



Cohasset Youth Work to Educate Peers about Big Tobacco and Fight for Racial Justice

Cohasset, Mass., November 8, 2019 – On Saturday, October 26, while most young people were either home relaxing, out playing sports, or hanging with their friends, Cohasset 8th graders, Noah McDowall and Casey Nichols, Sophomore, Evelyn Dickey, and Junior, Kira Jamieson, spent their day at The 84 Movement’s Youth Power Summit (YPS), working to educate their peers about the dangers of tobacco-use, and helping to address racial injustice in the community.



Cohasset Junior Kira Jamieson speaks during the opening plenary, about how the tobacco industry specifically targets people of color. Photo by: Gretchen Ertl

The 84, which began in 2007, is a statewide movement of youth fighting tobacco and vaping in Massachusetts and represents the 84% of Massachusetts youth who did NOT smoke when the movement began. However, thanks to the efforts made by countless young people over the past decade, that number has now risen to almost 94%! A part of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health’s Tobacco Cessation and Prevention Program, The 84 employs several strategies to educate young people about the dangers of tobacco with the annual Youth Power Summit serving as one of the group’s premier events.

Attracting young people from all over Massachusetts, from Cohasset all the way out to Springfield and Leicester, the YPS has become the hub for students who are interested in educating their peers about the dangers of tobacco and vaping, and continues to grow every year. This year’s YPS, which focused on racial justice, and, in particular, “Big Tobacco’s” relationship with communities of color, was no exception, and drew in a record-breaking 200 young people from across the state.



Cohasset Sophomore, Evelyn Dickey, leads a lunchtime activity to educate attendees about some of the lesser known facts about tobacco & vaping. Photo by: Gretchen Ertl

Much of the Youth Power Summit’s popularity derives from the fact that it is completely youth-led, making it a unique event that empowers young people to make a difference. Developed in conjunction with the 20-member Statewide Leadership Team (SLT), comprised of a diverse group of young people, who were selected based on their ability, passion for preventing tobacco and/or nicotine use among teens, and desire to bring about change in their communities, the YPS gives students the chance to take matters into their own hands and lead the call for change.

Casey Nichols and Noah McDowall, both of whom are also part of the Safe Harbor Youth Ambassador program, attended the conference to learn more about how state-wide issues, such as the

state's tobacco regulations, impact Cohasset and what they could do to stop 'Big Tobacco' from targeting their peers.

"I found the Youth Power Summit, highly educational, fascinating, and enlightening," said McDowall. "I originally planned to attend, to get a greater sense of boarder issues, related to substance-use, that affect the entire state of Massachusetts, and thus have some effect on Cohasset as well. What I did not expect is that they would address the issue so eloquently, diving into the nuances and articulating about the root of the problem," noted McDowall. "The Youth Power Summit was an empowering, well devolved, and engaging event, which I am overjoyed to have been a part of."

"I attended the Youth Power Summit to learn about how to help stop Big Tobacco companies from targeting people my age," said Nichols. "YPS gave me a chance to learn about how my peers are fighting Big Tobacco and what I could do to help. Seeing my peers help lead such a big movement, was very empowering and made me feel like I could really help my community fight back against the tobacco industry."

Attending the summit along with Nichols and McDowall, were fellow Youth Ambassadors, Evelyn Dickey and Kira Jamieson, who also serve on The 84's Statewide Leadership Team (SLT). As two of the twenty young people elected to the SLT, Dickey and Jamieson weren't only there as attendees, but spent countless hours over the last several months working with The 84's adult mentors to organize the event, and were instrumental in making this year's event a success.

"YPS provided great training about how racism is intertwined with Big Tobacco. It was fascinating and invigorating to learn the racist tactics of Big Tobacco and what young people can do in our communities to combat these tactics," Dickey explained. "Being part of The 84 Statewide Leadership Team, and helping to plan the event, was an amazing experience and I loved having the opportunity to educate hundreds of high schoolers (and middle schoolers) about the ways in which Big Tobacco targets youth. I left YPS with more experience public speaking and confidence in my knowledge, that I am excited to bring back to Cohasset!"

"Being able to help organize and attend Youth Power Summit was an amazing opportunity because, not only did I get a chance to help educate youth from other communities on tobacco and other tobacco products, but I also got the chance to learn from my fellow youth," Jamieson stated. "YPS gave me the opportunity to hear what my peers, in other communities, are doing to bring people together and stand up to Big Tobacco. The energy and atmosphere at YPS were empowering and I left the day with great confidence in young peoples' power to make a difference!"

Based on the glowing feedback from the four Cohasset youth that attended, it's clear that, just as it has been in the past, this year's Youth Power Summit was a huge success. However, even more impressive than the summit itself, were the, more than, 200 young people who gave up their Saturday to attend the event.

"I can't even begin to tell you how impressed I was with all of the amazing young people that attended this year's summit," said Safe Harbor Project Coordinator, Christopher

Colleran, who attended the event along with the four Youth Ambassadors. “The passion that these young people showed, for helping to educate their peers, should be an inspiration to us all and makes me want to do even more to prevent Big Tobacco from targeting youth,” Colleran added. “Also, when it comes to Kira (Jamieson) and Evelyn (Dickey), who helped organize the entire event, I am beyond impressed. The level of maturity and confidence that these young women showed, is well beyond their years. At that age, I had enough trouble planning out my day, and here they are organizing an event with over 200 people. I was simply blown away!”

Considering all the talented young people who attended, it’s easy to see why this year’s event was such a huge success. However, if The 84 Movement’s Youth Power Summit teaches us anything, it is that the future of Cohasset, and Massachusetts, are in very capable, albeit young, hands.

About Safe Harbor Cohasset Coalition

Since July 2014, Safe Harbor Cohasset has been working to promote awareness and implement resources to help make an impact on the substance use in the community. In September 2017, Safe Harbor was awarded a federal Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Support Program grant, which focuses on preventing substance use among youth ages 12-17.

Since then, the group has worked to foster a strong and inclusive community that allows youth to strive and encourages healthy, educated and responsible choices about drug and alcohol use. The mission is supported by evidenced based, prevention focused, sustainable policies and youth-focused programs, such as Ground Level Café and the Safe Harbor Youth Ambassador Program. To learn more, visit the Safe Harbor website at safeharborcohasset.org. Keep up to date on the latest trends by following Safe Harbor on Facebook at www.facebook.com/safeharborcohasset, on Twitter @cohsafeharbor, & on Instagram @safeharborcohassetcoalition.