

County health action team selected for statewide honor

The Oklahoma Turning Point Council has recognized the outstanding work of the Jackson County Community Health Action Team by awarding the group its "2004 Partnership for Healthy Oklahoma" award.

This is the first of what will be an annual award from the state Turning Point Council. It is intended to recognize the power and ability of individuals, organizations and agencies to improve the overall health of communities in Oklahoma.

Members of the Jackson County Community Health Action Team, including team Chairwoman Barbara Burleson, Vice Chairwoman Bonnie McAskill and Mary Zepeda of the Altus Police Department, and Debbie Beltzer of Jackson County Memorial Hospital, accepted the award at the Turning Point Council's annual forum in Oklahoma City last month.

"We are immensely proud of the work our team has accomplished in the community and so very pleased that this work has been acknowledged," Burleson said.

The Jackson County Community Health Action Team was established in March 2002 and since that time the group has grown to include a 60-member partnership made up of city, county and state officials, city and county staff; and representatives from business, health care, nonprofit organizations, military, schools, community volunteers and concerned citizens.

Early on, the group conducted a community health assessment and, as a result, began to tackle the health issues of most concern to the community, including motor vehicle safety, tobacco use prevention, substance abuse prevention, access to health care, immunization and infectious diseases, and physical activity/obesity/ nutrition.

Partners on the team worked together to focus on specific actions that could lead to community health improvement. Some of the group's more outstanding projects recognized by the "Partnership for Healthy Oklahoma" award include the following:

1. Successfully advocated for the Altus City Council to adopt the state seat belt law with the passage of a local seat belt ordinance. This ordinance has led to an 80 percent decrease in motor vehicle fatality rates for Altus and Jackson County, and a 15 percent decrease in personal injuries resulting from motor vehicle crashes.
2. Working with the Altus Public Schools, a 24/7 tobacco free policy was implemented, allowing more than 2,000 students to attend events in a smoke-free environment.
3. In a collaborative effort with the Oklahoma Highway Patrol, Oklahoma State Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs and a local drug task force, members developed an educational presentation on the dangers of methamphetamines for students, parents and others.
4. Through partnerships with Jackson County Memorial Hospital, local physicians, pharmacies and businesses, the group was the driving force to open a free community health clinic and patient assistance program.
5. Working with the Altus Kiwanis Club and the Jackson County Health Department, hosted communitywide immunization clinics. Hosted Jackson County's first "Drive-By Flu Shoot" that provided more than 400 free flu shots in 2003.
6. Promoted physical activity and improved fitness through health fairs and community walks, including the "Walk this Weigh" campaign.
7. Awarded a planning grant through the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust with Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group Inc. serving as the "lead agency".

If you would like more information about the Jackson County Community Health Action Team, please call Brandie O'Connor at 482-7308.