

Making Sure All Milwaukee Residents Have Access to Clean Air

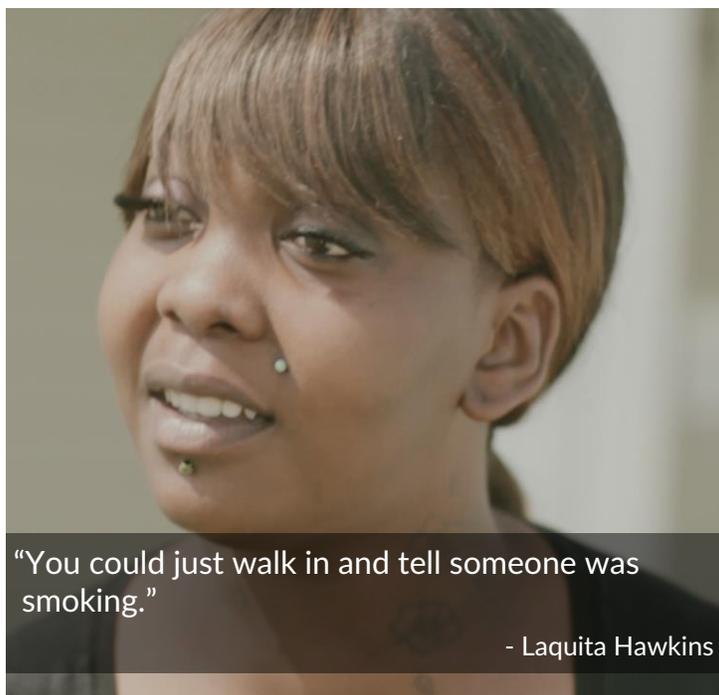
SMOKEFREE AIR IS A RIGHT

In life, there are needs and there are luxuries. Access to smokefree air at home should not be a luxury.

While Laquita Hawkins and her family were not smokers, living in an apartment building with smokers exposed them to a variety of risks. The American Lung Association in Wisconsin believes that Hawkins and other Milwaukee residents did not deserve those extra risks just because of where they lived. They are working with property managers, tenants and the Milwaukee Fire Department to make smokefree apartments and condos available for everyone in the city.

“My three kids have asthma. I was at the doctor’s office Monday through Friday with my kids. My youngest son, his asthma got to the point where we had to watch him sleep because he would stop breathing.”

- Laquita Hawkins, Milwaukee resident



“You could just walk in and tell someone was smoking.”

- Laquita Hawkins

“I have a right to breathe clean air. You have the right to breathe clean air. You don’t have to compromise your quality of life because of the choice of other people.”

- Vanessa Llanas, Milwaukee resident

REACHING OUT

According to Kathy Staats, Prevention Services Coordinator of the Milwaukee Tobacco-Free Alliance, smokefree housing efforts in Milwaukee were kickstarted by a grant the city received from the American Lung Association. The grant allowed them to perform an assessment of smokefree properties in the city and target areas impacted by disparities in the availability of smokefree housing. Special efforts were made to reach low income populations and groups with high instances of asthma.

Staats quickly found that many residents wanted smokefree policies but were afraid to ask.

“Often times, residents feel they can’t talk about why they want a smokefree policy. They are afraid that they are going to lose the housing they do have. Getting the information on smokefree housing empowers them that it is okay to ask for that policy.”

- Kathy Staats, Milwaukee Tobacco-Free Alliance

Resident Vanessa Llanas asked her landlord to support a smokefree policy. Llanas says that her landlord was interested but wasn’t sure how to implement the policy until the American Lung Association in Wisconsin helped her figure out how to do it in a way that respected all residents.



Staats enjoys working with property managers, and she opens the conversation by talking about the cost savings. Turnover costs alone for a smoked-in unit are about three times higher than a non smoked in unit. However, Staats says every single property manager also asks about the health and safety benefits.

“All the property managers I’ve worked with don’t do it for the cost savings alone. They want to provide a benefit for tenants, they want to serve the people that are living in their building.” - Kathy Staats

MANY RISKS

Secondhand smoke is not the only risk factor in an apartment or condo building. Smoking in the home also increases the risk of fires for everyone in the building.

“I was living on the third floor of a five story building. One night, a neighbor started hitting all the doors, waking everyone up. I went outside and saw flames shooting out of the windows. The guy above me fell asleep with a cigarette. If a neighbor hadn’t knocked, I might not be here to be the father of my beautiful family.”

- Darryl Davidson, Milwaukee resident

The fire danger is part of the reason the Milwaukee Fire Department decided to assist in local smokefree housing efforts. According to Deputy Chief Aaron Lipski, fires are a risk to residents and the firefighters who respond.



“You have more fires, you’ll have more fire deaths and fire injuries. A huge number of the people who die each year as a result of smoking-related fires in multi-family dwellings aren’t smokers.”

- Aaron Lipski, Milwaukee Fire Department



- Darryl Davidson and family

BREATHING EASIER

More Milwaukee residents now have smokefree policies in their buildings. Llanas says that almost no people moved out. For those few who did, the apartments were quickly filled by new neighbors who wanted smokefree homes.

“It’s been almost two years since the policy passed but every time I walk into the entry of my building and see the sign that says ‘Heritage West Apartments are Smokefree,’ I get a little bit of pride. I know that we are part of a solution to strengthen the quality of life.”

- Vanessa Llanas

For Laquita Hawkins, her kids are more active and have less asthma attacks since moving into smokefree housing.

“My six-year old has not used an inhaler in like eight to nine months. I don’t have to go to the emergency room anymore.” - Laquita Hawkins

THE WORK CONTINUES

The numbers of smokefree units and buildings continues to grow, according to Staats. While work continues with private property managers, new efforts are ramping up to partner with public housing authorities as well as groups working with persons with mental illness or substance abuse issues.

The scope grows but the mission stays the same—ensure that all Milwaukee residents have access to smokefree housing.