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## Taking Back Control

KAITLYN LAABS, Correspondent

Pat Thomas smoked her first cigarette at age 16. She would light one to steady her nerves, two to relax her body, and three to keep her buzz alive. Soon a single Marlboro Light turned to a chain, a carton, an addiction. At 18, she made her first attempt to quit smoking.

After a string of failed efforts she rationalized, "I'm gonna die anyway, at least this way I have a choice."

At the height of her tobacco dependence, 35 years after she first seemingly harmless puff, she was smoking three packs a day. She was a self-proclaimed "die-hard smoker:" never without a cigarette her in mouth and a pack in her pocket.

Surrounded by smokers in both she and her husband's family, Thomas realized the degree to which she was ingrained her smoking lifestyle and recognized the necessity to seek out other means to beat her addiction.

"This is an identity issue," she explained, "This is a whole subculture we're talking about here."

Thomas was finally able to overcome her dependence through **hypnotherapy**.

"With **hypnosis**," Thomas explains, "a link is established between the subconscious where change occurs. When the conscious discovers that a certain behavior is destructive to the body, the need for change is understood, due to its one overriding and fundamental purpose: the preservation of the body and its survival."

Thomas said that "the link between the subconscious and conscious is key, otherwise at the conscious level, the smoker stays in the cognitive dissonance conflict and no change can occur."

Thomas described **hypnosis** as "the language that speaks to the unconscious mind," which makes the clinical **hypnotherapist** collaborated with nurse practitioner and health educator Helen Newsom to found the comprehensive smoking cessation program called Take Back Control in 2004.

With Take Back Control, Thomas and Newsom give smokers "a new perspective on an old problem" by providing them with a "personal toolbox" that equips them to challenge tobacco dependence through coping strategies, **hypnotherapy sessions**, meditation, and the current nicotine replacement products. To date, the collaborative efforts of Take Back Control and partner Building a Generation to reach parents and caregivers of small children who smoke have been highly successful, said Thomas.

Using Take Back Control, Thomas strives to provide smokers with "the voice they so desperately want and need," as they are continually alienated in the "prevailing oppressive climate" in the United States today. Most government actions to combat smoking, such as proposing legislation to regulate where and when people may smoke, simply "increases smokers' hostility by encroaching on their civil rights," Thomas said.

Thomas is now working to raise awareness on one such measure - Proposition 86 - which will appear on the November ballot. According to the California Department of Health Services, the campaign moves to increase the average cost of a pack of cigarettes from \$3.95 to \$6.55 because of a \$2.60 increase in the excise tax. Theoretically, if the law is passed, Californians will consume approximately 312 million fewer packs of cigarettes each year due both to fewer smokers and to reduced consumption by the remaining smokers.

The actions of smokers within the community, however, have refuted this claim. Sherry Edwards, program director for Building a Generation explained how this "expensive habit" becomes detrimental to their income and consequently their quality of life.

"Many of the people we work with come from low income families," she said, "And when they have to cut back, they won't cut back on their smoking habit, they will cut back on the essentials."

But unfortunately, the prospect of poverty, cancer, and even death, is not enough incentive for some smokers to quit.

"It's gotta be their own choice," Thomas said.

In addition to Take Back Control, Thomas will also launch Smoke-Free Pregnancy Program this month. The partnership with Miracles in Recovery and New House Inc. has established residential treatment centers to support the 10 percent of pregnant women in San Bernardino County who continue to smoke throughout their pregnancy in their efforts to quit smoking.

Thomas said that she and her partner, Newsom, targeted their program to pregnant women because "they can't avail themselves to nicotine gum, nicotine patches, or any other nicotine replacement therapies." With the new program, Thomas and Newsom will provide pregnant women with **hypnosis** and guided imagery sessions, along with meditation and relaxation components to quiet their cravings and minimize the side effects of withdrawal. Thomas said that she and her partner will also offer "a support system nine months later in the event that new mother start smoking again."

Thomas's main objective in creating these programs was to free smokers from the burden she carried for the majority of her life.

"I was a fiend for tobacco for 35 years," she said, "Now I can't believe I smoked for so long and lived in terror of going without them."

Thomas sent this final message to current smokers: "It really can be done. ... You can quit too and live in less misery than you are while you were smoking!"

**NEED HELP QUITTING?**

For those seeking assistance to quit smoking, contact Take Back Control at (909) 794-3334 and toll free at (866) 414-2822 or Building a Generation at (909) 793-8822.