

## **No smoking! Youth group wants to snuff out tobacco**

Part of growing up is being able to make your own choices about things that affect your body.

And one of those choices is: Will I put drugs, tobacco or alcohol into my body?

There are kids your own age right here in Pittsburg County who desperately hope that you won't put any of those things into your body.

They are members of the Pittsburg County Youth Advisory Board, Students Working Against Tobacco, the Southeast Oklahoma Tobacco Free Oklahoma Coalition, and the 2MUCH2LOSE program.

"These programs are youth-led. They empower and ignite youth," Jamie Tippitt, SWAT coordinator, said.

Any teens or tweens who want to be a part of one of the programs—or all of them—can.

But what exactly do these kids do, and is any of it fun?

Fun is one of the keywords. A few weeks ago they held a youth rally at Chadick Park. Lots of other teens and tweens came to it and everyone spent the afternoon getting to know each other and telling why they have chosen not to take part in drugs, alcohol or tobacco.

Last Christmas the youth advisory board delivered an estimated \$3,000 in toys and non-perishable food items to the Salvation Army.

And right about the time school started, SWAT team members held a tobacco ad tear down event.

They talked with the area convenience stores about reducing the number of tobacco ads they displayed. Convenience store owners Tammy Cathey of TJ's Kountry Store and TJ's Bait Shop, along with Leroy Stuart of LC's Dandy Mart, donated several tobacco signs and promotional items after being asked to by SWAT members.

Robyne Lindley, who is the preventive medical consultant for the Tobacco Use Prevention Program, said that tobacco companies spend \$274.3 million each year promoting tobacco products and "Kids are twice as sensitive to tobacco advertising than adults."

That's why most SWAT members are in grades six, seven and eight. Fredonia Vogle, whose husband Jack smoked for about 50 years and wound up have his voice box surgically removed, said "Usually at that age they haven't started smoking yet. We need to get kids involved with these programs, and making the decision not to smoke, long before they ever try that first cigarette."

Some of you might be surprised to learn that, according to the state health department, 15 percent of kids in grades six through eight, and 33 percent of kids in grades 9-12, currently use some form of tobacco products.

The department also reports that of all the Oklahomans under the age of 18 right now, an estimated 87,000 of them will die prematurely as a result of tobacco addiction.

The choice is yours. Which one will you make?

For more information about joining these programs, contact Tippitt or Lindley at 423-1267, or Alicia Mass at The Oaks, 423-1113.