

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE CONTACT: Scott Proescholdbell (919) 715-3497

TEENS ACTIVE IN TOBACCO PREVENTION MUCH LESS LIKELY TO SMOKE

Raleigh – Many parents of teens and tweens are looking for ways to raise them tobacco-free. According to new data released this week, one way to raise tobacco-free kids is to get them involved in school and community activities aimed at reducing tobacco use among their peers.

“Most parents – even those who use tobacco – don’t want their children to start,” said Debra Horton, president-elect of the NC PTA. “Providing opportunities for youth involvement in tobacco prevention efforts is a great way that schools, PTAs and communities can work together to support families in keeping their kids off tobacco.”

During the March, 2004 Youth Leadership Institute on Tobacco Prevention and Cessation, co-sponsored by the Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch, NC Division of Public Health and the Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF), teen participants were asked to complete the NC Youth Tobacco Survey, which had also been administered during the fall of 2003 to randomly selected teens statewide.

As suspected, the teens attending the conference were different from average N.C. teens in two major ways. First, they are much more likely to have participated in tobacco prevention training events, to have made tobacco education presentations, or to have joined school or community clubs to address tobacco use prevention and cessation. Second, they are also much less likely to use tobacco.

“These results show that community-based tobacco prevention activities like those being funded by the HWTF work on many levels,” said Sally Herndon Malek,

head of the TPCB. “The teens who are actually involved as peer educators and teen advocates receive the largest ‘dose’ of the programs, so they show the greatest results.”

Only 36.6% of teen advocates reported ever smoking cigarettes, according to the survey. North Carolina high school students in general had tried cigarettes at a rate of 59.6% in 2003, according to the NC YTS.

Only 6.5% of the teen advocates attending the conference reported being current cigarette smokers, while 27.3% of NC High school students reported being current cigarette smokers in 2003.

About 83.7% of High School students statewide reported never having participated in an activity aimed at reducing tobacco use in their school or community, while only 7.9% of those attending the conference had never participated in such an activity.

“There are many areas where we learn best by doing and by teaching,” Malek said of the results. “Clearly, one way to inoculate your children against becoming tobacco users is to encourage them in middle school and high school to get involved in local efforts to reach their peers with prevention messages, help peer smokers quit, and change tobacco policies in their schools and other places they hang out. The community benefits, but the individual teen advocates may benefit just as much – or even more.”

For information on getting youth involved in the tobacco prevention movement in N.C., check out the following websites: www.realityunfiltered.com, www.StepUpNC.com and www.QuestionWhy.org.

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