

Public Smoking Policies—Youth Can Make a Difference

Pike County, Kentucky

Problem Overview

Tobacco use, which causes nearly 440,000 deaths in the United States each year, remains the leading preventable cause of death in our nation. Medical science has shown that nonsmokers suffer from many of the diseases associated with active smoking when they breathe environmental tobacco smoke, or secondhand smoke. In Kentucky, 25% of high school students were current smokers in 2006. Although the health risks associated with tobacco use and secondhand smoke are well documented, in states like Kentucky, where tobacco is a major cash crop, opposition to smoke-free policies can be strong.

Program Description

Youth from Kentucky's 4-H Team Leadership Councils participated in a local Help Overcome Tobacco (H.O.T.) Youth Conference in 2006. The Coordinated School Health Program and Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Program—both funded through the CDC—jointly conducted regional H.O.T. conferences through Kentucky's Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Lifestyle Education and Resource Team Regional Prevention Center. The H.O.T. conferences were organized to raise awareness of tobacco-related issues and increase capacity for youth advocacy efforts in tobacco use prevention.

Participating students learned how to organize a public awareness campaign and how best to contact elected officials. Working together, these 4-H youth spearheaded a petition campaign, ultimately gathering 4,000 signatures in support of a smoke-free ordinance for the Pike County Fiscal Court and the Hall of Justice Building. Consequently, at its May 2006 meeting, the Fiscal Court passed an ordinance prohibiting smoking in all enclosed areas in these two public buildings and within 15 feet of the building exteriors.

Program Impact

The successful petition campaign, organized by trained and committed students, underscores the growing awareness among youth about the dangers of tobacco use and secondhand smoke and the potential impact students can have in effecting environmental change. This achievement, accomplished through student advocacy, serves as a positive model for other students and communities throughout Kentucky.

Note: Success stories, including background data and outcomes, reflect information as reported by participating programs. Also, in this context, impact refers to short-term or intermediate outcomes.

