

Meeting stresses tobacco problems, remedies

By: Jeff Riggs, News Editor

In celebration of a first-year \$75,000 grant from the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust, the Wagoner Family Service Council (WFSC) met with other local organizations to discuss the grant, and what the representatives of these organizations would like to see implemented in Wagoner County.

WFSC was awarded the 5-year Communities of Excellence grant from the endowment trust, officially beginning activity on Oct. 1.

The first year of the grant will be a planning phase in which the coalition will develop a strategic plan to be implemented over the next four years of the program.

Lead agency for the grant will be the Wagoner County Health Department. Part of the grant money will be used to hire someone for a position to help implement programs related to tobacco-related problems and remedies.

Wagoner Family Service Council Director Wanda James, presided over the subcommittee meeting Wednesday, Oct. 10 at the Wagoner City Civic Center containing about 17 considering membership in the subcommittee.

The person selected for the position to be called the Tobacco Prevention Coordinator, has been narrowed to a field of three, and should be announced by the week beginning Sunday, Oct. 14. A number of training sessions will be required, as specified by the terms of the grant. The person will be supervised by Health Department employee Marjorie Lyons, Communities of Excellence Program Coordinator.

"The person chosen will begin as a planner, getting out into the community and finding its needs," James said. "They will also visit community stakeholders."

James explained that stakeholders include both organizations and individual citizens of Wagoner County.

"It (stakeholder) could be anybody," James said. "It could be citizens, businesses, or maybe non-profit groups."

She said the grant money will increase each year from its current \$75,000, with re-submittal of a grant application, and proof of the coalition's compliance with objectives specified in the grant.

Interestingly, Wanda James, who leads the WFSC, an organization heavily involved in the tobacco cessation program, is a 20-year smoker of cigarettes. James, who has a family history of death from both cancer and heart disease, admits that smoking is a habit to which she is strongly addicted. That adds fuel to her belief that it is necessary to get her message out to the Wagoner community.

"It makes me sick to see our kids smoking. Being a smoker, I understand the challenges and addiction of it," she said. "And, in Wagoner County, it has been shown, it is one of only a few Oklahoma counties, in which the major culprit is not the convenience store selling to youth. Here, it is the home, in which adults are providing tobacco to youth."

According to James, tobacco cessation classes may be in the future for Wagoner County through terms of the grant, as well as anti-smoking city ordinances the coalition would desire to have passed.

“The imperative thing about this grant is that there is a collaboration between so many different groups and citizens in Wagoner County,” James said.

Dr. James R. Turner, Administrator of the Wagoner County Health Department, also present at the meeting, said tobacco cessation is only part of the problem which will be the target of the program.

“What we are going to do, is much more than form cessation groups,” he said. “This marks the beginning of a comprehensive plan to target the entire community environment to reduce tobacco usage across the board.”

Turner said the efforts of the group will include change in advertising tactics, and the method in which tobacco is sold, to eliminate second hand smoke exposure and many other offshoot contributors to the problem.

“The financial implications, as well as health costs to citizens are quite significant,” he said.

As for the future of the county in terms of tobacco, Turner is optimistic.

“We really think this is an opportunity to change tobacco use in county, and change health of citizens in the county. We know tobacco usage is one of main ingredients of poor health nationwide, and locally,” Turner said.

He commented that the driving force behind the program will be the first year of planning going into the following four years of the 5-year plan, and that considerable time and effort will be utilized for planning.

Those attending the meeting of Oct. 10 include: James and Turner, as well as: Leslie Vick, Linda Born, Barb Volz, Marjorie Lyons, all from the Wagoner County Health Department; Dick Spillers of Wagoner Community Outreach; Meredith Zehr of the Wagoner Area Chamber of Commerce; Susan Johnson of the Post Adjudication Review Board; Sam Majors of Wagoner Area Neighbors; bill Waggoner of the Eastern Oklahoma Development District/Area Agency on Aging; Carolyn Monroe of Carolyn’s Education Station; Lisette Caveny of the Wagoner Literacy Center; Johnna Sue Blair of Wagoner Community Hospital; Tracy Colmenero of Oklahoma Turning Point and Debbie Brewster, a community citizen.

Jeff Riggs represented, both the Wagoner Tribune, and Wagoner World Class Speakers, a club of Toastmasters International.