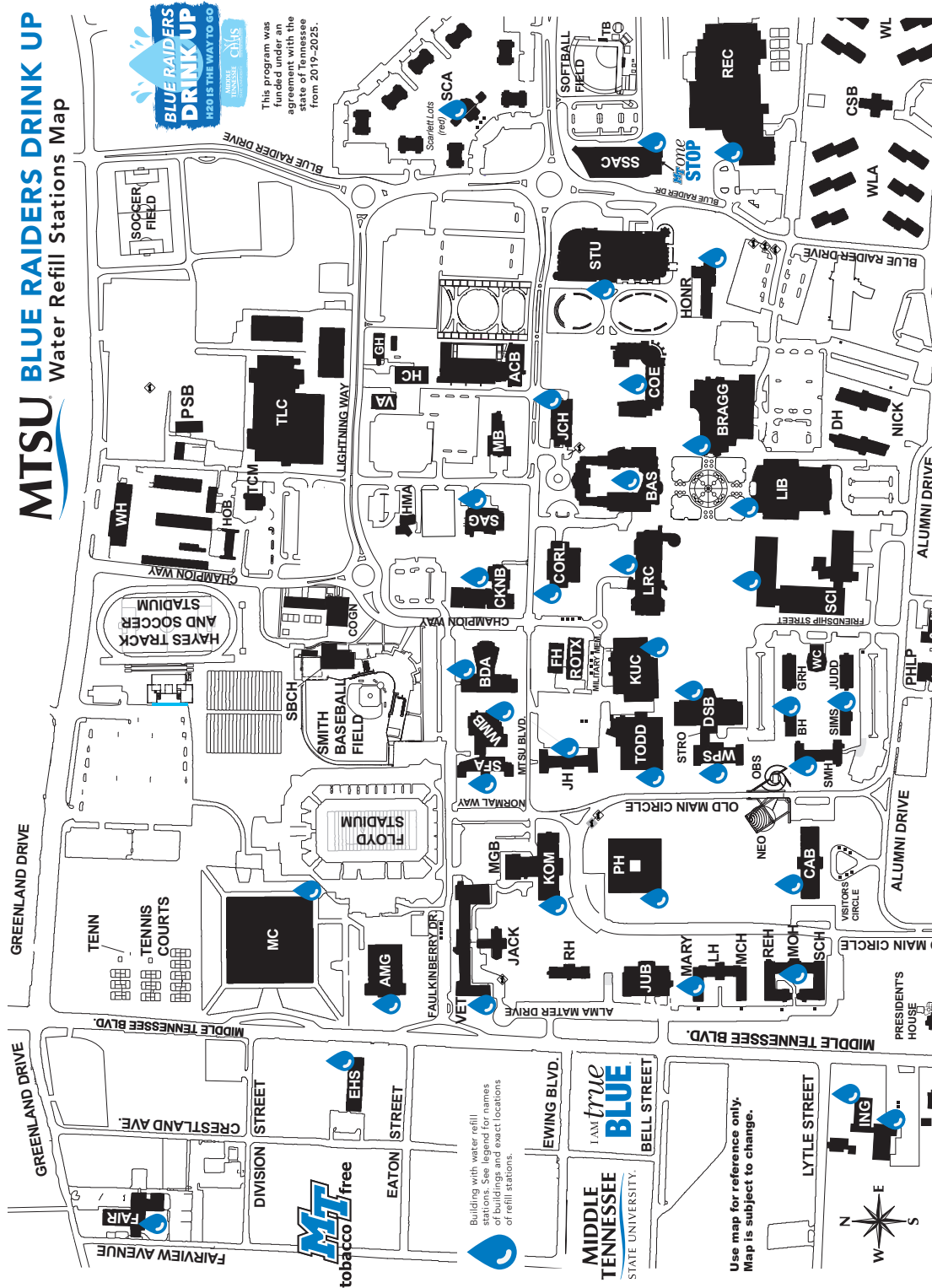


*While the Blue Raiders Drink Up six-year grant funded has ended, the water refill stations are still here and ready to serve our campus community with water as a healthy beverage of choice for many years to come!*

*Blue Raiders Drink Up was funded by the Tennessee Department of Health, Project Diabetes Initiative.*

## Trying to drink more water?

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



Over the past six years, the Blue Raiders Drink Up Initiative has led to the installation of 20 new water refill stations across campus—helping our community save approximately 281,687 plastic bottles from ending up in landfills. We are grateful to the Tennessee Department of Health for funding this impactful project and making the initiative possible.

# MTSU BLUE RAIDERS DRINK UP

## Water Refill Stations Map

\*funded by Blue Raiders Up



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



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 *true* BLUE®

0324.41 / Middle Tennessee State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, 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.



## 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 multiyear grant in 2023. As of end of October, there have been 286 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](https://mentalhealthfirstaid.org/take-a-course/find-a-course)
- [qprinstitute.com](https://qprinstitute.com)

FOLLOW US and  
stay connected!



@mtsu\_chhs




@mtsuschhs



facebook.com/mtsu.chhs





***"You may have to fight  
a battle more than  
once to win it."***

Margaret Thatcher,,  
former UK prime minister

## CHHS Featured Staff

### Linda Williams

This quarter CHHS is pleased to shine the spotlight on Linda Williams. Her interview is below.



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

**LW:** I began in February of 2019 and worked as project coordinator for the MHAT grant until it ended in Sept 2021. I was fortunate enough to return

to the role in November of 2024.

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

**LW:** I love hearing stories of how the material affects the lives of the participants. During each training session, participants provide feedback that the information has changed their thinking about how to support someone experiencing a mental health challenge.

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

**LW:** Trust the Process

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

**LW:** I make lots of attempts to learn another language, so, unless I could magically learn to fly, I would say it would be to speak Spanish.

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

**LW:** I have family that live here in Murfreesboro, and three amazing granddaughters in Humphries County. I have an Australian Shepherd and a house and yard, all of which keep me very busy.

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

**LW:** More office space, seating for sharing meals and visiting.

## The CHHS and MTSU Mental Health Awareness Team Is Hiring!

We are seeking a student for the spring 2026 semester for a paid position for up to 12 hours a week to be a part of our planning team. Want to learn more about program planning and/or mental health, practice organizational and communication skills, and be part of making a difference on campus? Reach out to us at [chhs@mtsu.edu](mailto:chhs@mtsu.edu) with "Mental Health Awareness Training Project Assistant" in the subject line. Hours are flexible and we will work with your class schedule.





# CHHS Welcomes Two New Team Members!

## Merredith Mooth, CPA, Ph.D. Grants and Development Specialist



Merredith Mooth, CPA, Ph.D., is an educator, financial professional, and public administrator with extensive experience in higher education, accounting, public policy, and grant management. In her state government roles,

including at the Tennessee Department of Health, she oversaw multimillion-dollar federal and state grants supporting public health initiatives such as chronic disease prevention and emergency response. Her work involved close coordination with program teams, federal partners, and oversight agencies to ensure accountability, transparency, and impact.

Mooth's academic research bridges theory and practice, with a dissertation on the effects of gentle movement on mobility in older adults. She has co-authored peer-reviewed research on COVID-19 health behaviors and presented on ethics, fiscal stewardship, and workforce development. Actively involved in community-based work with older adults, she is committed to promoting healthy aging and advancing public health through education and evidence-informed strategies.

## Kerry Foley Post-Award Grants Coordinator



Kerry Foley has lived and worked in Middle Tennessee since 2006, bringing extensive experience in the nonprofit sector to her role at MTSU CHHS. She spent the past decade at YWCA Nashville & Middle Tennessee, where

she managed program evaluation and both pre- and post-award grants management across the agency's initiatives, including its domestic violence shelter. Before joining the YWCA, Foley held similar roles supporting refugees, immigrants, and survivors of human trafficking in Nashville and Washington, D.C., area with nonprofit organizations and universities, and internationally with the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

She holds an M.A. from Georgetown University, with a certificate in Refugees and Humanitarian Emergencies, and a B.A. from Dickinson College.

Outside of work, Foley enjoys photography and traveling with her husband, a history professor at MTSU. Together, they've explored Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Oceania.

Foley is passionate about advancing health equity and has dedicated her career to empowering vulnerable populations. She is proud to support the mission of the Center for Health and Human Services in improving the health and well-being of Tennesseans.

# CHHS Staff and Faculty Partners

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

## **DIRECTOR:**

**Cynthia Chafin, Ph.D., MCHES®, NBC-HWC**  
[cynthia.chafin@mtsu.edu](mailto:cynthia.chafin@mtsu.edu)

## **CHHS GRANT COORDINATORS:**

**Kerry Foley**  
Post-Award Grants Coordinator  
[kerry.foley@mtsu.edu](mailto:kerry.foley@mtsu.edu)

**Merredith Mooth, Ph.D.**  
Grants and Development Specialist  
[merredith.mooth@mtsu.edu](mailto:merredith.mooth@mtsu.edu)

## **CHHS EVALUATOR, DATA COORDINATOR, AND TECHNICAL WRITER:**

**Michelle Sterlingshires, M.S.**  
Safe Stars, Pediatric mTBI, Mental Health First Aid, Rural Communities Opioid Response Program MAT Expansion Project, Office of Prevention Science and Recovery Projects  
[michelle.sterlingshires@mtsu.edu](mailto:michelle.sterlingshires@mtsu.edu)

## **PROJECT COORDINATORS:**

**Christina Byrd, M.P.H., CHES®**  
Death Scene Investigation/ Sudden Unexpected Infant Death, Rural Communities Opioid Response Program MAT Expansion Project  
[ctb4f@mtmail.mtsu.edu](mailto:ctb4f@mtmail.mtsu.edu)  
[christina.byrd@mtsu.edu](mailto:christina.byrd@mtsu.edu)

**Gabiral Cathey, B.S.**  
Office of Prevention Science and Recovery – Statewide Projects  
[gabiral.cathey@mtsu.edu](mailto:gabiral.cathey@mtsu.edu)

**Sarah Gwinn, MPA**

Office of Prevention Science and Recovery – Rutherford County  
[sarah.gwinn@mtsu.edu](mailto:sarah.gwinn@mtsu.edu)

**Jill Thomas, M.Ed.**

Office of Prevention Science and Recovery – H.U.S.T.L.E. Respite Housing and Infrastructure Projects  
[jill.thomas@mtsu.edu](mailto:jill.thomas@mtsu.edu)

**Linda Williams, M.A.**

Mental Health Awareness Training – Mental Health First Aid and QPR  
[lindad.williams@mtsu.edu](mailto:lindad.williams@mtsu.edu)

## **STUDENT ASSISTANTS AND INTERNS:**

**Brooke Springer**

M.P.H. Student, MTSU Public Health Program  
Spring 2026 Intern

## **MTSU MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS TRAINING FACULTY TRAINERS:**

**Mary Beth Asbury, Ph.D.**

Department of Communication Studies  
[marybeth.asbury@mtsu.edu](mailto:marybeth.asbury@mtsu.edu)

**Deborah Lee, Ph.D., RN, NBC-HWC**

School of Nursing, NHC Chair of Excellence  
[deborah.lee@mtsu.edu](mailto:deborah.lee@mtsu.edu)

**Seth Marshall, Ph.D.**

Department of Psychology  
[seth.marshall@mtsu.edu](mailto:seth.marshall@mtsu.edu)

**CHHS STAFF AND FACULTY PARTNERS** *continued from page 34***CAMPUS AND FACULTY GRANT PARTNERS:****Angela Bowman, Ph.D.**Department of Health and Human Performance  
[angie.bowman@mtsu.edu](mailto:angie.bowman@mtsu.edu)**John M. Burchfield, M.B.A.**University College  
[john.burchfield@mtsu.edu](mailto:john.burchfield@mtsu.edu)**Sara Shirley, Ph.D.**Department of Economics and Finance  
and Data Science Institute  
[sara.shirley@mtsu.edu](mailto:sara.shirley@mtsu.edu)**Chipper Smith, M.P.H.**Department of Health and Human Performance  
[chipper.smith@mtsu.edu](mailto:chipper.smith@mtsu.edu)**Jeff Stark, Ph.D.**Department of Economics and Finance and  
Data Science Institute  
[jeff.stark@mtsu.edu](mailto:jeff.stark@mtsu.edu)**Kahler W. Stone, Dr.P.H.**Department of Health and Human Performance  
Public Health Program  
[kahler.stone@mtsu.edu](mailto:kahler.stone@mtsu.edu)**David Jean**

Graduate Student, Data Science Institute

**Pallavi Suram**

Graduate Student, Data Science Institute

**Sara Rodriguez Molina**Graduate Student, Department of Health and  
Human Performance, Public Health Program**FUNDING PARTNERS:****Cannon County Opioid Abatement  
Task Force****Health Resources and Services Administration  
(HRSA) Rural Communities Opioid  
Response Program****Rutherford County Opioid Board****Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services  
Administration (SAMHSA)****Tennessee Department of Health****Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council****Williamson County Opioid Task Force**



***"Storms make trees take deeper roots."***

**— Dolly Parton, musician and philanthropist**

**MIDDLE  
TENNESSEE**  
STATE UNIVERSITY.

I AM *true* **BLUE.**

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

1025-7988 / Middle Tennessee State University does not discriminate against students, employees, or applicants for admission or employment on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, status as a protected veteran, genetic information, or any other legally protected class with respect to all employment, programs, and activities sponsored by MTSU. The Assistant to the President for Civil Rights Compliance has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies and can be reached at Cope Administration Building 116, 1301 East Main Street, Murfreesboro, TN 37132; [Christy.Sigler@mtsu.edu](mailto:Christy.Sigler@mtsu.edu); or 615-898-2185. The MTSU policy on non-discrimination can be found at [crc.mtsu.edu](http://crc.mtsu.edu).

Gifted by the MTSU Student Ambassadors  
Guidance, installation and support provided by  
MTSU Concrete Industry Management  
and the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration.

Dedicated October 22, 2005