

# Asheville Youth Hangouts Adopt Stronger Tobacco Policies



## Process of creating CHANGE

As part of building critical awareness, the ?Y Western region youth and adult team held a Data Party in early 2002 to reflect on progress made during their first year in operation. This led to the recognition that more could be done to protect youth from exposure to secondhand smoke.

In order to build skills for conducting advocacy campaigns for smoke-free schools and communities, ?Y West organized a training for their own youth, as well as other youth groups and adult leaders. The training included information on the extent of harm



caused by secondhand smoke, as well as "how-to" workshops on media advocacy and strategies for advocacy and activism campaigns. The training included hands-on experience collecting information from restaurant patrons on their smoke free dining preferences. A panel that included business owners, local officials and news reporters provided direct access to decision makers as a way to build communication skills to address secondhand smoke.

With strong skills to draw on, the ?Y team decided to create an opportunity to improve the smoking policies at popular Asheville youth hang outs. The seven-month campaign began in May when the ?Y youth brainstormed a list of 17 popular youth hangouts. In order to collect consistent information, they developed an assessment survey that included questions on policy as well as signage, ventilation and interest in holding a smoke-free teen event. The ?Y youth physically visited the hangouts to conduct their assessment. All but three managers/owners responded to the interview. After analyzing the information and rating establishments on a zero to three star scale, ?Y youth pulled the information into a brochure. They crafted a packet for each business owner that included a letter announcing the campaign, information on the dangers of secondhand smoke, and a copy of the brochure with each establishment's rating. The letter included a self-addressed stamped envelope and encouragement to respond with feedback on the brochure or for assistance improving their rating by mid-August.

Type of Change:	Environmental Policy
Location of Change:	three businesses in Asheville, NC
Reach of Change:	Youth, families, & staff

?Y youth followed up with each of the businesses: a movie theatre had already put up signs (verified by the ?Y team), while three establishments requested assistance with improving their environment by adding no-smoking signage. One of these groups, a skate park, had planned to add a designated smoking area, but because of ?Y efforts, decided to go the other direction. This park, a music club, and the Civic Center (where athletic events are held), also collaborated with ?Y to conduct special smoke-free teen events (a smoke free dance, a skateboard competition, and a smoke-free basketball game) which attracted hundreds of participants and garnered media attention. A final copy of the smoke free youth brochure was published and distributed to 30 local youth groups in December.

## Importance of the CHANGE

According to the US Preventive Task Force, creating 100% smoke-free environments is one the most effective strategies for reducing harm caused by tobacco smoke ([www.thecommunityguide.org](http://www.thecommunityguide.org)). By specifically choosing hangouts popular with youth, the campaign was able to reach important venues. They stopped one of these from adding a designated smoking area, and improved norms by adding visible signs. The ?Y youth also reached hundreds with their smoke-free message by organizing popular club and skate events.

## What we learned about CHANGE

- Draw on youth knowledge and skills to create a campaign. With a clearly defined set of businesses to target, a youth hangout campaign can be a low cost, effective way to build critical awareness and create a "doable" opportunity to get youth started in advocacy.
- Contacting the media does not guarantee coverage. In some communities, media coverage is hard to get. Working with businesses to "piggyback" the smoke free message on advertising for events was the way that this campaign received media attention.
- Follow-up and keep it going! An important adult role is keeping the campaign alive, even during youth down time such as breaks and summers.
- More difficult targets (e.g., those places with no stars or those that do not respond) may require more advanced youth skills or a more focused campaign.



(l to r) Elina Combs, Jamie Borowski, Tasha Henry, Katlyn Brahmer, Jeanne Dairahgi and Brandon Pickens visit with then NC Sen. Steve Metcalf in a local restaurant.