

STUDENTS HARD AT WORK PROMOTING SMOKE-FREE LIVING IN WESTERN NEWFOUNDLAND SCHOOLS

In 2012, smoking among youth in Newfoundland aged 15 to 19 years was 11%. This is the lowest rate of smoking recorded for this age group since Health Canada first reported smoking prevalence and is far less than the 30% for this age group recorded in 1999. Students in western Newfoundland schools are working hard to get these smoking rates even lower in our youth.

In October, 2012, schools in the western region of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District began a partnership with the Tobacco Free Network in Corner Brook to promote a student leadership program, *Students Working against Tobacco* (S.W.A.T.). S.W.A.T empowers junior and senior high school students to educate themselves and others about the health risks of tobacco and peer pressure that lures students into smoking. Each interested school selected a group of students (mostly grade 10) to form a S.W.A.T. team that agreed to work as advocates for a smoke-free lifestyle. S.W.A.T teams attended regional training sessions in October and received resources and leadership ideas to use with other students about the benefits of living smoke-free. Sessions have taken place in Plum Point, L'Anse au Loup, Corner Brook, Port aux Basques, and Stephenville. Students in 30 schools have been trained over the last two years to serve as ambassadors and work with younger students to promote a smoke-free lifestyle.

With National Non-Smoking Week (January 19 – 25) fast approaching, public health nurses and S.W.A.T. teams are busy advocating for the benefits of living smoke free by placing posters around schools and doing presentations to classes.

Sonia Lovell, principal of Main River Academy, says that the response to the S.W.A.T. presentations in her school has been excellent. "Having older students presenting to younger students about the health effects of smoking really seems to be having an impact. This is especially so at the Grade 4 – 6 level when students are starting to consider whether or not they eventually might like to try smoking. Hopefully, more students are realizing the dangers of smoking and choosing to live smoke free," said Lovell.

In Photo: Left to Right: Nathan Johnson, Matthew Osmond, Mackenzie Regular, and Alicia Heath
Caption: Pictured here are members of a S.W.A.T. team at Main River Academy in Pollard's Point doing a class presentation to primary students and sharing a Jar of Tar resource to highlight how much tar would be taken into a smoker's lungs over the course of one year.

Submitted by: Bill Allan, School Health Promotion Liaison Consultant, Western Health/ Newfoundland & Labrador English School District (Western Region)