

Teens participate in anti-tobacco summit



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Community-leader training: Young Kauaians including Mikiala Johnson, 18, Kaua'i REAL statewide advocate, are back from a statewide anti-tobacco summit.

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LIHU'E — Nearly a dozen young Kauaians are back from REAL Experience VI on O'ahu where they trained with peers from across the state as community leaders against the tobacco industry, states a press release.

They learned how big tobacco targets youth with its deadly products, in the REAL Experience VI Anti-Tobacco Youth Summit July 12 to July 14 at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa.

The theme was Hawai'i Youth Movement Exposing the Tobacco Industry.

Over the course of the three-day event, youth learned anti-tobacco activism techniques geared toward positively influencing their peers, and attended discussions by guest speakers LaTanisha C. Wright, national states director for the National African American Tobacco Prevention Network, and Nicole "CoCo" Toves Villaluz, Native American tobacco control advocate and community development manager with ClearWay Minnesota.

"Over 100 youth and young adults gathered at UH-Manoa for the REAL Experience VI to "share the love and spread the true message of how the tobacco industry targets our generation," said Mikiala Johnson, 18, Kaua'i REAL statewide advocate.

One of the summit's main focuses aimed to educate youth about REAL's "Out of Sight, Out of Mind" campaign, which investigates how the tobacco industry markets to youth using in-store advertising and product placement.

Additionally, as the tobacco industry markets its product to youth by engaging in popular culture techniques, REAL sought to arm youth activists with similar tools during expression session training workshops to effectively take their anti-tobacco message to their peers.

Expression sessions were led by experienced youth activists and local artists who encouraged youth to employ photography, dance, art, slam poetry and music as outlets to convey their activism, the release states.

Youth also attended seminars during the summit discussing media literacy, social-justice issues related to tobacco, and smoking in Hollywood movies.

The culmination of the summit's training sessions was on July 14 when youth put their activism skills to the test by staging several mobile rallies through the streets of Honolulu, ending with a group dance performance on the busy sidewalks of Waikiki.

Youth chose the theme "Share the Love" as part of their efforts to counter-market a current tobacco-industry campaign by RJ Reynolds' brand, Natural American Spirits, which asks potential customers to "Share the Love" by giving a friend a coupon for a gift certificate for free cigarettes.

After the flashmob dance, youth distributed informational cards to the public with messages asking individuals to truly share the love with friends and loved by:

] Sharing what they know about the deceptive tactics of the tobacco industry;

] Supporting friends and family members in quitting tobacco;

] Speaking up for those who can't speak for themselves in the fight against big Tobacco companies.

Other organizations sponsoring The Real Experience V Anti-Tobacco Youth Summit include the state Department of Health Tobacco Prevention Education Program, and the Clear the Smoke campaign.

See www.therealmesssage.net for more summit information.

REAL is a Hawai'i youth movement aimed at exposing the tobacco industry and is made up of youth from across the state.

Membership is 4,600 youth standing up to the tobacco industry's deceptive marketing tactics that are aimed to hook a young generation of customers on tobacco products.

REAL sponsors events, conducts street marketing, and has created the REAL brand to counter the harmful influence of tobacco advertising.

The group seeks to create an empowered, healthy, tobacco-free generation of youth; to attack the tobacco industry, not the consumers; to expose the tobacco industry's manipulative tactics; and to educate, protect, and empower a young generation.

REAL is coordinated through the Cancer Research Center, University of Hawai'i at Manoa and funded by the Master Tobacco Settlement Trust Fund through the state Department of Health.