

SMOKING: "How can we withstand peer pressure and stress to be smoke free?"

School: Taylor Elementary School

Grades: 4, 5 and 6

Curriculum connections: Speaking & Listening, Reading, Writing, Health, Physical Education, Using Technology & Media

Many of the students in Judy Acevedo's 4th grade class have parents who smoke. So it didn't surprise Judy that they chose smoking as the focus for their project.

In describing the project to her teacher colleagues at the end of the school year, Judy admitted that she would never have believed her students could have accomplished as much as they did: a PSA which they scripted and helped produce, a play performed for a school assembly and a health fair that involved many members of the school community.

Using NID's "Exploding the Issue" activity, the class decided to focus on two causes of smoking: peer pressure and stress.

A psychologist at Friends Hospital visited the students at Taylor to share techniques for relieving stress. She began by asking the students what they knew about smoking and its harmful effects. Then she asked the 4th graders what kinds of things caused them to feel anxiety and stress. Their answers surprised the adults: feeling unsafe in their neighborhoods, walking home and, in some cases, at home. A few revealed that they had tried smoking because of peer pressure.

She validated their fears and encouraged them to find an adult in whom they can trust to share their feelings.

The students also met with a yoga teacher who guided them through poses designed to reduce stress and anxiety.

As they began to consider the service aspect of their project, the students realized they were eager to share their new knowledge and insights with others at the school. Since the creation of a PSA was one of their goals, NID helped them connect with Digital Service Fellows, a program that offers recent high school graduates the opportunity to gain new skills in Information Technology (IT) while providing technology support to schools and teachers.

Judy's students learned what it takes to shoot a PSA and how to interact with the camera. They were thrilled with the resulting video. It was an important component of the health fair they developed with another 5th grade class at the school.