



## **A BREATH OF FRESH AIR**

### **Reducing Second-Hand Smoke In Our Community by Cassandra Holloway**

Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition, in partnership with the Vermont Department of Health, has begun working with community organizations and members to help address the concerns and effects of second-hand smoke of our community. Last fall, BAPC and other Windham County prevention coalitions conducted a survey regarding community interest in smoke-free places and events. What did the survey results tell us? They told us that Vermonters, even Vermonters who smoke or have smoked tobacco, are largely in favor of creating smoke-free places and events.

Nearly two-hundred community members completed the survey. Half of those surveyed currently smoked or had smoked in the past. The results of the survey reflected strong support for a range of smoke-free areas from public parks (74%) to playgrounds (93%), public events (80%) to children events (96%), and from sidewalks (70%) to bus stops (85%).

In response, Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition has begun working with local organizations and event planners. The Putney Community Center and Putney Cares now have smoke-free grounds and the Putney Pool will have smoke-free signs. Winter Carnival designated some of their family events as smoke-free this year. Strolling of the Heifers has put a smoke-free policy in place for their Saturday's Slow Living Expo; and Twilight Music on the Lawn concert series in Putney will have smoke-free event signs beginning this summer season.

According to Vermont Department of Health, there is no safe level of contact with secondhand smoke (SHS) - even brief exposure can be harmful to health. A 2010 Vermont Adult Tobacco Survey shows that Vermonters are increasingly more aware of the health risks of SHS where more than half of Vermonters (59%) surveyed agreed that breathing in SHS is 'very harmful' to one's health. Nine out of ten smokers believed that SHS is "very harmful" or "somewhat harmful" to others. Most would agree that there are many health risks of SHS inside buildings or cars, but what are the health risks of SHS outdoors?

In 2008 about 1 in 10 children and adults in Vermont had asthma. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states that, "exposure to secondhand smoke can trigger asthma attacks and make asthma symptoms more severe." Children with asthma, who are around secondhand smoke, have more severe and frequent asthma attacks according to the Center of Disease Control (CDC) who also states that a severe asthma attack can put a child's life in danger. For adults with heart disease (4% of Vermonters), CDC states that "even brief secondhand smoke exposure can create changes in the body which can lead to a deadly heart attack."

Fortunately, smoking is continuing to decrease. Why the reduction in smoking? The financial burden of a smoking addiction plays a large role along with increased awareness of health complications from smoking which has encouraged people to quit or not to start smoking. Cigarette taxes have increased the cost of cigarettes. The expense of smoking not only motivates smokers to quit, but it reduces the amount of young people starting.

It is also less convenient to smoke. Policies making public places and events smoke-free can make a significant impact in the reduction of smoking. It is estimated that "comprehensive clean indoor laws" can increase smoking cessation rates by twelve to thirty-eight percent. According to the Center of Disease Control, studies have also shown that "challenging the perception of smoking as a normal adult behavior through smoke-free policies can change the attitudes and behaviors of adolescents." Imagine how much a rise in outdoor smoke-free policies would positively contribute to raising tobacco cessation rates and preventing tobacco use among youth in our community.

Contact Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition to find out how you can be involved in increasing smoke-free places in our community to reduce second-hand smoke exposure, increase cessation rates, and prevent youth from smoking.

Cassandra Holloway is the Policy and Project Coordinator for Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition (BAPC), a local nonprofit that organizes community efforts to be involved in the ongoing prevention and reduction of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse in the Windham Southeast area. Visit [www.BrattleboroAreaPreventionCoalition.org](http://www.BrattleboroAreaPreventionCoalition.org) or call 802.257.2175 to learn more about their prevention efforts and to get involved.