Speaker 1: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: In 2017, Missouri State University received a three-year grant for Project HEAL, which stands for Help, Educate, Advocate and Listen from the Office on Violence Against Women in the Department of Justice. Project HEAL is a coordinated community approach to reduce sexual assault, dating or domestic violence and stalking on the campuses of Missouri State and Ozarks Technical Community College, OTC. I'm Emily Yeap.

The program was one of only 15 programs across the country to receive a continuation grant for another three years. Project HEAL Director Kunti Bentley joins me today to give an update on the initiative.

Kunti Bentley: For the last grant cycle, what we've done is we've improved previous efforts to comprehensively address sexual and domestic violence on campus. I want to talk a little bit about the relationship between the campuses of OTC and MSU, and we've demonstrated a cooperative partnership that's been collaborative in nature. Project HEAL has been able to enhance these efforts and has made clear the benefits to a more unified holistic approach to interpersonal violence prevention and victim services.

We've been able to establish these ongoing efforts to ensure campus-wide awareness of victim services, such as providing a counselor at the Counseling Center who's been able to solely provide assistance to students who have been victimized. We've also established a victim advocate at OTC, and that advocate's been able to work with many, many students to help them develop what we call a safety plan, should that student be dealing with some kind of an issue where they're being impacted. We put together a 65 on-campus staff, student and faculty coordinated community response team. That team was developed during the first cycle. We've been able to provide 1,400 students, staff and faculty to receive in-person, face-to-face prevention education, awareness education, and things like that.

Emily Yeap: What's the priority moving forward?

Kunti Bentley: The plan is to really continue to enrich those initial goals that we have outlined for the grant, which are to provide holistic prevention education to students, which is to train faculty and staff and including law enforcement and folks who work in our student conduct board on the trauma informed approach when it comes to victim services. What we're working towards is really institutionalizing these efforts, making sure that the university can see the importance of the work that we're doing here so that we can maintain engagement past the funding of the grant.

Emily Yeap: Efforts will be made to offer services to the satellite campuses of both institutions. Bentley believes Project HEAL is crucial because whether we like it or not, college students are affected at disproportionate rates by interpersonal violence.

Kunti Bentley: We're talking about sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking. Issues like these are affecting students on the campuses of Missouri State and OTC and off. So that's why a program like this is important, not only to deepen the victim services that we have that already exists such as our amazing Title IX offices on both campuses, but Project HEAL sort of adds different dimensions to the victim services piece, and then also that prevention. I think the prevention aspect in combination with the victim services is really what gives this program its strength.

Emily Yeap: The success of this project relies on strong collaborations with community partners.

Kunti Bentley: As we know, these campuses that we work with don't exist in their own vacuum. We thrive and we live and we work in the student study on campus community, but also off campus interactions are really a big part of what these students are experiencing in their everyday lives. So the importance of offering students resources that are off campus and in the wider community is really essential to providing them a multitude of options to take should something happen. In addition, some of these off campus agencies we work with have excellent prevention education, opportunities and services. So again, going back to that victim services and prevention piece.

Emily Yeap: Project HEAL's partners include Abilities First, Community Partnership of the Ozarks, Greene County Family Justice Center, Harmony House, The Rebound Foundation and the Victim Center. To find out more about Project HEAL, visit missouristate.edu/projectheal.

I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Speaker 1: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at (417) 836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.