

Community Success Stories: Youth in Communities Step Up

Reducing exposure to secondhand smoke often starts at the community level.

A number of cities in California made major policy changes thanks to the hard work of community partners and some surprisingly influential citizens.

In May 2017, the cities of Sanger in Fresno County and Laguna Beach in Orange County passed significant smokefree policies focused on reducing exposure to secondhand smoke in public places like city parks, sidewalks and parking lots. These policies did more than just raise the grades in these communities, they created a lasting impact that will improve the lives for these residents. In both instances, those leading the charge were young community activists.

Sanger, Fresno County

“ We partnered with the American Lung Association in California to attend health fairs and other community events, asking people if they would support broader smokefree parks policies and the support was overwhelming. We also teamed up with two middle school students doing a summer project featuring an event on the dangers of secondhand smoke. The event was well-attended and we realized that instead of trying to force the policy, let’s make it as organic as possible. It’s hard to argue with these students who are bringing something to the city council that is actually affecting them.

People are telling us that they’ve seen the signs and they’re glad the parks are smokefree. People tell us it has improved their experience at our community parks.”

- DANIEL GALVEZ
City of Sanger



“ I’m so proud of our students. They were so invested, so dedicated in the effort. Making a difference in the community provided a sense of empowerment for the youth and it taught them that you don’t have to wait to be an adult to make a difference.”

- MITZI TORRES
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central California

Laguna Beach, Orange County



“ We had a group of Laguna Beach High School students that wanted to take action and make a difference in their community by speaking in support of the smokefree ordinance at the city council meeting. Some of the things they talked about like finding cigarette butts at the beach when they go surfing or being exposed to secondhand smoke while eating outside at restaurants, were really powerful. It was really inspirational to see the students jump on board with this effort.”

- RYAN CROWDIS
Orange County Department of Education

“ I believe the city’s “F” grade had something to do with it. A couple of city council members said they were not happy with the “F” grade and knew the city could do better. I was really impressed with the Lung Association’s willingness to provide resources that assisted city staff in the development of the ordinance.

Laguna Beach seemed like a catalyst in Orange County. Now cities are going back and looking at their ordinances to see what they can do to protect the public health of their residents and visitors.”

- RYAN HALLETT
Laguna Beach City Manager’s Office

The American Lung Association in California encourages other communities to follow the lead of these passionate students and their community leaders!