

# MTSU Center for Health and Human Services Newsletter



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



## ACTION

**"PEOPLE WHO SAY IT CANNOT BE DONE SHOULD NOT INTERRUPT THOSE WHO ARE DOING IT."**

—George Bernard Shaw

In 2020, CHHS has had both its most challenging quarter and one of its best yet. Action is where we have been since March—mobilizing to dig out of the rubble from COVID-19 and reinvent our existing work while securing over \$1 million in new funding to support the center’s operations and mission, all while honoring its legacy and historical successes.

*Cynthia Chafin, M.Ed., MCHES® CHHS Associate Director for Community Programs*

**So much has happened since the inaugural MTSU Center for Health and Human Services newsletter published in March. No one could have seen what 2020 had in store.** For the second quarter of the calendar year, CHHS chose to focus on **resiliency** and reinventing the way our team accomplishes the center’s work so that goals, objectives, obligations, and opportunities for service

represented through the center’s portfolio of existing research, programs, and projects continued without interruption. As many on campus can understand, refining these new processes was a tremendous undertaking, yet the CHHS team did it, as did so many others at MTSU. With some modifications, CHHS was able to fulfill every goal and objective of the  
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CHHS staff (l-r): Linda Williams, mental health first aid program coordinator; Christina Byrd, program coordinator and special projects; Cynthia Chafin, associate director for community programs; Sarah Gwinn, grants coordinator; and Angela Mueller, mental health first aid trainer. (Photo does not include new CHHS members as of the time of publication.)

**ACTION** *continued from page 1*

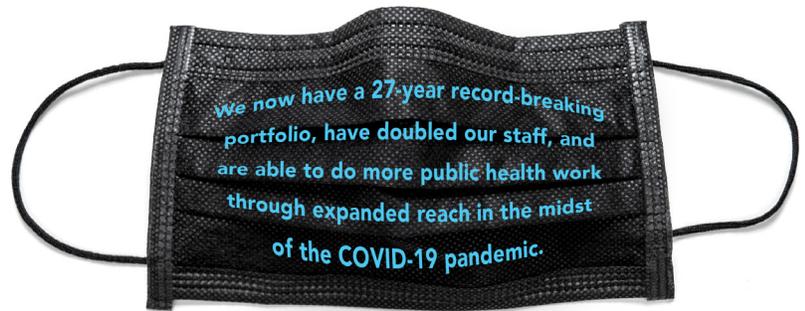
center's externally funded work, and in some cases we even exceeded goals. Our team has established a new normal and is doing well despite tremendous challenges and barriers. We are most grateful for the support—and grace—shown by campus administration, colleagues, and our funders as we transitioned to a new way of doing business while still working toward the mission and vision of better health and well-being for Tennesseans and building upon the successful history of the center and legacy of its founders.

The third quarter for CHHS focused on opportunity and seeking new external funding to support the ongoing operations of the center. In a climate of uncertainty on many levels—health, economics, social unrest—this was not an easy task. As budgets were being cut everywhere, with many across the country losing jobs, businesses, and livelihoods as a result of COVID-19, finding money to support the public health work of CHHS was a challenge. While our MTSU family has been encouraging and supportive, the outside world can be very discouraging. There were skeptics, and some said securing dollars in the current climate was just not going to happen, but “good luck next year.”

I am very pleased to share that the center has had its best quarter yet, receiving upward of \$1 million in external federal funding for new research, projects, and programs, including Rapid Response to Novel Coronavirus dollars. We now have a 27-year record-breaking portfolio, have been able to more than double our staff, and have significantly increased our reach and ability to have greater impact on multiple public health issues facing Tennesseans as well as others across

the country, all achieved in the midst of a pandemic. What a great “silver lining” to this disappointing time in history—an opportunity to continue to serve our fellow Tennesseans, and to make national impact, through the important work that these dollars will fund, which will support better health in a time when good health is everything.

The fourth quarter for CHHS will continue to focus on “action” and continuing the mission of the center and, by extension, that of the university. Our state faces continuing health

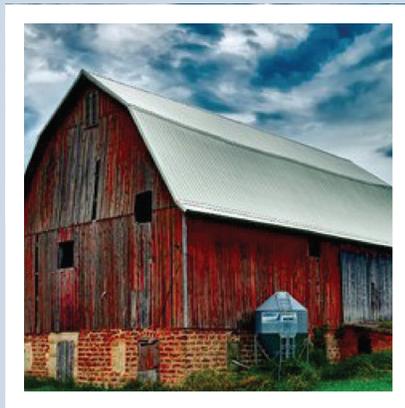


challenges, in addition to COVID-19, and some have worsened (read about our work with opioids and substance abuse and misuse later in this newsletter). CHHS looks forward to providing updates on the work of the center and how we are meeting needs that affect the health of our communities and citizens. The CHHS team is honored to be “doing,” and nothing—including COVID-19—is going to interrupt our commitment to the center’s mission and vision of promoting better health and well-being for all. We are honored to be part of this amazing campus community and to support the greater mission of the university through our work. While there may be continuing challenges ahead, we will continue to “do” and face each challenge as it comes.

# 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](https://mtsu.edu/chhs/MentalHealthFirstAid.php)

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

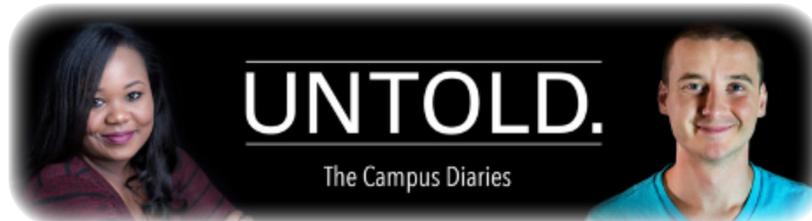
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# CHHS Partners with Global UNTOLD Project to Support Students



MTSU and MTSU Center for Health and Human Services is partnering with UNTOLD Originals, a global storytelling movement, to create a national pilot titled *Campus Diaries: Behind Every Smile* to help fill a need to “share one’s story” and to be heard.

The *Campus Diaries* is a “Dear Diary” showcase of student stories. The “Dear Diary” pages are anonymous and serve a dual purpose as a therapeutic outlet for students to share their struggles and as inspiration to others as they see fellow students successfully overcoming life’s obstacles. Diaries have always been considered a safe outlet for people to write down their feelings, their experiences, and their thoughts. Creating a campus diary allows the students to express how they

feel, and students also get to see that they are not alone by reading other “Dear Diary” submissions. The project launched in Spring 2020 right before COVID-19 emerged, and 50 students submitted entries throughout the semester. This fall, there have been upward of 150 submissions as of mid-November, and they continue to come in. Students are encouraged to share their thoughts on whatever is on their minds—challenges of being a student, COVID-19 stress and concerns, or just life in general. Information for crisis support is provided for students who need intervention. For more information on the project, visit the CHHS website [mtsu.edu/chhs/campus-diaries.php](https://mtsu.edu/chhs/campus-diaries.php) or UNTOLD Campus Diaries at [untoldproject.org/the-campus-diaries/](https://untoldproject.org/the-campus-diaries/).

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

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

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

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



# Staff Spotlight

## Sarah Gwinn, Grants Coordinator

Meet Sarah Gwinn, grant writer/program coordinator, who began her career with MTSU CHHS in March 2018. Her skills have grown



from preparing state grant applications to even more complex, multifaceted federal grant opportunities. She credits the supportive atmosphere at CHHS, where she is surrounded by a motivated team, much like herself. Her favorite project so far was the "All Children Excelling:

An Adverse Childhood Experiences Toolkit." Gwinn not only wrote the grant, but she also served as the project coordinator once the grant was awarded. This toolkit, a collaborative effort of the amazing CHHS team, is now free for all higher educational institutions to implement. Gwinn is not only a hardworking employee; she is also a new mom, which brings another rewarding career to her full life. If she gets any time to herself, she enjoys knitting, sewing, and embroidery.

Gwinn has some wonderful advice that applies to not only students, but anyone: "Learn how to be organized." She recommends, "Get a planner system that works for you (digital, paper, bullet) and use it. Put everything in there that will help you incrementally reach your goals, and take great pleasure in marking those off as you accomplish them." She adds,

"Seeing what you've completed helps to motivate you to keep working on the tasks you have yet to accomplish." Gwinn advises students or new employees to find a mentor in their field of study or line of work, as they "know what it takes to succeed and would love to share and help others succeed too." When asked, she says the best advice she ever received was, "Asking for help is not a weakness, and neither is unashamedly owning your mistakes and consequences."

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This young lady beams happiness and her welcoming smile brightens the dreariest of days. No matter how busy Sarah Gwinn may be, she never loses her sense of humor. Her determination to learn and succeed will ensure her future will be as bright as she is.

## New CHHS Team Members

**Michelle Sterlingshires**, *MTSU Mental Health First Aid Project Assistant.*



Sterlingshires joined the CHHS team in the spring and provides data support for the Mental Health First Aid project, as well as coordinates the social media campaign for the project—which is funded

by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Sterlingshires comes to CHHS with a master of arts in applied statistics/quantitative psychology from MTSU and a wealth of experience in research and data management.

**Anna Novack**, *Blue Raiders Drink Up/Project Diabetes Dietitian.* Novack joined the CHHS



team this summer and offers one-on-one dietetics counseling through Student Health Services as part of CHHS' Blue Raiders Drink Up project funded under an agreement with the state of Tennessee

Project Diabetes initiative. Novack is a registered dietitian and is a graduate of University of Wisconsin–Madison. She completed her internship through Lipscomb University in Nashville. She offers in-person and virtual visits for students referred by

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**NEW CHHS TEAM MEMBERS** *continued from page 6*

health services providers or who are self-referred and have an interest in improving their nutrition habits and overall health.



**Michael ("Mike") Ayalon**, Rural Communities Opioid Response Program Coordinator. Ayalon is a nationally recognized

public speaker for university students, fraternities, sororities, and alumni on topics including alcohol/drug abuse prevention and is on the board of directors for DrugFree WilCo, a community coalition on public health and substance abuse prevention, treatment, and facilitation. Ayalon will be working with various Wilson County stakeholders, including DrugFree Wilco, the lead community partner in the grant, and with the MTSU team to lead the community assessment process in addressing the opioid crisis in Wilson County rural communities. Read more about the RCORP grant in the "Campus Collaborations" section of this newsletter and Ayalon's impressive biosketch on the CHHS website at [mtsu.edu/chhs/staff.php](https://mtsu.edu/chhs/staff.php).

**Chipper Smith**, RCORP Student Assistant. Smith, a student in the Department



of Health and Human Performance master of public health program, will be assisting Ayalon with the implementation of the RCORP grant to address opioids in Wilson County. Smith comes to us

with a background in exercise science, and that has spurred him into a desire to promote health in a broader way to the public. His home is Wilson County when he is not in Murfreesboro.

**Amy Dotson**, STEMsational Ag Student Assistant. Dotson will be working with Dr. Tony Johnston, Dr. Keely O'Brien, and



Cynthia Chafin as the team develops and disseminates the new "STEMsational Ag: The Virtual Farm" curriculum for

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## Project Spotlight and CHHS Campus Collaborations

**CHHS Partners with the Data Science Institute and the Department of Health and Human Performance to Fight the Opioid Epidemic in Rural Wilson County Communities—Rural Communities Opioid Response Program**

With federal funding through the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, CHHS is partnering with the MTSU



*Charlie Apigian*

Data Science Institute to address the opioid epidemic in rural areas of Wilson County through the Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP). The center will use the planning grant to conduct a needs assessment and gap analysis and to develop a

strategic plan for Wilson County to address this public health challenge. Campus partners in the 18-month endeavor include MTSU's Department of Health and Human Performance and MTSU's Data Science Institute.

Early discussions have already identified data-related issues on several levels. "The Data

Science Institute is pleased to partner with the MTSU Center for Health and Human Services on its recently funded Rural Community Opioid Response Program grant, which addresses opioids in Wilson County. Assisting with the data needs of this project will provide the project staff and local community leaders and stakeholders with information vital to developing an effective strategy for changing the trajectory of the opioid epidemic in Wilson County,"



*Ryan Otter*

says Charles Apigian, director of the Data Science Institute and professor of information systems and analytics. Ryan Otter, Data Science Institute co-director and professor of environmental toxicology in the Department of Biology will also be working on the project.

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**PROJECT SPOTLIGHT** *continued from page 8*



Cynthia Chafin

Cynthia Chafin, CHHS associate director for community programs, and Kahler Stone, an assistant professor of health and human performance, are serving as co-investigators on the project. **“While**

**so much emphasis has been on COVID-19, we cannot forget that there remains an epidemic in this country—and within our own state and local communities—with**

**opioids and substance abuse,”** Chafin said.



Kahler Stone

CHHS is pleased to partner with the Department of Health and Human Performance to carry out the important work of this grant. Stone

said, “I appreciate the opportunity to partner with CHHS on its recent Rural Communities Opioid Response Program award from the Health Resources and Services Administration and to contribute toward the community needs assessment and gap analysis focusing on opioids in Wilson County. Being a faculty member of the Public Health Program in the Health and Human Performance Department, I know how important planning at the local level is in addressing public health issues. I am pleased to represent HHP and to contribute in a meaningful way as co-investigator of this important, community-focused grant.”

Wilson County’s DrugFree WilCo is the lead community agency participating in the grant activities. We look forward to a



feature article on DrugFree WilCo in future editions of this newsletter. Please see the “Staff Spotlight” section of this newsletter to

meet RCORP Coordinator Michael “Mike” Ayalon, who is leading the efforts with the project and who works directly with DrugFree WilCo, as well as graduate student Chipper Smith, who is serving as student assistant. For more information on DrugFree WilCo, visit its website at [drugfreewilco.org](http://drugfreewilco.org). CHHS will continue to post project updates on its website, [mtsu.edu/chhs](http://mtsu.edu/chhs), and on social media.

**NEW CHHS TEAM MEMBERS** *continued from page 7*

use during COVID-19 and beyond. After finishing her undergraduate degree in microbiology at MTSU, Dotson was accepted into the graduate program for fermentation science starting in Spring 2020. She hopes to turn her

love of microorganisms into a career in dairy fermentation and probiotics. More information will be shared in an upcoming edition of this newsletter about this exciting new curriculum and the grant funding supporting it.

## Other Campus Collaborations

We **love** our campus collaborations!

### MTSU Alumni Relations and CHHS team up to offer anti-anxiety webinar to MTSU alumni

MTSU Alumni Relations and CHHS co-sponsored their first joint webinar for MTSU alumni on Aug. 20, 2020: "Managing Anxiety: Coping Tips and Strategies for Within Yourself, Children, and Others" as a topic of interest for families dealing with the challenges of at-home education and family management during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Rhonda King, assistant director for Alumni Relations, there were 291 documented attendees from 21 states and from as far away as Bangladesh. The two offices are planning more webinars on health-focused topics that may be of interest to alumni, as well as to introduce alumni to the work of CHHS and its many contributions to the MTSU campus, to all 95 Tennessee counties, and to others nationwide through its multistate partnerships.

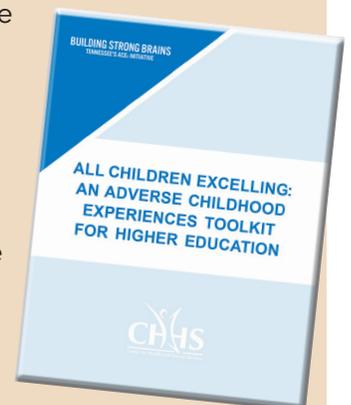
### "All Children Excelling" | CHHS partners with eight MTSU departments and programs to promote a better trained workforce

The Center for Health and Human Services received a "Building Strong Brains" grant from the Tennessee Department of Children's Services in July 2018. The grant recently concluded, but the program is now self-sustaining. The purpose of this grant was to create an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) toolkit that could be applied across multiple disciplines, with a focus on educating as many future



professionals as possible on the risks and impact of ACEs in the lives of Tennessee's children. While the grant ended, departments have been encouraged to continue using the toolkit to educate new students each semester about ACEs and to better prepare them for their careers.

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**"ALL CHILDREN EXCELLING"***continued from page 10*

The "All Children Excelling" toolkit is the product of the yearlong endeavor. It was developed in partnership among CHHS and eight MTSU departments and programs, and with support from FrameWorks Institute and Tennessee State University's Center of Excellence for Learning Sciences. The toolkit provides faculty with recommended resources, lesson plan outlines, in-class and out-of-class assignment suggestions, and visual aids to use in their classrooms.

The "All Children Excelling" toolkit contains five lesson plan modules that address topics relating to adverse childhood experiences. Module 1 provides an overview of ACEs, while modules 2 through 4 address deeper and more complex topics. Module 5 provides topics that are specialized for particular disciplines: Community and Public Health, Early Childhood Development, Elementary and Special Education, Public Policy, and Library Sciences. In addition, the toolkit includes a USB drive containing a majority of the resources referenced in the toolkit, as well as other helpful information. These modules are designed to be easily integrated into almost any higher education classroom across a broad range of disciplines.

The Center for Health and Human Services has additional resources available to MTSU faculty for use in conjunction with the



toolkit. CHHS has copies of the Brain Architecture Game available for classroom checkout. If faculty are interested in showing the movies "Resilience" or "Paper Tigers" as part of their toolkit integration, they may reserve the DVDs through the center.

Please contact Sarah Gwinn at 615-494-8986 or [sarah.gwinn@mtsu.edu](mailto:sarah.gwinn@mtsu.edu) for more information about these resources or to request a hard copy of the "All Children Excelling" toolkit. A digital version of "All Children Excelling: An Adverse Childhood Experiences Toolkit" is available for download at [mtsu.edu/chhs/publications.php](https://mtsu.edu/chhs/publications.php).

# Community Partner Collaborations

## MTSU CHHS Sleep Research Consortium Partners— Research May Have National Impact



In addition to the collaborations and partnerships the MTSU Center for Health and Human Services has fostered on campus, the center very much values its community partners. In 2019, CHHS formed a research partnership to highlight the importance of sleep quality in the overall health of Tennesseans and that of the nation. The university's Sleep Research Consortium (SRC) was formed to perform research and increase public awareness of how important sleep is to human existence, health, and well-being. An academic partnership among MTSU, the Sleep Centers of Middle Tennessee, and a growing group of community partners, the SRC is led by William H. Noah, M.D., and facilitated by MTSU CHHS.

According to Healthy People 2020 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020), poor sleep health is a common problem, with 25% of U.S. adults reporting insufficient sleep or rest at least 15 out of every 30 days. The report goes on to say, "The public health burden of chronic sleep loss and sleep disorders, coupled with low awareness of poor sleep health among the general population, health care professionals, and policymakers, necessitates a well-coordinated strategy to improve sleep-related health."

Currently, the SRC is focusing on publishing its research. Findings from the research will later inform grant-seeking efforts to address health needs of Tennesseans, which may have national impact as well.

The consortium's first paper, "Positive airway pressure supplied by an integrated sleep practice associated with greater adherence among pre-Medicare aged patients with sleep-disordered breathing," will be published in the January 2021 issue of the *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*.



Noah led the SRC's first study, the focus of the soon-to-publish paper noted above, which examined the CPAP usage of over 4,000 patients for compliance and for which inequities were identified that may have national impact for the underserved Medicare/Medicaid population—those who typically have the least resources. Continuous positive airway pressure machines help people with sleep apnea breathe more easily and regularly every night while they are sleeping, but they work best when used properly and with counseling and

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**SLEEP RESEARCH** continued from page 12

ongoing follow-up. Better CPAP compliance can lead to more favorable health outcomes for the patient. One aim of the research was to determine if patients who received follow-up care from a health care professional were more compliant in their prescribed CPAP usage than those who received follow-up care from medical equipment providers (CPAP equipment providers).

**Why is this important?**

Those on Medicare or Medicaid will only have their necessary equipment and care covered if it is provided by a home medical equipment company, per Medicare and Medicaid guidelines. Noah’s research found that those receiving equipment and care from a home medical equipment company had less favorable rates of compliance than those receiving care from a

health care professional (44% adherent vs. 66% at one year), which may translate into poorer health outcomes that extend well beyond sleep. **These findings have the potential to change federal policy, which may lead to better health outcomes for millions who are served by Medicare or Medicaid.** Noah’s vision of partnering with MTSU to create this research consortium, in part to identify opportunities to impact the underserved, is paving the way for more equitable coverage for those seeking help with sleep disorders, regardless of their income or insurance, and has the potential for national impact.

To learn more about the MTSU Sleep Research Consortium, visit the website at [sleepresearchconsortium.com](http://sleepresearchconsortium.com).

Source: Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (2018). Sleep health. *Healthy People 2020*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved Oct. 31, 2020, from [healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/sleep-health](http://healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/sleep-health).



# William Noah, M.D., of MTSU Sleep Research Consortium, receives a 2020 Tennessee Public Health Association Visionary Award

Each year, the Tennessee Public Health Association (TPHA) recognizes one exemplary individual from each of Tennessee's three Grand Divisions with the TPHA Visionary Awards. Dr. William Noah received the Middle Tennessee Visionary Award this year for his research, which may have national impact and lead to improved health outcomes for the underserved Medicaid population. Congratulations, Dr. Noah!



To learn more about the MTSU Sleep Research Consortium, visit the website at [sleepresearchconsortium.com](http://sleepresearchconsortium.com).



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