

City and County of San Francisco

Voluntary Approach to Ads in Stores "Health Promotores"

Background

San Francisco, with a population of 800,000, is a 49 square mile urban city and county located on a peninsula in Northern California. The ethnic make-up of San Francisco is 46.4% White, 28.4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 13.9% Hispanic/Latino, 10.5% African American, and 0.6% American Indian, Eskimo or Aleut, or Other. The city is rich in its cultural diversity and is a cultural center for many ethnic groups including Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese and Hispanic/Latinos. Several foreign language newspapers are published in addition to television and radio stations that provide programs exclusively in Spanish or Cantonese. A multitude of cultural events are sponsored throughout the year which draw participants from the entire Bay Area.

San Francisco has a reputation of having a liberal, progressive government within the politically diverse city. The city is home to many people who live untraditional lifestyles, while at the same time, there are many "native" residents who reflect a more conservative view.

The Mission District is an almost self-contained commercial and residential community within the City of San Francisco. The Mission is a working-class neighborhood that abounds with small businesses and Mom & Pop type stores. Although it is a culturally diverse neighborhood, the Mission is seen as the heart of the Latino community with many of its residents monolingual or bilingual in Spanish. Additionally, children make up a disproportionately high percentage of the Mission residents.

The "Health Promotores" is a volunteer group of teens and adults from the Mission Neighborhood Health Center in San Francisco who were originally trained in 1993 by the San Francisco Tobacco Free Project (TFP) as part of the Health Advocates program. The Promotores are predominately Latino and many are monolingual Spanish speakers.

Members of the Promotores assessed **community readiness** for countering pro-tobacco influences using four different needs assessments. A merchant survey was conducted to determine merchant attitudes around tobacco advertising and sign law compliance. A community opinion survey documented the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes of local residents concerning tobacco advertising. Next, an advertising survey was used to document the number of tobacco ads in stores. Finally, a survey of existing laws was completed and merchant compliance with the city sign law was assessed. After synthesizing the findings from the four assessments, the staff wrote the following in their action plan.

Overall it appears the community is supportive of reducing tobacco advertising and promotions targeted at youth. Additionally, as a result of listening to presentations by the advocates at a Board of Supervisors hearing on the problem of youth smoking, Supervisors expressed concern over the prevalence of illegal sales to minors and the ubiquitous and pervasive presence of tobacco ads and

promotions directed at children. An ordinance has been introduced to prohibit outdoor tobacco advertising on billboards and businesses within 1500 feet of schools, parks, and playgrounds, but the Supervisors are reluctant to move forward on it due to the opposition's claim of negative economic impact as well as threats of legal action.

This conclusion led The Promotores, in conjunction with the San Francisco TFP, to set the following **objective**:

By 11/96, merchants at 5 out of 10 stores in the Mission District will voluntarily remove 20% of the total tobacco advertising from their stores.

Chronology of Events and Key Players

The goal of the Promotores project was to focus on the health of the whole neighborhood and to try to revitalize the area by creating a better image. So, in addition to seeking a reduction in tobacco ads in all of the 10 stores that sold tobacco in the 24th Street neighborhood, the "Adopt a Street" project also sought to beautify the neighborhood and bring residents and merchants closer together.

The initial volunteers were recruited and trained by the Health Promotores project staff in July and August of 1995 with ten, three-hour sessions. Training topics included outreach strategies, skill building, how to make presentations, Tobacco 101, and youth access. Fourteen people completed the training. Between April and May of 1996, an additional training was held for six youth and three adult Health Promotores volunteers to train them on community mobilization.

Merchant Education. The Promotores decided not to approach merchants about their project until they had established their credibility with merchants in the 24th Street neighborhood. To accomplish this end, the Promotores began by *cleaning neighborhood streets* in the 24th Street area on a monthly basis.

At the same time, the Promotores created a *packet* of merchant education materials to use with retailers. The packets included a copy of Penal Code 308, a STAKE Act sign and information kit, the City and County Tobacco control ordinance, the San Francisco sign law, ID age-check information, a flyer on tobacco promotional items, a Promotores newsletter, a brochure explaining goals of program that listed eleven voluntarily actions that merchants could take to participate in the program, a pledge for them to sign, and a copy of potential merchant incentives for participation in the project. Many of the materials were prepared in Spanish as well as English.

After two months of street cleaning, in February of 1996, the Promotores believed that they had made a favorable impression with local merchants and began to visit area stores on the second Saturday of every month. During the *initial visit*, they explained the "Adopt a Street" program and told merchants about the STAKE Act and the San Francisco sign law restricting advertising to 33% on exterior windows.

During the *second visit*, volunteers gave merchants the prepared packets of information and answered the merchants' questions. At that time merchants were asked to sign two *pledges* as part of the "Adopt a Street" program: 1) to check ID's and refuse to sell

tobacco to minors, and 2) to reduce ads in the store by 20% and remove tobacco ads and promotions below three feet, near candy and near checkout counters.

At the *third visit*, Promotores collected the signed pledges from merchants. *Paid ads* were placed in both English and Spanish newspapers congratulating merchants for their participation in the project.

During the *fourth visit*, the Promotores gave all ten tobacco retailers in the 24th Street neighborhood *garbage cans* emblazoned with the logo, "Working together for a healthier neighborhood" that had been designed by group. A garbage can was also given to the owner of a travel agency and the secretary of the 24th Street Merchant Association who assisted the project in establishing contact with the merchants. The garbage cans were placed on the sidewalk outside stores and still serve as a visible reminder to all who visit 24th Street.

During the *final visit*, Promotores invited merchants to participate in the project and to come to the tobacco event and thanked them for their participation in the "Adopt a Street" program.

Half of all interactions with merchants involved youth, from the initial surveys to the monthly contacts with merchants.

Throughout the course of the project, six *letters* were sent to merchants to keep them up to date with the status of the project. The first letter announced the "Adopt a Street" project with the second and third letters providing additional copies of the San Francisco sign law and STAKE Act along with requests for merchant compliance. The fourth letter included copies of new, clearly explained merchant materials from the State Tobacco Control Section office on tobacco laws that had not been included in the previous packets. The fifth letter was a reminder of the October 5th event with the sixth letter serving as a follow up letter of thanks sent to compliant merchants for participating in the project. Included in this last letter was a copy of a newspaper ad congratulating stores that reduced tobacco advertising and a copy of the flyer that had been distributed to community residents.

Community Education. In addition to direct contact with merchants, the Promotores worked with the community. The group developed a script for a *theater presentation* to educate community members on the dangers of smoking and to raise community awareness on environmental issues around tobacco advertising and compliance with the sign law. Three theater presentations were made to a total of at least 250 people. The Promotores also distributed 100 *flyers* around the neighborhood asking residents to support stores in which merchants had signed the pledges agreeing to reduce tobacco ads in their stores and to halt sales of tobacco to minors.

As a public culmination to the project the Promotores received permission to host a neighborhood *festival*, "A Street Free Of Tobacco" on October 5, 1996. In keeping with the beautification theme, 20-25 volunteers worked long hours to organize and conduct the festival and even planned to steam clean the neighborhood prior to setting up the event. The neighborhood celebration took place on a closed portion of Lucky Street between 24th and 25th, accompanied by a live band that played Latin music. Over 300 community members attended and were able to visit booths that had been set up with a variety of tobacco and health-related information as well as free immunizations.

An effort was made to involve many representatives from the community including high school and middle school students, the Police Department, the County Health Department, local churches and other community based organizations. News releases were sent out prior to the festival to notify the media. County Supervisor Angela Alioto, an event co-sponsor, delivered certificates of honor to cooperating merchants, key individuals and volunteers, and to supporting community agencies that played an important role in achieving the project goals. Neighborhood residents who attended the festival gave positive feedback on the festival and project and congratulated the Promotores for the way they had involved the community.

Following the event the Promotores went back to the stores and gave the certificates to the merchants who were unable to attend the event along with electronic calendars that displayed the necessary birth date for anyone wanting to purchase tobacco products.

The Promotores conducted a follow up survey in November of 1996 to document changes in the number of signs at retail outlets in the 24th Street neighborhood.

Outcomes

Four of the ten merchants in the 24th Street neighborhood signed agreements, but 100% of the merchants have posted the STAKE Act sign to inform the public about not selling tobacco to minors. One store was willing to adopt all 11 voluntary actions presented by the Promotores. The project measured the total number of signs near candy, below 3 feet, inside, outside, and included in self-service displays at pre-intervention and post-intervention in seven of the stores. The project achieved a significant reduction in the total number of ads from an average of 56 at pre-intervention down to 40 at post-intervention. Significant decreases were found in the mean number of ads near candy, below 3 feet, and inside the stores, but not in ads outside stores or in self-service displays. Six of the seven stores achieved an average of a 45% reduction in ads, exceeding the objective of a 20% reduction in 5 of the 10 stores in the total sample.

Challenges and Solutions

One of the most difficult challenges presented in working on this objective was figuring out how to work effectively with merchants. The Promotores solution to this challenge was to be active and visible, to work at building an ongoing relationship with local merchants, and to frame the tobacco issue as a way to revitalize the neighborhood.

The project also experienced fluctuations in the numbers of youth and adult volunteers. Recruited volunteers signed an agreement prior to training that they would complete the training and participate in the project for a period of one year. The project offered an \$80 stipend for completion of the training with the promise of an additional \$120 stipend after the volunteer had participated in implementing the project. When a volunteer stopped coming, (s)he was phoned. A common explanation for the lack of participation was a problem with competing time schedules. In retrospect, it became apparent that volunteers participated in the project more for personal growth opportunities than for the stipend. Individuals who continued to volunteer cared about the issue and felt a level of comfort with the project goals and staff which was more important than the monetary compensation, but stipends were welcome to offset the time invested and traveling expenses for volunteers.

Lessons Learned and Implications for Tobacco Control

Through the conscientious process of providing long term, visible service to retailers, the Promotores created positive and enduring relationships with merchants and have established themselves as part of the community. Their goal, "From the community and for the community" provides a critical lesson in building relationships for groups desiring to work on voluntary policy issues. A project staff member stated, "You have to work very closely with community and be consistent."

In order to engage the community, it is important to plan activities that are fun and geared to different age levels so that many people can be involved. As an example, the Promotores were effective in delivering information using a game format to engage participants.

Project staff reported that the most successful outcomes centered around the merchant education process in which youth worked with merchants. The youth interacted with merchants on a monthly basis and established their credibility in the neighborhood. This turned into an enlightening experience as the youth volunteers learned, with surprise, that the merchants accepted them.

Choosing an issue and framing that issue appropriately for community members is critical to the success of programs. Carefully framing the tobacco advertising issue by asking, "Do you have kids" made it a personal issue for merchants and got their attention.

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