

## **Tennessee School Anti-Tobacco Program off to a Great Start**

*Tennessee, January 2009* – Nine counties across Tennessee participating in the Student Tobacco Outreach and Prevention (STOP) Program have taken a big step forward in their efforts to look at and do something about the continued use of tobacco by school age kids. This program aims to unite the community in the fight against tobacco and has been met with great success. Local program coordinators have made important partnerships with school systems and local Health Councils and together have mobilized students, parents, and community members.

Smoking kills more people than alcohol, AIDS, car crashes, illegal drugs, murders, and suicides combined – and tobacco use is preventable. In Tennessee, over 8000 children under the age of 18 become new daily smokers each year. This means that there are 132,000 children alive in Tennessee who will ultimately die early from smoking.

The STOP Program is working hard to combat these startling statistics. Recently the high school students in each county participated in an anonymous survey about their tobacco knowledge and beliefs. The willingness of schools and students joining the project is outstanding, with over 7000 students contributing. This accomplishment is valuable for targeting areas of concern. The early results show that tobacco use continues to be a problem in school age children, with over 50% of those surveyed admitting to trying a cigarette, most before the age of 14 years. Other survey results show areas for intervention include tobacco company influence, how minors obtain tobacco products, and secondhand smoke exposure in the home. One important area of concern is increasing efforts to make school grounds 100% Tobacco Free.

These communities are energized and enthusiastic about educating students, connecting people with resources to help them quit, and making sustainable changes for the better health of all their residents.

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