

conversation starters

SUMMER 2026

The newsletter of PreventEd

Building a Stronger Safety Net

By Jenny Armbruster



Jenny Armbruster
Executive Director

of needs and there is not a cookie cutter approach for behavioral health.

Partnerships. Networks. Collaborations. These are all terms that are frequently used and promoted in the non-profit and public health space. Agencies strive to work together and funders strongly encourage, or often require, these relationships between organizations. Of course, partnerships are necessary to be able to best serve individuals and communities. People have a variety



Our partnership with Jefferson Franklin Community Action Corporation (JFCAC), which helped us secure a brand-new van in the Summer 2025 for The Collective.

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As important as it is for PreventEd to understand substance use, it is equally important for PreventEd staff to be knowledgeable and connected to other community resources.

There is not one organization that can truly “do it all”. PreventEd staff aim to be experts in the areas of substance use prevention and recovery. When working on programming in schools, providing support to community coalitions or engaging one-on-one with a person

in their recovery journey, there are various other areas that intersect with substance use. As important as it is for PreventEd to understand substance use, it is equally important for PreventEd staff to be knowledgeable and connected to other community resources. To recognize what we don’t know—and who else understands that need best. PreventEd has historically positioned the agency as a trustworthy convenor in the community. A significant part of this is through strong partnership. Building the relationships with other organizations so that we are able to make trusted referrals to our communities and clients, along with other organizations trusting PreventEd for information and referrals.

Beyond the network of partners across St. Louis that make up a safety net for our communities, there are also more formalized partnerships and collaborations PreventEd engages in to strengthen our work. Some examples of these include MOUs approved by School Boards to present in classrooms, formal funding relationships with local coalitions, grant partnerships with other organizations or services and training with partner agencies to share resources. Formalized collaborations may take more intention and effort for success, but the reward that comes with strengthening the work and providing services to people in the community makes it worth it.

As we continue to navigate funding changes, shifts in community needs and strategies to best reach individuals, PreventEd understands the value of relationships across all levels—network partners, cross-agency collaborations, donors, and the people and communities we serve. The heart of all the work is in relationships. We would not be able to best provide substance use prevention and recovery services without having strong partners and being a strong partner. It truly takes many organizations coming together to create the most secure safety net in the community. As Mother Teresa stated, “You can do what I cannot do. I can do what you cannot do. Together we can do great things.”

The Power of Synergy

By Emily Wilkerson

At PreventEd, we know that preventing teen substance misuse and championing mental wellness cannot be achieved in isolation. It requires a network of dedicated voices, shared resources, and collective passion. This ethos was on full display at our recent Hear Us Advocacy event, driven by our dynamic, teen-led ElevatEd Youth Coalition (grades 9-12).

The success of the Hear Us event relies entirely on a unique web of partnerships. Bringing together high schoolers from across St. Louis City, St. Louis, St. Charles, Lincoln, Warren, Franklin, and Jefferson counties, the event serves as a masterclass in regional collaboration. By bridging urban, suburban, and rural lines, our youth coalition joined forces with local schools, community strategists, and grassroots organizations to form a united front against substance misuse.

ElevatEd did not march toward progress alone. A vital element of this year's success was the hands-on support from our dedicated area coalitions. Strong grassroots groups—including Lincoln County C.O.R.E., HOPE for Franklin County, Jefferson County Drug Prevention Coalition, Alliance for Healthy Communities, and All-In Clayton—amplified our message.



2026 Hear Us Participants at the Capitol in Jefferson City, Missouri

These localized coalitions provided invaluable regional infrastructure, helping recruit passionate local students, coordinate regional transportation, and ground the statewide advocacy data in real, community-specific stories. By blending local neighborhood insights with ElevatEd's broader regional reach, this collective pipeline turned local concerns into a powerful, unified legislative voice.

Before taking their message directly to lawmakers, students participated in a robust series of preparatory workshops. These sessions highlighted the critical link between corporate, scientific, and educational partnerships.

The Science of Prevention: Experts provided data-driven insights into the teenage brain and contemporary risks like “gas station cannabis.”

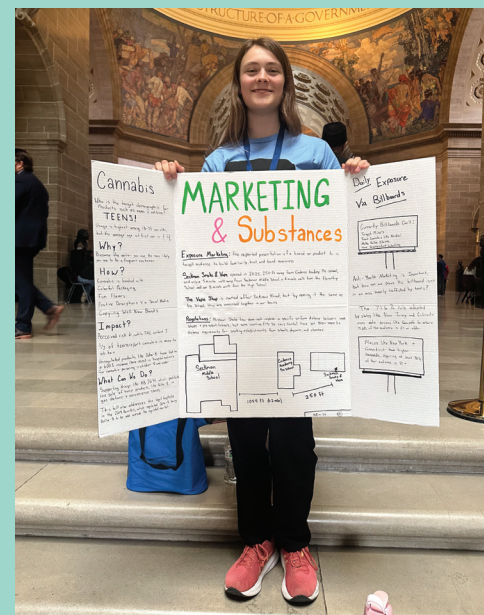
The Power of Telling Your Story: The American Cancer Society shared their experiences within the public and legislative communities with the teens.

Advocacy 101: Experienced community advocates equipped youth leaders with the public speaking and policy tools needed to command a room.

The culmination of this collaborative effort took place during an overnight trip to Jefferson City. Side by side, students met with state senators and representatives to share their personal insights, create conversations about protective legislation, and put their new skills into practice.

Through these efforts, Hear Us proved that when we combine the lived experiences of our youth with the structural support of regional partners and area coalitions, real change is possible. By connecting and strengthening partnerships, we are ensuring the next generation is not just heard, but impossible to ignore.

For more information on how to get involved with ElevatEd, contact Emily Wilkerson at ewilkerson@prevented.org



2026 Hear Us Participant at the Capitol in Jefferson City, Missouri



UPCOMING TRAININGS

Please visit our website for the most up-to-date event information and registration: prevented.org/events

Four days. Three nights. Memories that last a lifetime.

Teen Institute, PreventEd's longest running youth leadership program, is back, and registration is now open! At TI, we place an emphasis on fostering a space conducive to the development of relationships with diverse peers from all over the region. We include structured social activities where participants continue to hone their team-building skills. These sessions demonstrate and reinforce the fact that having fun does not need to revolve around the use of alcohol and drugs. Students leave TI prepared and empowered to be positive influences on their peers, their families, and their communities.

NOVEMBER 12-15, 2026 • CAMP WYMAN

- Learn how to advocate for real change in your community.
- Earn Volunteer Hours for attending.
- Make lifelong friends (seriously)!
- Have fun!



**Know a teen who
is interested?
Scan the QR code
to register today!**

**For more questions and information, contact
Grace DeClue, gdeclue@prevented.org or
Ali Stambaugh, astambaugh@prevented.org, 314.962.3456**



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I have always been a leader type, and once Ali came to my school, I realized that I would love to help keep people my age and younger be educated and stay away from substance use. I would also love to grow my leadership skills, and let them be useful in my everyday life.

- 2026 TI REGISTRANT



Creating Sustainable Prevention Solutions for Warren County

By Kim Rodriguez



Jessica Price
Evaluation Manager,
CPHSS



Kim Prewitt
Manager of Sustainability
Science (CPHSS)

One of the most valuable partnerships supporting PreventEd's Partnership for Success (PFS) work in Warren County has been our collaboration with the Center for Public Health Systems Science (CPHSS) at Washington University

in St. Louis. Bringing expertise in sustainability planning, systems science, and community engagement, CPHSS has helped strengthen both coalition development and community understanding.

Early in the project, CPHSS engaged coalition members in conversations around sustainability, helping partners think strategically about what it takes to build prevention efforts that can grow and thrive long after grant funding ends, because we all know grant timelines move much faster than community change. CPHSS has also helped elevate community voice in meaningful ways. Their team facilitated key informant interviews, as well as youth and adult listening sessions,

creating opportunities for community leaders and members to openly share their experiences, concerns, and ideas related to substance use prevention in Warren County.

These conversations have provided more than just data. They've helped tell the story of Warren County.

Youth highlighted the importance of addressing retail access to substances, with one participant putting it simply: "Try to go for the source of where we're getting it." Adults and community leaders offered perspectives on barriers, resources, stigma, and prevention priorities. Together, these insights are helping guide coalition planning and inform strategies that reflect real community needs.

The partnership between PreventEd and CPHSS reflects a shared commitment to evidence-informed prevention, sustainability, and authentic community engagement. By combining PreventEd's local prevention expertise with CPHSS's strengths in evaluation and systems thinking, this collaboration is helping build a stronger foundation for lasting prevention impact in Warren County. We're grateful for CPHSS's partnership and look forward to continuing this important work together. 🌱



Save the Date for the PreventEd Trivia Night!

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2026 • AMEREN AUDITORIUM

It's back! Join us for a fun, lighthearted game with the opportunity to bid on auction items and support PreventEd's education, intervention, and advocacy efforts in the community.

Doors open at 6 pm, with trivia beginning at 7 pm. This is an alcohol-free event. Soda, water, and non-alcoholic drinks will be provided, but bring your own snacks!

Registration is now open!
Free, secure parking is included with your ticket.



Scan the QR code for
sponsorship inquiries
and ticket purchases!

Share Your Impact

By Lauren Breig



Lauren Breig
Director of
Communications

It's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day and forget to look up once in a while to notice the incredible things happening around you. I, for one, am guilty of this every day.

At PreventEd, we're fortunate to have the option to work in the office, out in the community, from home, or wherever the day takes us. It's one of the perks of the job—having flexibility while still doing the

work that matters. But that flexibility can sometimes come at the expense of connection.

My colleagues are some of the most inspiring, hardworking people I've ever met, and I'm constantly in awe of the work they do. While my work often happens behind a computer screen, the majority are out in the community supporting someone in recovery, teaching students how substance misuse can affect their future, or connecting with a parent at a health fair who has lost a child to an overdose.

Those moments matter. And I started wondering: how could I use my role to help lift up those stories and create more connection across our organization?

That's where the idea for our Microsoft Teams channel, Share Your Impact, came from. It's a space where employees can share their moments that inspired them—a comment from a student, a conversation at a health fair, or a meaningful exchange with a peer client. Whatever the moment, we want to hear about it and understand the impact it had on them and on PreventEd's mission.

It also has a practical purpose: helping us capture these stories so we could share them more broadly through social media and other communications efforts, highlighting the impact our team is making every day. I'd like to share a few of those stories below.

“Just needed to brag on our girl, Emma Wilson. Presley and I did GuidEd screenings for a group of Lincoln County students last night, and one student said that Emma had just finished up lessons at his school.

*“Do you know if I could leave her a review somewhere or tell her boss how good of a job she did? She was very informative, very helpful, very good at her job. I just really enjoyed it.”
That's a lot coming from a senior!*

“As peer support specialists, this is a normal day for us. Some times this happens two or three different times in one day. By the end of the week we've touched many lives. I'm truly grateful to be in a place where I'm able to give back. I can't share every story with you because that would just take so much time, but I would like to share some here and there with you. Thanks for all the work that you all do! Collectively, as a team we are one heck of a unit.

Even though we aren't together every day, sharing stories like these has strengthened our connection and deepened our support for one another with one post, emoji, and reaction at a time. 🗨️