



**For Immediate Release  
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## **Teens as Teachers in Glen Cove** *Peer Educators Teach about the Dangers of Tobacco Use*

Glen Cove Middle School students know the dangers of tobacco use and are busy spreading the message to their younger counterparts. The “Teens as Teachers” (T.A.T.) program is a peer leadership initiative, where Finley Middle School students are trained with tobacco knowledge and the skills necessary to teach a full period lesson to student grades 3-5 in Glen Cove. This program was implemented at both Connolly and Landing schools and one thing is certain – students are hearing the anti-tobacco message loud and clear.

Each lesson starts off with small group breakout sessions where the peer educators test the students’ knowledge of tobacco facts. The students then participate in a series of games and activities that reinforce their newly acquired knowledge while incorporating a movement-centered physical education session. The Teens as Teachers are effective by challenging the elementary school students to resist and refuse negative peer pressure and other negative influences in our society. The T.A.T Group’s objectives are to emphasize the importance of preventing the onset of drug use.

“I am proud of these T.A.T students because they are making a positive impact on the future of our society,” reported Anthony Gallo, Finley Middle School Health Educator, T.A.T. advisor, and PRIDE Coalition Co-Chair. “The fact is that on any given year in the United States, there are 400,000 people that are dying prematurely from a tobacco related illness. Most of these people that are dying because of tobacco related illnesses started using tobacco products during their teenage years. I am very proud of the T.A.T. Group because they are making a difference in our Glen Cove community, they are leading by example, and they are inspiring the children of Glen Cove to lead a healthy life style.”

Perhaps most unique about this program is the platform it provides for exposing these students to the marketing strategies of the tobacco industry. In New York State alone, Big Tobacco spends \$430 million annually in marketing their products. Furthermore, research shows that youth in NY prefer the 3 most heavily advertised brands, proving their marketing efforts effective. Programs such as T.A.T. teach students critical thinking skills and bolsters self-esteem, increasing the likeliness that they will not fall victim to such advertising and the hazardous effects of tobacco use.

“Tony Gallo's students at the Finley Middle School are executing the teen teaching training exactly as it was intended,” stated Gail Volk, School Health Policy Specialist at Western Suffolk BOCES. “They used their tobacco knowledge acquired through the training that Western Suffolk BOCES provided to develop and skill-fully deliver an interactive lesson to younger

students at Landing and Connolly schools. Peer leadership programs are effective for the students being taught in the lower grades as well as for the student trainers. As the Healthy Schools NY Nassau County Coordinator, I delighted that Glen Cove School District has institutionalized this training.”

When asked about their thoughts about teaching the program, the peer educators had a lot to say.

“Teaching this program is a fun experience. We have a big influence on them and are doing something good for the community,” said Casandra Maher.

Kevin Shannon stated, “When we tell the kids how much money it costs to smoke, they are really surprised.” Arthur Natale added, “When we tell them about the diseases they can get, it leaves an impact. It really opens their eyes.”

“It’s different teaching as a teen because they really look up to us,” said Selena Guastella. Caitlin Brown added, “ I wish we had this program when I was at Landing School, it definitely would have had a lasting impact on me.”

“After having this program, kids will think twice about smoking,” said Taylor Grella.

For more information on the dangers of smoking or how to get help to quit, contact the SAFE, Inc. office at (516) 676-2008.