

Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group, Inc. Awarded Grant

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The Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group, Inc., lead agency is pleased to announce that they have been awarded a five-year Communities of Excellence grant from the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust. The Communities of Excellence grant program challenges local coalitions to create comprehensive programs to reduce tobacco use in their communities. The Red River Tobacco Education Consortium, combined representatives from Greer, Harmon and Tillman county Oklahoma Turning Point Partnerships and Wichita Mountains Area Resource Prevention Centers coalitions, will join the ranks of 23 other Communities of Excellence programs across the state.

Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group, Inc. was selected by the coalition to serve as the lead agency for the grant and will receive approximately \$75,000 in the first year of the grant program. Red River Tobacco Education Consortium will provide matching funds of \$7,500, or 10 percent of the grant award.

“We would like to thank Tillman County Health Department, Granite Housing Authority, City of Hollis, KWHW/KRKZ/MIKE FM Broadcasting, KEYB/KKRE Broadcasting, Hollis News, Mangum Star News, Granite Enterprise, Frederick Press, Frederick Leader, Big Pasture News, and Keleher Outdoor Advertising, Inc for their generous contributions to the program,” said Neil Montgomery, Executive Director, Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group, Inc. “Without their support we would not have had this exciting opportunity to improve the health of Greer, Harmon and Tillman counties.”

The grant officially began on October 1, 2007. 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. “The next step will be to come together as a community to develop a detailed plan to help reduce the risk of tobacco use and tobacco-caused disease,” said Mr. Montgomery.

The goals of the Communities of Excellence are to have communities in which public places and workplaces are tobacco-free, community organizations and events reject tobacco industry sponsorship, schools adopt tobacco-free policies and implement strong anti-tobacco curriculum; health care providers routinely refer tobacco-users to accessible and culturally-appropriate cessation services; businesses adopt tobacco-free policies and provide insurance coverage for tobacco cessation; and local tobacco-related ordinances are enforced.

Currently, Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group, Inc. is starting the fourth implementation year of a five year grant award from Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust to address tobacco prevention and use in Jackson County. Due to the success of the Jackson County Tobacco Education Committee, Mr. Montgomery felt that applying for funding for Greer, Harmon, and Tillman would increase awareness regarding tobacco prevention and education in Southwest Oklahoma.

Tobacco use remains the state's leading preventable cause of death, killing about 5,700 Oklahomans each year-more than AIDS, alcohol, illegal drugs, murders, suicides, and auto accidents combined.