

Arizona SmokeFree Living Builds Wide Support for Healthy Air

THE NEED

In Maricopa County, one million residents live in multi-unit housing. In the apartments and condos they live in, secondhand smoke can travel from one unit to another. For those residents, having a smoker next door means that their apartment—their home—isn't safe.

“Before, it was almost impossible for me to go in my bathroom and have a shower. It was like they were smoking right next to me.” - Maricopa County tenant

The smoke passing into their homes threatens the health of all residents, particularly young children and elderly residents with health conditions.

With the help of funds from the American Lung Association and the Arizona State Department of Health, Mary Kurth of the American Lung Association in Arizona and Susan Bergquist of the Maricopa County Department of Public Health focused on creating a movement with diverse support that would be sustainable for years to come.

The new community leadership team was Arizona SmokeFree Living and they had a simple mission statement: “Empower Arizona Communities to live Smokefree.”

“That mission statement was important. It gave us something everyone - government, business, community, faith, landlords, tenants - could sign onto.” - Mary Kurth

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

With planning in place, Arizona SmokeFree Living started recruiting partners. Some of the partners included groups that were already working together on tobacco coalitions but they focused on attracting new partners.

They reached out to local groups that had an interest in health equity or housing access. Early partners included Native Health and the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, two organizations concerned with the health of Arizona's American Indian population. Tanner Community



“Our apartment complex is full, and I've got 235 people on the waiting list. That tells me that smokefree is the way to go.”

- Myron Ware, Rehoboth Place Manager

Development Corporation, a faith-based non-profit, and the Southwest Fair Housing Council, a fair housing advocacy network, also joined as partners.

They started talking with property managers including Tiempo Development and Management which controls more than 2,000 apartment units. Arizona SmokeFree Living had initially planned on only holding half-day workshops for property managers, several property managers wanted to get more involved.

“We were amazed with the different people and groups that wanted to help. They had access to big audiences that we wanted to get our message to. We quickly had a lot of new voices at the table.” - Mary Kurth



GETTING TO WORK

Arizona SmokeFree Living made it their top priority to protect residents in affordable housing developments from secondhand smoke. For senior residents, the need was particularly great—many have serious health conditions but they have fixed budgets that limit where they can live.

Some affordable housing developments, such as Rehoboth Place were smokefree from the start. Others, like Broadway Terrace, passed voluntary smokefree policies in existing developments, which made some property managers nervous.

“When we officially became a smoke free property, I thought, we’re going to lose people, high turnover- but we got such positive feedback from the residents, even some of the smokers.” - Yudelka Cesar, Broadway Terrace Manager

Smokefree property managers were interested to see if other managers were getting similar feedback. Arizona SmokeFree Living started supporting a property managers group, where managers meet to share the strategies and successes they had experienced by going smokefree.

To help tenants find housing, the Arizona SmokeFree Living website (www.azsmokefreeliving.org) created a smokefree housing directory.

FOLLOWING THROUGH

While the experiences at properties like Rehoboth Place and Broadway Terrace were positive, other properties had violators who were still smoking in their apartments. Property managers and non smoking tenants weren’t sure what to do.



“My husband has lung damage. The number one reason we moved here was because it was smokefree.”

-Rehoboth Place resident

“We had to set up complaint protocols. Cigarette smoke would be coming through the vents in a smokefree property and many seniors were afraid to speak out, for fear that they would be kicked out.” - Phillip Carpenter, Arizonans Concerned About Smoking

Once again, Arizona SmokeFree Living’s strong partner base paid off. The Southwest Fair Housing Council helped seniors exercise their rights and led them through the process to report a violation. The Arizona Attorney General’s office has even stepped up to show support. According to Carpenter, having them onboard shows how important these smokefree policies truly are.

RESULTS

Between the efforts of Arizona SmokeFree Living and their wide range of partners, 4,000 more residents now live in properties that have gone smokefree and the numbers keep rising. Various programs have received additional financial support. New partners continue to come onboard and the work continues.

