

**Title:** Story Banking: the potential impact of tobacco use and tobacco ads on youth in Flushing, Queens

### **Organizational Description**

Since 1986, The Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF) has been working to improve the health and well-being of Asian Pacific American (APA) children and families in New York City (NYC). As the nation's only pan-Asian children's advocacy organization, CACF believes that children of all backgrounds should have an equal opportunity to grow up healthy and safe. CACF challenges stereotypes of APAs as a "model minority" and advocates on behalf of underserved families in our community, especially immigrants struggling with poverty and limited English skills. CACF promotes better policies, funding, and services to the diverse communities that make up the APA community.

In 2004, CACF launched The Asian American Student Advocacy Project (ASAP) as a leadership program for Asian Pacific American public high school students to be active and make improvements in their own communities. CACF believes that young people play a meaningful role as advocates. CACF developed the ASAP model to target predominantly immigrant, English Language Learners, low-income APA students to improve their organizing, advocacy, and leadership skills. Youth take on leadership roles, making decisions, and taking action. ASAP youth leaders participate in community research to raise awareness on important issues in their community.

Between March and April in 2016, CACF worked with ASAP youth leaders to canvass and survey the neighborhood of Flushing, Queens to collect information on tobacco use and its impact on young people in this neighborhood. This report documents the process and results from the ASAP youth.

### **Methods and Community Background**

CACF explored the potential impact of tobacco use and tobacco ads on youth in Flushing, Queens with the use of a story-banking process. For story collection, ASAP leaders approached and engaged with people in the streets and public spaces in Flushing.

Flushing is a neighborhood of Queens, NYC. In the past few decades, the number of Asian immigrants has grown exponentially. It is a gateway community for many Asian migrants coming to the United States. As one of the most populous city communities encompassing 250,000 residents, Flushing has one of the highest rates of severe overcrowding in the entire city. In addition, Flushing has one of the highest percentages of foreign-born residents and the highest share of Asian-born immigrants. Thirty-five percent of Flushing's residents are not English proficient. Flushing currently has more Chinese residents than Chinatown (Manhattan). Queens has more than double the amount of Chinese residents than Manhattan, with the majority of them residing in Flushing, and the surrounding Flushing areas (Asian Americans in New York City: A



**Lobby of New World Mall (136-20 Roosevelt Avenue)**

decade of Dynamic Change 2000-2010. *Asian American Federation, April 2012*). The location

that ASAP youth focused on was downtown Flushing, in the areas of Main Street, Kissena Boulevard, College Point Boulevard, and Roosevelt Avenue.

CACF trained 10 ASAP members on how to participate in effective story collection in the community. This is the second year that ASAP participated in this community assessment. We had some returning participants who had surveyed the Chinatown (Manhattan) community from the previous year. Having returning members helped in the coordination of the project, as well as ensuring the tasks that were assigned were carried out easily.

The goal was to collect stories on how tobacco impacts young people's lives. ASAP used a 1-page survey with open-ended questions pertaining to the effect that tobacco use (in all forms) has on participants as well as how often they encounter tobacco on a daily basis. The survey also recorded basic demographic data pertaining to age, sex, race/ethnicity, and how long the participant has been in this country.

On April 29th, 2016, over the course of 5 hours, 10 ASAP youth leaders were stationed across 7 different sites in downtown Flushing, where there is heavy pedestrian traffic. Downtown Flushing has a subway terminal, several bus lines and bus terminals, and an LIRR station. ASAP youth positioned themselves near parks, playgrounds, main pedestrian intersections, by the local library, 3 food courts, and 2 shopping malls. Our ASAP team conveyed to all of the people they approached that their stories would be anonymous and would be used for an education campaign. The participants were also encouraged to be candid and to provide as much detail as they could. The goal was to capture a wide range of anecdotes in this story-banking project.

## **Results**

ASAP interviewed 92 people. On the survey, the last section asks to record demographic data to collect information to better assist ASAP categorize the stories. The results documented that respondents ranged from the ages of 8 to 33 years old. ASAP let the participant self-identify race and/or ethnicity, hence some answers were more ethnic specific, such as claiming Chinese, and others just used more racial categories, such as Asian/Asian-American. Out of the 92 responses, 36 of respondents identified themselves as Asian or Asian-American and 40 replied as Chinese/Chinese American. The rest of the respondents declined to share their ethnic background. There was 1 person who identified as mixed-race (Chinese and White), and the other Asian ethnicities captured were: Korean (2), Filipino (1). In terms of non-Asian respondents, ASAP captured one 1 African American and 5 Hispanic participants.

Sixty-two percent of the respondents were foreign-born, and when asked how many years they were in this country, the answers ranged from 1 month to 20 years of residency. For the 2 respondents that have been here for 20 years, they were 23 and 25 years old. Out of all the responses, there were only 3 who mentioned that tobacco did not impact their everyday lives. All the other respondents had a story to share about tobacco and tobacco use. The majority of the stories captured talked about negative impacts of tobacco in their lives. Below are some stories shared by youth participants that mention the prevalence and impact of tobacco in their everyday lives.

There were several mentions of family members and friends who smoke as well as how often they see tobacco use in the streets. The negative comments on tobacco use were often about how it impacts health. Below are some recorded responses:

***“Dad smokes, he should stop. Don't like it because you die faster. Hold my breath and walk away, not good for lungs, annoying to smell it.”*** - 13 year old Asian female

***“Everyday, wish it would stop. Understand it's not good, addicted to it. Anti-smoking kind of helps, no one will really stop number of people increasing. Friend, mom tried smoking, didn't like it after one smoke, questioned why people smoke. Think it helps release stress.”*** - 14 year old Asian female

***“My neighbors smoke outside every day. I feel bad because people can die from smoking but they still smoke.”*** - 16 year old Asian female

***“It's bad, dad smokes and hates it because it is bad for lungs and cancer, wants it to stop, try to persuade, it's a cycle.”*** – 14 year old Chinese female

***“I don't advise it, nor do I enjoy seeing some of my family members take part in it. A lot of my friends smoke.”*** – 14 year old Filipino male

***“Father is a smoker. Very sick. School friends are not heavy smokers.”*** – 16 year old South Asian male

***“So annoying, everyone smokes. My family smokes”*** -17 year old Asian male

There were other respondent comments that did not necessarily mention they disliked smoking or indicated the ill-effects of smoking and tobacco presence. Instead, their comments were about how they were desensitized to it since it has been so visible in their daily environments:

***“Other people, students smoke. Indifferent because it's their choice. Aunt smokes, fine with it; control herself. Stress reliever.”*** - 15 year old Asian female

***“Family smoking, it's normal, get used to it.”*** – 20 year old Asian male

***“Don't mind, annoying on sidewalks when there is secondhand smoke and they don't clean up after themselves.”*** -21 year old Chinese female

***“[Tobacco use impacts me] not very much. Secondhand smoke. Get used to it is fine.”*** – 20 year old Chinese male

***“Friends smoke, it's normal. Secondhand smoker, smoked myself, quit three years ago.”*** -17 year old Chinese female

***“Doesn't impact much, mom smokes but doesn't mind. Don't mind secondhand smoke.”*** – 17 year old Hispanic female

***“College. Lots of people smoke, get to used to it but feel bad.”*** 19 year old Chinese female

***“Very often, seeing on the street. It's okay, since people only smoke outdoors.”*** – 30 year old Chinese female

The issue of secondhand smoke was also another major theme in these stories. It seems that almost every respondent had experienced secondhand smoke in their daily lives.

Whether it is in schools, at home, with their friends, and on the streets, they witnessed and experienced others smoking. There are various degrees of how they have been impacted by the culture of tobacco use in their communities. Some respondents mention that they ignore it, but majority do mention how much it bothers them. Below are more testimonies from the Flushing story banking project on how common tobacco is:



***“I see some people smoking on the streets and I try to avoid the smell. I also see cigarettes on the ground.” - 15 year old Asian female***

***“Secondhand smoking is something everyone has experienced and is very serious.” 16 year old Asian Female***

***“Every day there is someone smoking outside. I would experience secondhand smoking whenever I go outside.” - 16 year old Asian female***

***“Secondhand smoking might affect my health. Often, it makes me uncomfortable and just disgusted. People should be more considerate.” - 16 year old Asian female***

***“Parents don’t smoke. Don’t want secondhand smoke because see a lot of smokers on street. Pet peeve but no way to stop it.” -17 year old Asian female***

***“See people smoking on the street, feels like it’s pollution, scared for my body. Dad smokes, don’t care unless he smokes a lot, wants him to stop, doesn’t like the smell.” – 10 year old Asian male***



***“Tobacco use effect everyday life by secondhand smoke and people don’t realize it, however it is very harmful for the others.” - 17 year old Asian female***

***“A friend, smokes after school. That’s his own decision. People smoke on the street, very bad. Have to hold breath the avoid secondhand smoke.” – 14 year old Asian male***



***“No family smokes, family thinks it's bad. See it on corners, cover mouth, don't inhale it.” - 11 year old Hispanic female***

***“See people use it, there is a bad smell, it is unpleasant and hold breath and walk away.” - 10 year old Asian male***

Please note that the comments were direct quotes from respondents. Some were transcribed and directly translated by an ASAP member. Certain quotes are fragmented due to the English language proficiency of the respondents as well as providing a direct translation whenever the quotes captured was spoken in another language other than English.

### **Next Steps: Public Awareness**

After assessing the data, ASAP will implement an outreach campaign to report back on their findings from their community story collection project. Since this story banking project was conducted in April 2016, ASAP members have already shared some of their preliminary findings and main takeaways at several public forums. On June 6th, 2016 these findings were presented at a panel for a tobacco control convening hosted by NYPIRG and Dyson School of Arts and Sciences at Pace University. On June 17<sup>th</sup>, ASAP also presented the findings at a community briefing held at Teach for America national headquarters in NYC. Approximately 80 folks attended this event including media outlets from the Asian ethnic press, representatives from NYC elected official offices, and community members. ASAP will share these findings on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and CACF's website. CACF will also share the community report to our 50 member organizations that serve the Asian Pacific American community in New York.



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