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## Healthalachia: Rural Appalachian Youth Creating Solutions for Our Future

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# HEALTHALACHIA: RURAL APPALACHIAN YOUTH CREATING SOLUTIONS FOR OUR FUTURE



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## Background/Abstract

Kentucky's Appalachian youth experience high rates of adverse childhood experiences. Opioid abuse, poverty and unemployment dominate our news headlines. Youth are suffering negative impacts of these issues and experiencing disproportionate rates of depression, suicidal thoughts, food insecurities, obesity and lack of physical activity. Overdose deaths and incarceration rates among parents with substance abuse disorders negatively impact family units and contribute to increased homelessness, foster care and kinship care among our youth population.

Healthalachia was developed and piloted as a student-based, youth empowerment initiative that provides competitive mini-grants and research mentors to groups of high schoolers who aim to identify a health concern at their school and implement a student-led improvement plan.

This student-based research pilot engaged students from three rural high schools in Kentucky to identify and strategically address a specific health or social problem. Each team was required to have students, school staff and community members who agreed to actively participate in the project.

The initiative was a partnership between University of Kentucky Center of Excellence in Rural Health (UK CERH) and the Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative (KVEC). Student teams were provided with funding for their project and technical support as they implemented their projects.

## Healthalachia Model and Process

### Model

The Healthalachia model is inspired by the MIT hack-a-thon concept. A group comes together for one day to "hack out" a plan to address a problem.

### Implementation Process

- **Call for Proposals**
  - Local high schools formed teams, which included students, teachers and community members
  - Each school team submitted a proposal, which included a research question, project summary, data to show the issue, an implementation strategy, resources needed, measureable outcomes and budget
- **Hack-a-thon Day**
  - Three high school teams were selected as finalists and given the opportunity to participate in a hack-a-thon with on-site support from mentors from the community
  - Teams competed to design a winning proposal
  - Each team presented their proposal at the end of the day
  - Three projects were funded (\$1000 each)

- **Six-month Implementation Phase**
  - Leadership at each school appointed to keep projects moving forward
  - Regular reporting and accountability to sponsors

- **Dissemination of Outcomes**
  - Impact and outcomes reported back to the school and the community

## Participants and Projects



Pikeville High School  
*The Empty Chair*

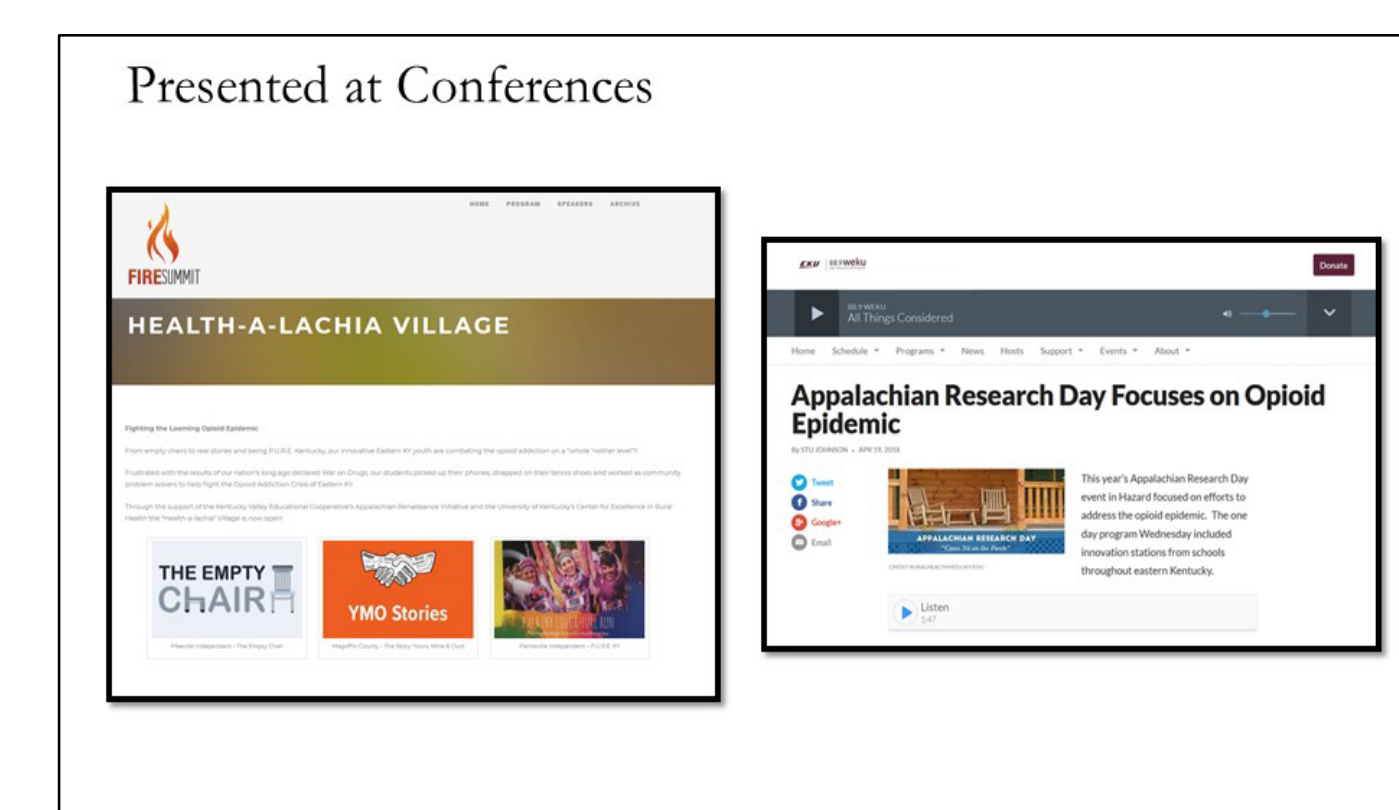
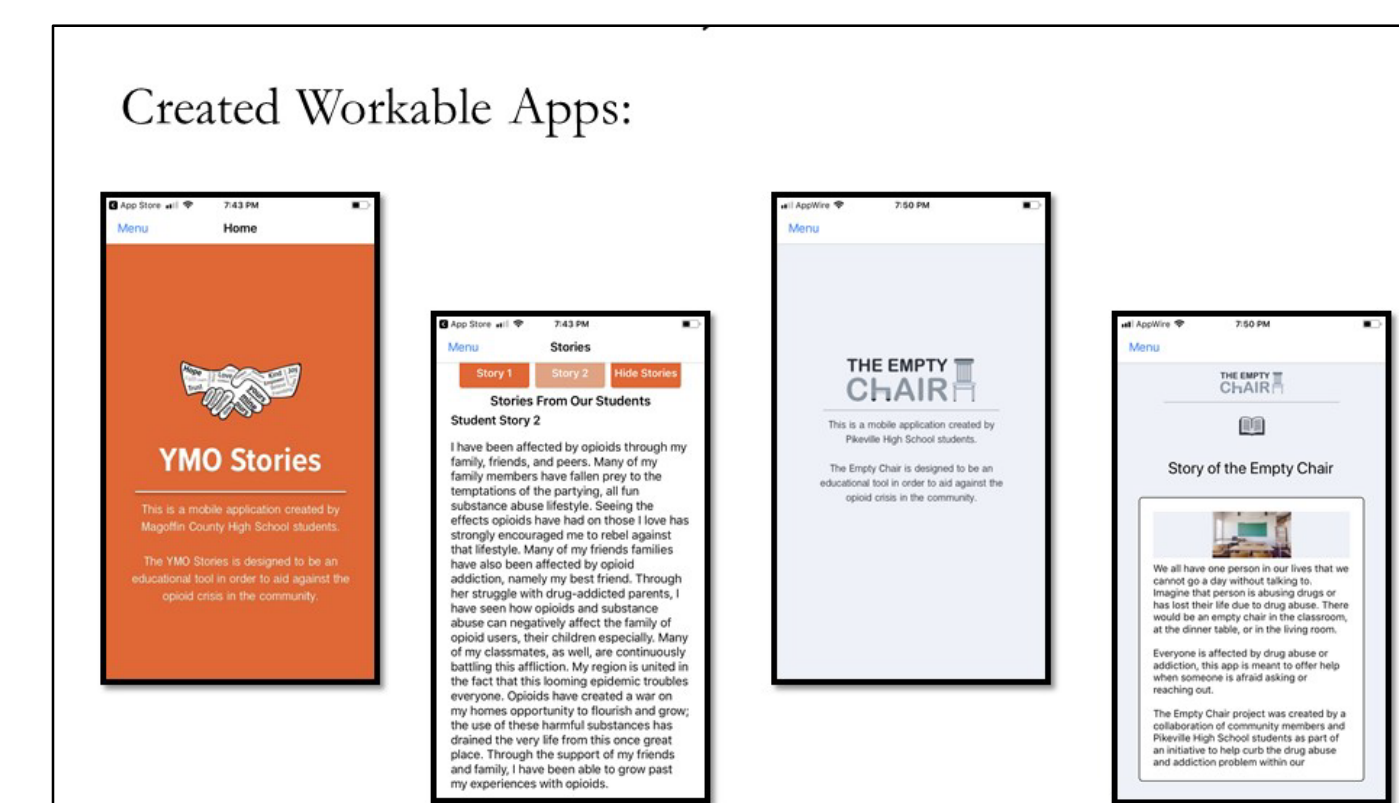
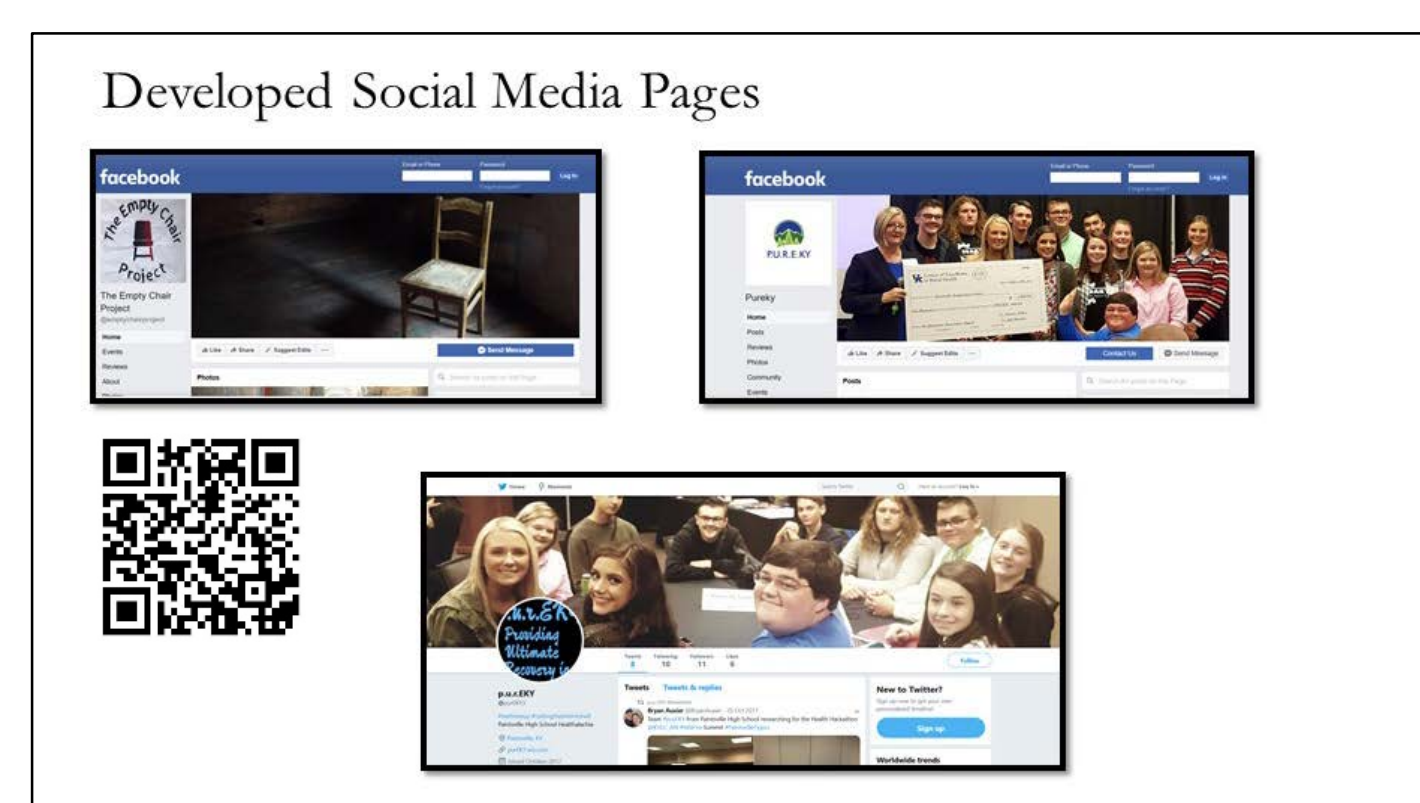


Paintsville High School  
*P.U.R.E. KY*



Magoffin County High School:  
*Yours, Mine and Ours:  
The Story of Addictions*

## Student Project Outcomes



## Overall Impact

Sustainable solutions to community health issues are being led by students in local schools.

Twenty high school students gained real world experience in:

- Community-based research
- Problem solving
- Proposal development
- Budget management
- Public speaking

## Conclusions

Healthalachia is a model that works.

Community organizations can successfully partner to invest in initiatives like Healthalachia to restore hope and resiliency in youth.

## Next Steps

Request for Proposals will be released and a total of six high schools from Kentucky's Appalachian and Delta Region counties will be funded to participate.

## About UK CERH

Established by state legislation in 1990 to address health disparities in rural Kentucky and the unique challenges faced by our communities. The mission was and still is today to improve the health and wellbeing of rural Kentuckians. For more than two decades, the Center has partnered with communities, providers, students and individuals to provide health professions education, health policy research, health care service and community engagement toward reaching this mission.

**MISSION-** *Improve the Health and Wellbeing of Rural Kentuckians*

**VISION-** *A Healthier Kentucky*

