



## NEVADA TOBACCO FREE TEENS PROJECT

### BACKGROUND

Each day in the United States more than 3,000 young people under 18 years of age try smoking for the first time.<sup>1</sup> One of the most important - and widely cited - findings on smoking and health is that virtually all cigarette smoking and tobacco usage begins before adulthood. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, nearly 90% of all smokers began before the age of 18. While the prevalence of tobacco usage among Nevada's youth has dropped significantly in the past decade, our rate still remains at 17% and seems to be climbing again. It is estimated that 41,000 kids in our state under the age of 18 will ultimately die prematurely from smoking.<sup>2</sup>

### METHODS

*A successful youth educational strategy that had been previously employed in Washoe County – an in-person presentation, including a question and answer session with a dynamic cancer survivor, someone who began chewing tobacco at their age and was diagnosed with cancer as a teen.* Gruen Von Behrens, today a cancer survivor and national motivational speaker, began using chewing tobacco at age 13 and was diagnosed with oral cancer at age 17. He has undergone 35 surgeries including removal of his lower teeth, jawbone, half of his tongue and part of his neck muscles. Von Behrens now travels across the country sharing his story and educating kids and teens about the risks of tobacco use, respecting yourself and others. While Mr. Von Behrens can be difficult to understand and is disfigured due to his cancer, gyms and auditoriums quiet quickly to watch his animated presentation and hear him speak. A post-presentation survey of the efforts in Washoe County showed a marked change in attitudes and beliefs about tobacco usage among the youth who participated in the Von Behrens presentations.

With success in the urban areas of Nevada, we turned our focus to the rural populations of Nevada. This focus required a different approach – working through rural community members to tap into the youth in each respective location. Project partners were recruited including Nevada Statewide Coalition Partnership, Nye Communities Coalition, Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, Saint Mary's Regional Medical Center, American Lung Association, and the Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health (DPBH). Partners identified the most at-need communities that would also reach a large amount of youth. Members of the Nevada Statewide Coalition Partnership – residents of the communities we planned to touch – contacted school officials, coordinated scheduling, and reached out to the students.

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<sup>1</sup> Schmidt, Lorna. March 17, 2014. *The path to tobacco addiction starts at very young ages*. Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids.

<sup>2</sup> Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. *Tobacco's toll in Nevada*. Retrieved on May 27, 2014 from [http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts\\_issues/toll\\_us/nevada](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts_issues/toll_us/nevada).

The Nevada Office of Rural Health and DPBH built a scanable survey tool to collect information from students about their experiences with and opinions on tobacco use (including cigarettes, cigars, chew, and hookah) and associated exposure. The pre-survey included one question on grade level, and four multiple choice/scale questions on perceptions of and exposure to tobacco use. The post survey included grade level and one scale question on perception and one open-ended question on what was learned from the presentation. Both a pre-survey and post-survey tool were created and coded per each school participating. Pre-surveys were delivered to each school either directly or through our contact for each respective community. A media advisory was circulated to local print, television, and radio outlets listing the schedule and inviting the public to attend.

## RESULTS

During the week of March 11-15, Mr. Von Behrens traveled to Silver Springs, Fernley, Dayton, Fallon, Eureka, Ely, Panaca, Alamo, and Pahrump speaking to more than 4,000 students from 11 middle and high schools across our state. A number of stories about his visit ran in newspapers including The Eureka Sentinel, Ely Times, Virginia City News, and Pahrump Valley Times. KPVM TV in Pahrump also picked up the story for the local news during the week. The pre- and post-surveys completed by students at all schools were collected and returned to the University of Nevada, Reno for analysis on tobacco experience and opinions.

- 3,835 pre-surveys were distributed (n= 3,835) of which 2,330 were completed for a completion rate of 61%.
- 2,735 post-surveys were distributed (n= 2,735) of which 1,314 were returned for a completion rate of 48%.

Open ended questions showed a marked change in perception, as indicated in the examples below:

**"I learned that you can easily die by using any tobacco products. I think it is important because if I wouldn't have known this I might have done tobacco in the future."**

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**"The most important this [sic] I learned was that chewing tobacco is very harmful. My thoughts were that it was no big deal because a lot of people do it and haven't had any sickness but as soon as I saw him [Gruen] I knew it was very harmful. Now I think they should not do it, it is very harmful to chew or smoke."**

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## Nevada's Teens and Tobacco

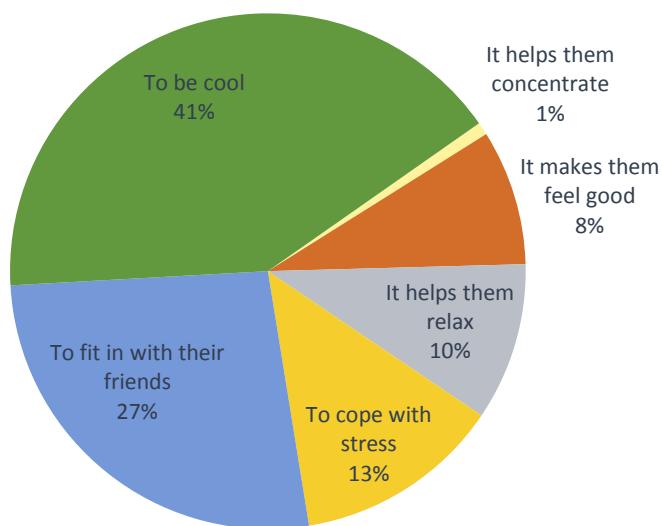
Teens are vulnerable to both social and environmental influences. They want to fit in with their peers and are often influenced by social leaders, friends, or family who smoke. Tobacco marketing makes tobacco use look appealing and tobacco companies are spending more than one million dollars an hour in this country to market their products.<sup>3</sup>

NEVADA	
High school students who smoke	17% (24,000)
Kids under 18 who become new daily smokers each year	1,900
Male high school students who use smokeless or chew tobacco	8.8%
Packs of cigarettes bought or smoked by kids each year	6 million
Estimated tobacco industry marketing expenditures in our state	\$74.3 million

Source: Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, [http://www.tobaccofreetkids.org/facts\\_issues/toll\\_us/nevada](http://www.tobaccofreetkids.org/facts_issues/toll_us/nevada)

Accordingly, almost 70% of the students surveyed through this project indicated they believe teens use tobacco for social reasons. The small remainder indicated reasons could be related to the effects of tobacco use or the effects of the act of tobacco use.

### What do you think is the main reason teens use tobacco?



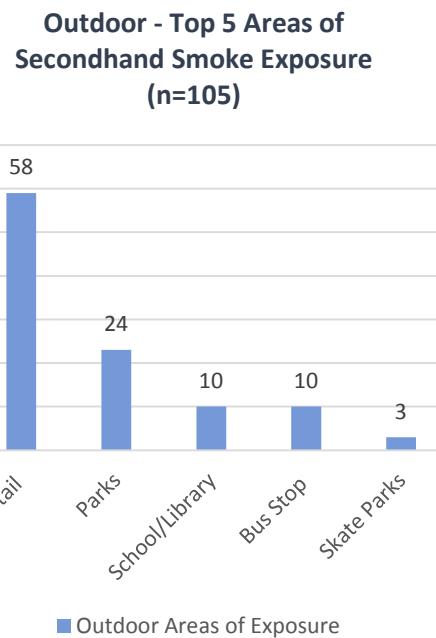
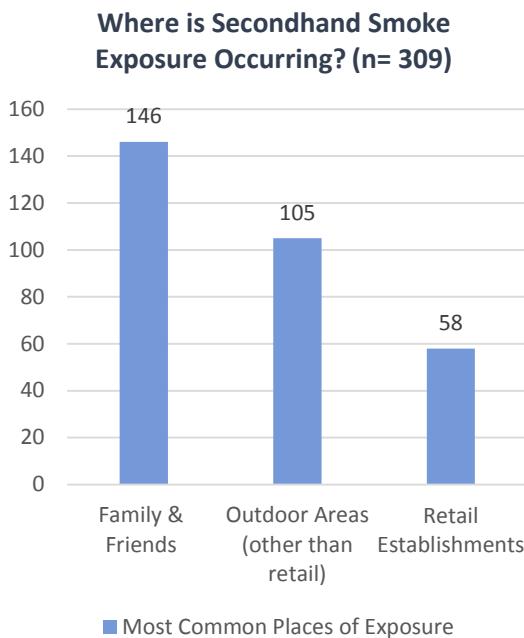
<sup>3</sup> Surgeon General. Preventing tobacco use among youth and young adults: fact sheet. Retrieved May 27, 2014 from <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/preventing-youth-tobacco-use/factsheet.html>.

## Secondhand Smoke

The information regarding secondhand smoke through the survey's quantitative and qualitative questions indicated the following:

- Almost 30% are exposed to secondhand smoke on a regular basis.
- Exposure to secondhand smoke use is most often from immediate family and friends.
- Outside of the home, the two primary locations students reported exposure to secondhand smoke were outdoor areas such as parks and streets (48%) and retail establishments (28%).
- Perceptions collected on secondhand smoke indicate that youth believe it is harmful, yet not as harmful as smoking tobacco, chewing tobacco, or smoking hookah.

While Mr. Von Behrens' presentation did not focus on secondhand smoke, the overall message regarding tobacco products and other substances certainly could have influenced the increase in the belief of the harm of secondhand smoke (see chart on page 5).

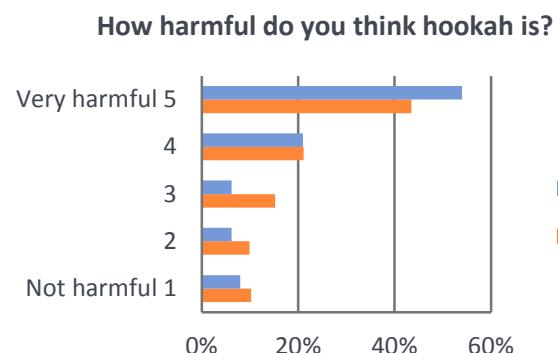
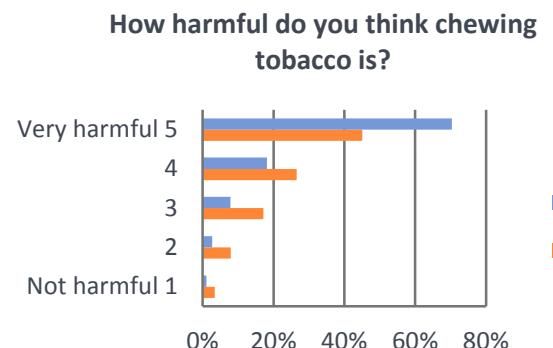
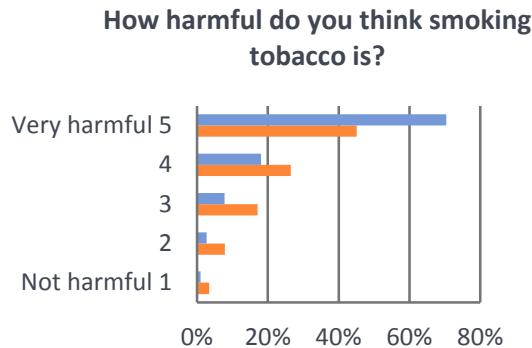


## Presentation Results

As indicated from the pre- and post-surveys, beliefs and opinions regarding tobacco use and exposure changed dramatically regarding perceived harm of each after Mr. Von Behrens' presentation. A review of the qualitative data indicated:

- Substantial number of students associating use of tobacco products with cancer
- A high concern with cancer
- Realization that tobacco not only affects your lungs, but can affect your looks
- Realization that tobacco and drug use not only affects the user, but those around them as well

## Presentation Results



### How often are you exposed to secondhand smoke?

