

Harrisburg Area YMCA  
Tobacco Control Program  
Programs and Services for Amish Communities

**OVERVIEW/TESTIMONIAL:** The Harrisburg Area YMCA Tobacco Control Program serves the Amish Communities mainly in Northern Dauphin County. These programs and services initially began when an elder of the community, reached out to the YMCA because he heard through a YMCA board member, that the YMCA offers these programs and services to the community supported by the American Lung Association and the PA Department of Health. Initial programs conducted were in the form of tobacco use prevention programs for a group of Amish youth that would meet on a regular basis. In attendance at these prevention programs were approximately 50 youth and 20 adults. The elders of this community always attended with the youth but would not give their input. They were mainly there to observe and make sure that the content of the program was sufficient to their needs because they did not want certain topics discussed such as tobacco use and the effects on pregnancy. From these first prevention programs, a few of the adults did take advantage of the free cessation programs that were offered. News spread about these programs across the different Amish communities in Northern Dauphin County and even parts of Northumberland County. From this, the Amish school districts scheduled prevention programs to be conducted at their schools throughout their school year and this has been occurring for approx. 10-15 years. Other programs and events have occurred and were in partnership with Dauphin County Drug and Alcohol. These events were larger, held at venues that could hold a lot of people, and usually involved all Amish communities in the area with hundreds of people. They were usually in the form of education/awareness programs.

**BEST PRACTICES:**

1. Trust: It is important to build trust with the male elders of the community. This is done by discussing with them exactly what they would want discussed, what they would not want discussed and then making sure that it is followed-through. At times, there are certain issues that they do not want mentioned, especially to their youth.
2. Meet them where they are: They are usually not willing to travel to you. It seems like they feel more comfortable on their turf. A lot of the meetings and programs were on their farms and meeting places. For the larger events with hundreds of people we would meet at a community center and even in actual barns.
3. Develop a relationship with a school board member: They have school boards that run districts of schools. Many times if there is a program happening at one school, they want it for the entire district that is usually multiple schools.
4. Don't be flashy: Dress plain, keep your phone turned off, don't expect to be able to use electronics or show a powerpoint presentation. Although, sometimes this is able to be done but be sure to discuss it ahead of time to make sure there is electricity and they are O.K. with using electronics.

5. Keep it simple: I've found that they respond better to basic facts and terms, especially the youth. The youth and even the adults love to see interactive displays and participate in hands on activities.
6. Don't take pictures: The Amish Community does not like their pictures to be taken. However, sometimes if you ask first, they will let you take a picture of their farm and sometimes of them. This is part of building trust.
7. Respect: Show respect towards them and their values. Participate in things that they will do at meetings such as singing and prayer even if you don't agree with it.

#### **SUCSESSES:**

1. Some of the farms that normally would grow tobacco, have stopped since participating in the programs.
2. The attitudes toward the tobacco industry and tobacco farming have slowly changed from favorable to unfavorable.
3. They are open to using NRT for those that are tobacco users and want to quit.
4. The elders of the communities value these tobacco prevention/cessation programs in the area as a resource for them and their youth.

#### **CHALLENGES:**

1. Communication: It tends to be difficult to get in touch with this community. Many times it takes weeks and even months to be able to have a conversation with them. They do have phones however, a lot of times you are leaving multiple messages until you get a call back. Sometimes it is better to call their business if they own a business.
2. The Amish Community likes to meet in large groups: Many times they bring all communities together for these types of programs so that all can hear the information that is presented. It usually turns into a couple of hours or even most of the day that you are spending with them. (However, this does help to build trust with them)
3. It is usually on their terms: They will reach out to you and expect you to be available at a date and time that is good for them. If you have to reschedule an event it seems to take a long time and months later.