



# Hope Renewed. RISE!

Report to the Kentucky General Assembly  
FY 2021-22

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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 offered five regional Shoot Hoops Not Basketball camps across the region, much to the delight of school-aged youth. Camps incorporate life skills with basketball fundamentals.

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.

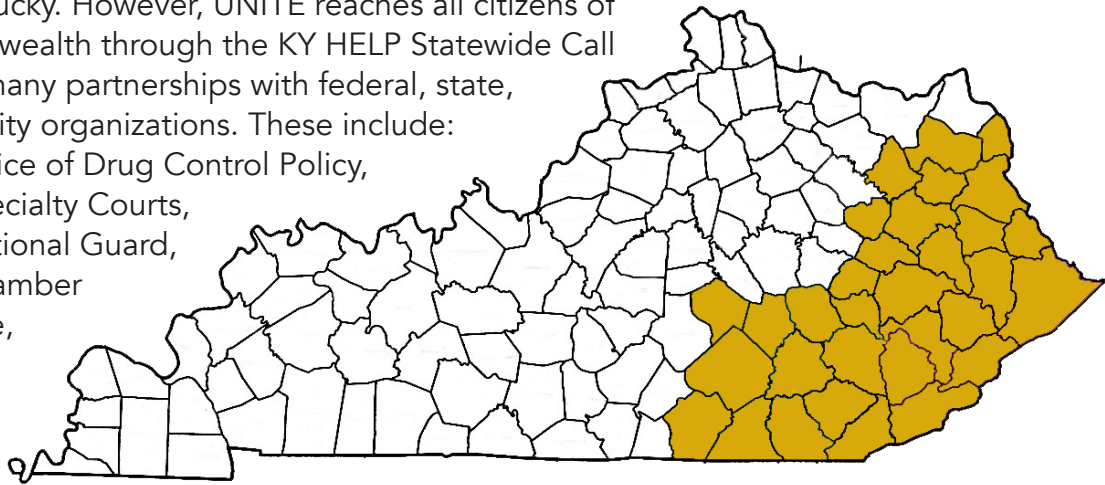
Collaborative efforts maximize impact

# Partnering for progress

Created in 2003, Operation UNITE - Unlawful Narcotics Investigations, Treatment and Education, Inc. - is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation that strives to combat substance abuse and misuse in Kentucky.

Today, the organization's primary service region includes 32 current or former 5th Congressional District counties across Southern and Eastern Kentucky. However, UNITE reaches all citizens of the Commonwealth through the KY HELP Statewide Call Center and many partnerships with federal, state, and community organizations. These include:

Kentucky Office of Drug Control Policy,  
Kentucky Specialty Courts,  
Kentucky National Guard,  
Kentucky Chamber of Commerce,  
Citizens Attacking Addiction Coalition



(Jefferson County), Kentucky State Police, 43 city police departments and 32 county sheriff's offices within the UNITE service region, Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources, Addiction Recovery Care, RECON Kentucky, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Kentucky Cabinet for Health & Family Services, Serve Kentucky (AmeriCorps), Federal Bureau of Investigation, Appalachia HIDTA (High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area), U.S. Department of Education, Kentucky Department of Education, Leadership Kentucky, ACT Now-Martin County, Berea College Partners for Education, University of Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center, SOAR (Shaping our Appalachia Region), Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, and numerous businesses and industry.

*UNITE's primary service region covers 32 counties in the current and former 5th Congressional District, but its reach extends across the entire Commonwealth.*

State funding provides the foundation upon which Operation UNITE operates. Additional resources obtained through grants, individual contributions, and corporate donations fund many of the law enforcement, treatment, and education/prevention initiatives provided to citizens of Kentucky.

## Much has been accomplished, but more work remains to be done

# Emerging from the pandemic

Progress is a process. It cannot be taken for granted, and, unfortunately, it can be reversed. That is why we must be more vigilant, more vocal, and more committed than ever before to defeating the drug epidemic.

Kentucky, through proven partnerships and strong priorities, had made great strides. It was just three years ago – pre-pandemic – that 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 declines in drug overdose mortality rate between 2008 and 2017 were located in Eastern Kentucky. Of the top 20 counties nationally, 14 were in Eastern Kentucky.



**Nancy Hale**  
President & CEO

But the pandemic and influx of fentanyl have proven to be devastating. In 2021, 2,250 Kentuckians died from drug overdoses – a 14.5% increase from 2020. Nationally, the most recent data available from the CDC shows Kentucky moved from eighth to second in overdose fatalities in 2020. With 49.2 deaths per 100,000 residents, we trailed only West Virginia, which had 81.4 deaths per 100,000.

Fentanyl accounted for nearly 70 percent of all overdose deaths. In addition, the Kentucky Office of Drug Control Policy reported that the widespread availability of potent, inexpensive methamphetamine also played a role in the increase.

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**Emily W., RN** | 2019 “I Am UNITE” Scholarship Ambassador

*“At just 12 years old, I chose to remove myself from a house full of drugs and live with my grandparents. I thought I was the only kid going through these problems. But, Camp UNITE made me realize these problems were everywhere, and we young people need to be advocates against drug abuse. I am now a Registered Nurse in an ER. If I hadn’t participated in Camp UNITE – as both a camper and Team Leader – and gained the strength and courage to make a better life for myself, I would not be where I am today.”*

*“With the trends continuing to go in the wrong direction we must ask ourselves, what will it take to move to robust and comprehensive action? The story behind these data is beyond devastating and heartbreaking to those families who have suffered loss. Let’s begin to address this crisis with the urgency it deserves by bringing care to where people are. From schools to primary care to our workplaces, let’s ensure that all places are equipped to address mental health and substance misuse. This is not just the responsibility of the mental health and addiction field – but all our responsibility.”*



**Dr. Benjamin F. Miller**  
**President**  
**Well Being Trust**

As our foes become more formidable, we must work to put even more emphasis on prevention initiatives. The urgency of our efforts has never been greater.

Thanks to a strong investment from the Kentucky Legislature, and by leveraging those funds with other partners, Operation UNITE has placed more people in life-saving treatment and drug-free transitional housing.

We also continue with important education and prevention initiatives, which you will see throughout this report. Since our inception, Operation UNITE has reached nearly 550,000 youth.

In addition, Operation UNITE announced a new partnership in June, which will

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***“The urgency  
of our efforts  
has never  
been greater.”***

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enable us to increase prevention initiatives through funding for a full-time Prevention Projects Coordinator provided by the nonprofit HarborPath. This multi-year grant will fund a staff member to focus on increasing access to Naloxone, the life-saving medication that can reverse an overdose from opioids

– including heroin, fentanyl, and other prescription opioids.

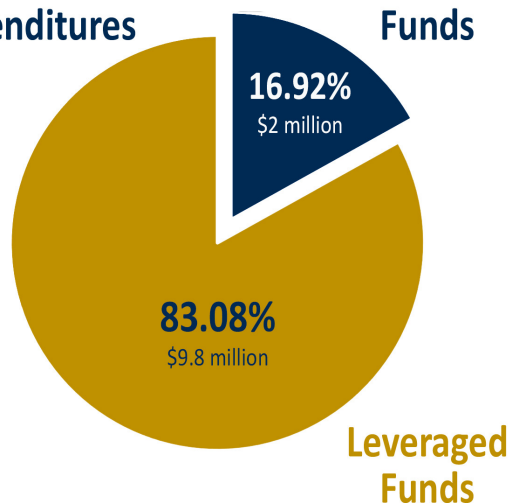
This investment will also sharpen Operation UNITE’s focus to more effectively and efficiently combat the destructive impact of the opioid crisis.

Together, we can remove barriers, overcome obstacles, and change the trajectory for entire families and communities for generations to come.

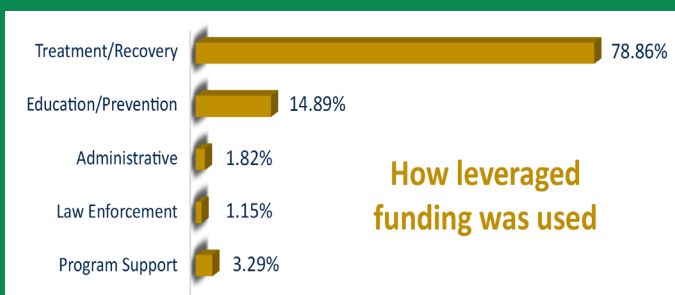
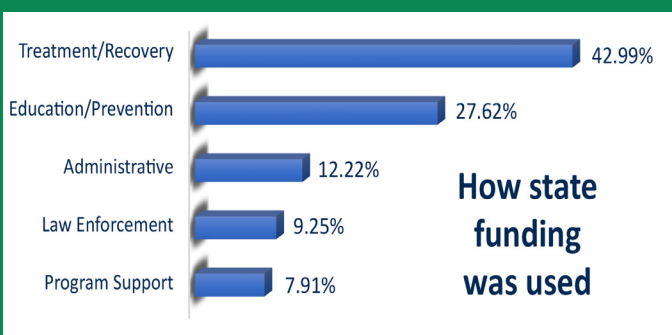
## Focus on education, prevention & treatment initiatives

# UNITE leverages funding

### FY 2020-21 Expenditures



**\$8.98 of every \$10 was spent on treatment and education/prevention initiatives!**



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

The Kentucky General Assembly's \$2 million investment in Operation UNITE during Fiscal Year 2021-22 enabled staff to secure an additional \$9.8 million from grants and private contributions for education/prevention, treatment, and law enforcement initiatives.

Without funding from the Kentucky General Assembly, Operation UNITE would not be able to provide comprehensive substance use and prevention services to the Commonwealth!

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, 89 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.



Program expanded to help those entering transitional housing

# Demand for treatment explodes

With the emergence of fentanyl and a record increase in overdose deaths, Kentucky experienced a dramatic increase in the number of individuals seeking financial assistance to receive treatment for substance use disorders.

At the beginning of the Fiscal Year, the UNITE Board of Directors upgraded the Treatment Voucher Program to support Kentuckians in need. We could not have anticipated the surge in the number of requests for vouchers to enter long-term, residential treatment.

In October 2021, faced with a shortage of funds and in order to honor commitments to approved clients, UNITE temporarily suspended approving vouchers. Additional funding was provided by the 2022 General Assembly, and the UNITE Voucher Program was able to resume in May.

149

individuals entered  
treatment using  
a UNITE Voucher

62

clients  
completed their  
treatment program

1,594

treatment-related inquiries handled  
by staff each month

47

transitional housing/sober living  
assistance applications approved



**Nick E.** | 2014 "I Am UNITE" Scholarship Ambassador

*"The knowledge given in events provided by Operation UNITE helped my class understand the temptations we would eventually face later in life, and the true cost of poor decisions in those moments. The information provided to me by UNITE has helped me lead a successful and substance-free life. I currently work as a DevOps Engineer."*



School and community programs

# Education & Prevention

**42,934 youth & 15,871 adults were engaged through UNITE Coalition youth programs**



## UNITE Coalitions

Coalition  
Activities  
Conducted  
**3,136**

National Archery  
in the Schools  
**11,455**  
youth

Special  
Programs  
**10,292**  
youth

Intramural  
Sports  
**4,393**  
youth

The First Tee  
Golf Program  
**2,393**  
youth

Backpack  
Program  
**1,374**  
youth  
*served each month*

Summer Activity  
Programs  
**3,608**  
youth

Drama  
Programs  
**3,498**  
youth

Red Ribbon  
Week  
**4,854**  
youth

Hooked on Fishing  
Not on Drugs  
**358**  
youth

Project  
Prom  
**719**  
youth



**Hannah F.** | 2017 "I Am UNITE" Scholarship Ambassador

*"UNITE helped me discover how I could use my voice to help others feel comfort in something I experienced myself. I found a family and network of people who made me feel like I belonged, and that my experiences matter. I was able to help reach the minds of other young kids through Camp UNITE. I recently graduated from UK and pursuing a career in physical therapy."*

# UNITE initiatives



## Medication Drop Boxes

**6,460 lbs (3.23 tons)**

of medications was collected by UNITE as part of National DEA Take-Back Days.

This represents

**27.35%**

of all medications collected in the Commonwealth.



**7,934**

students were members of 141 **UNITE Clubs** at schools in 25 counties

Virtually  
**#Hope Continues**



Camp UNITE 2021

**80**

middle school-aged youth were registered for **Camp UNITE**, which was held virtually over three days. Each camper was provided a box of supplies to enable them to participate in the activities from home.



**Vaping**

**2,926**

students attended a **"Truth About Vaping"** presentation



**Tori E.** | 2017 "I Am UNITE" Scholarship Ambassador

*"I volunteered at Camp UNITE for seven years, two of which I served as a summer intern. The 'I Am UNITE' scholarship aided me in receiving my bachelor's degree from Centre College. UNITE gave me the opportunity to foster my passion for helping people, particularly students, which helps me now in my current position as an ESL Tutor. UNITE left a lasting impression on me that I will carry close to my heart for the rest of my life."*

# UNITE initiatives



**AmeriCorps**

**3,410**

students receiving **Math Tutoring** by USC members

**42.91%**

average growth in math knowledge among students tutored

**4,474**

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

**2,172**

students taught **"Too Good For Drugs"** curricula by USC members

**62.96%**

average growth in drug education knowledge among students

**341**

**Volunteers** recruited to help in schools provided

**662**

hours of service

All 58 **UNITE Service Corps** (USC) members are state certified in FEMA disaster and emergency response by the Kentucky Division of Emergency Management



**2,482**

middle and high school youth participated in an **"On The Move!"** drug prevention education program at 27 schools

**42.85%**

average increase in student knowledge about vaping, alcohol, meth, fentanyl, and synthetic drugs as a result of these programs



**Jesse D.** | 2018 "I Am UNITE" Scholarship Ambassador

*"Because of my experience as a Camp UNITE Team Leader, I realized how much I wanted to help youth/young adults. I am currently the State Level Youth Coordinator for a federally-funded initiative where I advocate for 16- to 25-year-olds who have, or are at risk of developing, behavioral health challenges or substance use issues. Without Operation UNITE I would have never decided to work in a career where I can use my lived experience."*

# UNITE initiatives



**639**

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

**172**

parents or guardians attended an educational program on vaping during these camps



**300+**

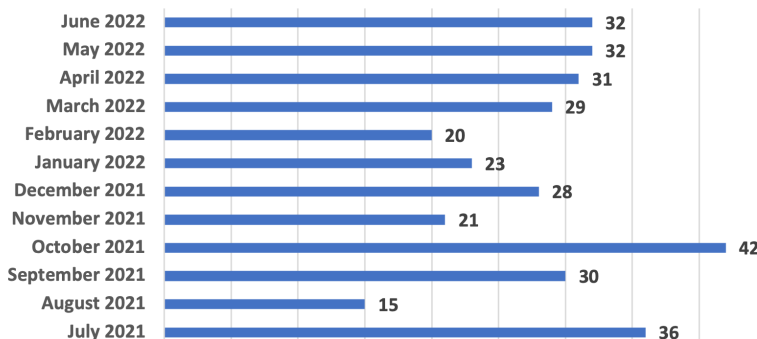
locations where parents can obtain a free **"Give Me A Reason"** saliva-based drug testing kit



**Morgan H.** | 2014 "I Am UNITE" Scholarship Ambassador

*"I was one of the very first campers at Camp UNITE and attended every year for 10 years. When I think back on those years, I remember how it shaped me into the person I am today. Now I spend my days trying to shape and influence the future of America as a 12th grade English and speech teacher. UNITE helped me keep a level head, stay away from alcohol and other drugs, and follow my dreams."*

## UNITE Drug Tip Line Calls



**21**

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



**331**

Students taught "Too Good For Drugs" curricula at 8 schools through the **Perry Promise Neighborhood** program

**28.26%**

average increase in drug knowledge by these students



Personalized assistance for substance use disorders

# Call Center serving entire state

New evening and weekend hours enabled Screening and Referral Specialists at the KY HELP Statewide Call Center to respond quickly to Kentuckians confronted with a loved one's addiction.



Specialists help callers navigate through treatment options - from medication-assisted treatment to faith-based care - insurance, recovery resources, and other barriers that may occur.

The Call Center offers 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.**

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 to ensure that a client's needs are being met.

**4,790**

calls received seeking assistance from **119** Kentucky counties

**941**

individuals referred to a treatment program

**10,042**

follow-up calls made in response to caller needs

**1,425**

outreach calls to clients who have entered treatment



**Chase G.** | 2018 "I Am UNITE" Scholarship Ambassador

*"Operation UNITE is one of the best things to happen to Southeastern Kentucky. When I was a teenager, I lost my father to an opioid addiction. UNITE gave me an opportunity to overcome that tragedy through education on how to live a sober life, and that I didn't have to follow in the steps of my father. Operation UNITE played a vital role in me becoming who I am today – a Kentucky State Trooper."*

UNITE strategies showcased at Rx Summit

# Kentucky takes national stage



Kentucky's tremendous success in reducing drug overdose mortality prior to the COVID-19 pandemic was highlighted on the national stage at the Rx and Illicit Drug Summit in Atlanta in April 2022.

More than 3,000 people representing all 50 states, Puerto Rico, Australia, Canada, and Denmark attended the Rx Summit, the

largest collaboration of professionals and advocates who have been impacted by Rx opioid abuse/diversion and heroin use.

Presenters were Nancy Hale, President & CEO of Operation UNITE, Michael Meit, Director of Research and Programs at the Center for Rural Health Research at

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**Hannah L.** | 2014 "I Am UNITE" Scholarship Ambassador

*"From being active in UNITE Clubs since its beginning in 2004, volunteering at Camp UNITE, traveling to schools to promote a drug-free life, having the opportunity to serve as a Congressional Page, dealing with the loss of a family member to drugs, then testifying before a Congressional Committee on the effects of drug abuse, UNITE has been a part of my life every step of the way."*

East Tennessee State University, and Tim Robinson, founder and CEO of Addiction Recovery Care.

The three shared factors that led to a substantial decrease in overdose deaths in Eastern Kentucky at a time in which most parts of the region and country were experiencing the opposite trend.

An independent qualitative study attributed much of this success to the multi-pronged strategies implemented by Operation UNITE, along with the “robust

and cross-sector collaboration” of local and state entities toward policies and practices related to education, prevention, treatment, law enforcement, and stigma reduction.

In addition, attendees learned lessons gleaned from the front lines of the addiction crisis, how to apply successful strategies in other localities, and opportunities to identify the policies and approaches that may be the most impactful to efforts within their own communities.

## About the theme

The past few years we have experienced many difficulties between the pandemic and the increase in overdose deaths with the outbreak of fentanyl. We have faced these epidemics head on.

In the last year, our communities began to rebuild from the remote experience we had in the first



year and a half of the pandemic. We learned how to come together and lean on one another in our greatest time of unknown. The ability to be back in person renews our hope. Hope that children can

be the difference in their own lives. Hope that these children can also help others. With renewed hope, WE RISE and we rise TOGETHER.



**Sandy B., MPH** | 2013 “I Am UNITE” Scholarship Ambassador

*“Since graduating (college) in 2017, I have been able to work to better the lives of Kentuckians through prevention, treatment and implementation. Currently I am working on the HEALing Communities Study – and keeping the promise I made to myself to battle an epidemic we all know far too well. Without the support of Operation UNITE, I would not be where I am today.”*



For additional information contact

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