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Community Coalitions Launch Text-based Program to Help Northland Youth Quit Vaping

The Northland Coalition, Youth with Vision, and community prevention coalitions from across Clay, Platte and Ray counties, have joined together to offer a free, anonymous, text-based program designed to help youth quit using e-cigarette vaping devices.

“*This is Quitting*” is a nation-wide program sponsored by the Truth Initiative that offers 13- to 24- year- old youths an anonymous, personalized way to give up the habit of vaping,” Emily Barnes said. Barnes is a community prevention specialist for Tri-County Mental Health Services.

“As youth vaping continues to be a nationwide and local concern, it’s imperative that we do everything we can to increase access to nicotine cessation for youth,” Barnes said.

The website for the Truth Initiative, which also offers programs for adults, explains that while e-cigarette use is often called vaping, it is actually an aerosol containing tiny chemical particles that is delivered through the device. They further report that there is evidence suggesting these particles lead to cardiovascular injury as well as negative effects on resting heart rate, blood pressure and the cells that line the blood vessels.

Barnes said that when a recent Missouri Student Survey indicated that as many as 15 percent of Missouri youth in sixth through 12th grade have reported vaping in the last 30 days, community coalitions throughout the Northland realized the importance of taking action to provide cessation help.

“Vaping is highly addictive, and many young people have trouble stopping once they have started. We realize that part of preventing youth from vaping is helping those who are already vaping to stop. This will not only help the health of those who vape, but also reduce the availability and social acceptability of vapes to other youth.” Barnes says.

Barnes explained when a community decides to join the national program, they create a keyword specific to their region to text to an established number.

“We worked with our youth prevention advocacy council Youth With Vision to develop our keyword,” Barnes said. Across the Northland, a youth wishing to connect with the cessation program texts the word BREAKFREE to 88709. “It’s all handled anonymously, so the teen can be assured of privacy.”

Barnes explained that when the teen contacts the program, he or she will receive some simple questions to determine age and other responses to help the program design some specific, age-appropriate, individualized quitting tips.

“Then the young person will receive a tip a day for 12 weeks to help them meet the challenge of walking away from vaping,” Barnes said.

Barnes said statistics from the Truth Initiative reflect that after two weeks 45% of participants have reported a decrease in use of vaping devices, with about 22% stating they have totally eliminated their use.

“We are so excited to be able to give our young people this cessation tool to help them in their efforts to quit this dangerous habit,” Barnes said.

Barnes said the coalitions have marketing tools including posters, palm cards and flyers available to schools and businesses in the community that would like to help promote the program to youth.

Truth Initiative is a nonprofit public health organization that engages in research and policy studies to create and implement successful campaigns in communities across the country to eliminate tobacco use and nicotine addiction.

More information about the program and contact information for the community coalitions involved can be found at www.northlandcoalition.com. Marketing tools to promote the program can be acquired by contacting the program directors for the various participating coalitions or Barnes at emilyb@tri-countymhs.org.