

# THE ANSR

Association for Nonsmokers - Minnesota

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## PARTNERS SPOTLIGHT

# Youth and the fight against the tobacco industry

By Sam Heggem  
Special to ANSR

The tobacco industry has long targeted youth through deceptive, insidious ad campaigns. The tobacco industry recognizes vulnerability and capitalizes on this to create life-long smokers. However, this is not a one-way battle. The same youth who have been subjected to the manipulative campaigns of the tobacco industry are now fighting back.

Starnisha McClellan is a longtime member of Breathe Free North, a tobacco education program centered in North Minneapolis at NorthPoint Health & Wellness. The group focuses largely on reducing the exposure of youth to tobacco products. She and Breathe Free North have been actively involved in the recent policy work.

Starnisha helped lead the charge in 2015 to get restrictions on flavored tobacco products passed in Minneapolis. She helped gather data to strengthen the argument for getting this proposal passed. She also testified in front of the Minneapolis City Council in May 2015. As a result of the work of



ANSR staff photo

**Starnisha McClellan speaks out about menthol tobacco while filming a video about how the tobacco industry targets youth and African Americans.**

Starnisha and Breathe Free North, as of January 2016, flavored tobacco products are limited to being sold in 18-over tobacco shops only.

Starnisha has been an activist since she was 11. Now 19 and graduated from high school,

Starnisha is pursuing her passion and working for Breathe Free North full-time.

Starnisha has a personal stake in the fight against tobacco control, as her family has been affected by the tobacco industry's campaign

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of targeting youth. Starnisha's younger sister smokes cigarettes and has been trying to quit for some time. Her sister's situation is "a prime example of how hard is it for people to stop smoking cigarettes."

It becomes clear where a large part of Starnisha's inspiration and motivation come from. Another thing that makes her activism so inspirational is her community-oriented attitude. Starnisha is personally motivated by the opportunity to help not only youth but her whole community. She sees how her work has the power to reach many people and protect those in the community she lives in.

Along with targeting vulnerable youth, the tobacco industry also seeks to target African Americans and especially African American youth through disturbingly effective tactics. Through lucrative advertising campaigns, the tobacco industry markets certain products – particularly mentholated cigarettes – to African Americans. When asked about her experience with this, Starnisha recalled her childhood growing up in North Minneapolis. She remembers tobacco products being advertised far more explicitly in this area of North Minneapolis than where she currently resides in New Brighton. The entire façade of a convenience



ANSR staff photo

**Starnisha testifies in front of the Minneapolis City Council about the harms of flavored tobacco.**

store would be covered with advertisements instead of a subtle ad or two in the windows of convenience stores in other neighborhoods. These convenience stores were also placed near recreation facilities like the YMCA. Said Starnisha, "When the kids are coming out of the YMCA doors, that's all they see."

The sale of tobacco products has become so engrained in the business revenue of small convenience stores that these businesses see tobacco control as a threat. Starnisha saw this reaction firsthand during her involvement in

the policy initiative that ultimately resulted in the restriction on selling flavored tobacco products in convenience stores. She recalled an encounter she had with a clerk in a gas station she had been going to for years. The clerk of the gas station was aware of her activism and felt victimized by the threat of flavored tobacco products no longer being sold at the store, resulting in the clerk ultimately confronting Starnisha.

Encounters like this have not deterred Starnisha from her involvement in the fight against the tobacco industry but has increased her passion and make her stake in this fight even more personal.

Having had such overwhelming success in the flavored tobacco sales initiative, Starnisha and Breathe Free North are continuing the fight against the tobacco industry and are now working steadily to get the minimum age to purchase tobacco products raised to 21 years old.

The work accomplished by Starnisha is extraordinary, and her achievements and activism ultimately apply to many aspects of her life, so when Starnisha stands before the legislature, or she walks by the YMCA, or she talks with her sister, she does it as an empowered activist.

*Sam attends the University of St. Thomas and wrote about Starnisha as part of a joint venture with ANSR.*

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**For more information, contact ANSR at:**

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## Summer 2016 Events



ANSR Staff

Youth advocates Cooper, Kira and Trai talk to people about the dangers of menthol tobacco at the Twin Cities Pride Festival in June.



ANSR Staff

Advocates Farhan and Trai talk to people about the dangers of menthol tobacco at the Juneteenth Festival in Minneapolis in June.



ANSR Staff

More than 50 youth who are in drug recovery programs in the Twin Cities stopped by the ANSR table at Recovery in the Park to talk with ANSR's Chris Turner and talk about cessation through the state quit line, [www.quitplan.com](http://www.quitplan.com).



## MENTHOL VIDEO BEHIND-THE-SCENES



ANSR staff photos

ANSR worked with a number of advocates to create a video about how menthol-flavored tobacco products target specific vulnerable populations, such as youth, African Americans and the LGBTQ community. Here's a look at the work of these advocates during the filming. Clockwise from the top, Cooper Felipe studies his lines as the filming crew prepares; Khaloni Freemont waits while a shot is set up; Kougar Lee goes through his lines at Phalen Park, and Joe Davis, who wrote the poem being recited in the video, represents for North Minneapolis.





## ROUNDUP

# ANSR's annual meeting set for Oct. 20

**Annual meeting:** ANSR will hold its annual meeting on Oct. 20. All members are invited. The meeting will start at 5:30 p.m. It will be held in Room 303 of the Security Building, 2395 University Ave., Saint Paul, MN 55114.

**Legislative follow-up:** The tobacco industry had a big win in the 2016 tax bill as the legislature removed the provision that indexes the tobacco tax to inflation and cut the tax on the type of e-cigarettes made by the big tobacco companies. When the governor vetoed the tax bill, it was good for tobacco use prevention. Now there is talk of a special session and if these provisions are included in the resulting tax bill, the tobacco industry will declare victory.

Since the negotiations over the tax bill and the special session are all behind closed doors and among

top leaders of the House and Senate, it is difficult for the public to have much input. If public health turns out to be the big loser in this bill, be prepared to come back next year fighting for tax policy and policy bills that promote the health of Minnesotans, not bills that undermine the progress we have made.

**Brooklyn Park Senior Housing goes smoke free:** Creekside Gables in Brooklyn Park, Minn, is designed to provide healthy, affordable housing for seniors in the city. Beginning Sept. 1, 2016, the smoking of cigarettes and other lighted tobacco products will no longer be allowed in any indoor units or common areas. Smoking will only be allowed outdoors in a designated smoking area. Creekside Gables will be Lang Nelson's 12th smoke-free

senior property. Creekside Gables manager Shane Chambers said the company chose to put the policy into effect to protect the health and well-being of residents and staff.

"Lang Nelson has decided to go smoke free in a number of their properties after several years of deliberations and planning," Tamara Richards of Lang Nelson management, said. "Throughout the years, we received frequent requests from residents asking us to consider going smoke free. We recognize smoke-free environments make healthier communities for our residents, staff and guests. Our company is on pace to have all of our properties smoke free by 2017."

**In loving memory of  
Edward G. Engen,  
Brodhead, Wisc.**

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# Protecting youth from secondhand smoke a priority

Minnesota has made strides in protecting its residents from the harms of tobacco, but we are behind in protecting our children and youth from secondhand smoke while they're in vehicles.

There's no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke, according to a 2006 U.S. Surgeon General's Report. Particularly at risk are children, as their bodies are still developing, and they have higher breathing rates. The toxins in smoke are even more harmful to them than to adults. Children under one year old are even more impacted.

In 2014-15, the Center for Energy and Environment (CEE) in Minneapolis ran 170 tests on what happens to the air quality inside of a car when the driver smokes a cigarette. They tested the concentration of fine particulate matter in several different



ANSR staff photo

There's no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke, per the U.S. Surgeon General's 2006 report. Youth in vehicles are particularly susceptible to secondhand smoke exposure.

situations such as different driving speeds, car ventilation and fans, and opening the windows. Fine particulate matter (PM2.5) is an air pollutant that has adverse health effects, especially at high levels.

CEE researchers measured the peak PM2.5 concentration from the start of smoking until the concentration decreased to the level it was at before smoking began. The concentrations they

found ranged from 359 to 5612 with an average of 2013  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ . Those levels are higher than concentrations typically found in bars where smoking is permitted. Secondhand smoke remains a concern even after the driver has stopped smoking. Even with the driver's window completely open and the car vents on fresh air mode, secondhand smoke exposure still occurs.