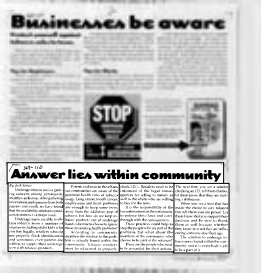


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Answer lies within community

By: *Josh Strine*

Underage tobacco use is a growing concern among community members in Kansas. After gathering information and opinions from both parents and youth, we have found that the availability of tobacco products to minors is a major issue.

Underage teens are able to obtain tobacco from a number of sources including older kids who can buy legally, retailers who do not properly check identification and sometimes even parents are willing to supply their underage teen with tobacco products.

Parents and teens in these Kansas communities are aware of the potential health risks of tobacco usage. Lung cancer, mouth cancer, emphysema and heart problems are enough to keep some teens away from the addictive grip of tobacco, but how do we keep tobacco products out of underage hands when teens choose to ignore these devastating health problems?

According to community members the solution to this problem is actually found within the community. Tobacco retailers must be educated to properly

check I.D.'s. Retailers need to be informed of the legal consequences for selling to minors as well as the adults who are willing to buy for the teen.

It is the responsibility of the law enforcement in the community to enforce these laws and carry through with the consequences.

These practices could help to stop the people who are part of the problem, but what about the members of the community who choose to be part of the solution?

These are the people who need to be rewarded for their actions. The next time you see a retailer checking an I.D. tell them thanks, let them know that they are making a difference.

When you see a teen that has made the choice to stay tobacco free tell them you are proud. Let them know that you support their decision and be sure to thank them as well because whether they know it or not they are influencing someone else their age.

The solution to underage tobacco use is found within the community and it is everybody's job to be a part of it.