



# CDC Healthy Schools Stories of Achievement

*Healthy Students, Ready to Learn*

## KENTUCKY

Using Youth Mental Health First Aid to meet the *social* and *emotional* learning needs of Kentucky's students

CDC funds from the 1801 COVID-19 Supplemental Grant have *made it possible* to serve so many in such **delicate, unfamiliar** times.

The Green River Regional Education Cooperative (GRREC), located in south central and central Kentucky, is one of eight educational cooperatives in Kentucky.



In response to the mental health issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, GRREC trained 689 people in Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA). These teachers, administrators, school nurses, food service personnel, custodians, and others represented 76 schools and central offices in 30 school districts.

YMHFA is a course that focuses on how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. GRREC identified the need for this training by surveying member districts on what they thought their social and emotional learning needs would be for the 2020–2021 school year.

### Impact

Two school districts, in particular, excelled in this training: Allen County (23 trained) and Butler County (211 trained).

### In Allen County...

Cyndi Mann, a 23-year math teacher, transitioned into the school counselor role at the beginning of the 2021–2022 school year. YMHFA has prompted her to assess each situation differently instead of as a one-size-fits-all approach. The training inspired her and her colleagues to research and learn more about their community resources and supports (strengths and gaps) to help students and families deal with a mental health crisis or

**23 School Counselors trained**  
in the Allen county School District



“I appreciate how the training explained the differences between mental health, mental disorder/ illness, and mental health challenge as well as the delivery of the idea that mental health first aid is no less important than physical first aid.”

– **Cyndi Mann,**  
School Counselor,  
Allen County School District



illness. She acknowledges that being able to connect her students to these resources is an essential task. Mann also used some of the YMHFA content to update the required annual state professional development on suicide prevention.

Mann's School school has implemented a system to identify, monitor, and support students who may need additional help navigating mental health challenges. She notes that not a day goes by that this system is not used.

## In Butler County...

Administrators made training all staff in YMHFA a priority because each adult interacts with different children daily. Doing so equipped staff members with a common language and understanding so any staff can be a critical support to any student in need.

Holly Howard has witnessed a direct impact from participating in the YMHFA professional development series. Transitioning from a fifth-grade classroom after 13 years, she recently assumed the role of school counselor and uses the YMHFA training to guide daily practice. She has seen an intentional focus on meeting the social and emotional needs of students as well as their academic needs rather than putting "Band-Aids" on mental health needs as they arise. She has also used strategies such as keeping her voice at a normal level when dealing with student mental health issues, being proactive rather than reactive, using empathetic listening and silence (when possible), and having more compassion.

To ensure sustainability of YMFHA practices in Butler County, the school district formed a Mental Health Cohort that meets monthly to address continued and emerging issues central to student mental health. One priority for the group is to ensure each student within their building has at least one adult they view as a trusted person and who truly knows them.

"We have to ensure our students' mental and emotional needs are being met prior to teaching and learning. They must have a sense of everything is going to be OK and the environment they are in (our school) is safe. Maslow demonstrated this many years ago, and it remains core to how each of us respond in the most basic sense. Youth Mental Health First Aid causes us to re-evaluate and prioritize and act in the best interest of our students and families."

- **Holly Howard**,  
School Counselor,  
Butler County School District

## 211 School Counselors trained in the Butler county School District



Learn more: [www.cdc.gov/healthyschools](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools)