

# New Youth Cessation Program Shows Promise!

by Nancy Speelman, CSW, CADC, CMS

The Youth Quit2Win Program (YQ2W) is New Jersey's *NEW Youth Tobacco Cessation Program*, which was developed by the Tobacco Dependence Program through a grant by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, Office of the State Epidemiologist, through funds from the New Jersey Comprehensive Tobacco Control Program. The Tobacco Dependence Program developed the YQ2W program via the involvement of health professionals and educators from various disciplines including psychologists, social workers, addiction psychiatrists and counselors.

Evaluations of most youth cessation programs have shown limited success in achieving and maintaining abstinence from tobacco.

Understanding the unique needs of this population is crucial to the success of the program. In developing YQ2W, we took into account key elements in working with young people. Whereas health concerns rank high with adults, adolescents are at a point in their life when they feel invincible. Youth are more sensitive to messages that portray the costs of smoking, effects on looks/breath or that illustrate the tobacco industry's reliance on addicting teen smokers. It is important for young people to feel they were making their own decisions. It can also be difficult for teens to make a total commitment to quitting.

The tobacco industry's goal is to get people addicted to their products as young as possible! Studies show that ninety percent of cigarette smokers start smoking before reaching 18 years of age. Surveys show that teens that begin smoking in high school continue to smoke into adulthood even though they say they want to quit. Nationally, 4000 adolescents experiment with tobacco every day, while 2000 other adolescents under the age of 18 become new, regular smokers.

## TDP Provides YQ2W Training

The Tobacco Dependence Program recently provided two 3-day trainings to New Jersey school professionals. The first training took place October 5, 6 and November 19, 2004. The second training took place January 25, 26 and March 11, 2005. The trainings were designed to familiarize schools with the YQ2W Youth Cessation Program. During Day 1 & 2 of the trainings, all participants were given a brief overview of the public health perspective of tobacco use among young people. Learning modules on medical complications, tobacco addiction, and treatment followed. Participants were taught specific assessment skills to properly determine if students were appropriate for group. Participants were also familiarized with each of the 10 group sessions.

In addition, each school was provided with posters and tips to successfully market the YQ2W Program in their schools to recruit students. Participants were instructed on New Jersey's law on tobacco use in schools as well as the components of a good school tobacco policy. To aid in this discussion, participants were asked to bring in copies of their own school policies.

The third day of the training was held about one month after the initial training days to give the schools a chance to begin to implement the program and return with questions, brainstorm challenges and highlight successes.

A total of 37 school staff members were trained over the course of two training sessions. Participants included substance awareness counselors, student assistance counselors, school social workers, nurses, school psychologists, teachers and guidance counselors. Of those 37 participants, 34 New Jersey schools were represented, most of which are high schools. Two of the training participants worked in middle schools, with grades 1-8.

Training feedback from both training sessions indicates that participants felt that the trainings significantly increased their knowledge of tobacco use, and prepared them to implement the program in their school district. Participants also indicated that the YQ2W manual was extremely helpful and easy to use. At the end of the training, the majority of participants surveyed felt that they would use the information to provide a program in their school to help students end their tobacco use. In addition, they felt they would be able to increase the amount of information provided to students on the

effects of tobacco and the benefits of quitting smoking. Participants became aware of the importance of a comprehensive school policy, implementation, enforcement issues, as well as addressing quitting resources for students.

## Pilot Schools Implementation and Session Feedback

New Jersey Schools who were implementing the YQ2W program were asked to complete session feedback forms after each group session. The form asked the facilitator to rate the students' interest, ability, and perception of the material covered in that particular session. Based on the feedback forms received thus far, the average rating across the board has been "very good", bordering on "excellent". The pilot schools provided the Tobacco Dependence Program with ongoing feedback and suggestions as to changes they thought would further improve the program. One suggestion stressed the importance of administration buy-in. A common concern amongst the group facilitators was how to educate other school staff and administration that this was a group to



continued on page 8

## **Quit2Win**

*continued from page 7*

support students who were motivated to quit and not to be used as punishment for students who were caught smoking.

Challenges in successfully implementing the program have included scheduling conflicts, snow days and a general shortage of time on the part of the facilitators (specifically Student Assistance Counselors). The marketing tools and tips provided in the YQ2W Program have proven to be effective in a large majority of the schools. Data collected from the schools indicate that students are receptive to the program. While final results on smoking reduction and cessation rates are not yet available, the feedback thus far indicates the YQ2W program, in general, has been a valuable learning experience for the students with most students significantly reducing their tobacco consumption.

### **Future Trainings**

To date, there are approximately 15 schools on the waiting list for future trainings. This suggests that the program has received reasonably positive “word-of-mouth” endorsement from school professionals and that there is an interest from more schools to implement this program. For more information, check our website at [www.tobaccoprogram.org](http://www.tobaccoprogram.org) or contact [nancy.spelman@umdnj.edu](mailto:nancy.spelman@umdnj.edu).

