

# The Tobacco Free Times

## Free Super Smash Bros. Tourney Coming Your Way

By Chris Bradley

Gamers, get ready! On Saturday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Leatherstocking Education on Alcoholism/Addictions Foundation (LEAF) will host a livestreamed Super Smash Bros tournament online for area youth. The FREE Super Smash Bros tournament will feature prize money, prevention messages and interaction in an accompanying chat box.

The online tournament is LEAF's latest activity to engage youth creatively. Super Smash Bros is a popular competitive video game on the Nintendo Switch gaming console that features a variety of iconic characters such as Super Mario. The bracket-based tournament will have contestants going head to head until there is a final winner. And did we mention there will be prize money?



The initial response to COVID-19 has presented many barriers for organizations to continue engaging with youth in the community. LEAF and Tobacco Free Communities Delaware Otsego Schoharie (TFC-DOS) have worked together to break down these barriers by providing activities, such as the Great Otsego Outdoor Challenge and the Mobilize Against Tobacco Lies Week of Action. Both provided an opportunity for youth to connect and engage safely during the pandemic, one through isolated physical activity promoting healthy behaviors and the other through vir-

tual education surrounding tobacco marketing.

"We offer many ways to engage with community members regarding their interests," said Tessa Cutting, Prevention Specialist with LEAF. "Our Great Otsego Outdoor Challenge drew interest from young families while our gaming tournaments often draw young people who are not as interested in outdoor activities."

The tournament will be live streamed on Twitch a free online streaming platform for games and hobbies, hosted by local One-onta gaming business, Serenity Hobbies. Registration is free for residents of Otsego, Delaware, Tioga, Broome St. Lawrence, and Chemung counties. You can sign up at <https://coinoplegends.com/>

## Poverty & Mental Illness Increase Likelihood of Smoking, Barriers to Quitting

By Jennifer Hill

Despite the barriers, people afflicted by either or both still want to quit.

Research has long shown that poverty, mental illness and smoking are intertwined. Those living in poverty are more likely to develop mental illnesses than their wealthier peers; people with mental illnesses are more likely to smoke than those without them.

Rebecca Snyder has known that harmful trifecta all too well, from both her professional and personal experiences. She has worked for Catholic Charities of Delaware, Otsego & Schoharie (CCDOS) for 20 years, the last five in the organization's Family Support Services. Most of her clients are families who live in poverty. Snyder herself

grew up in poverty and began smoking as a teen. She smoked for 36 years before quitting a year ago.

"Many of the families who come to Family Support Services, if not all, are affected by mental health," Snyder said about her work, "and many of them smoke. They use it as a coping mechanism."

Research has shown that smoking actually **increases anxiety** instead of helping people to relax. While nicotine creates an immediate sense of relaxation, the feeling is temporary and soon leads to withdrawal symptoms and cravings.

Snyder attested to those feelings of anxiety

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## FREE Cessation Resources!



Sign up today for FREE online sessions of St. Peter's Health Partners' The Butt Stops Here, a smoking cessation support group. Starts in August!

## Youth Awarded for Efforts to Expose Tobacco Industry's Lies



Praaghya Meyyan, 16, Rensselaer Co., with her 2020 Youth Ambassador of the Year

By Chris Bradley

young people to protect their peers and communities from tobacco's harms. RC Ambassadors fight to protect the health of their communities through public education efforts, peer-to-peer training, and outreach to policymakers.

Each year, RC gives Youth Ambassador of the Year Awards (YAYA) to young activists who have exemplified tireless effort in exposing deceptive tobacco marketing in their communities. This year, RC member Praaghya Meyyan from our sister grant, Capital District Tobacco Free Communities (CDTFC), was selected as a winner. CDTFC Youth Engagement Coordinator Cara Zampi spoke about Praaghya's work and leadership:

"As a result of being a part of Reality Check, Praaghya has become more comfortable speaking with community resi-

dents and decision makers about the many ways the tobacco industry makes their products sweet, cheap and easy to get", said Zampi. "I believe it's important for young people to get involved in Reality Check in order to develop their self-confidence and improve their leadership skills. I am so proud of Praaghya and I am very happy she is being recognized with this award for all her hard work "

Check out Praaghya's Reality Check spotlight video [here](#).

Reality Check youth have worked in our community by hosting a Smoke Free Movie night at the Sidney Memorial Public Library and will be active in the community as it reopens. You can get involved in the Reality Check program for Delaware Otsego and Schoharie counties and be a future YAYA award candidate by contacting Youth Engagement Coordinator Christopher Bradley at 518-944-0773 or at [chris-](#)

Youth engagement and advocacy is a key part of Tobacco Free Communities Delaware Otsego Schoharie (TFC-DOS)'s mission and is overseen by the New York State Reality Check (RC) program. RC provides a platform for

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ety when she smoked.

"You are constantly anxious about being able to smoke your next cigarette," she said. "Smoking is life-consuming. You plan out when you're going to have your cigarettes because you have to make sure you can smoke them."

Like 90% of adult smokers, Snyder had her first cigarette before she was 18. Snyder said she was a textbook case.

"Most start at a young age because they want to fit in," she said. "You feel different from the norm and you're looking for a peer group who will accept you. When I was twelve, my family moved to a place with a much bigger school. I wanted to fit in, so I cut class to hang with the cool kids. We smoked in the woods and at the local store; that was how we socialized together."

"I cannot stress enough just how much smoking is a social experience that starts when you're young and goes into adulthood," Snyder added.

She finally quit because she "got tired of thinking of quitting.

"I had an action plan and talked about it with my doctor. Then, I put it in place and quit cold turkey."

Changing her behavior after giving up cigarettes was key to her success and Snyder is adamant that people who want to quit need to go through behavioral therapy.

"When I smoked, I usually went outside," she said. "If I had to mow the lawn, I'd smoke while mowing it. So, I didn't go outside for a while after I quit because it was a trigger. You have to avoid your triggers."

Nicotine is a tough addiction for anyone to overcome, but people living in poverty and/or those with mental illness often have an even harder time. That is not because they don't want to quit. Data show that ["quit intentions are just as high, if not higher, among those with mental illness than the general population."](#) but because they face harsh obstacles, such as higher rates of unemployment, homelessness, poverty, incarceration and social isolation. And smoking adds a significant financial

burden. People suffering from schizophrenia were found to spend 27% of their income on tobacco products.

To make matters worse, the tobacco industry aggressively targets these groups in their marketing. It spends \$1 billion a year on marketing, filling stores located in low-income areas with its products, advertisements and discounts. The industry has even promoted them in mental health facilities, institutions and homeless shelters and has claimed its products are harmless for people with mental illnesses.

Remarkably, people dealing with all those harsh obstacles prevail in quitting. Researchers have noted that people with mental illnesses ["can achieve equal quit rates \[to those without them\] with access to appropriate cessation services."](#)

Reflecting on her own experiences, Snyder said, "When you quit, you feel as if you've lost a best friend – something that has been there for you, that has made you feel special. But you realize, your best friend was not good for you and you needed to get away from it."