

LEFLORE TOBACCO-FREE AGENCY LANDS GRANT

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Tobacco-free LeFlore County received a \$125,000 grant from the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust as part of the Communities of Excellence in Tobacco Control program, both agencies announced Tuesday.

Tobacco-free LeFlore County works with the LeFlore County Coalition for Healthy Living, with LeFlore County Youth Services, serving as lead agency to aid tobacco prevention efforts countywide.

In the past year, Tobacco-free LeFlore County worked with communities, businesses and schools to establish 24/7 Tobacco-free policies at Howe, Shady Point and Spiro public schools and at Kiamichi Technology Center. "We are dedicated to making LeFlore County a healthier place to live. This grant enables us to establish smoke-free environments and programs that prevent youth smoking and help people quit tobacco. It's our goal to create a community in which children can grow up tobacco-free," said Benjamin J. "BJ" Barnes, Tobacco-free LeFlore County coordinator.

The Oklahoma TSET grant is to be used to fund tobacco control programs. The LeFlore agency has received more than \$175,000 in TSET grant funds aimed at improving community health since 2010.

TSET Executive Director Tracey Strader said the efforts of local coalitions such as LeFlore County's has led to all-time low smoking and all-time high quit rates in Oklahoma.

According to TSET data posted on its website, the rate of adult smoking in Oklahoma dropped from 28.7 percent in 2001 to 23.7 percent in 2010. Attempts to quit smoking rose from 48.1 percent in 2001 to 58.4 percent in 2010. And cigarette sales dropped from 108.1 packs per person in 2001 to 79 packs per person in 2010, according to TSET.

And, TSET states, the number of high school students identifying in its surveys as committed nonsmokers rose from 25.5 percent in 1999 to 40.3 percent in 2009. The number of Oklahoma middle school students identifying as committed nonsmokers rose from 41.4 percent in 1999 to 64.1 percent in 2009, the agency states.

According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data released in 2010, 18.4 percent of adults nationwide smoke, compared to 24.7 percent of Oklahoma adults. According to the CDC, Oklahoma ranks 47th among the states in terms of death attributable to smoking among adults ages 35 and older. The national average is 248.5 deaths per 100,000 adults; Oklahoma averages 332.1 smoking-attributable deaths a year per 100,000 adults.

A County Health Rankings report released in March by the National Association of County and City Health Organizations found that LeFlore County experienced 11,094 premature deaths overall (all causes) of adults younger than age 75, compared to 9,416 statewide and 5,564 nationwide.

The County Health Rankings report found that 28 percent of LeFlore County adults surveyed reported they'd smoked at least 100 cigarettes and were currently smoking, compared to 25 percent statewide and 15 percent nationally.