

Taking One Puff Could Lead To A Lifetime Of Addiction

SAFE and Tobacco Action Coalition of NC are there to help the Glen Cove community

BY LAURA LANE, SAFE, INC.

Kids still think smoking is cool. And unfortunately, they often see smoking as a way to rebel. Yet if they can be persuaded not to smoke before they turn 18 the probability that they will even begin to smoke drops dramatically. According to an article running in *The New York Times* on Aug. 1, "For Teenage Smokers, Removing the Allure of the Pack," "only 1 in 10 smokers start after the age of 18." So the time to reach our children is now.

Continuing their fight against substance abuse, SAFE Inc. remains committed to helping the youth of Glen Cove and their families combat smoking. Partnering with the Tobacco Action Coalition of Long Island for over a year, they have begun their fight by posting drug-free signage in Glen Cove's parks and at the Glen Cove Housing Authority where SAFE prevention outreach staff has been for almost eight years. Even though federal and state funding for tobacco prevention in general has been cut, there are plans being discussed between SAFE and Tobacco Action to move forward.

Carol Meschkow, Nassau Project Coordinator for the Tobacco Action Coalition of Long Island, is hopeful that the district will make the favorable decision to have an event on the Great American Smoke-out on Nov. 15 of this year. Last year Carol manned a table at SAFE's PRIDE Project Coalition's 7th annual Health and Fitness Fair that was held in conjunction with the Glen Cove Junior Soccer League's Soccer Fest.

"It was an extremely well-attended event and we were very pleased with the numbers of parents that took the time to come over and learn about the campaign," said Meschkow. "It demonstrated to the children their parent's concerns about to-

bacco use. This is one of the important elements in changing the norm."

There are several long-term effects of tobacco use that should be enough to discourage anyone. They include:

- Permanent gum and tooth loss
- Stomach ulcers
- Abnormal sperm cells and impotence
- Prematurely wrinkled skin
- High blood pressure
- Blocked blood vessels and strokes
- Cancer of the upper lung, respiratory tract, mouth and throat
- Cancer of the bladder, kidney, pancreas, and cervix
- Emphysema

And it is a fact that most people who smoke wish they had never started. And what youth probably don't know is that smoking tobacco is the single largest cause of death in the world. Around 430,000 tobacco users die in the United States every year. And 53,000 people die each year from the effects of secondhand smoke.

The Glen Cove community recently learned at SAFE, Inc.'s Town Hall meeting on April 26 the results of the Bach-Harrison Prevention Needs Assessment Survey, which indicates that smoking among youth is on the rise. Administered by the Glen Cove School District to students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 this past January, the survey assessed the use of alcohol, marijuana, tobacco and other drugs by Glen Cove youth.

Cigarette use increased in all grades as follows: 0.5 percent increase in the sixth grade; 2.5 percent increase in the eighth grade; 3.2 percent increase in the 10th grade and 2.3 percent increase in the 12th grade. 14.4 percent of the eighth-graders have tried smoking at least once in their lifetime, which is a large increase from sixth grade. Lifetime cigarette use has continued to rise in the 10th grade by 32.3 percent and in the 12th grade by 41.4 percent.

SAFE and Tobacco Action Coalition are currently planning a strategy to change the statistics among Glen Cove youth. A campaign will be announced soon to the community.