



Focus on...



HEY KIDS,
KEEP IT
REAL.

The 2010-11 JEL campaign takes a satiric look at a fictional tobacco industry executive who tries—but fails—to appeal to youth by using trendy phrases such as “Just keepin’ it real, dawg.”

Youth and tobacco

A 2009 study found that a program like JEL, promoted on the national level, was associated with decreased smoking intentions and lower rates of smoking initiation.

Research shows that exposure to tobacco marketing more than doubles the odds that a child under 18 will become a tobacco user. Marketing of this type takes many forms, including advertising, promotions, cigarette samples, and pro-tobacco depictions in films, television, and videos.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends using a variety of methods, including paid television, radio, billboard and web-based advertising to deliver tobacco control messages as a best practice to preventing tobacco use among youth.

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Preventing youth tobacco use requires 'different language'

Most adults would agree they're not exactly on the same wavelength as teenagers. For some reason, adults and teens will forever be at odds on everything from the clothes they wear to the way they communicate.

“Adults and youth speak a different language,” says Garin Buttermore, youth tobacco prevention coordinator at the Iowa Department of Public Health. “Messages about tobacco use for adults tend to focus on health effects, such as cancer. Youth, on the other hand, are more interested in messages that expose facts about the tobacco industry, including its efforts to target young people as potential new customers. Preventing tobacco use among young people is always more effective when they are advocating on their own behalf—speaking to each other in a language they understand.”

Like many health advocacy efforts, Iowa's youth-led tobacco-use prevention movement, had humble beginnings. In 2000, a group of 130 youth from across the state gathered in Indianola on the Simpson College campus to discuss how they might organize themselves. At the time, they also decided on a name—JEL (Just Eliminate Lies). With 103 local chapters statewide, JEL now has more than 2,800 current high-school-aged members. Buttermore lists an additional 11,300 JEL members who have since graduated from high school, taking their experience as youth leaders with them.

Being a JEL member takes a lot of energy, Buttermore says. Since JEL is youth-led, it requires a high level of engagement at the local level. Adult sponsors are present to guide the youths' ideas, pull back the plans when necessary, and push them forward at other times. “But adults

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never set the agenda or take a leadership role,” Buttermore says. “Fortunately, preventing tobacco use is such an important topic, there’s always been considerable initiative on the part of the students.”

Jones County

Consider what happened in Jones County. Since 2006, only two schools in this county of approximately 20,500 residents have been able to establish local JEL chapters; one maintained a chapter for three years while the other lasted only a year. “We understand the busy lives of teachers and advisors, many of whom are already working with kids after school,” says Beth Chatteron, a senior at Midland High School, “But considering that tobacco is the number one preventable cause of death in Iowa, we knew we had to find another way to organize ourselves.”

It just so happens that Beth is a member of B.E.A.S.T.S., a coalition of student health advocates representing several area schools committed to “Being Excellent and Staying Totally Safe.” Funded through a federal Drug Free Communities grant, the B.E.A.S.T.S. took it upon themselves to include tobacco use prevention education in their activities by establishing their own JEL chapter this year. The youth in the chapter participated in several local tobacco prevention events including the Great American Smokeout, Kick Butts Day, and Through with Chew Week.

“Every adult knows that teens are impressionable and that once a young person like Beth gets an idea in their head, there’s almost no stopping them,” Buttermore says. “And it’s this impressionability that makes youth so susceptible to tobacco advertising.”

According to a 1999 article in the U.S. Distribution Journal—a monthly magazine covering the tobacco, candy and grocery distribution industry—teenagers are greatly influenced by advertising at the point of purchase. In fact, 73 percent of teens are influenced by promotional pieces in convenience stores (a major distributor of tobacco products), compared to only 47 percent of adults. Furthermore, the American Cancer Society has found that even brief exposure to tobacco advertising influences adolescents’ attitudes and perceptions about smoking as well as their intentions to smoke.”

There is little doubt that tobacco companies are invested in Iowa. According to the Campaign for To-

acco Free Kids, the tobacco industry spends more than \$174 million in Iowa every year on marketing. Given that this figure was 28 times higher than Iowa’s entire budget of \$6.2 million for tobacco use prevention in state fiscal year 2011, Buttermore says the cards are stacked against JEL. But, he adds, this doesn’t appear to discourage the highly motivated youth advocates.

Adams County

Take the city of Corning as an example. JEL has had active local chapters in Adams County since 2007, but had been prevented from delivering their messages at the Adams County Speedway, a popular local attraction that many youth attend. The closest these young health advocates were allowed to come to the Speedway was just outside the gates. Why? JEL members have a pretty good idea: a large tobacco company sponsored events at the speedway.

In 2010, however, the tobacco company dropped its sponsorship. Since that time, JEL youth leaders have been allowed inside the gates, where they can interact with other teens about tobacco prevention.

“Now that we’re allowed inside, we see adults walking past us to get to the designated smoking area,” says Paige Kuhn, a JEL member at Corning High



JEL members Paige Kuhn (right) and Bailey Heaton (center) speak to a fellow teen during a racing event at the Adams County Speedway.

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School. “Some of them glance at our display as they walk past, but it’s their kids who come up close to learn more. That’s what JEL is all about—we’re kids giving other kids the facts about tobacco.”

During his 6½ years as youth prevention coordinator, Buttermore has noticed that JEL members are acutely aware that they are being targeted by the tobacco industry in ways that adults don’t recognize. And they are able to convey this to one another in ways that just wouldn’t occur to adults. Take the case of a recent music concert that came to Waterloo in March 2011.

Linn County

Featuring artists familiar to young people (e.g., DJ Dextrous, Big Reeno, Nelly, and Cali Swag District) the Blizzard Music Tour caught the attention of JEL members Alisa Holverson and Brandon Peiffer, both of whom live in the Cedar Rapids area. “Advertising was all over the radio stations Q92.3 and Z102.9, the most popular radio stations among teenagers in the Cedar Rapids and Waterloo area,” Holverson says. “And the sponsor’s name was tacked onto every advertisement for the concert.”

That sponsor was the Cigarette Outlet. Not only did this chain of stores help promote the concert, but the ads also invited listeners to visit their tobacco shops to buy tickets to the event.

Holverson and Peiffer wrote letters to the radio stations asking that they remove the tobacco retailer from sponsoring an event that was so popular with young people. Though their bid was unsuccessful, the pair organized a youth educational conference at Kirkwood College and held a demonstration outside one of the Cigarette Outlet stores to raise awareness.

Like many JEL events, this demonstration drew the attention of the local media. Cedar Rapids television stations KGAN and KCRG sent reporters to cover the event.

“Whether they’re participating in a national observance, conducting local outreach, or developing their own unique strategies for spreading the truth about the dangers of tobacco, JEL provides a safe and supportive environment for

these young people to develop the skills they will need as future leaders and health advocates in our state,” Buttermore says.

And that, he adds, is a lot more important today than it was yesterday. In an effort to replenish their customer base, the tobacco industry appears to be targeting young people more than ever. A number of manufacturers are currently test marketing a variety of smokeless—yet highly addictive—tobacco products in several states, including nearby Kansas. Unlike chewing tobacco and the tea bag-like pouches of spitless “snus,” Buttermore says many of these new products are virtually indistinguishable



Jackson County high school freshman Rebecca Sherwood speaks with a reporter during a JEL protest outside a tobacco retailer that had sponsored a music concert geared toward young listeners.

from products teens might buy legally at a convenience store or supermarket. These include dissolvable tobacco products that resemble breath strips, toothpicks, and Tic Tac-sized mints.

Fortunately, Buttermore says, JEL youth are already organizing themselves to counter these new marketing strategies as soon as the tobacco industry introduces them to Iowa.