

JUNE 2026

THE CHARLES TOWN INITIATIVE

Monthly Newsletter



DEAR CHARLES TOWN,

As another school year comes to a close, we're reflecting on a season of growth, connection, and community at the Charles Town Initiative. In this issue, we celebrate Danielle Baker's impactful first year as School Support Specialist at Charles Town Middle School, shine a light on one of our dedicated coalition members, and recap our Spring into Safety event, which brought law enforcement and community members together in a meaningful way. We also share new research insights to keep our work grounded in what matters most. Thank you for being part of this journey!

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Success by Numbers

May 2026

School Support Specialist and Lead Mentor

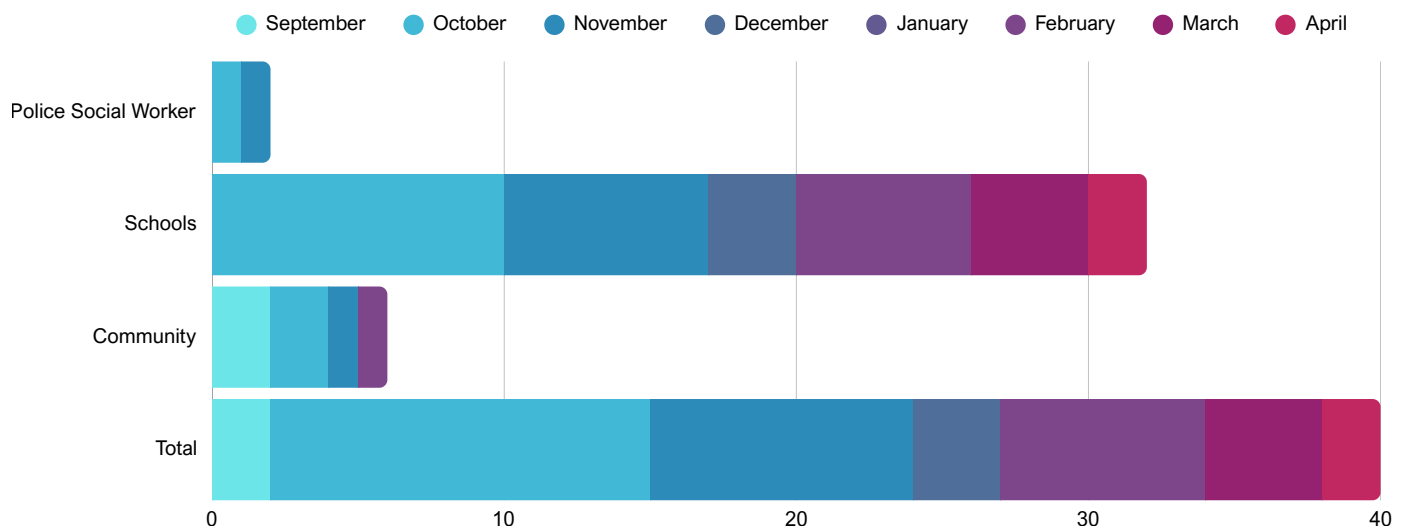
Number of Moderate- or High-Risk Students on Caseload

15 people

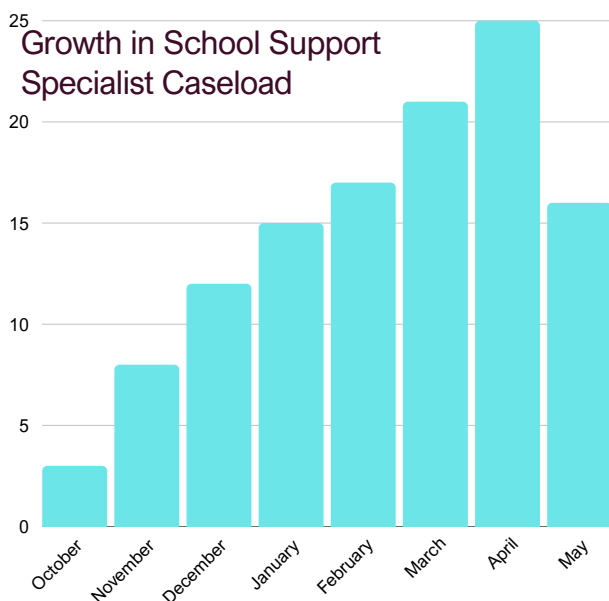
Specialized Skills Building to Moderate/High Risk Children

46 sessions

Source of Referrals to School Support Specialist



Growth in School Support Specialist Caseload



Number of Mentoring Sessions

44 sessions

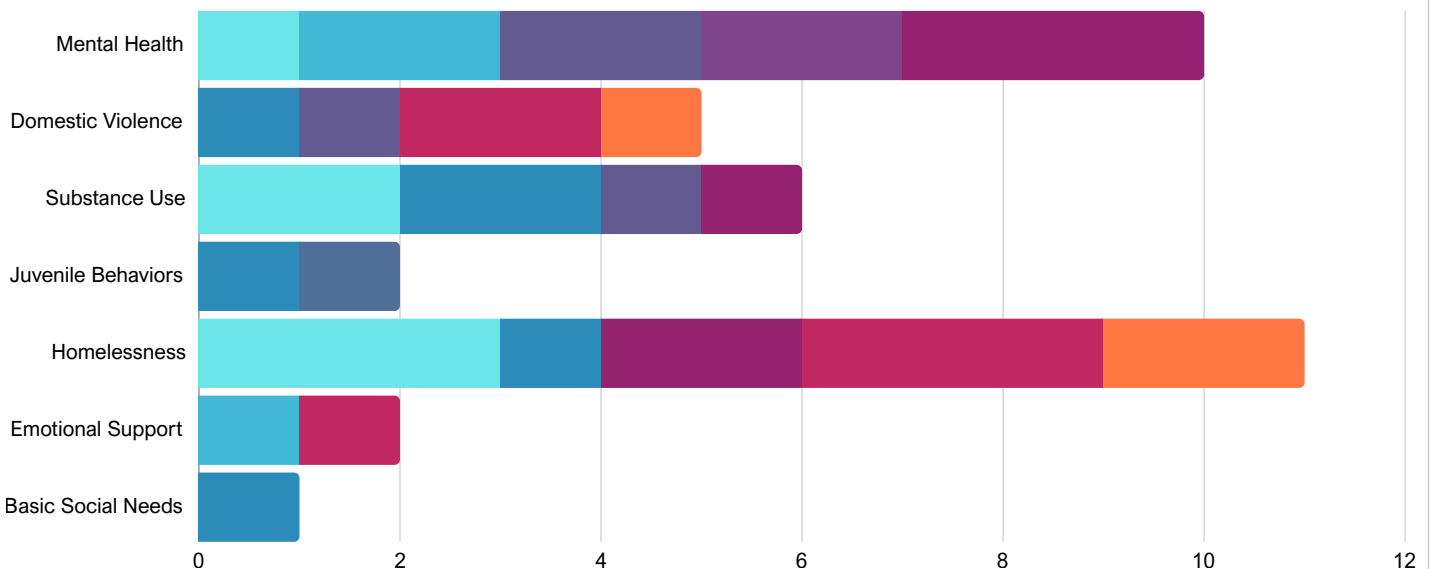
Number of Crisis Interventions Provided

1 session

Total Interventions

46 interventions

Police Support Specialist



END OF YEAR SPOTLIGHT: DANIELLE BAKER, SCHOOL SUPPORT SPECIALIST

The Charles Town Initiative is proud to recognize the incredible work of our School Support Specialist, Danielle Baker, as we close out her first school year in Jefferson County.

How has your role evolved throughout this school year?

This year was one of growth for Danielle and for the communities she serves. In addition to her day-to-day role as a School Support Specialist, she played a key supporting role in CTI's 40-hour Crisis Intervention Team training in April, contributing to sessions on personality disorders and children and adolescent mental health. She also helped plan Spring into Safety and is currently laying the groundwork for an exciting fall event: Elevate Youth, Elevate Joy.

"The biggest part of Elevate Youth, Elevate Joy is youth empowerment," Danielle shares. "We want it to be broadly accessible — encompassing all youth, not just a specific population." She's planning breakout sessions on financial literacy, financial aid, vision boarding, and more. One of the most popular sessions from previous years? A local law enforcement officer leading a discussion on knowing your rights during a traffic stop. "That one was honestly the biggest hit," she says. "We definitely want to bring that back."



**FLASHBACK TO ELEVATE
YOUTH ELEVATE JOY 2024!**

What's a moment from this year you're most proud of?

When a student Danielle had been working with transferred to a school in a neighboring county, something meaningful happened: the student's mother reached out and asked if Danielle could continue working with her child for the remainder of the year.

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"That meant a lot to me. It showed that the relationship we'd built mattered — enough that the family went out of their way to keep it going."

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She also points to a challenging situation at two local middle schools involving a bomb threat. Watching first responders and school staff come together with professionalism and care for the students left a lasting impression. "They did amazing with the kids," she says. "It was hard, but it reminded me why this work matters."

How do you build trust with students who may be hesitant to open up?

Danielle's approach is rooted in a trauma-informed, child-centered philosophy — and it all comes down to one word: choice.

"I go at their speed. I never force a student to talk about something they're not ready for. I let them lead." When she needs to pull a student from class, she gives them the option to come or not — no pressure, no judgment. "Kids get told what to do all day long and often don't feel like they have any say. I try to change that, even in small ways."

Visibility is also a big part of her strategy. "I make sure my face is in the hallways so students know who I am before they ever need me. A lot of what I do runs on word of mouth — when students feel safe with me, they tell their friends."

What do you wish more parents and families knew about your role?

"Some parents see me as a disciplinarian, or as someone who can get their child to do what they want. That's not really what I do." She's received calls about everything from phone use at home to conflicts at school, and while she always wants to support families, she's also an advocate for the students themselves. "Kids are emotional — they're literally learning how to regulate themselves. There's usually a lot of middle ground between what a parent or teacher sees and what a child is experiencing. My job is to help navigate that with compassion for everyone involved."

She also wants families to understand the difference between her role and that of a school counselor. "School counselors are incredible, but their focus is largely academic — schedules, transcripts, college planning. I'm focused on mental health and wellbeing. Ideally, we work together, and I think there's a real opportunity to bring both pieces closer."

What was the biggest challenge you navigated this year?

"[In Berkeley County], I'm used to being called for every crisis," Danielle says. "Here, I had to build that presence from scratch. People are still learning who I am and how I can help." She's approached it with patience, knowing that trust within an institution takes time and consistency.

What have you personally learned or grown from this year?

Two things stand out for Danielle: professionalism and self-care. Having recently received her licensure, she feels a deeper sense of responsibility. She's also been intentional about practicing what she preaches when it comes to wellbeing. "I talk to students all day about taking care of themselves. I have to do the same." For her, that looks like reading, being present with the people she loves, and finding moments of stillness in a busy season.

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"Now that I'm a licensed social worker, the standards are higher — and honestly, that's pushed me to be better."

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What are you most excited about heading into next school year?

More presence. More connection. More community.

"I want to be more visible across the whole building — not just in one hallway... I want to be more proactive in staying connected with teachers and counselors, not just showing up when there's a problem." She's also eager to continue growing CTI's community footprint, building on events like the Blue Ridge Community College Career Fair and the upcoming Elevate Youth Elevate Joy. "We're getting our name out there. I want families, students, and community partners to know we're here — and what we can offer."

Thank you, Danielle, for your dedication, your heart, and your commitment to the young people of Charles Town. We're grateful to have you on the team and can't wait to see how next year goes!



JBA MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: AIMEE CHAVE

PFS Coordinator, Potomac Highlands Guild

When Aimee Chave stepped into her role as Partnership for Success (PFS) Coordinator for Region 2 at the Potomac Highlands Guild in March 2025, she brought with her a deep belief that prevention works best when it comes from within a community. "I believe in prevention science, local data, and local people," she says. That philosophy shapes everything she does.

As Region 2 PFS Coordinator, Aimee oversees more than 40 objectives aimed at reducing substance misuse among youth across an eight-county service area encompassing Jefferson, Berkeley, Morgan, Hampshire, Mineral, Grant, Hardy, and Pendleton counties. Her work focuses on underserved youth aged 9–20, using evidence-based programs like Botvin LifeSkills, Positive Action, and Ripple Effects, alongside prevention education resources including the BBH Clearinghouse and Stigma Free WV initiatives.



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"I am inspired by partnerships with youth, parents, law enforcement agencies, religious affiliations, multiple coalitions, schools, and behavioral health facilities," she shares.

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Aimee has been attending JBA Coalition meetings since joining her PFS role, and the experience has been energizing. **"Each [JBA] meeting hosts ideas and networking that grows prevention measures out into the community at large. I want to be a part of it all!"**

A Lifelong Learner

One of Aimee's proudest professional achievements came in 2025 when she graduated from the CADCA Coalition Academy — a milestone she pursued while already in the field. She is currently working toward her Prevention Specialist Certification.

What many people don't know is that Aimee earned her Master of Social Work degree from Concord University in her 50s, proving it's never too late to deepen your impact. She also serves as an Advisory Board Member to the Central East Prevention Technology Transfer Center and as Secretary for the National Association of Social Workers West Virginia Chapter.

And when she's not advocating for prevention? You might find her on stage. Community Theater has been a lifelong passion: she has served as director, assistant director, choreographer, and in both major and minor lead roles throughout the years.

One memory stands out above the rest: joining the JBA Coalition's presence on Capitol Hill on February 4th, 2026. **"The importance of showing prevention to our state legislators and senators through the eyes of our youth is essential," she reflects.** She also cherishes her involvement in the 2025 Red Ribbon Campaign and looks forward to many more moments ahead.



"JBA has amazing planning and implementation of healthy alternatives for youth and adults. I would love to see the capacity in numbers grow so that all youth receive doses of prevention year round."

We're grateful to have Aimee as part of the JBA family. Her energy, expertise, and commitment to community well-being make her an invaluable voice in the prevention movement.

SPRING INTO SAFETY

This year's Spring Into Safety event was nothing short of a tremendous success, bringing together families, children, and community partners for a day filled with fun, connection, and a whole lot of heart.

Two local law enforcement officers attended CTI's recent *Spring into Safety* event. State Trooper C.S. Barrett and Charles Town Patrolman Dana Cowell showed up fully — playing ball, coloring with kids, and engaging warmly with families throughout the day. Officer Cowell even gave attendees a memorable (and laugh-worthy) demonstration of what it's like to be arrested, with our very own Danielle volunteering as the "suspect." It was one of the highlights of the afternoon!

The event also drew strong support from several valued community providers, including EPEC, the Health Department/QRT, Jefferson-Berkeley Alliance, and Mrs. Eastern Panhandle, each of whom came out to connect with the community and share their resources. Families enjoyed hot dogs, chips, and water, while Danielle kept the little ones entertained with beautiful body art.

Perhaps one of the most meaningful moments came from State Trooper Barrett, who expressed how much it means to be included in community events like this one. He shared that the State Troopers of Jefferson County are committed to supporting all future events — and he walked that talk by bringing his own family out to show their support.

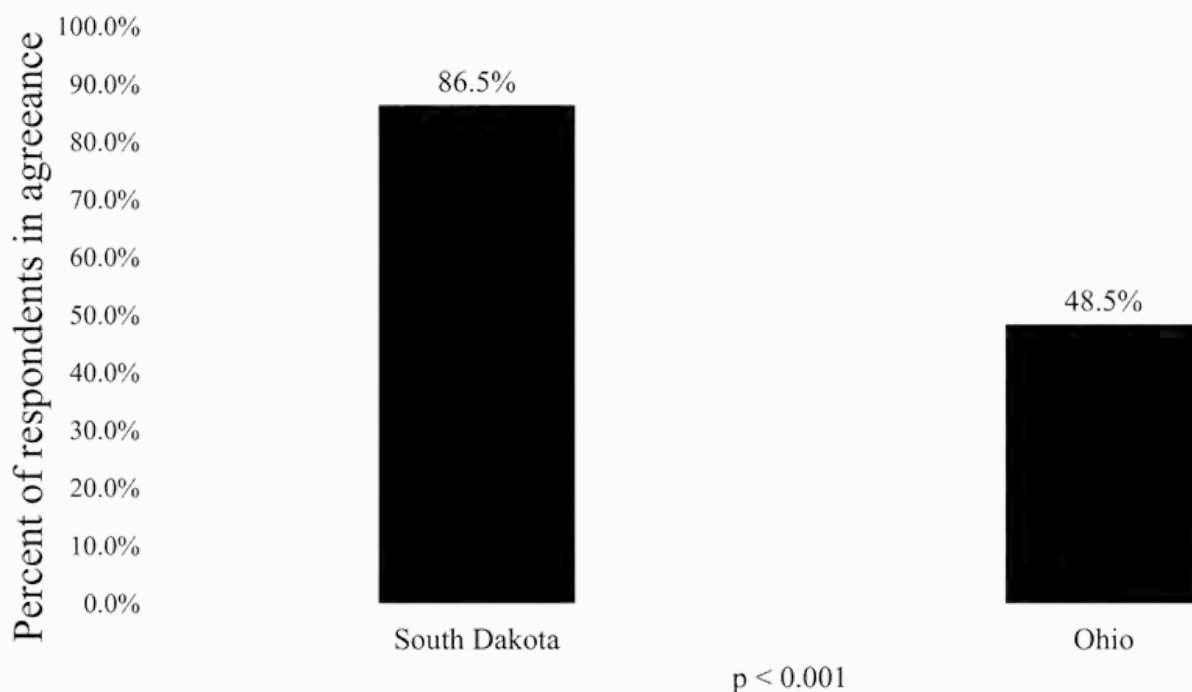


Spring Into Safety has all the makings of a beloved annual tradition, and we are already looking forward to making it even bigger next year. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who came out, contributed, and made it such a special day.

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT: HOW WE THINK ABOUT ADDICTION SHAPES HOW WE RESPOND TO IT

What's the biggest barrier keeping people with substance use disorder from getting help? It might not be cost or distance — it might be stigma. A 2024 study published in BMC Public Health offers encouraging evidence that public attitudes toward addiction in rural America may be shifting, and that this shift matters for recovery.

Researchers at South Dakota State University, led by Dr. Erin E. Miller, surveyed 41 South Dakota community members between 2022 and 2023 and compared their responses to a similar 2019 survey of 173 residents in a rural Ohio county. Both communities share a lot in common — rural geography, limited access to medical services, and similar income levels — making them a useful comparison. The headline finding: 86.5% of South Dakota respondents agreed that addiction is an illness like diabetes and heart disease, compared to just 48.5% of Ohio respondents three years earlier. And that belief appears to travel with a whole set of more supportive attitudes. South Dakota respondents were significantly more willing to live in the same neighborhood as someone with a substance use disorder, more likely to support equal employment rights, less likely to view people with addiction as dangerous, and more supportive of naloxone (the overdose-reversal medication) and medications that treat substance use disorders.



Why the difference? The researchers point to timing. Between the two surveys, several national campaigns from the Addiction Policy Forum, SAMHSA, and the National Institute on Drug Abuse worked to educate the public on the "brain disease model" of addiction: the scientific understanding that addiction is a chronic, relapsing medical condition rather than a moral failing or simple choice. The study's results suggest those educational efforts may be making a real impact.

Why does this matter for our community? Stigma isn't just hurtful — it's a documented barrier to treatment. When people fear judgment, they hide their struggles, avoid seeking care, and disconnect from the support systems they need most. The study found that when people understand addiction as a medical illness, they're more likely to support the evidence-based treatments and harm reduction services that save lives.

The authors note some limitations, including the small South Dakota sample size, and they plan broader follow-up surveys. But the takeaway is hopeful: attitudes can change, education works, and communities that embrace a medical understanding of addiction are better positioned to support their neighbors in recovery.



[READ THE STUDY HERE.](#)



"TALK. THEY HEAR YOU."®
CAMPAIGN



What You Can Do to Prevent Your Child From Drinking Alcohol or Using Other Drugs

Be aware of potential risk factors, including:

- Significant life transitions, such as graduating from middle or high school or getting a driver's license;
- A history of social and emotional problems;
- Depression, anxiety disorders, or other mental health issues;
- A family history of alcohol or other substance use disorders; and
- Hanging out with friends or peers who drink alcohol or use other drugs.

Be a positive role model.



- Don't drink alcohol or use other drugs and drive, and don't get in a car if the driver has been drinking or using other drugs.
- Don't use prescription medication that wasn't prescribed by your doctor. And don't misuse medication that was prescribed to you.
- Get help if you think you have an alcohol- or other drug use-related problem.
- Don't give alcohol or other drugs to your child or their friends and peers. Explain that underage drinking and other drug use are never acceptable inside or outside your home.
- Know where you keep all of your alcohol and prescription medication, and always remind your child and their friends and peers that these substances are off-limits.

Work with schools and communities to ensure that they:

- Support and reward young people's decisions not to drink alcohol and use other drugs;
- Identify and intervene with kids who are engaged in alcohol and other drug use;
- Create, enforce, and promote rules that prevent underage drinking and other drug use; and
- Develop acceptable behavior agreements that are established, well-known, and applied consistently.

Provide support and give space for growth.

- Be involved in your child's life. Go to their school events and extracurricular activities, ask about their day, follow through on your commitments to them, and set aside time to do things together.
- Stay actively engaged in their social media activity. Talk with them about the differences between appropriate and inappropriate content and emphasize that what gets posted online can be there forever.
- Encourage their independence while establishing appropriate limits.
- Make it easy for them to share information about their life by actively listening and asking open-ended questions.
- Know where they are, what they're doing, and whom they're spending time with.

- Meet and get to know the parents or caregivers of their friends and peers. Share your rules about not allowing underage drinking or other drug use.
- Find ways for them to be involved in family life, such as participating in fun family activities and events, helping with house projects or weekly meal planning, doing chores, or volunteering together in the community.
- Tell them to never drink alcohol or use other drugs and drive or get in a car driven by someone who has been drinking or using other drugs.
- Help them find services and support if you're worried that they're using substances.
- Create and sign a family agreement form where you agree to help keep them substance-free and they agree to not drink alcohol or use other drugs.
- Learn more about the risks and dangers of underage drinking and other drug use by visiting talktheyhearyou.samhsa.gov and using #TalkTheyHearYou on social media. Share and discuss this information with them.



Set clear rules and expectations.

- Brainstorm with your child about ways they can have fun without drinking alcohol or using other drugs.
- Encourage them to avoid parties and other gatherings where alcohol or other drugs are present. And don't allow underage drinking or other drug use at get-togethers in your home.

Use Screen4Success.

Talking with kids early and often about the risks and dangers of underage drinking and other drug use can help keep them safe. But how do you know if your child needs more support, and where do you go to find it? Screen4Success will help you better understand your child's health, wellness, and wellbeing and find resources to help address their needs.

HELPFUL RESOURCES



Use and share Screen4Success.



Download and use "Talk. They Hear You." mobile app.



Subscribe and listen to "What Parents Are Saying" podcast.



Download and order "Talk. They Hear You." materials online from SAMHSA Store.



Download and read full "Tips for Teens" fact sheet series.



Download and read other SAMHSA underage drinking prevention and reduction materials.



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