



"No matter where you are in life right now . . . it's OK to not feel OK."

Commissioner Marie Williams

A note from Commissioner Williams

Dear friends, teammates, colleagues, and fellow Tennesseans,

As the calendar turns to May, our awareness month for mental health arrives with new emphasis. It is true that we all have mental health, and as our normal has been upended over the last two months, we all have become keenly aware of that. The social distancing measures necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19 have increased feelings of anxiety, isolation, fear, despair, and even depression in many people. Whether you are an essential worker on the front lines of the crisis, a parent suddenly juggling a child's education and your job, a student who's missing classmates or graduation, or a person longing for the human contact we all crave, this new normal does not feel normal.

No matter where you are in life right now, it is important to know this: it's OK to not feel OK.

As businesses reopen and we attempt to find balance in the weeks and months

ahead, being mindful of our personal mental health and that of those around us is essential. I would like to invite you to focus on three strategies: Find your center, practice patience, and maintain connection through communication.

Finding your center, that activity that is calming and grounding, is a priceless coping strategy. Spending quiet time in meditation and spiritual practice, going for a walk in the sunshine, video chatting with a friend or relative, taking a long bath, popping in your earbuds and jamming to your favorite music – what is the one thing you know you can do that helps you find balance and return to stressful situations with a clear head? We make better decisions when we have a clear view of the situation around us.

When centered, we are also better able to extend grace and practice patience with those around us. While its common to hear “We’re all in this together“ the reality is that you never know what someone is going through. Wearing a mask in the checkout line at the grocery store, sitting on a video conference for work, or trying to make sense of a middle schooler’s math problems, patience is paramount as we get through this.

Connect through communication. If you are having a tough time, please reach out and speak up. Call a friend, Facetime with a relative, or jump on a videoconference with your coworkers. This crisis has quickly shifted modes of communication to new technology, and while it is not a complete replacement for the in-person contact we crave, it is the best balance we have for containing the spread of the disease. Part of effective communication involves listening. Make sure that you are listening to others as much as you are talking.

While these are but a few simple strategies to help us cope with the mental health impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, please know that if your concerns reach the level where you need to seek professional help, it is available. You can call our Statewide Crisis Line any time any day 855-274-7471 or text TN to 741-741.

May God continue to bless, keep, and provide for each of us.

Marie

TDMHSAS Receives Federal Grant for COVID-19 Response

\$2 million will fund mental health, substance abuse treatment, and recovery services

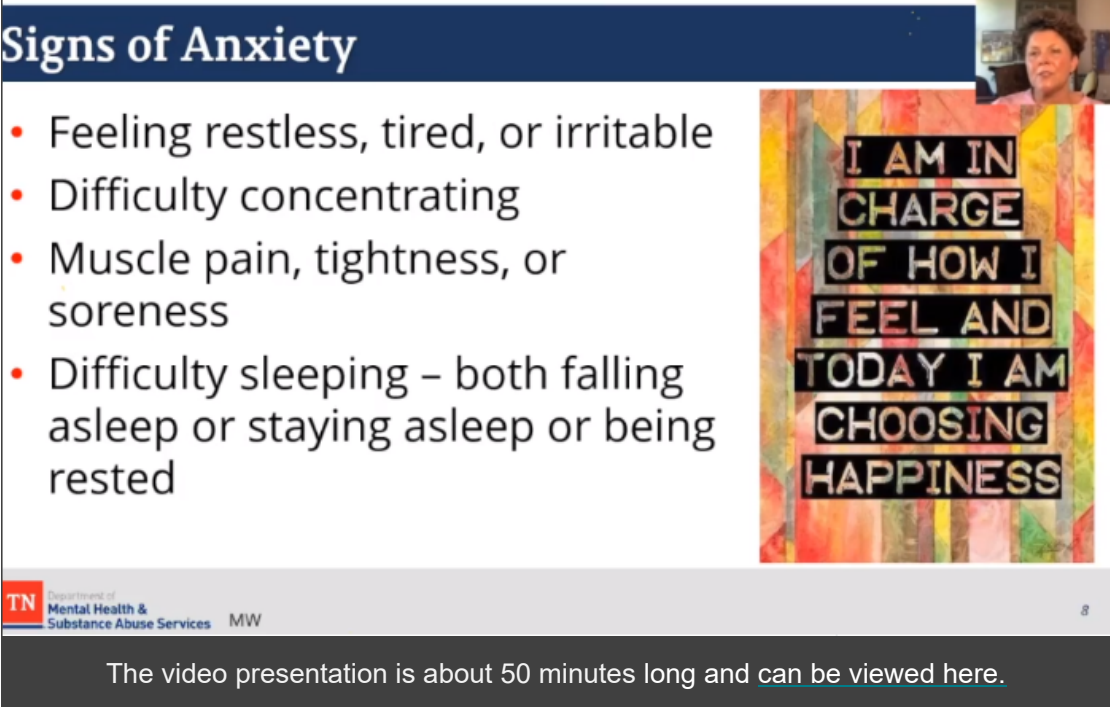
(TDMHSAS) is receiving a \$2 million federal grant to provide additional services in response to COVID-19 over the next 16 months.

The funding will be used to bolster the state's existing crisis services continuum, Behavioral Health Safety Net, and substance abuse treatment and recovery services.

"While the physical symptoms of the COVID-19 pandemic are visible almost immediately, this outbreak is going to have long-lasting behavioral health impacts that will rise to the surface and need attention in the coming months. This grant will allow the department to expand its services to best respond to the growing needs of Tennesseans," said TDMHSAS Commissioner Marie Williams, LCSW.

[Visit our Newsroom to read the press release in its entirety.](#)

*How are you tending to your mental health during COVID-19?
Commissioner Williams and Dr. Monty Burks share tips with
Leadership Tennessee*



Signs of Anxiety

- Feeling restless, tired, or irritable
- Difficulty concentrating
- Muscle pain, tightness, or soreness
- Difficulty sleeping – both falling asleep or staying asleep or being rested

I AM IN CHARGE OF HOW I FEEL AND TODAY I AM CHOOSING HAPPINESS

TN Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services MW 8

The video presentation is about 50 minutes long and can be viewed [here](#).

State of Tennessee promotes children's mental health awareness

Gov. Lee proclaims May 3-9 Children's Mental Health Awareness Week



Thanks to Gov. Bill Lee for his continued support of children's mental health. [Read his proclamation for Children's Mental Health Awareness Week at this link.](#)

Regional Intervention Program staff offer tips for parents

3. LEARN TO LABEL EMOTIONS TO HELP IDENTIFY FEELINGS TN

Young children develop at an amazing rate! Check out our new video featuring the Top Five things you should know to promote mental health in children, starting at birth! These tips were provided by the team at our Regional Intervention Program flagship site in Nashville. Thanks for lending your expertise (and children's acting skills) to this video just in time for Children's Mental Health Awareness Week.

May is also Recovery Court Month; Participants focused on success, sobriety despite virus

[Read Governor Lee's proclamation.](#)



*Submitted by Coordinator Jill Barrett, 10th Judicial District Recovery Court
Photos courtesy of The Cleveland Daily Banner*

While we have all been navigating these difficult and stormy times, both literally and figuratively, there was a burst of light at the graduation ceremony for eight participants of the 10th Judicial District's Recovery Court which comprises of Bradley, McMinn, Monroe, and Polk Counties. The celebration that is usually conducted upon participant's completion of the program had to be augmented due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Participants, the graduates, and their collective friends and family gathered in the parking lot of the Bradley County Justice Center. There were celebratory honks from car horns and yells in surplus. Judge Andrew Mark Freiberg commented on how important it was to still honor the hard work of the graduates.

Judge Freiberg remarked, "We have eight graduates who have worked really hard to get sober and build a better life for themselves. We wanted to honor

them in some way. . . . We have done surprisingly well under the circumstances as a program. While health and safety is important, there is more to life than merely breathing. Many of our neighbors need mental health and addiction treatment. The pandemic has made such therapy difficult to obtain. These graduates have overcome so much.”

He added particular praise to the current graduates by observing: “It could have been very easy for these graduates to give up hope. They never wavered. I’m so proud of them.” And so are we! Congratulations to the newest recovery court graduates of the 10th Judicial District!

Keep up the great work: Eric Elkins, Brandon Evans, Andrew Norris, Billy Pinella, Nathan Buckner, Jennifer Green, James Maynard, and John Miller! And great job, 10th Judicial District team (pictured below)



Some tips for Rocking Your Recovery during COVID-19

Congratulations to TDMHSAS Peer Recovery Coordinator Michelle Webster who recently celebrated 20 years in recovery! We asked Michelle to share some of her tips for "Rocking Your Recovery" during COVID-19, but these apply any time! Thank you, Michelle, for the work that you do and for sharing your recovery story in order to help and inspire others!



Rocking Your Recovery

***Staying on track during COVID-19 By Michelle Webster**

1. Take this time to revisit the literature that helped lead you to recovery. Go back to the basics.
2. Find a "home group" if you do not have one. Connect virtually when in-person meetings are not possible.
3. Stay connected to your sponsor. If you do not have a sponsor, go through that process. This is crucial.
4. Focus on spiritual growth. My relationship with my God is a very important part of my recovery. I pray in the morning and all day long!
5. Make self-care a priority. I run five days a week. I walk my dog twice a day. I lay out in the sun when I can. I stay connected with my family.
6. Get involved in service. Find somewhere to lend your talents, and give back.
7. Allow yourself to feel your feelings! Whether you're sad, mad, or glad.



TN Department of
**Mental Health &
Substance Abuse Services**

**For help with an addiction, call/text:
REDLINE: 800-889-9789**

Congratulations, Keri Virgo!

*System of Care Across TN director chosen to lead
Office of Children, Young Adults, and Families*

Congratulations to Keri Virgo who has been promoted to Director of the Office of Children, Young Adults, and Families (OCYAF) in the TDMHSAS Division of Mental Health Services. Keri has worked for the state since 2014 and has

provided driven and dedicated leadership for the System of Care Across Tennessee (SOCAT) office. She brings with her an amazing leadership style and a vast knowledge of children's service systems, contacts, and outcomes to move the OCYAF office from great to LEGENDARY.



Welcome Kayla West to a new, key role with the TN Recovery Navigator program



Please help us welcome Kayla West, PMHNP-BC, to TDMHSAS! She will be working as a Nurse Practitioner/Clinical Specialist with the TN Recovery Navigator program. Kayla has several years of experience in direct patient care including caring for patients with mental health and co-occurring substance use disorders and patients receiving medication-assisted treatment. In her role with TDMHSAS, Kayla will help direct the initiation of the

MAT program in emergency departments. She has prepared for this new role by becoming one of the first Advance Practice Providers in Tennessee to apply for a DEA X-waiver demonstrating expertise in the medications used to treat substance use disorder. Kayla is a graduate of the nursing program at UT-Knoxville and received a Masters of Science in Nursing with a concentration in psychiatric care from Vanderbilt University.

Two generations of Perleys focus on

suicide prevention in TN and beyond



We've just celebrated Mother's Day, and we think it's pretty special that Tennessee has a mother/daughter team who have devoted their careers and lives to saving others. Joanne Perley, MPH, serves as Project Director of Suicide Prevention Grants in the TDMHSAS Office of Crisis Services and Suicide Prevention. Her mother, Sandra Perley, Ed.D., MSN, RN, is a retired nursing professor and Suicide Prevention Outreach Specialist at Centerstone. Together, they were selected to conduct the workshop *From the Styx to the Tennessee River: Research to Practice in Higher Education* at the annual American Association of Suicidology conference scheduled for April. Since the conference was held virtually this year, the pair participated online, potentially reaching even more people with their presentation.

In the workshop, Dr. Perley shared the results of her research and outlined the steps taken to increase suicide prevention strategies on campuses of Tennessee community colleges, colleges of applied technology, and universities. Joanne provided an overview of internal processes. These included important work completed with support from the Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network (including the creation of a higher education task force) and Tennessee House Bill 1354, passed by the 111th Tennessee General Assembly. This bill requires each state institution of higher education to develop, implement, and provide a suicide prevention plan for students, faculty, and staff at least once each semester. Governor Lee signed this legislation on

July 1, 2019.

Following passage of the legislation and continued support from the Governor, in FY19, TDMHSAS was provided \$1.1 million to be allocated towards suicide prevention efforts. Centerstone of Tennessee was awarded recurring dollars through the Youth and Young Adult Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Program to provide prevention services to institutions of higher education in Middle Tennessee with hopes of expanding the services to other areas of the state in upcoming years. Dr. Perley, recently retired from her teaching career and accepted the position of Suicide Prevention Outreach Specialist for this grant.

Thanks Dr. Perley and Joanne for your continued work in suicide prevention!

#TNHeroes campaign continues

We appreciate all the wonderful submissions that have come in nominating TN Heroes. Follow our facebook and Instagram pages as we will continue to post those. To nominate, email OC.TDMHSAS@tn.gov. Tell us how your Everyday Hero continues serving fellow neighbors and Tennesseans during COVID-19.



Three-year-old Charlotte King recently helped dad complete a very important mission and was named a TDMHSAS Everyday Hero! Charlotte is the daughter of Alex and Kristen King. Alex serves as our Deputy Assistant Commissioner for the Division of Administrative & Regulatory Services and has been one of the staff members making sure our state hospitals and providers have needed equipment.

"My 'superhero' daughter helped deliver some PPE to a fellow superhero from Moccasin Bend Mental Health Institute," explains Alex. "She was very excited to meet a real life hero!"

#TNHeroes



Tennessee Heroes



Our Regional Overdose Prevention Specialists are ALL Everyday Heroes for their lifesaving work! Michael Bare and Will Taylor joined the ROPS team just as COVID-19 began to disrupt public gatherings. Michael and Will launched a social media campaign to connect with individuals needing Naloxone or other recovery services and have been delivering online training and bringing Naloxone directly into homes.

Our hospitals have no shortage of Everyday Heroes

The following note was submitted by Pamela Hampton who is a Registered Nurse at Middle Tennessee Mental Health Institute. We certainly second her sentiments and extend her feelings of gratitude and unity to ALL of our heroes at our Regional Mental Health Institutes.

"Staff at MTMHI are showing exceptional courage, nobility, fortitude, and resilience by coming to work as scheduled during this pandemic. We serve a vulnerable population, but we serve with grace. We constantly strive to balance our own well-being and that of our families.

As a facility, we have been able to maintain our infrastructure and have support in place for our staff by providing education on COVID-19, providing face masks, screening temperatures upon entry, providing cleaning solutions, providing facts, and snacks to say thank you for being here.

We will continue to treat each other and the people we serve with respect, civility, and dignity. We are in this together and will continue to provide excellence. There is not just one hero or some heroes, **we are all heroes.**"



We honor all nurses aka #TNHeroes working in our hospitals! Here are some of the nursing staff from Memphis MMI featured during National Nurses Week.

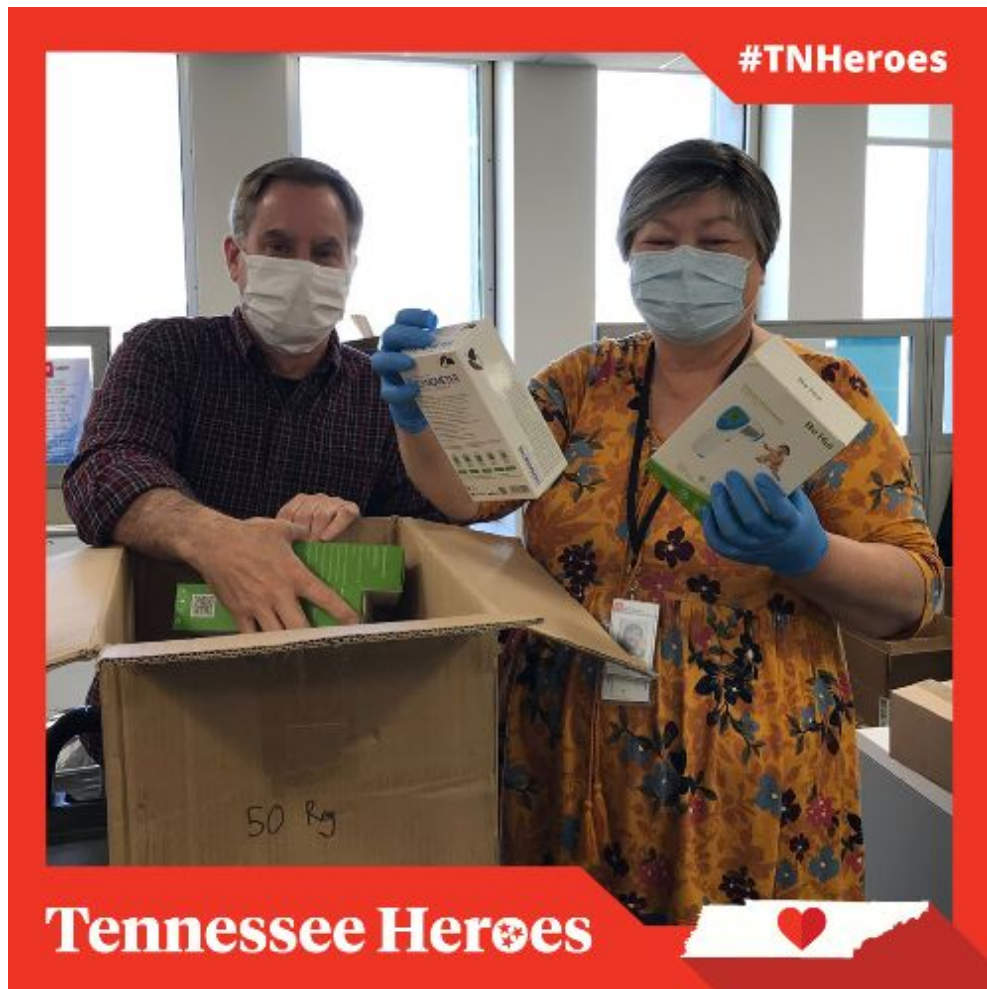


Treatment Plan Coordinators work tirelessly to ensure that patients receive the individualized and specialized services that they need and deserve. Here's the team of Everyday Heroes at Middle Tennessee MHI. Pictured, left to right, are: Kala Simmons, Program Director; and Treatment Plan Coordinators Angela Boyce, Pamela Mieles, Cyrus Greene, Jameyuh Walker, and Ashley McGowan. Not pictured: Jason Gordon.



A big thanks to all custodial staff keeping our hospitals clean and safe during this time. This is the team of #TNHeroes from Western Mental Health Institute: Devante Marcell, Kamedria McKinnie, Brenda Williams, Louise Lockett, Ada Bowers, and Shertara Ellison.

Meet two of Central Office's Everyday Heroes



TDMHSAS Manager Jay Oziminski and Diann Cox are two of the behind-the-scenes TN Heroes who are keeping our Regional Mental Health Institutes and our community behavioral health providers stocked with supplies. Jay and Diann represent the many administrative professionals who are providing support behind the front lines of COVID-19. Thanks to ALL of you!

New Behavioral Health Safety Net launches successfully

Amid the COVID-19 crisis, IT's development team (Mohammed Osman, Adeel Mohammed, and Carrie Kissner) led by Gina Young, have been working diligently with the Behavioral Health Safety Net team on the design and development of Behavioral Health Safety Net System 2.0. The system will be developed in phases to replace an outdated system using a modern framework and to add additional functionalities to make business operations more efficient and effective. In spite of the extra workload due to the COVID-19 crisis, the development of the system is right on schedule, and phase 1 release of the new system for internal staff went live on May 6. Congrats, team!

Shannon Rogers joins #TeamTDMHSAS in permanent role



Congratulations to Shannon Rogers who is transitioning from a contract employee to our new Revenue Cycle Manager for Hospital Services. Shannon brings more than 20 years' experience in healthcare, process and system improvement, and management. She has spearheaded billing system switches at four companies and worked with IT and vendors to build a brand new billing system from the ground up. At her prior company as Billing Director, she was the project manager during a system switch and integration of a full-service clearinghouse and new workflow queues. Shannon's work has earned numerous awards. Her background marries management, systems, process improvement, and revenue cycle to make her an ideal fit for her unique role with MHSAS. With a minor in Organizational Leadership, Shannon is pursuing a Master Black Belt in Lean Six Sigma.

Longtime agency leader receives prestigious child advocacy award



Submitted by the Tennessee Commission on Children & Youth

Congratulations to Frontier Health's Kathy Benedetto for receiving the Jim Pryor Child Advocacy Award at this year's Tennessee Commission on Children & Youth annual awards. This award honors an exemplary child advocate, and Kathy has been just that. Kathy has recently retired after a 40-year career as an advocate for children, youth, and their families and has advanced mental health treatment options available for them in Northeast Tennessee. She led the effort

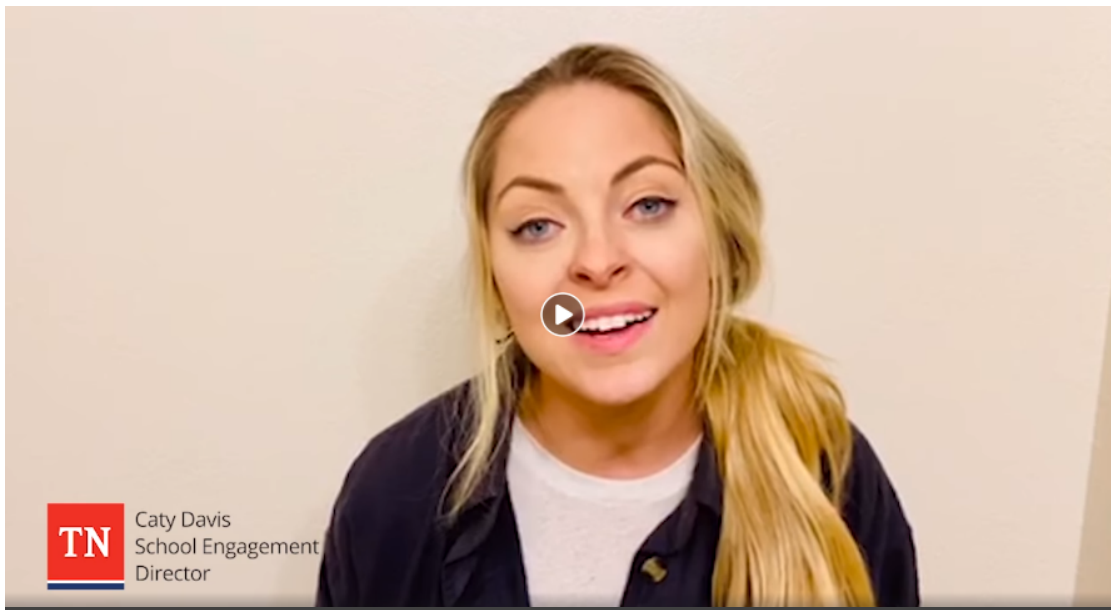
to secure Safe Schools programs in five school systems, as well as early intervention, prevention, and school-based mental health services in eight school systems. She has striven to get behavioral health services in all school districts in Northeast Tennessee and accomplished that goal in 2019. She was appointed to the Governor's Juvenile Justice Reform Implementation Council last year and is a board member for the Association of Infant Mental Health in Tennessee, two roles she will continue throughout retirement.

TDMHSAS staff sharing their stories, voices to inspire others

One good thing to come out of COVID-19 is that we are exploring new and different ways to share information (and messages of hope!) with the public. Thanks to Caty Davis, our Director of School Engagement, for providing Morning Motivational songs to share on social media. Tennessee students may recognize Caty as she has spent a lot of time in our schools educating and inspiring students to stay drug-free! Her passion comes from personal experience.

After struggling with an addiction to alcohol and opioids, Caty's father tragically took his own life. Her family also mourns the loss of her half-brother who also

died by suicide. Despite facing incredibly difficult circumstances in youth, Caty was able to push through, overcome, and rise up! She has a bachelor's degree in psychology and was crowned Miss Tennessee 2017 choosing combatting addiction and restoring families as her platform, and we are so happy to have her on our team.



TN Caty Davis
School Engagement
Director

Click the above screen shot to hear Caty's rendition of Rise Up! And you can listen to more motivational songs from Caty in the links below.

[Somewhere Over the Rainbow](#)
[Lean on Me](#)

TN's community anti-drug coalitions getting creative with communications, outreach



Congratulations to Union City High School senior Jaheim Ceaser! Jaheim's banner (created for an [Obion County Prevention Coalition](#) project) was made into a billboard on Highway 51 South! We love the artwork, and what a great message! Don't abuse. Refuse!



Even though COVID-19 has cancelled most school and coalition activities, that hasn't stopped Tennessee students from continuing to share what they've learned about prevention! We love your poster, Caroline! Together, we can: Make Our World Drug-Free!

Via [Monroe County Prevention & Wellness Coalition](#)



When cars arrive at Dekalb County schools to pick up food, [Dekalb Prevention Coalition](#) is also there with goodies and important information. Here are some members handing out educational anti-drug kits and note pads that encourage parents to talk to their children about the dangers of alcohol and provides important phone numbers.



The Middle Tennessee Mental Health Institute NAMI Walks team exceeded their fundraising goal despite COVID-19. Here's what NAMI Davidson Co. Executive Director Robin Nobling had to say about the team led by psychiatric nurse Nancy Moore: "In its third year as a walk team with the event, Nancy Moore was determined to meet the \$1000 goal set for all teams. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, but that didn't stop this determined team. They faced the virus head on. With protocols in place they stepped out in support of the Walk and the people they care about. The week of April 20th, they not only met their goal, they exceeded it."

Remembering Joseph Brenner

Longtime TDMHSAS attorney passes at age 72

Longtime TDMHSAS attorney Joseph Brenner passed away in early February. Mr. Brenner began his career in service with Tennessee Legislative Legal Services and completed more than 30 years of service with TDMHSAS. From Mr. Brenner's obituary: "He was known and admired for his considered, deliberate analyses; was a champion for the protection of human rights; and authored many mental health and developmental disability statutes. He supported multiple non-profits whose missions mirrored his regard for people with mental and physical disabilities."

[You can read Mr. Brenner's full obituary at this link.](#)

Save-the-Dates

TDMHSAS Planning and Policy Council meetings continue in conference call format

Planning and Policy Council meetings have taken place via conference call due to COVID-19. To listen to recordings of April and May meetings, and to verify the schedule and plans for upcoming meetings, [please visit the department website at this link](#).

Regional meetings are scheduled to resume in July. The next **TDMHSAS Statewide Planning and Policy Council** meeting is:

Tuesday, June 9, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Middle Tennessee Mental Health Institute | Nashville

If you plan to attend, please RSVP via email or phone call. Contact Amy Holland at 615-253-3785; Amy.Holland@tn.gov or Kirby Fye at 615-253-6396; Kirby.Fye@tn.gov.

2020 CPRS Conference announces keynote speaker



The Certified Peer Recovery Specialist Conference Planning Committee has announced that Brad Schmitt will serve as the keynote speaker for its 10th annual conference scheduled for Oct. 8-9 in Nashville.

Brad served as one of TN's first Lifeline Peer Project coordinators and is a writer for the Tennessean where he has shared his personal recovery journey.

CPRS: Watch your email. Registration information and more details coming soon!

**For questions about substance abuse treatment,
Call or Text the Tennessee REDLINE
800-889-9789**

In the event of a **MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCY:**

Call 855-CRISIS-1

***855-274-7471**

For confidential help
from a caring crisis professional
in your area, available

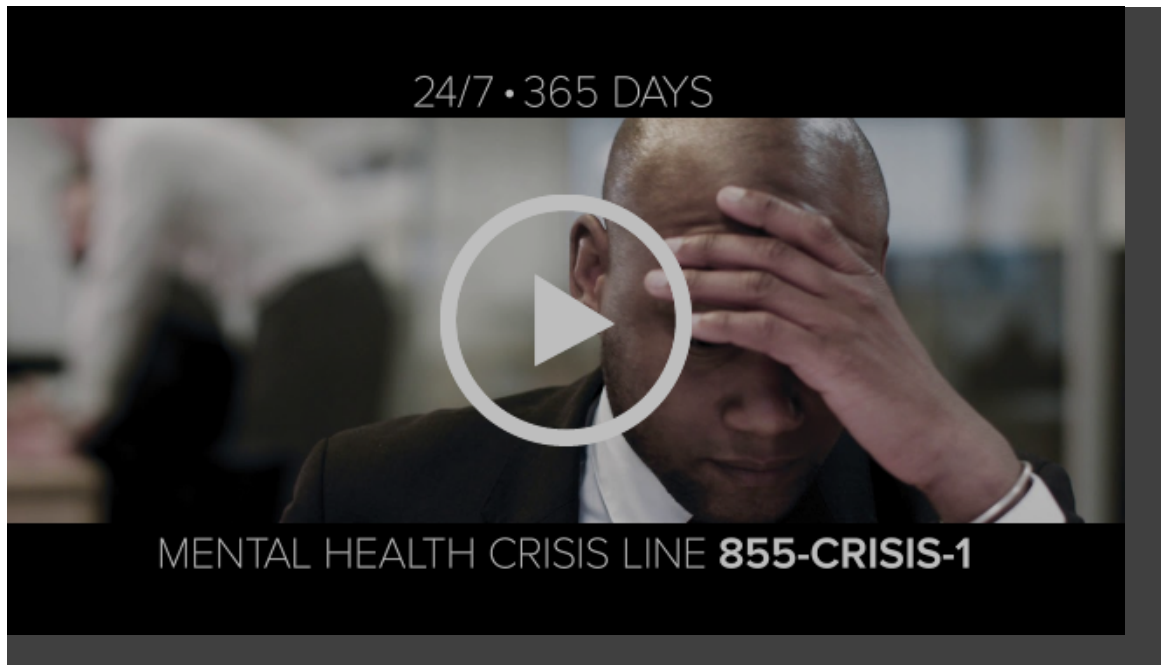
24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

This is a free call.

You can also text TN to 741741.



To learn more about Crisis Services in the State of Tennessee, [visit our website.](#)





Happy Children's Mental Health Awareness Month
from the Office of Children, Young Adults, and Families

*We hope you've enjoyed this issue of the Update!
If you have news to share (a story idea, accomplishment,
provider news, etc.) or if you'd like to be added to the
distribution list, please email: the Office of Communications
at OC.TDMHSAS@tn.gov.*

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