

Tobacco Education Program

by Kathy Ball, Bonner Scholars Coordinator

Purpose

- Uses Bonner Scholars to teach preschool and elementary school children the health hazards of tobacco use.

Background

The West Virginia School of Dentistry received an initial grant from the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Bureau for Public Health to award mini-grants to colleges in the state to develop tobacco education programs. The Concord Bonner Scholars Program was invited to participate in 2000 and was awarded \$10,000 for the first year of the program.

How It Works

Selection

Two or three Bonner Scholars are recruited in the summer or early fall to work on the project. Most of the students selected have served or are currently serving at the childcare centers where they will be giving the lessons.

Preparation

The Bonners then plan age-appropriate tobacco education lessons for the children. Each lesson is usually between 20 to 30 minutes in length and incorporates various teaching methods and media including role-playing, video, puppet theater, and learning games. Students select and purchase items for the packets given to the children, as well as posters and games for teachers at the centers to use for follow-up lessons. Bonners also research and develop original brochures and pamphlets to be distributed.

Lessons

Bonner Scholars visit three area childcare centers to deliver the lessons during the school year. Bonners use their entertaining educational materials to make the lessons fun and interesting while delivering the core message of tobacco's harmful effects. The children are each given a "goodie bag" including rulers, bag tags, and coloring books to take home with them. The bags also include materials targeted at parents and other adult family members to further increase the impact of the lessons.

What Makes The Project Unique

This project seeks to counteract the hip, cool image of tobacco use that is often marketed to young children through popular media. The intent is not just to present the facts about tobacco use and its health hazards, but also to help the children remember what they learn and present the information in a way that makes it "cooler" not to use tobacco products.

The majority of children at the child development centers who participate are familiar with the Concord Bonners who give the lessons. Therefore, the children are receiving a positive message from students who are already established role models in their lives.

Benefits

Impact on Bonners

The Bonners who conduct this work feel very passionate about the cause. They have knowledge of the health hazards of tobacco and are determined to fight against the tobacco companies that continue to market their product aggressively.

Low Cost

This project can be implemented with very little financial support. Many resources can be found on the Internet, and students who are energetic and creative can duplicate the games and puppets that are used during the lessons. Only minimal funding is needed for copying costs, paper, craft materials, and other supplies.

Resources And Partners

West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources

- They provide the funding to purchase all necessary educational materials and resources for the program. They also have stipends available to pay students for summer work done on the project.

Child Development Centers

- Bonner Scholars have presented lessons at the CASE/Concord Preschool and School-Aged Development Centers located in Athens, as well as centers located in Princeton, West Virginia, and McDowell County, West Virginia. The teachers and staff at the centers allow Bonners to work with their children and facilitate the learning process by incorporating the tobacco education materials into subsequent lessons.

The Bonner Foundation

- Community funds are sometimes used for purchasing materials and resources for the lessons.

Overcoming Challenges

As with many similar state and federal grant programs, the funds for this program will not be available next year. Although the program can be operated with very little expense, there are some costs involved. The Bonner office is considering submitting a mini-grant to a local area foundation for continued funding. They are also considering the possibility of incorporating the tobacco education lessons into the existing Athens/Concord Summer Youth Program for delivery during the summer months, as opposed to a year-round program.

How to Make it Grow

The Bonner program could partner with the physical education department to develop a full curriculum for the program, and they could create a program targeted at older children in the community. The lessons could also expand into the local kindergarten and elementary classrooms.