



TOBACCO FREE ENVIRONMENT INFORMATION FOR STAFF

Oak Hill’s mission statement states that Oak Hill “sets the standard for providing services and supports for people with disabilities”. We also strive to set the standard as an employer regarding our obligation to provide a safe environment for all employees. We have found that tobacco use has placed program participants and employees at risk for harm. Several program locations, including campus, have suffered fires due to cigarettes being improperly extinguished. Nonsmokers have complained about working near smoking areas where the smell and smoke permeates the buildings as well as second hand smoke.

The two major hospitals in the area, Hartford Hospital and St. Francis, have implemented tobacco-free environments at all of their locations in order to “model” best practices in the communities they serve. Oak Hill seeks to do the same. In fact, Oak Hill and its colleague agencies are frequently characterized by state agencies as health care providers, and in many respects we are.

Benefits of a Tobacco-Free Environment

There are many benefits to creating an entirely tobacco-free environment. The risk of fires and property damage will decline. We’ll reduce the likelihood of serious cancers and other illnesses in smokers and non-smokers. The rate of absenteeism due to smoking-related illness should decrease. We also anticipate that the costs of health insurance, workers’ compensation and property and casualty insurance coverage will decrease over time.

Our Plan

We will present a proposal to DDS’s Human Rights Commission to allow us to provide smoking cessation supports to our program participants. Once that is in place, our program participants will receive supports through their teams and smoking cessation programs that may be available to them. If necessary, we will look for grant-funding to supplement the costs of smoking cessation programs and treatments for our program participants.

We do not intend to ostracize or penalize employees who smoke. We are not requiring employees to quit, but smoking will not be permitted at any worksite. We will be changing our Smoking Policy to address this change. We understand that for those employees who will take this as an opportunity to quit smoking, doing so may be a challenge. To that end, we will provide education and supports for our employees through our health insurance carrier and public health agencies.

Timeframe

We plan on taking a full year to implement all aspects of this initiative – from drafting the policy, to providing the proper health care assistance to employees and program participants, to communicating with parents, guardians, vendors, landlords and visitors, and, finally, to implementing the policy in a way that respects the rights of our program participants and staff.