



“ I made a decision to quit smoking so I have the lungs to exercise, so I can have a physically healthy future, and in turn, have a mentally healthy future.”

Carla was sick and tired of being sick and tired. After a half dozen recent trips to the emergency room and witnessing a smoking buddy’s death, Carla decided it was time to quit smoking — at age 70, after 52 years. “Seeing this person drop dead from a massive heart attack was a rude awakening. She was overweight, a heavy smoker, four years younger than me. It was very depressing. I had to come to terms with myself that I’d rather be able to breathe, and have some quality of life left after 70 years, than snuff out my life with something as poisonous as smoking.” Carla hopes to share her story and help young people. “I want to cry sometimes when I see young kids smoking. The main thing that has helped me has been returning to the club, using my hands. I’m washing pots and pans, anything I can to do keep my hands busy. Anyone can do it, but it has to be for yourself.”

Certified Peer Support Specialist Sahra Colford has quit smoking after 20 years. She believes it’s important to be a good role model for people she serves. “I am working on that total recovery package. I need to be both physically and mentally healthy for my own future and also to give hope to others about what is possible. For me, the first step to physical health is freedom from nicotine. I made a decision to quit smoking so I have the lungs to exercise, so I can have a physically healthy future, and in turn, have a mentally healthy future. They go hand in hand and now I can tell others I did it!” said Colford.

Carla and Sahra are trailblazers at Northern Lakes Community Mental Health where we’re starting a 12-month groundbreaking project to promote tobacco-free living among people with mental illness. The project’s primary goals are to train mental health professionals to better screen for tobacco use, support and assist persons with mental illnesses to stop using tobacco, and assist Northern Lakes to realize its vision of a tobacco-free culture.

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The effort is being made possible by an American Lung Association “Expanding Smokefree Communities” Community Transformation Grant (CTG) through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Northern Lakes is one of only five grant sites in the country.

Under the grant, we’ll develop policy, incorporating the five As (Ask, Advise, Assess, Assist, Arrange) into our protocols and electronic medical records, and educate and provide cessation support to staff and the persons we serve.

A change initiative of this magnitude requires many hands and broad support. We established a core leadership team of 10 staff who attended the CDC’s CTG Action Institute in Dallas, Texas, in December. The group attended three days of intensive presentations and workshops and returned with an understanding of tobacco cessation best practices and a workplan.

“I took that trip as my cue to begin my own journey to quit,” shared Colford, who was on the team of ten. “I couldn’t be a smoker at an event with the American Lung Association! I quit the day we left for Dallas.”

The core team has presented to the Board of Directors and trained all managers. Michigan Department of Community Health posters focusing on smokers with mental illness are posted throughout Northern Lakes’ four offices. Quit resources, both national and local, are being collected on a special web page.

Northern Lakes has also assembled a strong community leadership team with more than 60 partners from a variety of agencies committed to the success of the project. They’ve have been invaluable in providing perspective as well as data for the community needs assessment.

Over 40 percent of people with mental illness use tobacco and 70 percent of those tobacco users with mental illness want to quit. Jim Harrington with the American Lung Association in Michigan, said, “Asking each person if they use tobacco, advising them to stop if they do, and helping them with cessation resources is critical to their success. Persons with mental illness can and have successfully quit using tobacco, dramatically improving the quality and length of their life. In addition, because tobacco use can decrease the effectiveness of many psychiatric medications, those people with mental illness who quit may respond better to treatment or need less medication for their mental illness. This project will definitely save lives.”

**GREG PAFFHOUSE**

**CEO, Northern Lakes Community Mental Health**

#### The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

continues its long-standing dedication to improving the health and wellness of all Americans through the Community Transformation Grant program. CTG is funded by the Affordable Care Act’s Prevention and Public Health Fund. CDC supports and enables awardees to design and implement community-level programs that prevent chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. CTG expects to improve the health of more than 4 out of 10 U.S. citizens — about 130 million Americans.

CTG works to create healthier communities by making healthy living easier and more affordable where people work, live, learn, and play. Awardees are improving health and wellness with strategies that focus on areas such as:



**Tobacco-free living**



**Active living and healthy eating**



**Clinical and community preventive services to prevent and control high blood pressure and high cholesterol.**

Awardees may also focus on disease prevention and health promotion, including social and emotional wellness (e.g., facilitating the early identification of mental health needs and access to quality services) and healthy and safe physical environments.