

# Youth group helps with tobacco prevention

By Sharon Corcoran

*The Goodland Star-News*

Pictures of teeth and gums rotted out from cancer and reminders about choking on smoke didn't ruin the appetites of over 30 people who met at the Rock House on Sunday to hear about the Motivation, Achievement, Success Youth Group.

And centerpieces of paper flowers with statistics on the dangers of smoking didn't spoil the atmosphere. The only thing that would have dampened the mood is if someone had lit up.

But everyone there knew better — the "MAS" group, the event's host, has been spreading the word about the dangers of tobacco and the deception in tobacco advertising.

Three members told people what they have done, are doing and will do to combat teen tobacco use. Everyone enjoyed a home-cooked Mexican meal; watched a video by TASK, a state teen tobacco prevention group; had a chance to view displays of tobacco advertising and the dangers of tobacco use; and could pick up pamphlets, notepads and pens with anti-tobacco messages.

The group gave awards to owners of smoke-free restaurants. Harold and Mary Ann Sneten, owners of Picnic in the Park, attended and received their award. Youth group members announced that Taco John's, Dairy Queen and Rubidolls (Cowboy Loop) would also receive awards.

The video showed tobacco pre-



vention efforts of youth groups across Kansas that participate in TASK, including articles and ads from *The Goodland Star-News*, *The Colby Free Press* and other newspapers.

The group's television spot tar-

getting Hispanic youths in the Goodland area was included in the video. Members gave a message in English and in Spanish addressing the tobacco industry's manipulative marketing tactics.

The youth group has paid for its



served a homemade Mexican meal for the Motivation, Achievement, Success Youth Group's sharing session last Sunday. Priscilla LeDesma (left), who attended the sharing session with her family, picked out brochures about the dangers of tobacco.

Photos by Sharon Corcoran/The Goodland Star-News

anti-tobacco efforts with grants from the American Legacy Foundation, a federal organization that distributes money from tobacco settlements reached in 1998 after lawsuits by 46 states against the four major tobacco companies.

The terms required the companies to spend \$300 million a year on anti-smoking campaigns.

The youth group has received \$30,000 in grants from tobacco settlements in the past three years, said member Olivia Lovington, \$10,000 each year. Last year, Lovington said, the group received two \$3,000-mini grants from TASK as well.

The group used the money to send members to statewide training

to help members with "cross-age" teaching to elementary kids, Olivia said, and to provide alternative activities in the community.

The group has paid for commercials, radio spots and newspaper advertising, she said, offered Family Nights to increase parent involvement, provided outreach programs to Kanorado youths and recognized smoke-free restaurants.

The group has participated in National Kick Butts Day and in the Great American Smoke-Out.

Louann Medrano talked about what the group is doing now, which includes recruiting members and working with the high school art teacher to create a commercial.

The kids are in the process of

starting a "Youth Are Not for Sale" advertising sticker project, Medrano said, which involves placing anti-tobacco stickers on tobacco ads in magazines found in Goodland offices, schools and salons.

This week, she said, the club planned to begin its Good Start mother program for teen moms, pregnant girls and mothers of newborns and children up to age 3. The program will highlight the dangers of second-hand smoke around children, she said, and smoking during pregnancy. Marisol Renteria will teach the program, Medrano said, working with the GRACE high school girls' club.

Crystal Hernandez said the group will keep finding ways to continue its tobacco prevention efforts, whether through fund-raising or grants.

This is the last year of the Outreach to Youth and Minority Grant, said Cris Lovington of the Regional Prevention Center, the \$10,000 grant the group has received three years running.

She said members have been encouraged from the start to do their own fund-raisers and will continue that and seek other grants.

The group will begin working with retailers to discourage selling to minors, Hernandez, begin working on a recruitment letter to other youths and continue to ask adults to support the group's efforts.

The group will recruit a representative to TASK, she said, a person who will become one of its 40 board members across Kansas.

## Motivational group looking for memebbers

The Motivation, Achievement, Success Youth Group is on a membership drive.

The group, started by the Hispanic Advisory Board three years ago, was down to three members before adding two new ones Sunday.

The group started with 17 young people but is now down to five, mostly because of families moving elsewhere to look for jobs. Some members have graduated from high school, said Cris Lovington, a member of the advisory board, while others have moved away.

Six have left recently for that reason, she said, and the group has never been so low on members. Even though the group was started by the hispanic board, she said, it's open to youths of all races and backgrounds, not just Hispanic youths.

Though the three long-time members, Olivia Lovington, Louann Medrano and Crystal Hernandez, are all girls, the group is open to boys. The two new members are boys, Cris said, adding that she is reluctant to name them.

They are worried about being stereotyped, she said; they have been in trouble before. But that goes to the heart of the group's purpose, to make a place for young people to fit in.

There are no bad kids, Cris said, just kids who make bad choices.

"When that happens," she asked, "do we help them or see them as a lost cause? When kids fall, are we going to be there to pick them up?"

Sometimes adults forget what it's like to be a kid, Cris said; many of today's adults didn't always make the smartest choices.

Whether kids have been in trouble or not, she said, all are encouraged to join the group, where they can fit in. Many young people find their place in sports, she said, or 4-H; others don't feel they fit in

anywhere. She said the group was started as a place where kids can fit in.

Diversity is encouraged in the group. When joining, Cris said, youths are asked to fill out a like and dislike sheet.

"We tell them it's OK not to like the same things," she said.

Anyone who wants can help the group, Cris said; it's not just money that they need. Some supporters have donated snacks for meetings, she said, and others have lent a place to meet. The group usually meets at the Regional Prevention Center, she said, but it can be fun for them to meet somewhere else.

"It's not always about money," she said, "it's what we can do to help the kids."

The advisory board was started five years ago, Cris said, largely to help Hispanic people gain access to services available in the community. The group helps with translation, she said, for Spanish-speaking people to communicate at the schools and other organizations.

The board is a guide and a resource for Hispanic families, she said. It includes original members Irma Benavides, Art and Cris Lovington, Adrian and Crissy Conde, Jorge Araceli, Mendiola and Marisol Renteria and Maggie Hernandez, as well as Miguel and Lizeth Hernandez, who joined eight months ago.

The board received a grant three years ago that helped with forming the youth group, Cris said, but would have formed the group with or without that.

The group provides support for families, she said, and help for youths. Young people need to be helped as individuals, Cris said, not just as a group.

"If we expect them to fail," she said, "they will."

## Tobacco prevention campaign aims at teens, fights advertisements

Why tobacco prevention?

A lot of reasons, but a prevention specialist says we need to stop smoking before it starts, and that requires giving young people the facts, rather than letting them be lured by slick advertising.

Besides, she said, lives are at risk.

Tobacco is the first drug for most kids, Prevention Specialist Cris Lovington said; alcohol is second. Most people who smoke began when they were young, between 11 and 18.

Big Tobacco, the industry profiting from the unhealthy habit, is to blame, Lovington said. The industry needs to be sure it has a steady supply of new customers to keep the profits coming, since customers die from using their products.

"They will do anything to get young people hooked," she said. That includes slick advertising

and getting "role models" to use tobacco on the big screen.

The ads show young people looking healthy, Lovington said, and kids often don't know the difference between those pictures and reality.

Thirteen and 14-year-olds think if they smoke, they'll grow up to look like the pretty people in the ads.

And, she said, if a popular actor or actress uses tobacco, kids want to imitate them. John Travolta is paid \$100,000 per smoking scene, Lovington said; he doesn't inhale, but kids look up to him.

Kids in Kansas wrote letters to movie stars who smoke in movies, she said, to ask them to consider the message they are sending.

Is tobacco a problem in Sherman County?

Yes, Lovington says; a lot of eighth graders here are using tobacco. According to kids' re-

sponses to the Communities That Care Survey, tobacco use has been rising.

Art Lovington, Cris' husband and a former deputy at the Sherman County Sheriff's Department, said he caught a 10-year-old with cigarettes, cigars and knives.

The boy thought he was pretty cool, Art said, and was showing them off.

Art, now a surveillance officer for Northwest Kansas Community Corrections, checking on adult felony offenders and parolees, said the boy recognized him as being involved in law enforcement and handed the stuff over when confronted.

Ten-year-olds should be out playing with their friends, he said, not smoking, but tobacco is a reality — it's here.

There is a tie between alcohol and drug use and violence, Cris said, and for youths who use to-

bacco, the use of other addictive substances isn't often far behind.

And just using tobacco is dangerous enough.

Among the messages brought out at the Motivation, Achievement, Success Youth Group's sharing session Sunday is that cigarette smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals.

Chemicals found in cigarettes include ammonia, found in toilet bowl cleaner; arsenic, a poison sometimes used as a murder weapon; polonium 210, a nuclear waste; carbon monoxide, the deadly component of car exhaust; acetone, a paint remover; and 38 other known cancer-causing chemicals.

Smoking is so dangerous, Cris Lovington said, that the tobacco industry does not allow it in their buildings. This is why, she said, young people need to be taught that smoking is not "cool."

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