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Start Noticing smoke-free survey work at income-based multi-unit housing kicks off

by MIKE JORDAN
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School may not have been in session for most kids this summer, but a few Jackson County Central school students kept right on with the work they started over this past school year and — for some — even before that with the Start Noticing smoke-free group.

“We worked in Cottonwood County and ended up going door-to-door at one income-based multi-unit housing complex after talking with the owner,” said Susan Vileta, Start Noticing program coordinator/health educator. “We had a simple three-question survey that we had been asking owners and, in some cases, managers to distribute to their residents. But this owner felt more comfortable having us hand out the surveys, so we did. There were a lot of smokers there and we found that most were residents. This housing complex had a very high rate of resident smokers.”

Vileta indicated that, statistically, the highest percentage of smokers is low-income residents.

“We are still gathering the results from our surveys,” she said. “Interestingly enough, when we talked with the resident smokers, 70 percent or even a little higher percent of them said their preference would definitely be to live in smoke-free housing.”

Vileta also noted that one apartment complex in Mt. Lake has agreed to go smoke-free as of Oct. 1.

“We have been working with ‘Live Smoke Free,’ a group out of the Cities, that

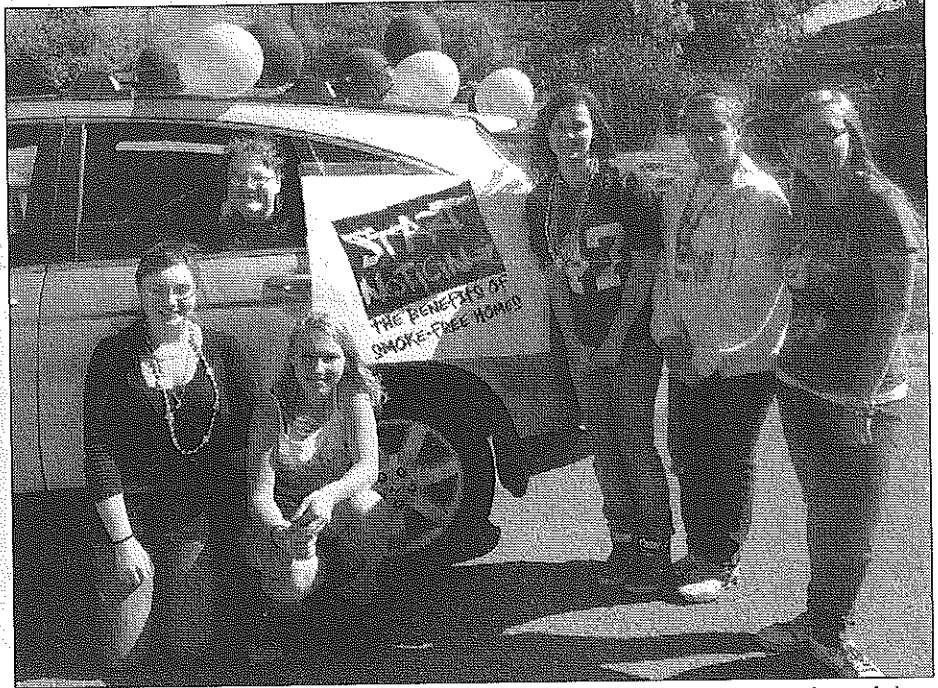
has helped us with the surveys,” Vileta said. “Once an owner agrees to designating their multi-unit housing as smoke-free, they pick a date when their housing units will go smoke-free and have an addendum to their lease agreements that states it is smoke-free for their present residents and for any residents that move into the housing in the future.”

Start Noticing has just started to get the surveys back from multi-unit housing residents members had talked with last month.

“We have a pretty equal number of students from JCC High School and JCC Middle School — about 10 to 15 students each — that are active participants in Start Noticing,” Vileta said. “We sent out 500 surveys in Cottonwood and Jackson counties this summer.”

Part of the emphasis with Start Noticing’s initiative to multi-unit housing is not only for the sake of the smokers themselves, but also for the other residents living in the buildings who don’t smoke.

“Really residents of these multi-unit housing locations deserve to have the choice to live in smoke-free buildings because non-smoking residents can be exposed to secondhand smoke from unit to unit via spaces between walls, floors and ceilings, as well as through gaps around pipes or electrical outlets,” Vileta noted. “Secondhand smoke can cause asthma, pneumonia, lung cancer, emphysema and chronic diseases like bronchitis and heart disease. Statistics show that in 2005 alone, nearly 600 Minnesota adults and infants died



Submitted photo

Members of the local Start Noticing group who participated in last week’s Jackson County Central homecoming parade included Amanda Deel (from left), Heidi Evers (in car), Angelica Schwering, Monica Heckard, Hunter Klontz and Kyanna Hall.

from secondhand smoke.”

And there are a number of benefits to the owner/managers in creating a smoke-free environment in multi-unit housing. One is reduced cleaning costs, which are often higher in housing that allows smoking due to the difficulty in removing the smell of smoke, cigarette burns and smoking residue from the units, as well as their hallways and other common areas. Then there is the fire-risk issue. It is a well-known fact, Vileta said, that smoking-related fires are not only deadly, but costly. Putting smoke-free policies in place within a multi-housing residence eliminates the source of smoking-related fires. And as to the question of the le-

gality of making a building smoke-free, any building owner/manager can make a rental building — including individual units or their entire property — 100 percent smoke-free, she said, as smoke free-policies are legal.

“Children are especially vulnerable to secondhand smoke,” Vileta said. “Their lungs don’t develop fully when they are exposed to secondhand smoke. They are more susceptible to pneumonia, asthma and ear infections. And it is potentially fatal for a small child or even a pet to ingest a cigarette butt.”

But that isn’t even touching upon the issue of the effects of third-hand smoke on people, which comes

from walls coated in nicotine or carpeting that can actually become sticky from the nicotine residue.

“We will be working with daycare providers and foster homes to advocate for smoke-free environments for the kids staying at daycares or living in foster homes in our counties too,” Vileta said. “Anyone that would like to join us advocating for smoke-free environments for our kids can feel free to do so.”



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