“TOBACCO CESSATION AND PREVENTION EFFORTS: STAMP OUT SMOKING TARGETS YOUTH THROUGH GRASSROOTS PROGRAMS.”

Miriam Karanja, MBA, Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Program, Arkansas Department of Health
J. Gary Wheeler, MD, MPS, Medical Director, Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Program, Arkansas Department of Health

BACKGROUND

Youth tobacco use remains one of Arkansas’s greatest challenges. To help lower youth tobacco use, the Arkansas Department of Health Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Program (TPCP) established four grassroots programs through the SOS media and educational campaign. Each year, SOS strives to implement the following programs:

- Coloring Contest
- Essay Contest
- Drama Contest
- Banners in Schools Educational Program

PROGRAMS

Coloring Contest (Started 2003)
Implemented through public and private schools, this contest is for students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Artwork features the “Clean Air/Arrange” and delivers a prevention message.

Drama Contest “The Big Pitch Film Festival” (Started 2004)
Teams in middle, junior, and high schools create and submit tobacco-free television spots that speak directly to other teens.

Essay Contest (Started 2005)
This prevention contest allows students in grades 2–9 to submit essays about a tobacco-related theme which changes annually.

Banners in Schools Educational Program (Started 2006)
Schools request banners with prevention messages to display in hallways, entryways, auditoriums, and classrooms. Messages focus on how the tobacco industry tries to manipulate youth. The contest is geared toward middle and high school students.

EVALUATION METHODS AND RESULTS

Success for the programs is measured respectively by the number of youth participating, video entries, coloring pages, essays, or other materials submitted. The number of schools and counties participating, website page views, people chart rates, social media engagement, earned media value, and press coverage are also measured. Winning videos are placed on statewide or regional media buys. Since 2003, SOS has received 429 video submissions, 7920 essays, and 57326 coloring pages. Additionally, 499 banners have been placed in Arkansas schools. In 2012, 167 schools participated in the Banners Program, placing the SOS message in 69 out of 75 counties reaching 93,444 Arkansas students. Fiscal year 2013 includes not only evaluation of outputs, but also lesson plan implementation and outcome evaluations from students. The 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS) reveals a decline in the Arkansas youth smoking rate from 8.4 percent in 2001 (national average 21.5 percent) to 8 percent in 2011 (national average 18.1 percent). Additionally, rates are rising from 4.4 percent in 2001 (national average 4.8 percent) to 5.9 percent in 2011 (national average 5.3 percent).

CONCLUSIONS

Each year, these programs impact more students with their respective prevention messages. Youth are becoming increasingly involved through national and social media campaigns. Combined with cutting-edge content, these programs offer youth burn tobacco-free messages to peers and adults via engaging, educational, and impactful ways. The programs, combined with other interventions, have contributed to lower tobacco use rates in Arkansas.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND/OR PRACTICE

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Best Practices have proven successful in reducing tobacco use through comprehensive, tobacco-only control efforts. State and community interventions as educational campaigns, community engagement, parental involvement, or student programs. The TPCP seeks to share these programs for replication by other states, and as a way to contribute to the national control evidence base.