

Louisiana Tobacco Control Program Success Story

“Quit With Us (Mom & Baby Edition)” Campaign Wins Regional Public Relations Lantern Award

The Louisiana Tobacco Control Program via its Quit With Us, Louisiana initiative, received a Lantern Award from the Southern Public Relations Federation for its 2011 media and community outreach campaign aimed at getting pregnant smokers to call the Louisiana Tobacco Quitline for cessation coaching.

Quit With Us, Louisiana is a partnership of the state of Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals Tobacco Control Program (LTCP) and The Louisiana Campaign for Tobacco-Free Living (TFL), which is a program of the non-profit Louisiana Public Health Institute (LPHI). The two organizations coordinate their efforts in tobacco prevention and control by providing statewide coordination of evidence-based tobacco control initiatives, funding innovative community programs for tobacco control, offering services for people who are ready to quit through the Louisiana Tobacco Quitline (1-800-QUIT-NOW), and developing statewide media campaigns to help reduce the excessive burden of tobacco use on the state’s resources and improve the overall health and quality of life in Louisiana.

In December 2010, the LTCP commissioned a physician-distributed survey to learn about attitudes and beliefs related to Quitline services among pregnant patients who use tobacco. Twenty pregnant smokers were surveyed, and results indicated the majority of respondents (63%) were aware of the Quitline and would consider calling a free service for help quitting. However, respondents also said they would be more likely to call a Quitline if they knew the counselors would be caring and compassionate, if they would continue to receive help throughout the pregnancy and afterward, if the counselors were respectful and understood the difficulty of the situation, if it were private, confidential and free. Respondents also were asked which negative health effects would make them more likely to quit smoking while pregnant, and the majority (51.9%) said Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), followed by low birth weight and asthma. The number of respondents was low in part because of the social stigma associated with being a pregnant smoker, which may have turned away some who were asked to participate.

Informal Internet research reviewing tobacco-related Web sites such as *CDC.gov*, *Women.Smokefree.gov* and the National Partnership for Smokefree Families provided additional insight that aided in developing a plan to reach the target audience of pregnant smokers, who are also generally part of the low socio-economic status population. This type of research validated what was learned in the surveys and confirmed what types of messages and tactics would be most appropriate for this audience.

The LPHI division of media and communications is contracted to provide media and public relations services to the two organizations. Members of the division worked together with LTCP and TFL to develop a statewide paid radio campaign, as well as an earned media and public service community outreach program targeting pregnant smokers to complement the radio campaign. LTCP community partner grantees publicized and carried out community events that were held throughout the state at

birthing centers and rural medical clinics. The combined effort was named “Quit With Us Month (Mom & Baby Edition)” and took place throughout the month of March 2011.

Planning

“Quit With Us Month (Mom & Baby Edition)” began with a statewide paid radio advertising campaign that aired for four weeks. The objective was to increase the number of pregnant smokers who normally call the Quitline within a year from 50 to 100.

In addition, the Louisiana Tobacco Control Program wanted to create a series of statewide events that would complement the radio campaign, reach the same target audience, and generate earned media coverage. The objectives of the events were:

1. To create awareness of the dangers of smoking for pregnant women and their babies by providing cessation educational materials to at least 20 individuals in each of nine regions.
2. To generate earned media coverage through at least one television, radio, web or print story in each region.
3. For each event to result in at least five pregnant smokers who called the Quitline immediately following the event.

The target audience for the events included:

- Pregnant smokers
- Non-smoking pregnant women who are exposed to secondhand smoke from immediate family or others
- Spouses, partners or other immediate family members or friends who smoke
- Healthcare professionals
- Community supporters of smoke-free living

The communication strategy was to create an “event in a box” that could easily be carried out by community partners in each region. The campaign also included cessation information and support for pregnant women through *QuitWithUsLA.org* and via Facebook (Quit With US, Louisiana) and Twitter (@QuitWithUsLA).

Implementation

LPHI media and communications staff put together a communications plan for “Quit With Us Month (Mom & Baby Edition)” that included objectives, communication strategies and key messages, a target audience analysis, and tactics to be used in the campaign. The plan included a timeline and responsibility check-list to aid community partners who would be organizing the outreach events in their areas.

An “event in a box” was delivered to community partners who hosted a total of 16 “Quit With Us Days” in birthing hospitals, OBGYN clinics and rural health centers throughout the state. These locations were chosen to reach the objective of providing information directly to pregnant smokers. Each information booth received a kit that included *How Smoking Affects Pregnancy & Children* brochures, Quit With Us, LA-branded cessation items such as chewing gum, Quitline wallet cards and notepads, as well as water bottles and baby bibs branded with “I love my smoke-free family.” The Quit With Us, Louisiana logo, which is normally blue and orange, was recreated in pink and blue to help brand the campaign. That logo was used on banners included in the event kit. In addition, pink and blue awareness ribbons were worn by participants and were distributed to medical personnel at the hospitals.

To achieve the earned media objective, a PR kit was created for community partners to utilize in promoting their events to local media. The kit included a press release template, talking points about tobacco use and pregnancy, a customizable flyer, and a photo release form.

LTCP community partner grantees, which are local non-profit agencies with health-related missions, are expected to carry out such events as part of their grant contracts. A telephone-based technical assistance call was held to familiarize the grantees with the public relations and event tactics they would be handling.

Since both the paid advertising campaign and the public relations events focused on drawing pregnant smokers to the Louisiana Tobacco Quitline (1-800-QUIT-NOW) and QuitWithUsLA.org, the communication plan also called for creating a special section on the Web site with information for pregnant smokers. The Web content included an MP3 link to the radio spot, as well as a list of reasons for pregnant women to quit smoking. Social media was also used as a strategy, and Facebook and Twitter posts provided cessation tips, pregnancy information, and emotional support and encouragement for pregnant smokers trying to quit.

The messages that were developed for the radio spot, press releases, talking points, web content and social media were based on the key findings of the initial research. In all aspects of the advertising and public relations campaign, the program made sure to let the audience know that the Louisiana Tobacco Quitline is a free resource that provides caring, compassionate, confidential support throughout pregnancy and post-partum. Messaging also included awareness points related to negative outcomes such as asthma, low birth weight and SIDS.

Evaluation

The radio advertising campaign exceeded its objective of 100 pregnant women calling the Quitline, and reports indicated the majority of women who called heard about the service through the radio advertisement or a medical professional.

Community partners held 16 events in medical venues statewide. The events reached 1,600 individuals, including more than 150 pregnant smokers, 500 women, 200 women exposed to secondhand smoke,

180 family members of pregnant women who smoke, 130 health care providers, and 250 community supporters. The events definitely reached the target audiences and exceeded the participation objectives.

Earned media was another objective of the program. Every community partner submitted a news release and followed up with phone calls inviting the media to attend. Although not every event resulted in coverage, there was a significant amount of press in several regions, including television, radio, newspaper, magazines and social media. Quit With Us, Louisiana also launched Facebook and Twitter accounts which gained more than 60 Facebook fans and more than 100 Twitter followers.

Another objective was to drive at least five pregnant women to call the Quitline following each event. While it is difficult to know for sure if the events are what drove the calls, we do know that calls increased during the timeframe of the events, and that many callers heard about the service from the radio advertising as well as from medical providers, such as the clinics where these events took place.

About SPRF

Founded in 1972, the Southern Public Relations Federation is a regional network of nearly 1,500 public relations professionals from Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and north Florida who share a common interest in the public relations profession. SPRF exists to further the professional and networking interests of today's public relations and communication professionals in private, public and nonprofit businesses and organizations. Along with networking, SPRF serves to advocate on behalf of and assist its members through ongoing professional development and defining ethical behavior.

SPRF recognizes outstanding work in the field of public relations through its annual Lantern Awards program. Awards, including Certificates of Merit, Awards of Excellence and Lantern Awards, are given in 25 categories.