

MTSU Center for Health and Human Services Newsletter



*Better Health and Well-Being
for Tennesseans and That of the Nation*



ACTION

“THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN, THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO WATCH THINGS HAPPEN, AND THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO WONDER WHAT HAPPENED.”

—**Jim Lovell**, retired American astronaut, command module pilot of Apollo 8, naval aviator, and mechanical engineer

Making things happen! That’s what the Center for Health and Human Services (CHHS) has always strived for. The center had a productive fall semester and continues its work this spring to promote better health and well-being for all, through projects and research with local, state, and national reach. Our focus word over the last quarter of 2020 and continuing into the current quarter remains “Action.”

It is an honor to be able to serve and be a part of the solutions to many health issues impacting so many today. Those who have not had an opportunity to read the CHHS December newsletter are encouraged to take a look via the CHHS website. Much was shared about how we survived a very challenging time as a center and how we were able to regroup and move forward, coming out better positioned than ever before.

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*Cynthia Chafin,
M.Ed., MCHES® CHHS
associate director for
community programs*

We continue to “dream big” with goals and opportunities for impact on our campus community, in Tennessee communities throughout the state, and with

national reach. We are committed to making things happen that support better health and well-being for all. COVID may have thrown out a few speed bumps—OK, a LOT of speed bumps—but we have risen to the challenge and have done quite well “making things happen.”

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In the last six months, the center has received over \$1 million in new funding for three new research and public-health-focused projects to supplement its existing portfolio of work, doubling its staff and increasing its reach to serve the public in greater numbers than ever before. The spring and summer semesters required significant changes to existing CHHS projects to ensure goals and objectives were fully met during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. But the pandemic also created opportunities. One such opportunity was a COVID-19 Rapid Response research grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. CHHS, in partnership with Fermentation Science faculty from MTSU's School of Agriculture, applied for the grant and was successfully funded. This project will create agriculture, health, and STEM-focused curriculum for teachers, parents of children learning remotely, and home-school families in an 11-state area for students from kindergarten to community college. The project launched in October, and preliminary work has kept CHHS staff and faculty very busy and engaged with stakeholders from 10 other states in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) southeastern region, along with other campus faculty and partners. The goal is "to develop and deploy rapid, reliable, and readily adoptable COVID-19 agricultural strategies across the food and agriculture enterprise," according to the USDA. The project is featured in this quarter's newsletter with more details in the article that follows.

A few other recent CHHS highlights include:

- CHHS received a Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) planning grant, which also began in October, from the Health

Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The effort will focus on Wilson County, Tennessee. COVID-19 is not the only epidemic facing this country, and data indicates that substance abuse has increased significantly during the pandemic for many counties as people reach for substances as a coping mechanism, creating an even greater need for this work.

This planning grant sets the stage for up to \$1 million in future funding to implement effective strategies and programs in



conjunction with the community-led group DrugFree WilCo. The work done in Wilson County through this grant may serve as a model for other counties in the state, particularly for data management and tracking of opioid overdoses and deaths. The center has engaged the MTSU Data Science Institute as a partner in this important work, along with the Department of Health and Human Performance. This project was introduced in the December 2020 newsletter, and DrugFree WilCo is featured in this newsletter's Community Partner Spotlight.

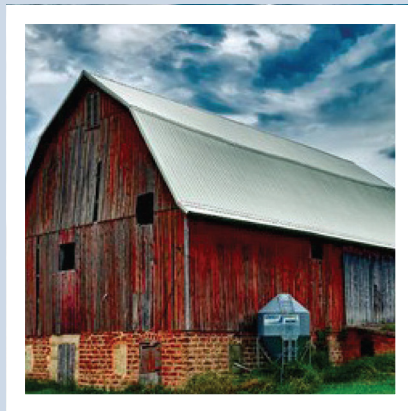
- The center received a grant to address environmental health and water quality from the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), an effort that began in February with involvement from several partners including the MTSU Center for Environmental Education, MTSU Environmental Health and Safety Services, MTSU School of Agriculture, and members of the TDEC Nutrient Reduction Task Force. We look forward to featuring more on this project and partners in future newsletter editions.

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Whom Do We Serve?

The Center for Health and Human Services collaborates with MTSU faculty and staff, and public and private organizations and partners, to develop and implement local, regional, and statewide programs, projects, and research activities designed to improve the health and well-being of Tennesseans and of the nation. 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, dietetics students in the Department of Human Sciences and CHHS staff

CHHS Campus Resources

MTSU Mental Health First Aid | Over 700 have been trained through MTSU Mental Health First Aid in the past 24 months. Want to learn more?



Please visit the CHHS website for more information. Mental Health First Aid 2021 workshop dates and times will be posted as details are finalized.

mtsu.edu/chhs/MentalHealthFirstAid.php

Links to mental health articles and resources are posted on MTSU-CHHS social media pages.

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CHHS Partners with Global UNTOLD Project to Support Students



MTSU and MTSU’s Center for Health and Human Services continue their partnership with UNTOLD Originals, a global storytelling movement, to create the national pilot *Campus Diaries: Behind Every Smile*.

The *Campus Diaries* is a “Dear Diary” showcase of students’ stories. The “Dear Diary” pages are anonymous and serve as a therapeutic outlet for students to share their struggles, while also providing inspiration to others who see students successfully overcoming life’s challenges and obstacles. Diaries have always been considered a safe outlet for writing down feelings, experiences, and thoughts. Creating a campus diary allows students to express how they feel and to see that they are not alone by reading others’ “Dear Diary” submissions.

The *Campus Diaries* project launched in spring 2020 right before COVID-19 emerged, and 50 students submitted entries throughout the semester. During the fall, there were more than 100 submissions. The initiative recently kicked off for the Spring 2021 semester, and in addition to collecting stories from MTSU, the project is expanding to other universities and campuses across the state.

Earlier plans to do podcasts and photojournalism exhibits—put on hold because of COVID-19—may return later in the year. Students are encouraged to share their thoughts on whatever is on their minds—challenges with being a student, COVID-19 stress and concerns, or just life in general. Information for crisis support is provided for students who need intervention.



Samantha Udell

We are pleased that Samantha Udell, a Community and Public Health student from the Department of Health and Human Performance, is completing her internship with CHHS and the UNTOLD project this semester. Samantha will be responsible for

facilitating efforts to expand the project to other campuses across the state.

For more information on the project, visit the CHHS website mtsu.edu/chhs/campus-diaries.php or UNTOLD Campus Diaries at untoldproject.org/the-campus-diaries/.

Staff Spotlight

Rose Chilsen and Ash Abro

Rose Chilsen and Ash Abro are senior Dietetics students at MTSU and joined the CHHS team in summer 2019. As project assistants and student ambassadors with the grant-funded initiative Blue Raiders Drink Up: Healthy Choices for Healthy Students, both have been fundamental in the program’s implementation and success.

Rose and Ash kicked off the program with events across campus and social media campaigns. Together they provide healthy beverage education; promote the many free resources offered through the program, including dietetic counseling and personal training; and distribute promotional materials like creatively branded Blue Raiders Drink Up water bottles. Since COVID-19, they have shifted to all virtual education and activities ranging from virtual wellness conferences and workshops, game nights, social media outreach, and cooking classes. The unforeseen circumstances have fortunately led to greater accessibility and unique collaborations. We are so proud of how they have grown into their roles at CHHS and are grateful for their continued adaptability and creativity.

Rose is a driven student and plans to become a registered dietitian. She is waiting to hear back from dietetic internships, and we cannot wait to see where she goes next. Rose is the creative foundation to the program. This is no surprise; in her free time, she enjoys sewing, painting, and playing guitar. She is not only creative, but also motivated, versatile, and compassionate. She is best known around campus for her roles as a supplemental instruction leader for Human Anatomy and Physiology II students; vice



Rose Chilsen

president of the Food Science Association at MTSU; and an active member of MTSU’s Nutrition and Dietetics Association. Originally from Kenosha, Wisconsin, Rose loves the warmer weather of Tennessee but misses her home on Lake Michigan. “I am grateful for the

friendships, opportunities, and growth I have found here at MTSU,” Rose said.



Ash Abro

Ash’s dedication, work ethic, and amiableness are some of the many traits admired by his coworkers at CHHS. As a Tennessee native, he serves his community as presiding president for the Student Tennessee Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and former mentor with

tnAchieves. More locally, he is secretary for MTSU Food Science Association and an active member of MTSU’s Nutrition and Dietetics Association. Following graduation, he will

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STAFF SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 5*

continue his education with a master’s program in science. Ash’s enthusiasm for science and health has been clear for some time. “I knew I wanted to be a dietitian since my sophomore year of high school.” Ash hopes to become a clinical dietitian and is interested in specializing in oncology or diabetes.

With a shared passion for nutrition and health science, Rose and Ash have loved working together on this grant, alongside their project coordinator, Christina Byrd, M.P.H., CHES®. “Rose and Ash have been pivotal in the success of [Blue Raiders Drink Up]. Their knowledge, enthusiasm, and work ethic has complemented this program immensely. In every task they surpass my expectations by thinking outside of the box and approaching things from a unique

perspective. CHHS has been so lucky to have them; we will miss them both so much, but we are so excited to see what they accomplish,” Byrd said.

Rose and Ash agree their favorite aspect of the project is “reading and replying to weekly discussion posts with [Blue Raiders Drink Up] cooking class students.”

“Seeing the students’ personal growth in their health journeys from week one to week four is both gratifying and affirming,” Rose said.

As future dietitians, Rose and Ash have enjoyed the experience of working with registered dietitian and dietetics faculty Lisa Shepherd, and providing nutrition education to fellow students. Both will graduate this May. We are sorry to see them go but are so excited for their bright futures.

Want to donate to further the work of MTSU’s CHHS?

MTSU CHHS operates primarily through external funding. To continue our mission of promoting health and well-being for all Tennesseans and that of our nation, we need financial resources to continue our work. We operate from public and private grants as well as sponsorships and donations.

Please consider a donation of any size, which will go directly to CHHS. Visit mtsu.edu/chhs, click on Donate Now, and specify that your donation is for CHHS. The site accepts MasterCard, VISA, and American Express.

mtsu.edu/chhs • Follow us on social media



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- The center recently completed its second of three years of a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant, which supports the Mental Health First Aid program on campus. Over 700 students, faculty, and staff have been trained in Mental Health First Aid since the program was implemented in 2018. CHHS is currently seeking continuation funding to carry the project beyond October 2021.
- Multiple campus and external collaborators and partners continue to be involved in CHHS projects and research, and information on each will continue to be shared via this quarterly newsletter, the CHHS website, and social media updates.

*Cynthia Chafin, M.Ed., MCHES® CHHS
associate director for community programs*

Project Spotlight and CHHS Campus Collaborations

CHHS Partners with School of Agriculture’s Fermentation Science Program on U.S. Department of Agriculture COVID-19 Rapid Response Grant: Innovating Educational Experiences in Food and Agricultural Sciences in the Time of Social Distancing

CHHS, in partnership with the School of Agriculture’s Fermentation Science degree program, received \$816,000 for the proposed “STEMsational Ag: The Virtual Farm” project from the USDA’s COVID-19 Rapid Response funding opportunity. This project will provide educational content for students from kindergarten to community college that is appropriate for traditional school settings (distance and in-person instruction) as well as children being homeschooled in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Fermentation Science



The STEMsational Ag content will be culturally and geographically appropriate for use in other states with similar agricultural and social environments.

These resources will be quickly adapted and redeployed, allowing for rapid dissemination and implementation across the 11-state USDA Southern Region (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia). The curriculum will consist

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New CHHS Team Member

Jill Thomas, coordinator, *STEMsational Ag: The Virtual Farm*



Jill Thomas rejoined the CHHS team in January 2021, but she is no stranger to the center. Thomas served as a project coordinator on numerous projects from 2007 to 2013. During her time away from

the CHHS, she was an elementary school educator as well as a full-time professor in MTSU’s College of Education. Thomas received her master’s degree in Elementary Education from MTSU and her Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish with a minor in Biology from the University of Minnesota. Her experience in the Tennessee public schools as well as her work as a professor in the School of Education will be a valuable addition to the center.

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 7*

of modules and audiovisual resources that are recommended by grade level, and age-group-tailored projects and assignments. This approach allows for greater reach in terms of student age, empowers formal and nonformal educators to guide students, and provides delivery options regardless of technology access.

The CHHS associate director of community programs, Cynthia Chafin, M.Ed., MCHES®,



Cynthia Chafin

says, "I, along with my colleagues Drs. Tony Johnston and Keely O'Brien of the School of Agriculture, are excited to engage in a project which will help educators, parents, and students during this historically challenging time. Through educational content and

interactive activities, not only will children learn about agriculture and STEM-related topics, they may also start thinking about careers in agriculture. The content also supports good health and healthy living, which is a great fit



Dr. Keely O'Brien



Dr. Tony Johnston

with the CHHS mission. We are aggressively moving forward with this project and are very grateful to the USDA for their support."

A project coordinator, Jill Thomas, was recently hired (see "New CHHS Team Member" on page 7), and Chandra Story, an associate professor in the Department of Health and Human Performance, is serving as project evaluator. Faculty from various departments are participating with curriculum development.

USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA) announced the award in November, along with seven other projects, as part of



an investment of more than \$10.5 million to support educators across the nation. These institutions are deploying innovative techniques and technologies to continue offering high-quality skill development during these unprecedented times. "The work of educators in Extension and technical colleges across America to persist in providing effective learning experiences for youth and families has been truly remarkable over the past eight months," said USDA-NIFA Acting Director Parag Chitnis. "Whether they are 4-H educators delivering programs online, community or junior colleges teaching technical skills, or Cooperative Extension educators serving local farmers, gardeners, and families, we are truly inspired by their hard work. NIFA is proud to fund these innovative projects that will not only help during this current health crises, but also will provide innovative STEM program delivery for the future."

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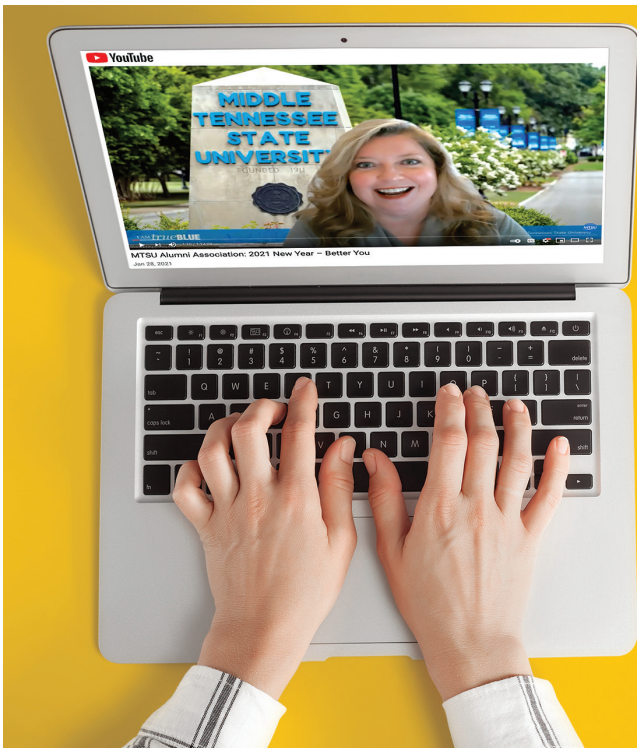
Other Campus Collaborations

We **love** our campus collaborations!

MTSU Alumni Relations and CHHS offer webinar to alumni on healthy habits, tips, and tricks for 2021.

MTSU Alumni Relations and CHHS co-sponsored their second joint webinar for MTSU alumni on January 19, "New Year, Better You; Healthy Habits, Tips and Tricks for 2021." In just one hour, participants heard from three health and wellness experts about small changes that can be implemented to create a healthier and happier lifestyle for the new year. According to Rhonda King, assistant director of Alumni

Relations, there were over 100 documented attendees from 12 states across the United States, and one attendee from Kenya. The two offices are planning future webinars on various health-focused topics that may be of interest to alumni, as well as to introduce alumni to the work of CHHS. If you would like to view this webinar and multiple others, a recording can be found here: mtalumni.com/webinars.



MTSU Alumni Relations and CHHS co-sponsored their second joint webinar for MTSU alumni on January 19, "New Year, Better You; Healthy Habits, Tips and Tricks for 2021."



Community Partner Collaborations

CHHS partners with DrugFree WilCo in Wilson County to address the opioid epidemic

In addition to the many collaborations and partnerships MTSU Center for Health and Human Services has fostered on campus, the center very much values its community partners. In 2020, CHHS formed a research partnership with DrugFree WilCo to address the opioid epidemic in rural Wilson County communities as part of a \$200,000 planning grant CHHS applied for and received from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), an agency of the U.S. Department



of Health and Human Services. Working closely with DrugFree WilCo's leadership team, with program coordinator Michael Ayalon, and with project assistant Chipper Smith,

the community recently completed a needs assessment and gap analysis with a goal of submitting a grant application this spring to HRSA for up to \$1.0 million, which will fund needed services and resources identified through the assessment process. The CHHS team and DrugFree WilCo also engaged MTSU's Data Science Institute, led by Charles Apigian and Ryan Otter, and Kahler Stone

of the Department of Health and Human Performance to assist with project activities.

Who is DrugFree WilCo?

DrugFree WilCo started in May 2018 through Wilson County Mayor Randall Hutto's office. Community leaders were assembled to discuss an incident in which a local resident, Lisa Tapley, lost her son Thomas after an opioid overdose.

Tapley tried to find local assistance for her son's treatment after a work injury to his back, but they were traveling to neighboring states because they were not aware of the resources available in Wilson County. Thomas' story ended with street pills that were laced with fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid that is 80–100 times more powerful than morphine. Leaders in Wilson County decided to take action immediately.

A board of directors was assembled, and a mission statement was developed for the new coalition. Twelve community sectors participated in the initial meeting, including a youth component, parents, media, school administrators, youth-serving organizations,

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COMMUNITY PARTNER COLLABORATIONS*continued from page 10*

law enforcement, religious organizations, health care professionals, local politicians, civic groups, and the business community.

DrugFree WilCo meets monthly and has a coalition of up to 180 volunteers. They are dedicated to uniting the community of Wilson County with the mission to prevent and reduce drug misuse and addiction among youth and adults, and to provide education, communication, and awareness of resources.

In December 2020 and January 2021, focus groups were held with various leaders in Wilson County.

“It was fascinating to capture all of this qualitative data from our leaders on the problems we are facing as a community,” said Ayalon, coordinator of the Wilson County Rural Communities Opioid Response Program. “Some of the solutions they came

up with include a diversion center [called the PIC Center, Preventing Incarcerations in Communities], a jail-based reentry transition specialist, education in businesses and youth organizations, a real-time [overdose] map for Wilson County, a Naloxone distribution program, and a plan for transportation to treatment appointments. We’re going to make a difference in Wilson County, and it’s because the entire community came together to brainstorm solutions and take a different approach than what we are accustomed to. We have an incredible team at DrugFree WilCo, and this new partnership with MTSU has opened doors for us that we couldn’t do on our own.”

For more information on DrugFree WilCo, visit its website at drugfreewilco.org. CHHS and DrugFree WilCo will continue to post project and other organizational updates on their websites and on social media at [facebook.com/drugfreewilco](https://www.facebook.com/drugfreewilco).

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 8*

“It was quickly evident at the onset of the pandemic that agricultural systems, families, and workforce development programs—key focus areas for USDA and our partners—would be greatly impacted by the changes facing our society,” Chitnis said. “USDA-NIFA is uniquely positioned to fund rapid response research, outreach, and education efforts, while continuing to support our base research, education, Extension, and 4-H youth development programs that respond daily to producer and consumer needs, large and small, across the nation.”

For more information on “STEMsational Ag: The Virtual Farm” please contact Jill Thomas, project coordinator, at jill.thomas@mtsu.edu.

Information concerning the grant can be found on the USDA website at [nifa.usda.gov/press-release/usda-nifa-invests-over-105-million-support-educators-4-h-and-others-workforce-training](https://www.nifa.usda.gov/press-release/usda-nifa-invests-over-105-million-support-educators-4-h-and-others-workforce-training). CHHS will continue to post updates on its website.

This work is supported by the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative, Education and Workforce Development Program [grant no. 2021-67037-33380/project accession no. 1024880], from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Institute of Food and Agriculture. “Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and should not be construed to represent any official USDA or U.S. Government determination or policy.”

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