

For the past two years, I have been working with ninth graders at the High School for Medical Professions (HSMP) in Canarsie, Brooklyn. Because the nature of the school focuses on health, a significant portion of curriculum is dedicated to learning about the effects of smoking and creating actions to speak out against Big Tobacco companies.

Global Kids is an organization that uses the lens of human rights to mold young leaders able to make change in their local and global communities. For the past few months, my colleague and I have been working with our HSMP students connecting media literacy and the marketing tactics of Big Tobacco companies. They are now successfully able to make the connections between the visible placement of tobacco products at their local corner stores and the strategy of Big Tobacco towards youth; they are also now have the ability to see past the appeal of many tobacco ads to be aware that just because it may look cool to smoke, becoming addicted to a product containing rat poison and nail polish, among other harmful ingredients, is not.

As proud as I am with the way my students have absorbed this new knowledge, I know very well that media literacy is unfortunately not enough. Every day, my students are bombarded with messages attempting to lure them into smoking. This is why the display ban policy is of critical importance for my students and all young people throughout NYC. There needs to be more policy that supports the continuing health of youth, especially in Canarsie where there are already not enough resources to help individuals quit smoking. While there is a long way to go, the display ban would definitely a strong start in supporting children in growing up smoke-free.

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Justine Ouano

Senior Trainer

Global Kids Inc. <<http://globalkids.org/>>

137 East 25th Street, 2nd Floor

New York, NY 10010

P. 212.226.0130 ext: 113 <<tel:212.226.0130%20ext%3A%20113>>

F. 212.226.0137

E. justine@globalkids.org