



# ANNUAL REPORT

OCTOBER 2021



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**MEMPHIS**

Center for Community Research  
and Evaluation



## VISION

The Center for Community Research and Evaluation (CCRE) at the University of Memphis strives to be the leading source of expertise on community transformation in the Mid-South. The center serves as a vital partner in research and evaluation of community-based projects, providing consulting services and conducting original research in the areas of rural and urban poverty, education, and health.

## MISSION

The mission of CCRE is to **provide interdisciplinary social science research and evaluation support for community-based projects.**

## FROM THE DIRECTOR



In 2020, we established our Center to fill what we saw as a gap in the regional civic infrastructure. After years of work and multiple conversations with practitioners and leaders in the public and nonprofit sectors, we concluded that there was a large unmet need in our region for social science expertise among civic organizations. The use of strategic data is critical for civic groups to identify the needs of the target populations, improve processes, demonstrate effectiveness for stakeholders, and acquire funds. However, many organizations lack in-house capacity to create and sustain the infrastructure needed to effectively use data. To help civic leaders quantify their efforts, we established our Center to create a community resource of interdisciplinary social scientists and statisticians that could meet the needs of organizations large and small.

The first year of the CCRE has been a resounding success. We expanded our longstanding partnership with Delta Health Alliance (DHA) to multiple years and acquired new evaluation opportunities with them. We completed our first campus partnership with the Center for Applied Earth Science and Engineering Research (CAESER) at the University of Memphis, and we joined in new ventures with community partners in Memphis and Shelby County including A Step Ahead Foundation, The Women's Foundation of Greater Memphis, and Southwest Tennessee Community College. We are also excited to be engaged in COVID-19 research and evaluation projects in West Tennessee and Mississippi through DHA and a new regional partnership with the Town of Inverness, Mississippi. As our portfolio has expanded, so too has our staff. We are fortunate to have added new full-time analysts and part-time student internships, which have been a great addition to our already outstanding full-time staff.

We look forward to continuing this positive trajectory of work and growth in the years ahead, and the 2021-22 academic year will serve as an important year for CCRE. As partner needs for research and evaluation services grow, so does the necessity to have the infrastructure to thrive as a University social science research center. We will implement our strategic plan to expand center capability and position CCRE to become the leading source of expertise for community transformation in the region. We look forward to having continued collaborations with the University administration, affiliates, and community partners to secure new projects, increase staffing, and find a campus home. CCRE is also looking forward to growing its role to become an integral part of the University's institutional efforts to transform our community, serve students, and enhance the research capacities on campus.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wesley James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wesley James, Ph.D.  
Executive Director, Center for Community Research and Evaluation  
Professor, Department of Sociology

## ABOUT THE CCRE

A social science research center in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Memphis, the CCRE is an interdisciplinary team dedicated to leveraging the full power of data and scientific methodology to support community projects. With years of expertise in helping academic non-profit and community-based entities identify and articulate the impact of their efforts, our diverse team offers services covering every step of the formative and evaluative process.

We believe that all organizations can benefit from incorporating some level of strategic data. For civic groups, this is especially true because data is integral to identifying the needs of the target audience, improving processes, demonstrating effectiveness for stakeholders, and acquiring funds. After years of work and numerous conversations with practitioners and leaders in the public and nonprofit sectors, we firmly believe that when organizations invest in building capacity to use and rigorously analyze data, they are rewarded with enhanced impact and clearer paths to sustainability. We strive to help our partners receive meaningful formative feedback to improve operations, clearly demonstrate and articulate impact during and after implementation, break down silos between researchers and clients, and contribute to awareness and trust in local civic efforts.

CCRE recognizes the need to tailor practices to client needs and differences between research and evaluation. Although the methods used in research and evaluation studies often converge, the purpose of evaluation is essentially to improve an existing program for the target population whereas research is intended to prove a theory or hypothesis. We also believe it is important for community partners to guide methodological decisions and identify culturally sensitive approaches, especially when evaluating programs focused on providing community services.

## OUR SERVICES



## YEAR 1 COLLABORATIONS



Quantitative evaluations and needs assessments for dozens of interventions aimed at promoting health and education in the Mississippi Delta.



Return-on-investment analysis and evaluability assessment for interventions promoting contraceptive access in the Mid-South.



Qualitative evaluation of intervention aimed at promoting undergraduate retention through course redesign.



Mixed-methods study to investigate a digital literacy program in Memphis designed to increase equity in Internet access and computing skills.



Mixed-methods, large-scale studies to promote health literacy and improve COVID-19 vaccination rates in the Mississippi Delta.



Administered the Shelby County Water Survey, a representative mail-based survey establishing a baseline for regional environmental outreach and education.

CCRE works with academic, nonprofit and community entities to assess the implementation and outcomes of projects and programs designed to help the community. Supporting over \$20 million of grant-funded interventions, we research and evaluate programs in many domains, such as family, health, education, urban and rural poverty, and community equity.

# 6

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

# 100+

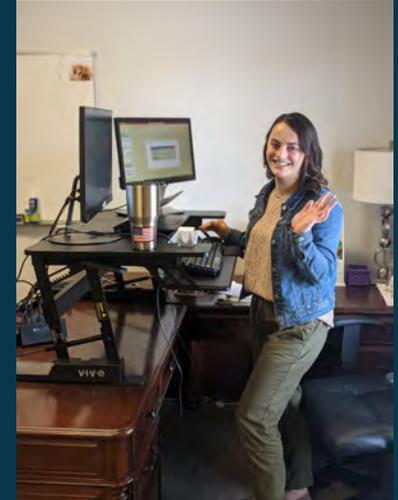
EVALUATIONS

# \$604k

EXTERNAL DOLLARS

## CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: DELTA HEALTH ALLIANCE

*Left:* CCRE staff visited Leland, Mississippi in 2021 to tour DHA's innovative summer camp model.



*Right:* Madeline Plaster, one of three DHA researchers working on DHA projects in collaboration with CCRE.

While CCRE was founded formally in 2020, center director Dr. James has, since 2015, led a core research team since 2015 to evaluate the programming of Delta Health Alliance (DHA), a Mississippi-based non-profit organization with an ambitious goal to improve the health and education of the Mississippi Delta region.

Starting with a small team of three researchers focusing primarily on the quantitative analysis of programmatic data, CCRE's portfolio with Delta Health Alliance has expanded to include evaluation planning, needs assessments, preparation of external deliverables, quarterly stakeholder presentations, instrumentation, data engineering, and dashboarding to support the dozens of grants led by this regional organization.

An important part of CCRE's evaluation portfolio is to support the continuous quality improvement process for the Indianola and Deer Creek Promise Communities. Modeled after the Harlem Children's Zone, these programs serve as pipelines of wraparound social and educational supports from cradle to career, designed to transform the communities of Indianola, Leland, and Hollandale. DHA's investment in rigorous methods and evaluation has paid dividends. In March, the CCRE wrote a 92-page needs assessment to support DHA's successful \$30 million proposal to establish a cradle-to-career Promise Neighborhood in Leflore County, Mississippi.

The CCRE looks forward to continuing to work with DHA on its critical work in the years ahead.



## SUPPORTING COVID-19 VACCINATION OUTREACH

Much of CCRE's work this year has been focused on supporting regional partners conducting outreach campaigns to promote COVID-19 vaccination in Mississippi and West Tennessee, including Delta Health Alliance's \$9 million *Get Your Shot Mississippi* campaign. To support this important work, CCRE is undertaking multiple quantitative and qualitative research projects, including:

- A representative mail-based survey to assess residents' attitudes for and against vaccination.
- Weekly quantitative assessments of vaccination trends in the service area.
- Real-time dashboarding of COVID-19 case and vaccination data for project leaders.
- Interviews of the recently vaccinated to determine pivotal factors in the decision to vaccinate.
- Segmentation analysis to determine best practices for outreach across the service area, including spatial analysis of secondary data.

The Center, in partnership with Alcorn State University, is also supporting the Town of Inverness in Sunflower County, Mississippi on a project to improve vaccination rates within ten counties of the Mississippi Delta. Funded by the federal government's Office of Minority Health, the Inverness project uses a health literacy approach to improve the suitability, availability, and use of COVID-19 information and services by rural minorities. CCRE has supported the Town of Inverness through its contributions to a Disparity Impact Statement, Evaluation Plan, and the preparation of assessment tools which will aid in impact assessment of the project in the months ahead.

## SUPPORTING EMERGING SCHOLARS AND CHANGEMAKERS

CCRE is delighted to have undergraduate and graduate interns on board from a range of academic backgrounds. While students become interns through a variety of reasons (university programs, Honors program, volunteering), the internships build research and evaluation skills, offer an insight into how social science centers work with nonprofits, and enhance essential workforce skills such as teamwork and effective communication. Through our internship program, we hope to support emerging scholars and changemakers committed to transforming their community.

### MEET OUR UNDERGRADUATE INTERNS

#### Justin Harris

Senior, International Studies, Univ. of Memphis



*I am a senior at University of Memphis. I chose the CCRE because I am minoring in Public Administration, and this is a good opportunity to gain insight into that field. I am currently working on the Delta Eats Program. I have learned a lot so far and I hope to learn more over the course of this experience.*

Justin recently started his internship with CCRE. He is working on the Delta EATS (Edible Agriculture Teaching Students) project, a school gardening program in Mississippi Delta elementary schools.

#### Laurel Martens

Junior, Liberal Studies, Univ. of Memphis

Laurel started with CCRE in summer 2021 and is continuing into the 2021-22 academic year. She assisted with various DHA evaluations and is currently evaluating a program that connects dietitians with students in PE classes at partner schools to educate them about healthy meals.

*Working with CCRE this summer has been one of the most educational and fulfilling experiences I have had since starting school. I have learned about various methods of research and evaluation, data collection, and statistics, as well as the value of working as part of a team. By working with people in seemingly disparate fields, I gained a deeper understanding of how their disciplines are connected and saw the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach firsthand. The sense of community and camaraderie at CCRE was evident from my first day and is something I will always cherish.*



I wanted to intern at CCRE to put a sharper lens on what policy and programs look like at the local level. I loved the camaraderie of the CCRE team, being able to explore and challenge myself in a supportive environment, and learning about evaluation work in a different context than my previous experience.

I am currently a second year graduate student in the Sociology department at the University of Memphis. After I graduate, I hope to pursue a doctorate degree in Sociology and a master's degree in Public Health. Ultimately, I hope to become a public health analyst at the Centers for Disease Control. My research interests include Children, Family and Mental Health.

I picked CCRE for my internship because I enjoyed how diverse the Center was when it came to projects. When I end up working in the healthcare industry, I will now have the ability to look at patient care from a new perspective. Rather than looking at a patient as set of ailments, I will be able to socially understand why they may or may not have come in for care and the best way to educate them for follow-up care.



**Claire Brindley**  
Health Policy  
University of Chicago

Claire traveled to Memphis from Chicago to intern with the CCRE during her Master's program. During her time, she evaluated a health program designed to reduce the morbidity and mortality of diabetes in rural, low-income, minority communities, served as an interviewer on a COVID-19 vaccination outreach grant.



**Clarion Harris**  
Sociology  
University of Memphis

Clarion is CCRE's 2021-22 graduate assistant. She is currently working on COVID-19 projects focused on increasing vaccination rates in MS and West TN. She led an analysis of vaccination provider outreach efforts within the 82 counties of Mississippi.



**Bailey Tadlock**  
Healthcare Management  
Christian Brothers Univ.

Bailey completed her internship in her junior year, but is continuing with CCRE through her first year of graduate school, until she transitions to Physician's Assistant school in 2022.

She has worked on a broad variety of projects, including a survey on the socioemotional effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and an evaluation of how interventions shape college readiness.

## MEET OUR GRADUATE INTERNS

## MEET ALUMNI OF THE CCRE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

McKinlee interned with CCRE during her first year in graduate school, in spring and summer 2021. She worked on a variety of evaluation projects which included evaluations of students' life skills and perceptions of school climate. Her focus project involved coding and analyzing qualitative data associated with faculty perceptions of implemented redesigned college courses for students attending community college.



**McKinlee Deutsch**  
University of Memphis

*I chose to intern at CCRE because I wanted to see the connection between community research and public administration from a social science lens. With my time as a Master of Public Administration student at UofM, one of my goals is to be able to apply my liberal studies background to nonprofit practices. I enjoyed learning from the researchers and staff at CCRE, and I've gained more insight into what my career path may look like in the future.*

*I enjoyed this internship so much. I really learned a lot. I build on my data presentation skills, data analysis software knowledge, Excel skills (who knew you could do so many things!), and overall worked with a great team who was happy to teach me new things. I got an introduction to using R, helped work on a literature review and helped write a paper that later got published.*



**Chelsea Joyner**  
Christian Brothers Univ.

Chelsea was an intern for CCRE through her senior year of college. Her internship involved analyzing data and preparing reports for educational projects implemented by CCRE's client, Delta Health Alliance (e.g., school gardens, school health and youth council programs). After graduating with a Bachelor's in Psychology, Chelsea transitioned to the PhD program in Cognitive Psychology at Kansas State University, studying the use of EEGs to evaluate multimodal perception.

Zenia interned at CCRE during fall 2020 in a partnership with Christian Brothers University and Delta Health Alliance. A computer science major, Zenia worked on several projects focused on using enhancing her coding skills to statistically evaluate educational programs. Zenia also supported the questionnaire design for the Shelby County Water Survey.



**Zenia Lomas Valdez**  
Christian Brothers Univ.

*I helped analyze data for a few summer camp programs and created graphs to represent the progress. I also helped on the creation of flyers that included this data. This helped me to use my coding skills learned in my statistics class and learned the management of the programming language R.*

## MEET OUR STAFF



### Wesley James, Executive Director

<i>Education</i>	Ph.D., Mississippi State University, 2009
<i>Expertise</i>	Medical sociology; demography; rural health
<i>Role at CCRE</i>	Principal investigator; external relations
<i>Fun fact</i>	College sports expert



### Jonathan Bennett, Assistant Director

<i>Education</i>	Ph.D., University of Rochester, 2017
<i>Expertise</i>	Applied quantitative methodology
<i>Role at CCRE</i>	Statistical projects; coordination of research operations
<i>Fun fact</i>	Director of CCRE March Madness, knows nothing about basketball



### Rachel Arthur, Research and Data Analyst

<i>Education</i>	Ph.D., South Bank University, 2003
<i>Expertise</i>	Mixed-methods research; grants management
<i>Role at CCRE</i>	Educational evaluations; qualitative research; academic publication and technical writing
<i>Fun fact</i>	Winner of the 2010 St. Jude Half Marathon



### Joseph Branson, Research Associate

<i>Education</i>	B.A, University of Mississippi, 2019
<i>Expertise</i>	Spatial analytics; data visualization
<i>Role at CCRE</i>	Maps; dashboards; data management; nutrition evaluation
<i>Fun fact</i>	Ultimate Frisbee player



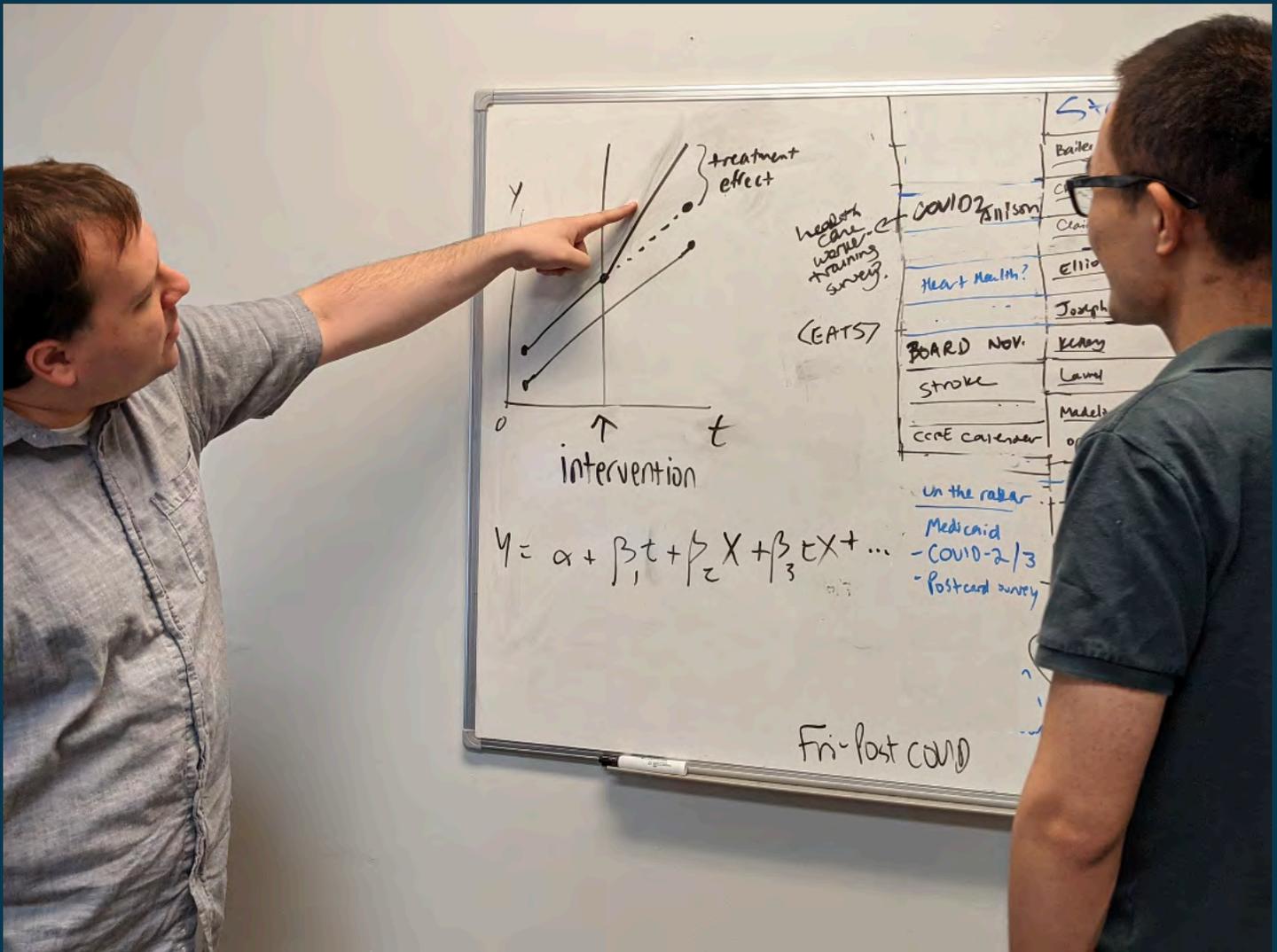
### Chris King, Research and Data Analyst

<i>Education</i>	M.A., University of Memphis, 2015
<i>Expertise</i>	Sociology; political economy
<i>Role at CCRE</i>	Early childhood evaluation; research design
<i>Fun fact</i>	Helped coordinate the first laparoscopic surgery in Honduras



### Shuai Yuan, Research Associate

<i>Education</i>	M.S., University of Chicago, 2020
<i>Expertise</i>	Public policy; quantitative methods
<i>Role at CCRE</i>	Educational evaluation using quantitative and automated methods
<i>Fun fact</i>	Once had an owl as a pet



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