



## **St. Thomas Youth Group Stomp Out Smoke (S.O.S) Helps Bring About Smoke-Free By-Law For Park and Recreation Spaces**

Stomp Out Smoke (S.O.S) was a group of 6 teenagers from the city of St. Thomas and Elgin County. Our goal was to inform our peers about the dangers of tobacco, expose the truth about the harmful effects of tobacco use and reveal the marketing tactics of the tobacco industry. We wanted to do something really impactful in our community, so we decided to advocate for a by-law to prevent smoking in parks and recreational areas. We wanted to prevent young kids from seeing adults using tobacco, and from breathing in second-hand smoke.

To see if there was public interest for the creation of a tobacco-free by-law for our local parks and recreational areas, we surveyed the public and also had a postcard campaign called: "My Parks, My Game, My Air" to gather support. The response was overwhelming and many people in our community supported what we were doing.

One of our first steps was collecting cigarette butts from our local sports fields and parks. We collected an unbelievable quantity and wanted the cigarette butts to be displayed, to show just how disgusting it is. We decided to glue them to a tri-cycle, and covered the bike with over 1600 cigarette butts. From then on the tricycle went everywhere with us to local events, city/town council meetings. It even made the front page of our local paper! It created a buzz within the community as it was a great visual to represent how tobacco and parks where children play do not mix. It was very rewarding to see how something we did affected our city and the surrounding municipalities.

Our group S.O.S presented to the St. Thomas Parks and Recreation department and the St. Thomas City Council asking for a by-law to be implemented. At our presentations we made sure we were prepared. We had evidence to support our request for the by-law. We had about 20 letters of support from local businesses and school councils. We also presented them with a banner that said "I support Tobacco Free Parks and Recreation" that over 400 community members signed.

In the fall of 2009, city council passed the by-law request on a 6-2 vote which would restrict the use of tobacco within 30 metres of playgrounds, splash pads, and player's benches. Signs are now posted at all local parks and recreational facilities. It's a great feeling for Stomp Out Smoke to know that our hard work paid off.

Written by Taylor Longfield, Age 18, St. Thomas Ontario

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