



CARON YOUTH CESSATION SERVICES: FUNDED AND APPROVED BY ALTRIA

Caron Treatment Centers, founded by Richard J. Caron and his wife, runs a youth cessation program that has been receiving funding from the largest tobacco company, Altria, since 2001 and continues to do so today. Altria is the parent company of Philip Morris USA (PM USA, makers of Marlboro cigarettes), U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Company (makers of Copenhagen and Skoal), John Middleton cigar company (makers of Black & Mild cigars), and has a 35 percent stake in JUUL. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that “public health and school-based efforts to prevent youth tobacco product use are encouraged to remain independent of tobacco industry influences.”¹

Using internal tobacco industry documents showing exchanges between PM USA’s senior vice president of the Youth Smoking Prevention program and staff at the Caron Foundation, a research study documented how Caron worked with Altria to develop a youth cessation program. The program promoted life skills and removed any criticism of the tobacco industry: “In May 2001, after meeting with Levy, Caron agreed to submit a new funding proposal to implement ‘End Nicotine Dependence,’ (END) a youth cessation program developed by Utah’s Department of Health; it did not, at the time, contain anti-tobacco industry content. The following month, PM awarded Caron \$300,700 to implement END in 53 eastern Pennsylvania schools.”²

Since then, Caron has consistently been listed on Altria’s “Recipients of Charitable Giving” each year, though the entity name has changed over time, most recently in 2019, listed as “RJ Caron Institute.”³

In some of its recent annual reports, Caron also lists the amounts that Altria has provided them, with descriptions about the programs funded by the donations:⁴

- 2018-2019:
 - “Altria Client Services continued their generous support with \$3,015,000 in funding for prevention and intervention services related to nicotine use, parent and professional programs, as well as digital learning courses.”
 - “2019 Education Alliance Highlights...Raised \$3.4 million through philanthropy to support our expanded menu of services, with Altria providing just over \$3 million.”
- 2017-2018:
 - “Altria Client Services enhanced their traditional funding to expand Caron’s Digital Learning through \$965,000 in additional funding.”
 - “Caron Education Alliance...Raised \$2.3 million through philanthropy to support our expanded menu of services, with Altria providing just over \$2 million.”
- 2016-2017 and 2015-2016: “Caron has been generously supported by the Altria Group since 2001 to provide nicotine cessation services to youth using tobacco and other nicotine delivery systems. With Altria’s continued dedication to our students and our prevention efforts we have been able to support youth in making positive changes in their use, attitudes and behaviors. Our Project CONNECT® programming has a proven record of increasing nicotine quit rates, and additional funded services help to reduce the barriers impacting today’s youth.”
- 2013-2014: “Altria Group Makes Major Investment in Youth...A grant of \$1.65 million was made to support Caron’s Student Assistance Program for the 2013-2014 school year. The Student Assistance Program is a leading alcohol, tobacco and drug education, prevention and intervention program that guides students to healthy, productive living. Through this grant, Caron will grow its premiere adolescent tobacco reduction and cessation program in 15 states across the East Coast.”

The Problem with Industry-Funded Youth Prevention Programs

According to the CDC, “Tobacco industry-sponsored school-based tobacco prevention programs are ineffective and may promote tobacco use among youth.”⁵ For decades, tobacco companies have launched or funded so-called youth prevention programs, but no tobacco company campaign has ever produced any peer-reviewed evidence that their programs prevent kids from smoking or help smokers quit. In fact, evidence from several studies confirms that these programs are ineffective at best and even work to encourage kids to smoke.⁶

The 2012 Surgeon General’s Report stated that programs “provided to students by the tobacco industry, as well as other industry-sponsored efforts with the stated purpose of preventing youth tobacco use, could create favorable impressions of the sponsoring tobacco companies among young people, their parents, or others in the community.”⁷ Indeed, the way that Caron describes Altria’s “generous” support and “dedication” certainly shows that it does not hold the company accountable for the decades of targeted marketing to recruit kids as “replacement smokers” in the first place. Furthermore, the 2012 Surgeon General’s Report found that “Focusing programs on issues such as parenting, decision making by youth, life skills, and reducing youth access helps to focus the responsibility for smoking on the young people themselves and on their family environment and diverts attention from the tobacco industry’s marketing efforts and the addictiveness of tobacco products.”⁸

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, September 2, 2020

¹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *Evidence Brief: Tobacco Industry-Sponsored Youth Prevention Programs in Schools*, June 25, 2019, https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/youth/evidence-brief/index.htm.

² McDaniel, PA, Lown, EA, & Malone, RE, “It doesn’t seem to make sense for a company that sells cigarettes to help smokers stop using them’: A case study of Philip Morris’s involvement in smoking cessation,” *PLoS One* 12(8):e0183961, 2017, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5573297/>.

³ 2019: <https://www.altria.com/-/media/Project/Altria/Altria/responsibility/investing-in-communities/2019-grantees.pdf>; earlier years on file with Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. McDaniel, PA, Lown, EA, & Malone, RE, “It doesn’t seem to make sense for a company that sells cigarettes to help smokers stop using them’: A case study of Philip Morris’s involvement in smoking cessation,” *PLoS One* 12(8):e0183961, 2017, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5573297/>.

⁴ Caron, Annual Reports, <https://www.caron.org/about-caron/annual-reports>.

⁵ CDC, *Evidence Brief: Tobacco Industry-Sponsored Youth Prevention Programs in Schools*, June 25, 2019, https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/youth/evidence-brief/index.htm.

⁶ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids factsheet, *Big Surprise: Tobacco Company Prevention Campaigns Don’t Work; Maybe It’s Because They Are Not Supposed To*, <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0302.pdf>.

⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General*, Atlanta, GA: HHS, CDC, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2012, pp. 554-555.

⁸ HHS, *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General*, Atlanta, GA: HHS, CDC, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2012, p. 563.