

THE PEOPLE
VS
BIG TOBACCO

THESE INTERVIEWS WERE INSPIRED BY ALL OF OUR COLLECTIVE EXPIERENCES BEHIND BIG TOBACCO. MY NAME IS SENA GELETO THE CREATOR OF THIS BOOK.

I REALLY HOPE THAT IT DOES IT'S INTENDED PURPOSE OF RAISING AWARENESS AND EDUCATING EVERYONE ABOUT THE DEEPER IMPLICATIONS OF THE DAMAGES TOBACCO CAUSES IN OUR LIVES.

OPEN YOUR MIND, TAKE IT IN,
ENJOY.



If you could tell us your name?

Damone Presley.

Okay. Perfect. Please tell me about your experiences with tobacco and how would you describe how it has impacted you or your loved ones?

Yes. My experience with tobacco, I had used tobacco from what I can think of, tried to puff on a cigarette at eight years old. In the community that I grew up in, tobacco was frequent everywhere. Local store, I want to say, was a family store and all the families in the area went to this particular one, it was called Tom Thumbs. Okay, and not only tobacco was throughout the whole store. But there were also, as I understand more today and being in this world, there was a lot of advertising and marketing. They had candy cigarettes, candy toy tobacco type boxes that had candy products, but it was in advertise within tobacco.

And that shows how much they wanted to start, people getting hooked at a young age.

Yes. So family wise, I'm not too sure if anyone had died of cancer, but cancer has been cause for several of my uncle's, aunties and I had never really, you know, looked at was it tobacco. But have an understanding in this field, I want to say yes, tobacco had some relation to cancers that some of my elder uncles and aunties had passed from.

Okay, so my next question is, please describe a time that you or a loved one stopped tobacco use, what was that transition like? Were there any challenges and what went well, what didn't go well? What was that process?

Yeah, that's a good question. I was the last one to stop. But my mother, brother, sister, my father, those immediate family they had all stopped over 20 years ago.

Did they have similar experiences when it came to starting at such a young age?

I never really asked my parents but I know they are really big at, tobacco is no good. And, you know, starting to look at their own health. And so that began to be a part of our conversations, and whatnot. So as I said, I was the last one to quit. I had stopped, I want to say, about 10-12 years ago? It was based on because my family used to say you smell like smoke. And I was I don't want to say... I was feeling a little uncomfortable. Because they had stopped. And so it was like, you know

You felt that they were a little judgy maybe?

Yeah, something like that. And I felt they would be snippy, you know. But the more I continued to do this work and started learning more of how the industry is marketing, targeting, and advertising, and some of the things that have been said, by the tobacco industry, about people of color and low income communities. It had me taking a look at myself, and how much money that they do make and looking at my community and communities that I'm around. I really wasn't aware. But as you began to really stop and take a look, it was everywhere.

The way they're profiting off of us.

And what they said about people of color that really just hit a nerve with me. Yeah. So that was kind of the experience around that. That really kind of took it home and I want to say maybe it was because I started doing this work but my mother and father have done work around tobacco when I was growing up, and so getting involved in this work really was kind of like yeah, this is something I would like to do. Plus it's important. When I think about the younger generation, who really have been affected and don't even know it, sometimes these are not the conversations that our communities have. And so we have to have these conversations with our younger folk. With, the community, because so many things historically against us and our people that it's hard to say, you know, this is not good for us.

But it also can be taken as you're telling me, what I can't do as we have been told through generations, what to do, and not to do. And so, having that understanding, it's been and I don't want to say strategic, but I had been good with a listening ear as well, for them to listen, that hey, I understand. The severity of it... is our lives.

And something I feel that in the tobacco work, what's different is a lot of us, a lot of people haven't experienced smoking or being addicted. So it's really important for people like you that have smoked and stopped or are continuing to try to stop to also be okay to be a part of this work, because I feel like a lot of people might feel hypocritical if they're doing tobacco reform work, and they're still smoking. But again, we need people like them to also be a part of this work as well.

Yeah.

To show the impact.

And it's important because, one of the things that I have understood, and hopefully folks can understand, is that, it's not, it's not telling you, that you can't. The importance I believe in this work is the education and once folks begin to understand that part, then it's more receptive and it's not taken as because I done got a lot of flack. The community was kind of upset. They said I remember you, you *pointing at himself* Yeah. That's one of the reasons why I'm involved in this work because it doesn't say that you have not had to smoke and so the community, sometimes our community will take that like, you know, who are you? And it's like, that's understandable. So I believe I'm more effective in that voice to reason right, and to have that conversation with all, as I share with you, it's just the education. Your choices are yours but we can have a better understanding of what this industry has done, what it is doing, and what it will continue to do. And whose lives are most affected by what they're doing? What tobacco has done. And then when you say, Well, do you know anybody in your family like you asked me in the beginning, that had been affected by tobacco, or any cause of death by tobacco.

THE SERVERITY OF IT...
IS OUR LIVES.
– DAMONE PRESLEY

And almost all of us can say we have.

Nobody can dispute that. So, I always say that, that's an opening to those conversations. And, for me, that's been a tool that I use first, because I understand, nobody wants to be told what to do, yeah, especially when you talk about our communities that we come from.

Because they'll say, oh, do you think you're better than me?

Yeah. Historically, the tobacco industry targeted us just like all those other systems.

That's true.

They have oppressed us and this is a mechanism to keep us where we're at, because we're at the high. We're at the highest end when it comes to health disparities, when it comes to those health deaths. And so yeah. I've been doing this work for the last 14 years. And the community has really opened up the ear to the education.

You're going into my next question, actually. With everything that we know about tobacco, could you share some of the ways that you've witnessed tobacco companies target those underserved and marginalized communities?

Oh, yeah. I mean, we all eat Cocoa Puffs, Fruity Pebbles. They have all these dynamical products that display the script as what you like. And every tool that they're using, you can't say that it's not marketed for a young person. Anything grape, strawberry, fruity. You could ask the average young person, what do you like out of the store and it's gonna be one of those, one of those flavors.

And how menthol also was targeted to POC.

And yes menthol was very highly addictive. And so, with those tools that they're trying to use, have really captured our young people, especially when it comes to those e-cigarettes.

You know, those vapes. It's a distraction I call it. It's a diversion to divert our young people from the brilliant, intelligent minds that they do have, and distract them from as you are, in education as I am, educating. It takes away, I believe, from people excelling.

I know. It's disheartening to hear that kids in schools are vaping in bathrooms or even in the classrooms and hiding it.

And I want to share a story which I've been thinking about, since we started emailing and getting in contact, with one of my teenage daughters. So, to witness and not only be doing the work but to witness this effect, right in my own home, yeah. And, so parents have to be aware, you know, and to them it's cool and hip. This is the thing. So there's peer pressure, there's all these things that why I dislike the tobacco industry, and how they are targeting young people. And so with my own child I found 15 devices and I don't know if she was the holder for all the friends. And so with the conversation is that they're socializing and that's how they communicate literally. And so, I did want to share that, you know, you want to share this with others, for our community to be on notice. And it's not nothing to punish my child because this stuff is everywhere.

And that's why I want to use this as more of an education.

Yes.

It's all in our communities. And we can't sit here and hide and say, no, not my kid. Yes, your kid.

Yes, I would have been one of those parents, years ago. But you know, being a youngster, at a time in my life. I know what it was like for me. Like you said, we gotta stop saying, it's not my kid. Because I always say, yeah, maybe not your kid, but what about your kid who hangs with the other kids. And if it's not that kid, what about the other kid? And so if your kid is around that kid, sooner or later, and I know for one that's how my daughter started trying those vapes and e-cigarettes.

Okay, and that brings us to our final question. Given everything that we have discussed, what recommendations would you have for policymakers, which is something that you're already doing to ensure the health equity of individuals who come from these underserved and marginalized communities?

One thing I would say is to listen to the community, to be proactive with the community, as well as continue to put regulations and ordinances, where communities have been affected, but in all, all communities because it best serves us all. Because if we don't serve our own community, and we take heart to these issues, if other communities don't, our community will travel to wherever that may be. If that's the case, you know, so, you know, hopefully our policymakers continue to look at the health disparities. Continue to look at the community that is most impacted by work in this industry, and what tobacco has done and will continue to do. Yeah, because we're doing the work. They're doing their work, and whatever way they can continue to manipulate, I say, our communities into saying that their products are okay. Or making them look all glamorous, and good. We know the true effect and what it causes... is death. And as our city officials, if they represent the community, they need to make sure our communities are safe, prosperous and health is most important for our community to survive.

Right 100%. And as a parent, what advice would you give to other parents about staying proactive when it comes to their kids?

First, having conversation and not taking the approach that you're bad, you're wrong or you're going to be punished, but to understand that these products are playing throughout our community. And that if you're a young person may not know of the severity and of course, young people will tell you oh I know. And then you say, Well, why are you doing it? They don't have no answer.

Yes.

BECAUSE I ALWAYS SAY,
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OR LATER...

– DAMONE PRESLEY

And so as a parent, and understanding that and just having these conversations. It's about education, and not, don't shun your young person. Don't shun your young adult. Just have a conversation to share if you have your own experience as a parent, share that experience and that is something I had done with my children, and my child, in particular, who was caught with these products by that conversation, she began to take a look at, what harm it was causing not only her, but it was causing her little sister, because they're looking at you, and that, we can give the wrong impression to our community. And don't say this at least, don't make them feel bad, or you're wrong. If you want to make a better choice, hopefully it would not be to use these products. Then give yourself time to grow. To live. And as you become an adult, then you will be more free to make a better choice. As a young person making this choice, it could affect you to have a tobacco free long life.

Perfect. I think that was wonderful. Thank you so much.

Thank you.

Would you like to add anything else?

No, I just appreciate you for asking me to be a part of this. You know, these conversations are meant to happen...

They just need to happen. And that's what I'm trying to do is bridge that gap especially. A lot of young adults and youth are too scared to have these conversations with others, or anyone older than them. So that's, I want to bridge that gap and have these conversations and also have other people be able to read or hear this conversation that we had. Because a lot of our work is very close-doored and people that are doing the work are in the work, but there's no one else outside of the work that really sees what we're doing. And so this project will help everyone to see what you're doing and have that conversation.

I've been doing it for years with the young people. Through my youth work and it is effective.

Because as long as the seeds are being planted, it's getting watered And it's growing, you know.

It might take 5 years, might take 10, might take 30.

The point is that it's planted. And sooner or later it's going to start growing branches.

Exactly.

And even if, I like how you said that and we need more people that have been through it and see how they see it. And regardless if people choose to, it doesn't mean you still can't share the education piece. I really like that. And we need to be more open with that.

And this is more personal, they hear a lot about the facts but how about people that have been directly affected.

That's where it hits home, you know for us.

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START GROWING BRANCHES.
- DAMONE PRESLEY



KNOWLEDGE | USE | APPRECIATE


NORTH POINT
Health & Wellness Center

If you could tell us your name.

My name is Terrell Johnson.

I'll start off with the first question. Please tell me about your experiences with tobacco. How would you describe you or a loved one that was impacted?

Well, my mother was impacted by tobacco use... She smoked for about 50 years. And I could definitely see the impact it had on her and her health as a matter of fact, and how it has affected us as well. She smoked in the house for many, many, many years, and it had a profound effect on me. I have asthma. I was affected directly by secondhand smoke. Obviously she tried to keep it away from me, but I mean, it's in your clothes and things of that nature. My grandma smoked as well. And, interestingly enough, she would go to Beagle where they would smoke and then she would come home with these smoke filled doughnuts, which is really interesting. And so it's just one of those things that affected me. Luckily, before she passed, she stopped smoking as well. But it had a profound effect because I see how it affected her health, her breathing. She wasn't able to be as active as she normally was my grandmother, she would end her days pretty much sitting on the porch, and kind of watching the neighbors in the neighborhood but she wasn't able to be as flexible as she could be in the neighborhood and in the community.

And as active as...

She wanted to be, yes.

Okay. So my next question is, please describe a time you or a loved one stopped using tobacco. And what was that transition like? Were there any challenges and did it go well?

Well, my mother, I go back to my mother, Barbara. It was a transition. I think she really did it for me, because I was pretty much a sickly young man.

I had different health issues. And so she really stopped and I might and I have to say that it went pretty well. I mean, she smoked for 50 years. She was smoking because of my health. And what she said was actually that she was doing it for her. Like you said with my grandma, who wasn't as active, so she was able to do some of the things that she normally wanted to do. She's basically a social smoker. But she would come home and smoke a lot outside and things of that nature. But I give her credit because she made a decision, a conscious decision to stop smoking because it affected my health in a very negative way and she saw how it affected my siblings as well. So she made a conscious effort. She stopped. I mean, it was almost cold turkey, because it was around the time we got into church and things of that nature. So that was something that had the profound effect of being in church. So yeah, she stopped pretty much cold turkey for us and for religious purposes.

That's good, going back to your grandmother and when you said that she passed away do you think that the tobacco use might have had an impact on her like cause of death or...

I think it had an impact on her quality of life. Like I said she sounded coarse, and I remember I could hear her breathe. I can't forget that you can hear her breathing and even going from her room to the front of the house. It was, it was labor intensive. So she would have to take stop breaks just to break in the kitchen. Just to get to the living room. She'd have to stop and just catch her breath. So I remember how she always was having to catch her breath all the time.

Okay, perfect. And then my next question is with everything you know about tobacco. Could you share some of the ways that you've witnessed that these tobacco companies have targeted, underserved and marginalized communities?

They target us within our culture. Basically, when you see celebrities or you see sporting, sporting figures and things of that nature, and they make it seem really cool, you know, they dress up these people, especially these young folks, they put on a nice little outfit, and they want to talk cool and it's like a persona.

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– TERRELL JOHNSON

It's almost as if smoking goes alongside with who they are as a person. They don't differentiate between smoking and the behavior of smoking, and who that person is, they make it a part of that person's personality. They make it seem as though if you're not smoking, you're not cool. It has to be part of who you are, what you do in every aspect of your life. I see it a lot of times, like a lot of times in advertisements as well. But they make, they target our neighborhoods and even in stores you see where the smoking products where, it's situated at, when you go into the front of the store, you have it fully displayed and I can see how it definitely affects our BIPOC communities and how it's been lured into that whole persona of this is cool. This is something that you need to be doing.

And seeing the influx of tobacco shops.

Oh my goodness, yes.

In areas where there's more BIPOC communities that live there compared to the suburbs, it's kind of disheartening.

Absolutely, yes. Sometimes the vape they just disguise it as not as bad as a cigarette so you got the vape shops and the tobacco shops. You see all these things happening, but it's just really again, it's targeting a demographic of people, for one that a lot of times can't afford it but they would do anything to get it.

Okay, perfect. So given everything that we've discussed, what recommendations would you have for policymakers to ensure the health equity of individuals who come from underserved and marginalized communities?

I would say that they would have to put a disclaimer on everything that they put out in the market, let people know that this is really bad for your health, it causes cancer, it can cause death. I think they don't do enough of that.

They may have a little disclaimer at the end of the commercial or they have to make a note that this is something that can cause a disease or can cause your life to end based on the fact that you're utilizing what they call it recreationally. I would suggest to them that they make sure that people know and it's upfront and they're honest about who they're targeting. And they would even do some type of laws, some type of laws changes how they target communities as well. How they do it, how they are going after young people and things of that nature? How they are utilizing these young models and these young people to make it look cool. Making it look like something, that's actually acceptable. So I would say for the policymakers to make sure people are fully aware of the consequences of smoking.

And what do you think people like you and I could do to educate our community?

Well, we could even have a pop up shop. Do like a pop up shop in the community. A pop up shop gets the information out and anytime there's an information fair, resource fair, make sure that we're visible. It's all about having visibility and making sure that your voice is heard, and making sure your voice is strong.

Thank you so much. Do you have anything else that you would like to add?

No, I just feel passionate. I'm glad that I had an opportunity to be part of this. I feel passionate about how it's affecting our community, our young people, what it's doing, and how it's really tearing down our community, realistically it's really tearing down our community. So hopefully this makes a difference and we just start making that change.

And that's what I'm trying to do with this project is to bridge the gap between youth and adults. I feel like we don't have these conversations openly enough with each other and that's why it's really important just to have these conversations.



BLNG
A Belongings Piece

Okay, could you please tell us your name?

My name is Mahamed Shariff.

And the first question is, please tell me about your experiences with tobacco and how would you describe how you or your loved ones or your community was impacted?

Yeah, absolutely. So thankfully, I've never had a direct experience with tobacco. But in terms of community, I think a lot of the people around me, friends and family, have dealt with tobacco use. Initially, honestly, the biggest thing that it connects to me in terms of tobacco use is trauma. I, I look at the use of substances as a coping mechanism for trauma and I think that tobacco is a very accessible but also highly addictive and you know, highly dangerous substance. So I definitely saw a lot of the people around me use tobacco as a stimulant to kind of get over their problems, the traumas, maybe seeing like a homie, like, you know, die or somebody overdose or even domestic problems within their household or struggling in school, whatever it may be. I definitely experienced, especially in high school, a lot of the younger people around me, using tobacco to cope with just the everyday aspects of life being difficult. And I definitely saw it spiral in a very dangerous way as well. So that's been my experience.

With everything that we know about tobacco, could you share some of the ways that you've witnessed tobacco companies target these underserved and marginalized communities like ours?

Absolutely. So first and foremost, tobacco use is detrimental to brain development for kids 14 to, 14 to 21 and if not even older. It can cause cardiac problems, it can cause lung problems, it can cause you know, tons and tons and tons of cancers. And despite that, the amount of accessibility that young people have to these tobacco products. They can go to a vape store, they can go to a gas station, they can go to a tobacco store. So that's definitely, the fact that the government doesn't restrict that is huge.

We also see that a lot of youth, they know the implications and the problems that come with it, but they're stuck, they still continue to use it.

Exactly. Second, there is a hyper popularization of it right. There is a commercial aspect of it that is pushed right. And also beyond that. In neighborhoods where I grew up, space is a very, very miniscule thing. It's something that we kind of fight for, like community spaces, open spaces are things that we struggle with. Despite that, our government is giving incentives and tax breaks to tobacco stores. The neighborhood that I grew up in has multiple tobacco stores and multiple bars on one block. It doesn't have a single organic grocery store, for example, to promote healthy living. So things like that. And then lastly, I would definitely say the flavors, the fruit flavors the way that you can get a mango blast or ice, ice watermelon or all these different flavors. That can definitely incentivize a young person going like okay, it can't be that bad. It doesn't, it doesn't necessarily burn like a cigarette. So it's not that bad.

And a lot of these young people will say, "eww, a cigarette," but a vape or, e-cigarette, "oh, it doesn't affect me as much."

And it actually affects them more because of the continuous use.

Exactly.

A cigarette has what, like 14 to 16, we call them squares in the hood, *laughs* in each box, but that runs out, you know what I mean? And people kind of spread that out throughout the day but a kid has a nic in their pocket, they're hitting that the whole day.

And it'll have about 400 to 500 puffs.

Exactly and then they go and they buy another one. So I would definitely sum it up to the lack of restrictions for tobacco, the accessibility in marginalized communities to tobacco in comparison to the accessibility to healthier living.

And the fruit flavors and the commercialization of it. Once you mix all of that and how dangerous tobacco use is, it's almost crazy that we aren't doing something different about it.

Exactly. And these tobacco companies are using those three things to target our communities. Going off of that, what do you recommend for policymakers to ensure the health equity of individuals from communities like ours?

In all honesty, I've always been somebody who speaks the truth and is candid. We know that tobacco lobbies and tobacco companies are huge. We know that tobacco companies have a huge influence on our government on our legislators and they incentivize getting help from the legislator by telling them hey, we bring in business to your city. We bring in taxes to your city, we bring in money to your city, but what good is it? What good is any of that, when you guys are compromising? If the constituents that you serve, don't live healthy lives. Don't live long lives? What's the point of bringing in more money, bringing in more work and more taxes? If the constituents that voted you in are either living unhealthy lives that are difficult, or they're living very short lives. So I would definitely tell legislators "Hey, tax tobacco at a higher rate. Regulate, especially big companies, regulate how they package these tobaccos and how they sell these tobaccos. You can't put some fruit flavor on a tobacco, that's going to attract these kids and they make mistakes. I don't think it's necessarily pointing a finger at the kids. It's terrible for them to start this stuff.

And that's something that we don't want to do is shun or make a kid feel like they're bad because of it.

There's definitely, there's a level of exploitation and there's a level of pointing fingers and going after people, especially marginalized people that are in difficult situations that are dealing with a lot of different things at the same time. From identity issues, to economic issues, social issues, to racial issues, and for you to exploit that and then be like, hey, here's a cancer stick use this. And we're going to put a cancer stick at every corner of your block.

That can't fly. So definitely I would encourage our legislators to tax, to regulate and to create ways in which we slow this down and bring it down. That's definitely my opinion.

Perfect thank you. Do you have anything else that you'd like to add?

No, that's about it.

Okay, that's perfect..



Love
BLACK
Love

Perfect. Okay, if you could tell us your name.

My name is Sylvia Amos.

My first question is going to be please tell me about your experiences with tobacco. How would you describe how your loved one or your community was impacted?

I have never been a smoker. But my mother, both my mother and my father were smokers. My mother was a heavy smoker but my father quit in the 60s, he quit cold turkey. But my mother continued to smoke, and my mother was a community activist. They're known, well known in the community and well respected in the community. All of us tried to get my mother to quit smoking. Taking her cigarettes, she'd get mad at me. So when she came to my house. I'd crack her cigarettes up and I'm a grown adult but she was grown too. She got mad when she found her cigarette pack and there's broken cigarettes in there. But she ended up with lung cancer, a direct result of her years of smoking cigarettes, and it was terminal so they could not heal her. She had to go through the chemo and radiation and she still kept smoking. When she, when we started taking her to the doctor, we found out that she started smoking when she was 11 years old. That just literally shocked me, ya know? My mother did get married when she was 14, and she had a lot of us at a young age. She started smoking at 11 years old. She finally, I ended up and how it really impacted me, I took her in and she moved in with me because I had a younger sister who had no idea how to take care of someone with some of the issues my mother was going through. So I had her move in with me and she knew I don't smoke and when she moved in she asked me, "where are your ashtrays?" I don't have any ashtrays then she asked, "Well where am I going to smoke?" *laughs* "Not in here! There's no smoking in my house. You have to smoke in the great outdoors." And so she would call her sisters and everybody telling them how I was making her smoke outside in 20 below zero.

And that shows the addiction through everything she went through she still wants her cigarettes.

And she even, before that when we were bringing her home from the hospital she insisted to my brother, from the hospital take her directly to the store to get her her cigarettes. Nonetheless, she came to my house. And finally, that's when she finally stopped smoking. I wouldn't allow her to smoke in my house, it was too cold to go outside. So then she decided she'd quit. And it was amazing that she quit, it could be one week, two weeks, three weeks, after three weeks and that's when at the doctor which was interesting for me was when the doctor asked her "Do you, did you smoke, any smoke?" and she said no. And I said oh oh tell him you just quit three weeks ago.

Sena and Sylvia

laughs

I lost my mother. I had a husband that died. He smoked as well. He died of lung cancer as a direct result of years of smoking. He went a little faster than my mother did. It took her about a year, a little over a year after she was diagnosed before she passed. He passed probably within six or seven months of being diagnosed with an inoperable tumor. I have a daughter who smokes. She doesn't smoke now she finally quit but I used to, it bugged me that she smokes. Your kids, my grandkids, you smoked around the kids and she'd always say "Oh, I'm not smoking, I'm not smoking in their room I smoke in the basement." And I would tell her those commercials how the smoke goes through the house and into the bedsheets. A hand, a smoky hand comes around and chokes you. That's what happens. I used to leave her anonymous messages on her phone. I would tell her I'd call child protection on her if she didn't quit smoking, if she didn't quit smoking in the house. And she finally figured out it was me. I'd mail things to her. Oh my god, the thing that really got me. I'm a seamstress. And I made dresses for both of my granddaughter's for one of my kids' weddings and it was out of white taffeta. They wore it for that wedding. My brother was getting married shortly thereafter. So they wanted to be the flower girls so they had these dresses with dolls that had matching dresses. He wanted them in his wedding. So we went to my daughter's house to get her daughter's dress and it was hanging in the closet in the kids bedroom.

But it was yellow... the satin had turned yellow. And that was a real wake up call for her. How the cigarette smoke penetrated the garment and you couldn't get that color off. It stayed tainted yellow. That's how, because of them, that's how I really got involved with tobacco with NorthPoint back in 2007. At that time. I was actually President of the, appointed President of the Minnesota State Baptist Women's Auxiliary. Women it was easier to get. The women were involved and getting them involved through the churches and their pastors. With the women's auxiliary, we did a number of different things to go out and educate, do presentations with our women's group and share information with them and communicate what tobacco was doing and how it had an impact on us and our communities. So many smoke and it's so hard for them to be able to quit.

And especially in our communities we don't realize how much it's impacting us until a loved one is impacted or that we see it through our own eyes.

Exactly.

Instead of hearing it from other people.

And even though you know I used to tell my mother right on the side of the package it's telling you, I'm going to kill you. Isn't that enough to make you stop smoking? And that's because I didn't understand it as the addiction that it is until I became involved and understanding what they put in it and the menthol and what they did and to make it easier to smoke it. I didn't understand. I just kept asking her why can't you stop smoking? You might as well just roll up your dollar bill to be at the cost of those cigarettes. To me I just looked at it as just paper. It's just something that you're just puffing on.

You don't understand the feeling until you're the person smoking.

And then I realized that and I can't remember if this is a part of your question, but I realized that sometimes, I felt some guilt sometime afterwards. I felt that I assisted my mother years before.

BUT IT WAS YELLOW...
THE SATIN HAD TURNED
YELLOW. AND THAT WAS A
REAL WAKE UP CALL FOR
HER. HOW THE CIGARETTE
SMOKE PENETRATED YOU
COULDN'T GET THAT COLOR
OFF. IT STAYED TAINTED
YELLOW.

– SYLVIA AMOS

I worked at the Urban League for 35 years, the National Urban League had a conference every year. And at that conference, there was cigarette stations that gave out free cigarettes. I didn't smoke but I knew that my mother did. So I kept going up there and getting more so she wouldn't have to buy as many because they'd give a bunch of free ones. Not even thinking about what I'm doing to assist her. So that was clear that major conventions were African Americans would gather and they're offering them free cigarettes. And then the cigarettes always offered these gifts you get with all these different package labels. If you save the package and send them in you'd get more free stuff and I was the one sending them in and getting the stuff.

That's crazy. I mean, they incentivized smoking. It's probably not the same as it was back then. But a little bit different now with the price discounting and how they'll give you a buy one get one free, so might as well get two if you're able to get it for a cheaper price. They just find these ways...

Yeah, they have their ways of really and that's what I have learned. They have their ways and that's why many in the community will not stop it. They understand what the tobacco companies are doing

Right exactly.

Those who are addicted are ADDICTED. And even though they want to quit and then some of them will try to quit, it's an addiction.

It really is. You kind of talked about it a little in the previous question. But if you could describe a time that your loved one stopped smoking tobacco and then what was that transition like for you and if you could speak more about the challenges that you went through in that process?

For my mother the challenge was watching her die and knowing what caused it and then again, trying to work with her and my other siblings to get her to stop smoking was a challenge.

It took a lot to get her to finally quit and it took me bringing her into my home to get her to finally quit smoking and when she did the joy that not only she felt but I felt to know that you, you beat this you finally beat the addiction, you're still are gonna die from the cancer but you finally, she felt good about having having to quit. The biggest challenge was watching, my mother was such a huge part of the family and for all the grandkids. It was such a hardship for them to see their grandmother go. And even now I mean that's the main thing we get together every year on her birthday. We, my mother's, you talking Soul Food the movie Soul Food that was that was, that was us. My mother always cooks the meals. Anybody in the community was welcome to come so there could be 30 people at my mom's house on Sundays for dinner. We've tried to keep that going in her memory. All those things are lost now, those things are gone. And the kids bring up the fact that Big Grandma, that's what they would call her. This wouldn't be happening if Big Grandma was here. This wouldn't even be happening in the community if Big Grandma was here. And again I lost my husband to cancer and it was difficult, again to watch somebody die and he's at home and having to, I sort of at that time, you don't have difficulty accepting that this is what it is. And I kept saying because he had finally quit too. I told them well just do something, all he needed to do was eat, you can do something to make him feel better. He's not smoking anymore. And they will tell me well you know, you may come home, because he wasn't working then. And I was working and they said that you may come home and he just may be gone. And I couldn't imagine that. Although many times when I came home, he almost looked like he was. And eventually it came to that, I had to call the ambulance and have him transported to the hospital. As a direct impact of smoking cigarettes.

What advice would you give to someone going through that process of seeing a loved one that's addicted and how can they speak to them, what advice would you give to those people?

For me you have to continue to have compassion for them. You can't judge them. You know, don't say, don't tell them this is what happens when you smoke cigarettes. But continue to encourage them to quit if they haven't quit. When they have quit. Celebrate that.

BUT CONTINUE TO
ENCOURAGE THEM TO QUIT
IF THEY HAVEN'T QUIT.
WHEN THEY HAVE QUIT.
CELEBRATE THAT.

– SYLVIA AMOS

Again, even though you know that they may be leaving sooner than you wanted them to leave, just having them, I think it's important to have them talk to other family members that are still smoking or were smokers. I didn't even realize I had a son that was smoking. But he kept it from me. And he was an athlete and he didn't smoke in high school, and I was like why did you pick up smoking now... so late in your life. And we tell him, well look at your grandmother. Look what happened to her life. She died at 71. It was good to have her and to encourage her to speak to other family members about the impact that cigarette smoking had on her health and her life.

My next question is with everything that we know about tobacco, could you share some of the ways you've witnessed these tobacco companies target underserved and marginalized communities like ours?

Pretty much primarily through advertising. And again, like I said, conventions giving out free cigarettes. They had vans that came into the community to pass them out. When you're not a smoker, you don't notice those things until you become aware of what's going on. And that when I look at the advertising and how they use the hip hop community, to attract younger, younger folks. That's directed to our communities. They buy more advertising in the African American community than usually any other communities. So it's, it's a conscious effort to target our community. And to me, it's because they don't value us. And so we have to speak out against Big Tobacco and let them know that we're not taking it just laying down now, we're going to keep on and keep on until we eliminate their business. And keep young people from becoming addicted.

Especially now we hear, when we talk to a lot of youth they say oh cigarettes are disgusting or icky but a vape is more wow, I don't see any issue with that or any problems with that, a vape is just flavor and pretty. They just find different ways to hook them back in again, because we almost had a generation where no one was smoking cigarettes.

No one was picking up a cigarette because it wasn't appetizing. But now with the whole vaping it looks cool.

Exactly.

And even with that, talking to young people, it surprised me, especially in our community. We don't talk about it as much as we should. But talking to some young students of North High School when they told us that they believe that half the kids vape and how it impacts those who don't. That they lock the bathrooms and they can't get in? Parents in the community need to contact the school and let them know that this is going on. Kids want to learn and want to study and now they need to use the bathrooms. Now as a student my intention and mind is not where it should be. Now I have to wait until an opportunity for a door to open where I can use the bathroom. I think that's sad.

Very.

They are directly targeting our kids and it's important that we, those who are willing to go out there and talk against it, continue to do that and not let anybody stop us and have no fear. I've had to watch myself to not grab some of the folks and want to tell me something's wrong with me. *laughs* And telling them "I'm not the one, I'm not the one to start talking to like that." It's challenging but it's work that has to be done. If we can get more young people or young people talking to young people like you, that's a blessing. And young people listen to other young folks.

That's true we've seen that.

They won't listen to Mama but they'll listen to sister or friend.

Exactly. Given everything we've discussed, what recommendations would you have for policymakers to ensure the health equity of individuals who come from underserved and marginalized communities?

One of the key policies that I think we're working on now that I think really has to be pushed, is the nicotine free generation so it comes to a point where it will no longer be available to young people at all. So I think we have to just work hard so that gets passed.

I think we're making progress. But there's still a lot of work to be done.

And it's not happening fast enough.

Because they're continuing to do what they can to continue to pull more young folks and add more flavors. The different devices that they have come up with is just shocking. When you're not a smoker, you don't come in contact with this. What I share with the folks at the churches, the main thing that they want to know about, especially parents, is vaping so they can identify what their kids are doing and talk to them about it.

And that's another thing that we heard, with a cigarette, you can tell if someone is smoking because you smell it, you see the butts. But with e-cigarettes and vapes, they look like a little USB so you can walk into a room and scan the room and not even know that...

Right, right.

That there's a vape in there. So it's hard for parents to figure out or identify that their kid is using or not using because of how easy it is to hide it.

And this passing of the cannabis bill made it all challenging because now they use those same devices. So you don't know whether they're... what they're smoking. Sooner or later we're going to have flavored cannabis. *laughs*

Exactly, if it's not already out there.

And hopefully the Big Tobacco Company doesn't move from cigarettes to cannabis. I think we definitely just have to continue to stay in the legislators' faces and encourage them to pass the legislation now, and really push for the nicotine free generation.

Do you have anything else that you would like to add?

Like I said, it's a blessing to see young people and I would love to see you continue to try to train more young people within our community within the churches and the mosques to talk to. I know at my church part of the group the third Sundays are our youth Sundays, we use our youth to make announcements and talk about vaping to their peers.

Right.

That's kind of my main goal with this project. To bridge that gap between our youth and our adults so that they can better understand each other through other people's stories. So they can accept it, I guess. Educating about the Civil Rights Movement. Many of them will say I wasn't around then but it still impacts them now. When you understand that not only was this happening then, you also have the tobacco company. They have the quote where RJ Reynolds said "We don't smoke that shit, we just sell it. We reserve the right to smoke for the young, the poor, the Black, and the stupid." That's what they think of us. Is that acceptable? Why would you want to continue to fill their pockets?

Exactly.

You don't want to fill their pockets and not get anything out of it. All you're doing is feeding, you're feeding their families and ignoring yours. Getting kids' attention and so that they can understand that history, because if we don't understand our history, we will repeat it.

Thank you so much Mrs. Sylvia.



If you could tell us your name

My name is Musab Adam.

Okay. Please tell me about your experiences with tobacco. How would you describe how you, a loved one or your community was impacted.

For us tobacco experiences, I grew up in the city and smoking is one of the first early things that kids can call it if you're not doing it your not really cool. At the time it wasn't really more cigarettes, people tried cigarettes but went away from cigarettes right away and it was kind of like the gateway drug to start smoking marijuana and all of that. But it was also easier to be able to like having a guy outside at that time. It wasn't more towards vapes and stuff like that, but it was black and milds in the industry. They used to push that a lot because it was flavored tobacco and it was cool to do it and everybody was smoking it so it was like let me get a black and mild, it was only \$1.50. You would have it in your ear and it was a statement piece. You might not even be smoking it, but you look cool with it like yeah I got a black and mild.

And how cheap it is. \$1.50, wow.

It was super cheap. And a lot of the corner stores didn't require you to have an ID if they know you are a kid in the community and they know that you're not going to get them set up, they're like yeah you can have one. Even cigarettes a lot of our youth and black people, we also used to smoke menthol.

Right, exactly.

So now in like the intercity corner store New Port shorts New Port 100's menthol. So they created all these flavors because it's easier to take in, you don't see the negative side or the bad side of cigarettes so why not smoke it.

Exactly. That's so true. My next question is please describe a time you or a loved one stopped tobacco use. What was that transition like? Were there any challenges and what didn't go well?

100%. Right after high school, cause again, growing up I was, I used to smoke black and milds and all of that but it shows you that especially if you're an athlete, you'll notice it if you smoke often running around with your friends you'll see it the next day. As you're playing ball because as you get a little bit older, you start to play less and less. In highschool you're playing sports every single day you don't notice it. But once you're playing like once a week, we start to see that we're winded, we have no air. You're getting tired very fast. And then you're like okay, I need to quit this. And also just the smoke, you have to cover it up. A lot of us lived with our parents.

You can't come home smelling like smoke.

You're smoking with your left hand because you know, you're gonna shake your parents hand with your right. So I quit for like a couple of months and started feeling good. The hardest part is it is a mental game. And then right when you quit and as you get a little bit older, everybody's smoking hookah now. So it's like a social thing.

Exactly.

And again, it goes back to that flavored tobacco, different flavors and all of that.

That's so true.

Quitting is easier a little bit but the hardships you go through. It's like your friends are like "bro do you have a lighter" or you're walking by the gas station. Everybody's like "oh, do you have a cigarette? Can you give me one." And I don't smoke anymore. So it creates that hardship, so even after you quit, you get pushed to it. Everybody's either asking you, your friends might say come to the lounge with us. Next thing you know a few weeks later you're back in it.

So that was the challenge for you basically.

Yes, yes.

It's the peer pressure and the people around you.

And they don't take it, they take it apart. It's like smoking cigarettes, eww it's disgusting but smoking hookah is okay.

Right, exactly

They both have nicotine; they're both still bad for you. But one is, you know, condemned against then the other one is like, yeah, if you smoke hookah you're cool you can go out and hang with us.

That's true. So with everything you know about tobacco could you share some of the ways you witnessed companies target underserved and marginalized communities like ours.

Yes. Tobacco companies supported corner stores. Like if you see and as bad as it sounds, I feel like a lot of 7/11's, Arab communities through the vapes they messed up our communities. If you see a 7/11 or corner store, they only have them in the inner city and marginalized communities. You never see them in the suburbs. Now we have 150 different flavors of vapes. They have cigarettes. They sell them by singles. They're having flavored tobacco. They're having hookah, all of that. A lot of that started getting pushed towards the city, which made it easier. Because I remember, the city of Minneapolis or in St. Paul they started doing, they don't do tobacco in big gas stations like menthols. And they also don't do indoor smoking. Yet, they made it easy for people to open up vape shops, they made it easier to open up tobacco shops. So now it's like kids are coming in and it gets to a point where I think they're spending, they're getting a vape every two days. You know, upwards from \$25 to \$30 every two-three days. They're expensive. So it's like they're targeting that to our kids. They have different flavors. They're not asking IDs and these kids that are getting it are like high schoolers... middle school, you know.

And now, highschoolers are selling it to the middle schoolers like it's a business. You can't get it but I can so let me make a couple dollars off of it.

But also in cities, there's an influx of tobacco shops and that's why it makes it so much easier for you because of how accessible it is.

It's super accessible, every couple of blocks. If you go to Dinkytown I think there's like 5, 6, 7 of them in Dinkytown. Within northeast I think there's like over 20. So it's like every couple of blocks I can go and I know there's something there. On Lake Street here, there's so many different tobacco shops back to back to back. And a lot of them are also owned by a lot of East African people who are also getting into it because there are a lot of East African tobacco shop owners. They're just like okay, I'm making money from this. Why would I open up a halal grocery store when I could just open up a tobacco shop and make more money.

Exactly at the end of the day it goes back to the money.

I thought that too. How much do these guys make, because they're getting the individual vapes for maybe \$5 - \$6 apiece, selling it for \$25? So they're making 3x for each vape. So like they're doing it on purpose. So it's like some of them are seeing what sells the most. It comes straight from China or whatever the case is. Loon is a Minnesota brand and it's a popular one.

And it's Palestinian owned.

Yeah. Talk about that, you know what I mean? The guys instantly became a multi billion dollar company after the pandemic. So it's us within us hurting our own communities.

And if people start to have these conversations, everything will slowly but surely be better.

It's easy for us because I've seen the power of conversations.

SO IT'S US WITHIN US
HURTING OUR OWN
COMMUNITIES.

– MUSAB ADAM

When we started not going to Starbucks, we stopped going to McDonald's and the numbers went down. The first couple days were hard for all of us to go through caffeine withdrawal *laughs* but now you have to stand on business.

Right, and then finding places like Nomadic cafe.

Thank you, thank you. Exactly, to see that happen for all of us. If we started condemning a lot of these tobacco shops and holding these owners accountable. We wouldn't have a lot of these issues. It's like the young people don't care enough because once you shed light to it then you can get it to become better. Because if you started with nicotine easily you're thinking what's next. Okay let me try THC. Okay, now that you've tried THC you know you go to weed and then let me try alcohol. Now you have a generation of young kids that are chasing that next high and that's what we're dealing with right now. And a lot of our guys when they come from the treatment side, and they come from using heavier drugs like opioids and stuff like that. A lot of it is that they have to get that nicotine so it's almost like a switch. And with everything that they're going through, I feel bad for them. A lot of them are spending a lot and one they're sharing with each other because some of the guys might not be able to buy it. Now all their money that they get, they're stipend goes straight to nicotine and they can't even get basic needs because they have to get this nicotine.

So given everything that we have discussed, what recommendations would you have for policy makers to ensure health equity of individuals in our communities?

First and foremost, allow us the chance to be able to say who can open up the shops because I know a lot of us are really trying to open up home care, home health care, and we go through extensive background checks, licensing, all of that. Have them also go through all of that. Minimize what they can bring into the shop and what they can't bring into the shops. If you make things very difficult like they do in the burbs, it will not happen in the inner-cities.

But it's just so easy as long as you just have a fun storefront you can bring in about anything you want.

All the bright colors.

Exactly and that's all you need. A lot of it is also that we celebrate these people "Oh you just opened up a tobacco shop!" But it's also making that many more kids smokers and making that many more families addicted and then later on it, as these kids get hooked, healthcare becomes a problem you know. So I say make it harder for people to open up these corner shops, tobacco shops and start fining people if they're selling it to under 21. Some hookah spots say that it's over 21, but everyone that I know that smokes there is under 21 so how are they getting in there.

And some of these lounges are not even legal. The cities don't even know about them.

They open up at shady times and close at shady times. I remember some friends went out this one time and they went to this lounge and they were looking at their credit card charges and they were like "Yo, I got charged by this transportation company." It wasn't a transportation company. They didn't even have a system that was properly and legally set up. And this is like a very well known lounge that everybody goes to and it was so crazy. *laughs*

So is there anything else that you'd like to add?

No, is there anything else you would like to ask?

I don't think so. I think we're all good. Perfect. Thank you so much.

A LOT OF IT IS ALSO
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ADDICTED.

– MUSAB ADAM



If you could tell us your name.

Hi, my name is Heybad Sharif. I am the Executive Director of Access Healing Center, a culturally specific faith based treatment center for African and Muslim people.

Perfect. Thank you. Please tell me about your experiences with tobacco and substances. How would you describe how you or a loved one was impacted or your community?

So, honestly speaking, growing up in America, I grew up in a time where we had a lot where I grew up, we had a lot of tobacco education, like cigarettes are bad for you and secondhand smoke was bad for you. I grew up in Maine so majority, white, white community. We learned a lot about the dangers of tobacco smoke and how it can impact people like secondhand smoke, all of that. But I feel like things kind of changed because you see cigarettes as bad. I remember going to college and there's a new, I think I was like the first wave of where my generation thought that hookah was cool to smoke. Yeah, studying and going to different places and people thought, okay, this is better than cigarettes. When in reality it was not, it was worse. Smoking 100 packs of cigarettes in one session. Because it's flavored, people thought it was less bad, and it was a social, social type of thing. So we went from tobacco, learning about tobacco and that smoking is bad or tobacco cigarettes are bad to what is it called? Chews, tobacco chews? I don't know what they're called. The ones that are put on your cheek, those are bad for you too. Oh hookah, yeah, this is a social thing. So I feel like it keeps getting more and more innovative on how they target our communities. So first, it was cigarettes, then it was hookah and now its vapes. I work with a lot of clients who are coming off of hard drugs, fentanyl, meth, and they're addicted to those substances. So in our treatment center, we allow them to smoke vapes and cigarettes because we feel like okay, they're coming off of this really hard drug, which is really hard on their body. Even though cigarettes and vapes are bad for everyone. They're not any better and they're bad for their lungs. It's like, okay, it helps them get off that drug because they're getting their mind off of the drug.

And then after they're off of the drug and they've been in recovery for a long time, then we do some tobacco cessation classes, but it's a lot harder because they're like, oh, I'll just quit smoking tobacco. I'll just quit smoking cigarettes, and I'll do vapes because vapes are flavored, right? People assume this is just air and it's flavored, and it's not as bad for you.

When in reality we know more about cigarettes than we do about what's inside vapes.

And I've seen one friend who heavily smoked vapes, and then she ended up in the hospital and she got something called popcorn lungs. Yeah, so it's like, imagine tobacco takes a long time for it to show up. You know, back in the day, what we used to see in school like dark lungs and stuff like that. Imagine you're still in your 20s and then right away you get popcorn lungs so that definitely has to be 10x worse.

But also the cigarettes, a pack of cigarettes. 20 cigarettes and people kind of try to move that throughout the day. And the vapes have like 400 or 500 puffs and it's so accessible, you're just able to smoke it wherever.

You can smoke it in your room, in your bed, it doesn't smell so it's definitely a different type of addiction. People think it's,, it's less severe than actually smoking cigarettes. And then what I've also noticed is people that normally wouldn't smoke now vape. So like, a lot of Muslim girls or Somali girls or people that I'm familiar with will vape. Because it's not something that you can smell off of them.

Exactly right.

Yeah, they're like, oh, it helps me not overeat. They find excuses to smoke it. It takes my mind off of things. Now, I feel like the tobacco companies or whoever is behind this wider market because now they found something that doesn't smell it's undetectable but just as bad for you.

And that's where the addiction comes in.

They're saying that these are the reasons why I'm smoking when in reality, they're just addicted to that nicotine

Yeah.

My next question is, please describe the time your clients or the people you've worked with stopped tobacco or substance use and what was that transition like and what were the challenges?

So when my clients are stopping tobacco use or vapes, is vape and tobacco the same thing?

Yes, all tobacco products including vapes have nicotine which is what makes them similar.

Okay. So honestly, the first thing that they ask for is a way to stop using it, whether it's gum, whether it's patches, whether it can be fixed. So that process is really, they always tell me mind over anything else like the addiction is more mental than anything else, that's what they feel. So it's just very difficult, but I've noticed that when people stop, they end up going back to it because it's something that starts, it's a comfort thing. So it's actually very, it's a lot more difficult to stop than anything. Even with my clients I only have one client that stopped smoking or vaping. She's actually here and you might want to talk to her too. And so it's extremely difficult.

I think it's something that they seem to just be doing, like muscle memory, because I know that when some people try to stop especially the youth they'll use something else instead of the vape, so it might be a whistle that they're blowing into something of that sorts because they're so used to inhaling something that they say even if they're inhaling air that's something that helps them stop.

And now there's, I know some people when they try to stop nicotine there's nicotine-less vapes now. Just flavor, apparently which I'm pretty sure is not the best either.

THEY ALWAYS TELL ME
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LIKE THE ADDICTION IS
MORE MENTAL THAN
ANYTHING ELSE, THAT'S
WHAT THEY FEEL.
– HEYBAD SHARIF

They still have the same chemicals.

Yeah. Absolutely. It's a struggle. So when my clients are trying to stop, they try to find different needs, they try to find a different way to cope because it's not something you can honestly stop cold turkey.

Do you have any clients that smoke cigarettes and went from cigarettes to vapes?

Yes. I have a client that stopped smoking and then he went to vapes thinking this is a lot better. That's honestly the first transition. From cigarettes to vapes. And the vapes are way more expensive than cigarettes.

Exactly. Some of them are double.

And they're constantly charging it and because the guys, my clients also live in our facilities, they'll try to charge them and one of them blew up.

Wow.

And so vapes, there's this risk of okay it's hurting your lungs but I want to say that it can, it can blow up in your pocket too. So I remember he tried to charge it because they let you charge vapes which is wild.

Just crazy.

And it blew up in the socket and there's a huge burn mark on our wall. So now we're like, okay, you guys can't charge your vapes.

That's another part, the environmental aspect of vaping because how many vapes are being thrown around. The batteries that are in them, they also could just blow up.

So it's a struggle for them.

AND SO VAPES, THERE'S
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YOUR POCKET TOO.

– HEYBAD SHARIF

I haven't seen, I'm telling you, I've been working with a lot of people and it's hard for them to say okay, I'm stopping all substances.

Wow. My next question is with everything that you know about tobacco? Could you share some of the ways you've witnessed these companies target underserved and marginalized communities like ours?

I feel that they're marketing a lot more to our communities, especially like menthol cigarettes, I know in Minnesota now they're trying to ban menthol cigarettes. I've seen a lot of POC tend to look for menthol cigarettes because it's easier to smoke. And then that's what you find in corner stores. Like anywhere around here, you'll be able to find them. So I feel like we're targeted more with all the vape shops. We're targeted a lot more. You can find vape shops in the suburbs, but it's a lot more common in the city and they're more accessible.

That's definitely one way that they target is that every block in Minneapolis there's a corner store that you can grab tobacco products from.

And it's Muslims who own a lot of these vape shops. Loon is owned by a Muslim family. One of my one of my staff members friend said that and I was like crazy.

I'm sure we know one person that owns a tobacco shop, a Muslim tobacco shop. Given everything that we've discussed, What recommendations would you have for policymakers to ensure health equity of individuals who come from communities like ours?

I guess when it comes to tobacco addiction, it requires a culturally sensitive approach. What works for other communities might not work for us. So that's really important, and also providing the resources for community organizations who work with our populations to be able to do those tobacco cessation or do ad campaigns on why they're bad. So I feel it because this is even hitting our older community, I have friends who their mothers vape.

Sena and Heybad
Which is crazyyy.

And smoke even hookah.

Exactly.

I know one organization, they're called the Wellshare International, they had a campaign.

We work with them!

Oh, no way! They said, 'cause in Somali we say Shaax and Sheko which means tea and talk. Yeah, but they're like not not hookah and talk, Shisha and Sheko or Shisha and Shaax. And they had this interest. I read it somewhere and was like this is brilliant, because usually culturally we drink tea and talk, you don't smoke and talk or drink tea and smoke hookah.

Right.

So having tailored, tailored approaches like that, I think will stick with people a lot more and let them know the dangers, because also I'm at that age where all my friends are getting married, having kids and all that stuff, and I know people who don't stop smoking hookah while they're pregnant. And I've actually ended friendships because of that because you're not only yourself but you're harming your unborn. So I think a very open dialogue, judgment free, culturally sensitive approach. Also in a language that they can understand.

Because it's very taboo in our communities. So having these types of conversations I feel like is definitely the first step.

Absolutely, yeah.

Okay, perfect. Do you have anything else that you'd like to add?

No but thank you for this opportunity. Learning from each other is so important.

Perfect. Wonderful, thank you!

Cessation Resources for Those Impacted by Tobacco Use

Access Healing

Faith Based Healing Center

612-217-2863

2817 Anthony Ln S #310 St Anthony, MN 55418

My Life, My Quit for Teens

Text “Start My Quit” to 36072

QuitPartner

1800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669)

Text “QUITNOW” to 333888

quitSTARTapp

SmokefreeMom

Quit for Two—for pregnant woman

Text “MOM” to 222888

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

1800-662-HELP (4357)

As you come to the end of this book, I am filled with gratitude. Gratitude for the individuals who shared their stories, their struggles, and their triumphs. Gratitude for those who tirelessly work to combat the devastating effects of tobacco use. And gratitude for you, the reader, for taking the time to delve into these pages.

I hope that this book has served its purpose—to raise awareness and educate the community about the profound impact of tobacco on our lives. It is my wish that it sparks conversations, inspires action, and perhaps even changes perspectives.

But the journey does not end here. It continues with each person who chooses to take a stand against the big tobacco, each individual who decides to support initiatives aimed at prevention and cessation, and each community that rallies together to create a healthier future (and a smoke free generation)

So, as you close this book, I urge you to carry this message forward. Let us continue to open our minds, to absorb knowledge, and to work towards a world free from the grip of tobacco.

With heartfelt appreciation,
Sena Geleto