

# Hope Continues

Report  
to the  
Kentucky  
General  
Assembly  
FY 2020-21



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## Purpose

*We create hope and change the culture.*

## Vision

*Operation UNITE is a collaborative model striving to prevent abuse of drugs and facilitate recovery.*

## Mission

*We create strategic partnerships.  
We provide leadership.  
We promote education.  
We coordinate treatment.  
We support law enforcement.*

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**ON THE COVER:** Operation UNITE's mascot, Freedom, was a big hit in May 2021 during the first community celebration to be held following a year-long pause resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.

Operation UNITE (Unlawful Narcotics Investigations, Treatment and Education) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation that strives to combat substance abuse and misuse in Kentucky.

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## Focus on education, prevention & treatment initiatives

# UNITE leverages funding

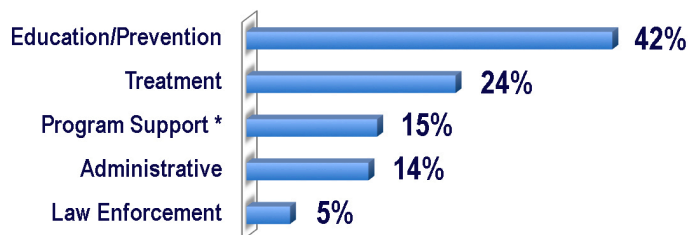
The Kentucky General Assembly's \$2 million investment in Operation UNITE during Fiscal Year 2020-21 resulted in an additional \$7.7 million from grants and private contributions being secured for education/prevention, treatment, and law enforcement services.

Without funding from the Kentucky General Assembly, Operation UNITE would cease to exist and not be able to offer these services!

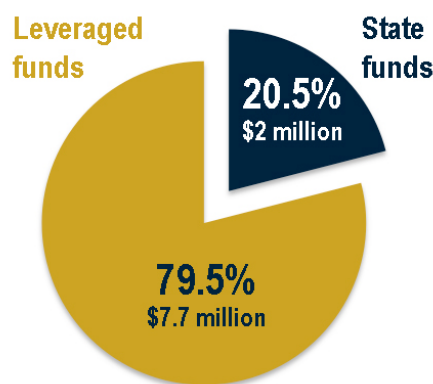
Although primarily serving Southern and Eastern Kentucky, citizens in all 120 counties have access to law enforcement collaborations, treatment and recovery services, and the sharing of education/prevention program expertise and support.

During the fiscal year, 88 percent of all expenses were used to: 1) educate youth and community members about substance use and misuse; 2) provide access to long-term treatment for a substance use disorder; 3) provide support for those in recovery; 4) provide assistance to families impacted by a substance use disorder; or 5) provide anti-drug youth programs.

### How state funding was used

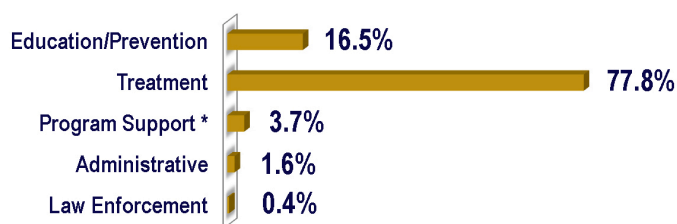


**\$8.80 of every \$10 spent during the fiscal year was used for treatment and education/prevention initiatives**



\* Program support includes fuel, vehicle maintenance, insurance, rent, utilities, supplies, and professional development.

### How leveraged funding was used



Greater access to treatment, recovery services

# Voucher program expanded

To enable more individuals with a substance use disorder to benefit from the UNITE Treatment Voucher program, the UNITE Board of Directors approved changes that:

- Nearly double the amount paid to providers for 90 days of long-term, residential treatment;
- Offer payment for an additional 90 days of treatment;
- Increase income limits for Voucher eligibility;
- Add payment to help cover costs of entering a sober living/transitional housing program;
- Streamline the application process;
- Authorize payment for transportation to treatment or a sober living/transitional housing program.



**62**

individuals used a UNITE Voucher to enter treatment

**1,938**

average treatment inquiries handled by staff each month

**\$13,500**

maximum value of UNITE Voucher for 180 days treatment

**2**

Vouchers that may be approved per client

**11**

transitional housing applications approved in first two months



*"I realize that the addiction to drugs and alcohol does not define a person. It is hard to grow close to others and create a positive impact within the community if your mindset is altered."*

**Clay M.**

2021 "I Am UNITE" Ambassador

Progress during the pandemic

# Now, more than ever ...

The coronavirus pandemic, which touched every phase of our lives over the past 18 months, had an overwhelmingly negative impact on those struggling with a substance use disorder.



**Nancy Hale**  
President & CEO

We saw the age-adjusted drug overdose rate in Kentucky increase 53.7 percent from 2019 to 2020 – the second highest increase in the country. Last year, more than five Kentuckians each day lost their lives to a drug overdose.

Suddenly it seemed a decade of progress was being threatened as families and children became casualties to the scourge of opioids.

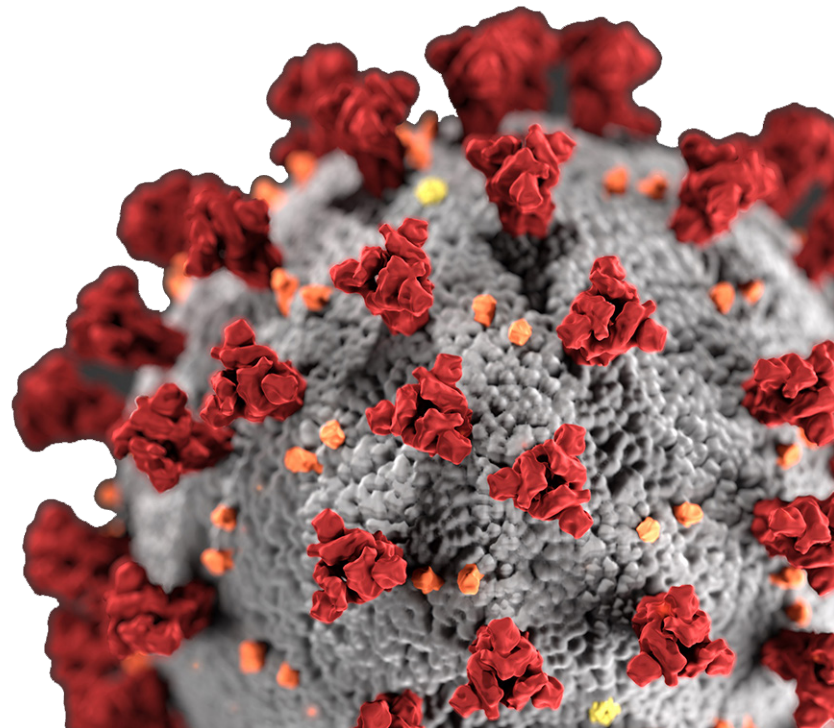
More than ever, we needed to focus on prevention. More than ever, we needed to expand opportunities to provide treatment and recovery services. More than ever, we needed to provide the promise of hope.

Because of the Kentucky General Assembly's continued support and investment in Operation UNITE, our efforts persist. We have regrouped and fought back with science, faith, and community.

During this uncharted and uncertain time, Operation UNITE reimagined how to best deliver essential prevention and treatment services. As a result, more Kentuckians now have access to treatment for a substance use disorder and additional support as they transition into long-term recovery.

With new resolve – bolstered by the

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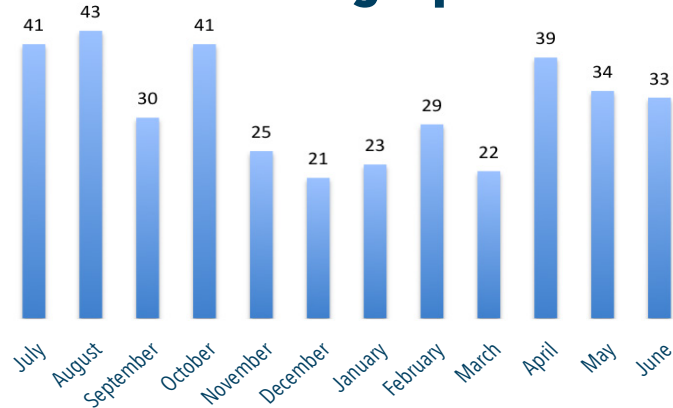
same resilience and unity that allowed Operation UNITE to make progress in the past – we continue to position ourselves for the future.

We embraced technology to keep in touch with our coalition partners, our youth, and those isolated from their peer support networks. With one voice, we moved together and reached out to help pull our friends, family, and loved ones from the pit of despair caused by addiction and into the light of a brighter future.

Operation UNITE knows that the work we do together is too important to allow anything to interrupt our efforts.

Now, more than ever, we must not stop – or allow to be reversed – initiatives that are making a difference, that strengthen families, promote recovery, and serve as a catalyst for strong, thriving communities.

## UNITE Drug Tip Line



## Med Drop Boxes

Operation UNITE maintains 48 medication drop boxes in or adjacent to its service area for citizens to dispose of their expired or unwanted medications – both prescription and over-the-counter.

**8,375 lbs (4.18 tons)**

of medications collected  
as part of National  
DEA Take-Back Days



*“UNITE has brought my family back together, because we have realized that we need each other in order to help [each other] recover. Without love, support and kindness, it is near impossible to recover from addiction.”*

**Kristin T.**

2021 “I Am UNITE” Ambassador

School and community programs continued across region

# Education & Prevention

**53,496 youth & 12,962 adults  
were engaged through  
UNITE Coalition youth programs**



It was a challenging year, but members of Operation UNITE's 32 grassroots UNITE Community Coalitions rose to the occasion and continued to provide prevention, education, and treatment/recovery support services. With in-person gatherings limited, many meetings and activities were presented through virtual platforms or direct communications.

**3,041**

activities were  
conducted by **UNITE  
Community Coalitions**  
despite coronavirus  
limitations

National Archery in  
the Schools Program

**10,433**  
youth

Drama  
Programs

**1,200**  
youth

Summer Activity  
Programs

**4,440**  
youth

Special Programs/  
Red Ribbon Week

**18,894**  
youth

Intramural  
Sports

**1,236**  
youth

The First Tee  
Golf Program

**1,631**  
youth

Project  
Prom

**466**  
youth

Hooked on Fishing  
Not on Drugs

**270**  
youth



*"Thanks to UNITE, I had an outlet in which I could help others avoid the fate of my mother, and the fate of so many other people in this area. UNITE helped me feel like I wasn't alone."*

**James H.**

2021 "I Am UNITE" Ambassador

# UNITE initiatives



**6,676**

students were members of 135 **UNITE Clubs** at schools in 25 counties



**21**

high school seniors were awarded privately-funded \$1,500 **"I Am UNITE" Scholarships** for post-secondary education



**531**

health professionals participated in the **UNITE Rural Health Opioid Program** Provider Education Summit



**AmeriCorps**

**21,797**

students tutored in math by **UNITE Service Corps (USC)** members

**39,383**

students served via technology

**14,377**

students mentored by USC members in addition to math and "Too Good for Drugs" components

**46,186**

meals were provided to students



**300+**

locations where parents can obtain a free **"Give Me A Reason"** saliva-based drug testing kit



**320**

youth participated in a **Shoot Hoops Not Drugs** basketball camp

**73**

parents or guardians attended an informational program on stimulant drugs during these camps

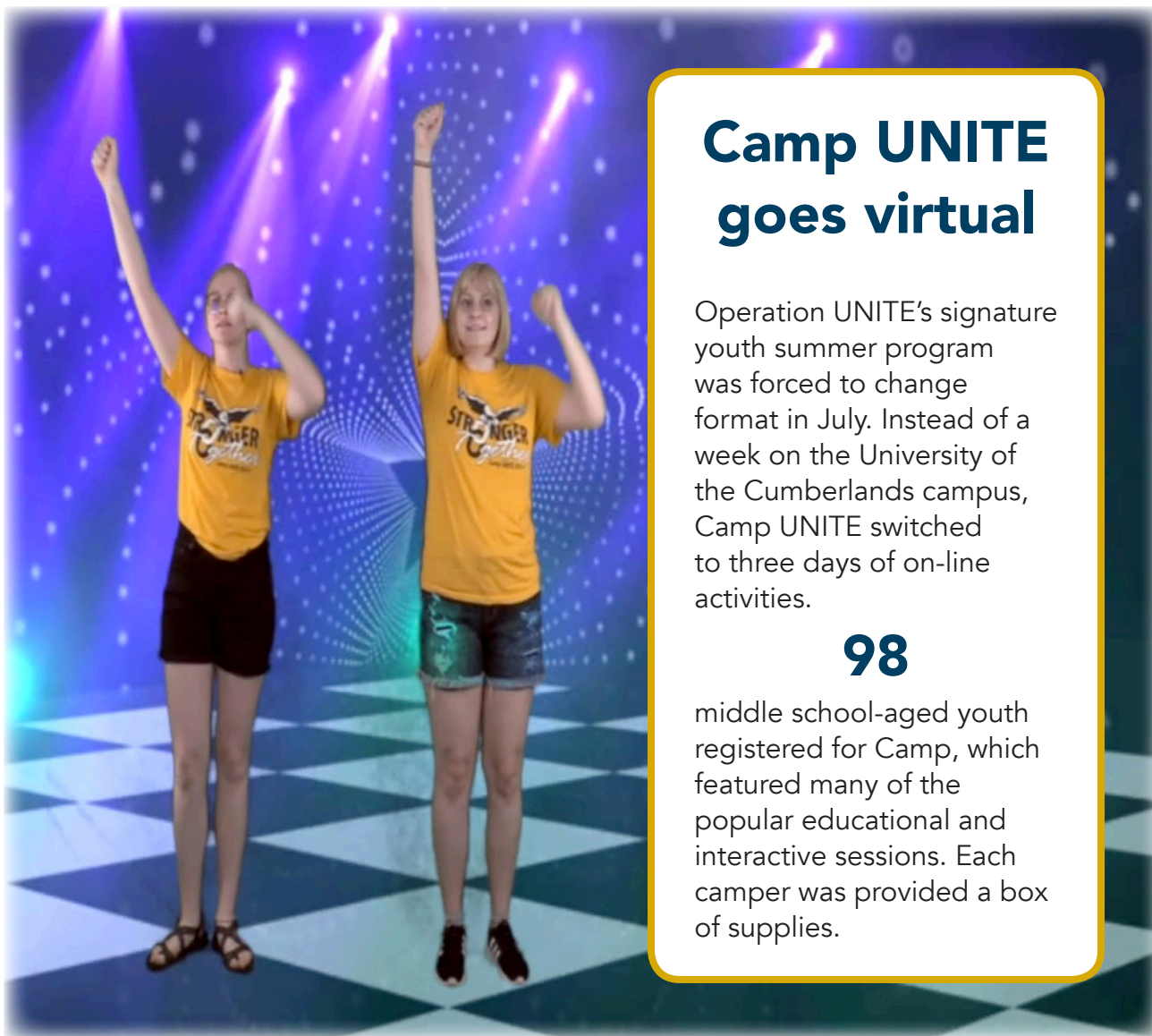


**605**

elementary students taught "Too Good For Drugs" curricula at 16 schools through **Promise Neighborhood** programs

**27.25%**

average increase in drug knowledge as a result of these classes



## Camp UNITE goes virtual

Operation UNITE's signature youth summer program was forced to change format in July. Instead of a week on the University of the Cumberlands campus, Camp UNITE switched to three days of on-line activities.

**98**

middle school-aged youth registered for Camp, which featured many of the popular educational and interactive sessions. Each camper was provided a box of supplies.

## Flood relief assistance

Spring 2021 flooding devastated communities across UNITE's service area. Staff members quickly sprang into action to offer assistance by collecting and delivering supplies from Lexington and across the region. In addition, the UNITE Board of Directors oversaw distribution of monetary donations to assist families in need.

**475.75**

hours of service provided by 19 Operation UNITE staff, board members, and UNITE Service Corps members

**36**

truck and trailer loads of cleaning and household supplies picked up and delivered

## UNITE pioneered key strategies to reduce overdoses

# Health. Healing. Hope.

Two years ago, the NORC Walsh Center for Rural Health Analysis and the University of Kentucky Center of Excellence in Rural Health reported that eight of the 10 counties nationally with the largest decline in drug overdose mortality rate between 2008-12 and 2013-17 were located right here in Eastern Kentucky. Of the top 20 counties nationally, 14 were in Eastern Kentucky.

In late 2019 and early 2020, researchers conducted formal interviews and data collection to explore why overdose fatalities in Appalachian counties in Kentucky dropped 8 percent from 2011 to 2019, while rising 44.6 percent in West Virginia and a whopping 94.5 percent in Ohio.

NORC's final report, issued in April 2021, references Operation UNITE's work a dozen times. Key strategies identified in

this study are ones that Operation UNITE pioneered or has served as a champion and partner since its inception in 2003. Strategies ranging from prevention

and education, to access to treatment, to collaboration and partnerships – the hallmarks of Operation UNITE's work – were credited for most of the decline of fatal overdoses at a time when they were surging in other parts of Appalachia.

***"The UNITE approach engages adolescents and teens throughout their schooling."***

**NORC Study**

An essential partner in this effort has been the Commonwealth of Kentucky, the study reported. Not only does the state provide crucial funding to support Operation UNITE, but officials also had the foresight to launch one of the first Prescription Drug Monitoring programs in the country.

Law enforcement and the criminal justice system are also important partners, not only with keeping drugs off the streets,



***"It is through our support for each other, and the power we gain working together, [that we are able] to combat the entrapment of what many youth feel like is a given."***

**Hunter B.**

2021 "I Am UNITE" Ambassador

***“I’m very hopeful (about the future).  
What we were doing before the  
pandemic was working -- especially in  
Eastern Kentucky’s Fifth Congressional  
District. A lot of the efforts of  
Operation UNITE had created an  
environment where we were seeing a  
lot of success in the mountains. ... We  
need to double-down on these efforts.”***



**Tim Robinson**  
Founder & CEO  
Addiction Recovery Care

but recognizing the need to help those with a substance use disorder obtain treatment through the Kentucky State Police Angel Initiative. The Angel Initiative allows anyone experiencing a substance use disorder to come into one of the 16 KSP Posts and receive help in finding and accessing treatment with assistance from Operation UNITE.

In addition, Operation UNITE has worked closely with the Administrative Office of the Courts to expand drug courts from five in the 5th Congressional District to one serving every county in Operation UNITE’s

32-county service region.

Operation UNITE’s Treatment Help Line and the KY HELP Statewide Call Center, staffed by Operation UNITE – coupled with providing vouchers for long-term residential treatment – expands access to care and provides quick intervention in situations where timelines can be a matter of life and death.

Operation UNITE engages youth through interactive and engaging school presentations; UNITE Clubs in elementary, middle, and high schools; Camp UNITE;



***“Each obstacle that I have been forced to overcome has only strengthened my faith. I could have become a product of my circumstances, but the Lord decided He had greater plans for my life.”***

**Makala S.**  
2021 “I Am UNITE” Ambassador

as well as academic tutoring and drug prevention curricula. These prevention and education programs not only help improve grades, they also make it less likely that children will use illegal substances or misuse over-the-counter medications.

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*Strategies ranging from prevention and education, to access to treatment, to collaboration and partnerships -- the hallmarks of Operation UNITE's work -- were credited for most of the decline of fatal overdoses at a time when they were surging in other parts of Appalachia.*

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Community. Cross-sector collaboration.

Care. Commitment.

Those aren't just the themes of the NORC report. They are imbued in the work of Operation UNITE. They are a formula for the future of our families – and the future of Kentucky.

But much work remains.

Despite setbacks brought about by the coronavirus pandemic, Operation UNITE's purpose and determination remain steadfast and on-going.

People need purpose. Health begins with help. Healing leads the way. And Hope continues.



*"I may be young, but I know that people younger than me need my guidance. I am a living example of how not doing drugs can affect your life in a positive way."*

**Hayley J.**

2021 "I Am UNITE" Ambassador

*"You could actually feel the care that was given to me over the phone – the genuine care. They went beyond the call of duty. I knew that I wasn't left alone."*

Karen K., Hopkinsville



Call Center provides assistance for substance use issues

## Helping all Kentuckians



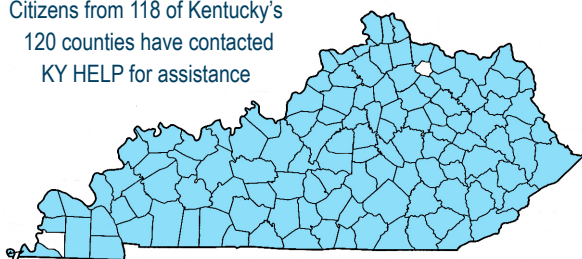
**3,474**  
Calls received

**637**  
Treatment Referrals

**6,810**  
Followup calls

**747**  
Outreach followups

Citizens from 118 of Kentucky's  
120 counties have contacted  
KY HELP for assistance



Rising overdose rates during this past fiscal year, coupled with an increasing call volume, led the KY HELP Statewide Call Center to add evening and weekend hours to better serve all Kentuckians confronted with a loved one's addiction.

Operation UNITE's Screening and Referral Specialists now offer support, comfort and guidance for substance use issues from **8:30 am to 10 pm (EDT) Monday through Friday, and 8:30 am to 5:30 pm (EDT) on Saturdays and Sundays.**

Specialists help navigate through treatment options - from medication-assisted treatment to faith-based care - insurance, recovery resources, and other barriers that may occur. They are trained to manage crisis situations, help family members understand the procedure for utilizing Casey's Law, and provide outreach services for up to a year.



For additional information contact

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