

WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES TO REDUCE HEALTH INEQUALITIES: PROTECTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FROM TOBACCO



Newsletter 2

September 2009

FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

Welcome to our second newsletter. The *Working with Communities to Reduce Health Inequalities* project is a two-year project, which addresses tobacco control issues affecting children and young people, as it has been proven that measures will be more effective when local communities and peer groups are involved. Interventions to protect children from exposure to tobacco smoke are more likely to succeed in the context of a wider smoking ban. Nevertheless, significant gaps still exist in fully assessing the effectiveness of such interventions, as there is a general lack of evaluation of their impact or the health outcomes. Therefore, the project's primary objective is to develop effective methods of engaging local communities and peer groups in order to bring about changes in lifestyle, thus generating positive health outcomes and reducing health inequalities, developing tools to reduce high smoking prevalence among young people and reducing children and young people's exposure to second-hand smoke. The *Working with Communities* project has now entered the third phase of the work plan, which concentrates on six pilot interventions targeting disadvantaged communities and groups. Partners from France, Latvia and Liverpool, UK are implementing pilot projects which focus on peer-to-peer interventions with the aim of raising awareness about tobacco-related issues and reducing smoking prevalence amongst the 11 to 16 year age group. Our next newsletter will feature reports from these partners in due course. Partners from Italy, Romania and Manchester, UK realised pilot interventions, which centred on engaging communities in protecting children from exposure to second-hand smoke. This newsletter examines the progress and reactions gathered by the latter three groups and presents some illustrations of their work. We wish you pleasant reading and hope that you will find the outcomes and findings both inspiring and innovative and that you will be able to incorporate them in your own work to prevent tobacco exposure among children and young people, who are a particularly vulnerable group.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM MANCHESTER

The project got off to a flying start with a children's art competition in Wythenshawe Children's Centres and school holiday projects. The children received a framed copy of their work and one picture was selected to be the project logo; prizes were awarded to the winners

and runners-up in each age group. The competition theme was *Healthy, Happy Families* and all artwork was displayed at a public launch at Wythenshawe Forum on national No Smoking Day, 11th March 2009. More than 1500 local people came to talk about protecting children from tobacco smoke and to find out about their local *SureStart* children's centres. The day was also

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supported by a TV soap star, who posed for photographs and spoke on local radio in support of the project.



Children's art competition

Our fantastic community participation worker, Chris Bell, took up post in April. She lost no time at all briefing local people, volunteers and staff at lunchtime events across the Wythenshawe area from May. Chris's background is healthy eating, which has been instrumental in her truly inspirational training, including her chemical soup demonstration, which we have been using in briefings and at public events. Chris produces a large soup pan and ladle, dons protective goggles, mask and gloves, and proceeds to mix (imaginary) acetone, rat poison, ant poison, battery acid, tar etc. from real (but empty) containers. She then suggests leaving the soup to bubble on the stove while the children play in the house. This is a new and powerful way to get the message across to health professionals, parents and children and feedback has been extraordinary. Many have expressed how they have read the list of chemicals in cigarettes several times before without really thinking about what that means. This has been a hugely successful contribution to the work, leading some people to take the decision to keep their home or car smoke-free and some also to attempt quitting.



Chemical soup demonstration

Manchester United football club announced that they would support the launch of a new health academy (for pupils aged 11-18) in the area. We worked in partnership with the club on June events for local primary school children (aged 7-11). 561 local children took part in football activities and healthy eating sessions and Manchester United coaches explained the benefits of a smoke-free life. Manchester United Foundation launched a *Give Smoking the Red Card* project and all the children were given a red card and a smoke-free goody bag.

The local media have been increasingly interested in the project and *Manchester Evening News* awarded a local mum, who had made her home smoke-free, a make-over: she spent a day in a top Manchester hotel being fitted with glamorous clothes and a new make-up look, then went on a complimentary shopping spree. The paper ran a full-page article on the benefits of protecting children from tobacco smoke.

The summer has seen a whole succession of community and family events across the area, where Chris, other Wythenshawe staff and volunteers have been demonstrating chemical soup, promoting the project and encouraging local families to protect their children from tobacco smoke. Since its launch in March more than 600 families have signed up their homes and cars as smoke-free. Plans for autumn include work at local schools, supermarkets, pubs and a bingo hall, as well as making the most of the Christmas events.

*Contributed by Alison Reid, Manchester NHS,
and Chris Bell, Barnardo's*

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VENETO REGION COMMUNITY PROJECT

Tobacco use in adolescence and pre-adolescence is a severe public health problem and health-promoting interventions for children and families are much needed. In Italy most tobacco prevention interventions at regional and national level are directed at secondary school pupils aged 12-13, when attitudes and knowledge about tobacco are already established. Veneto Region has developed a three-year experimental project on health promotion in primary schools focussing on improving life skills in children in an attempt to reduce vulnerability to social pressure, while at the same time involving family, school and peers. This project targets primary school children (8-10), parents, teachers and communities.

Specifically the project aims to: (1) prevent smoking habits and promote a tobacco-free culture in primary school children and their families; (2) increase awareness among target groups (local communities, families and parents) about the dangers of exposure to second-hand smoke; (3) promote behavioural competences to address problems related to tobacco smoke in children and their families; (4) create smoke-free environments to protect children from exposure to smoke; (5) strengthen community action to promote a smoke-free society.

Following the recruitment phase, when the project was presented to principals and teachers, 11 local authorities in the Veneto Region decided to launch the project and send their health professionals on training. Training focused both on creating competences and knowledge about how to increase children's life skills to prevent smoking initiation and also on engaging families and communities to reduce children's exposure to second-hand smoke.

In 2008-2009 Adria local authority, the regional project co-ordinator, launched activities involving three schools, 13 classes with more than 200 children. Specifically, the interventions with children were educational activities such as creative writing, drama, drawing, information games, while the interventions involving families, which were carried out solely by health professionals, were educational and information activities about health and tobacco issues, creating focus groups about tobacco

attitudes and behaviour and also individual or group counselling activities about quitting smoking. In order to create a positive context for both health promotion and tobacco prevention, the community was involved in three campaigning activities.

As part of the *Five-Star Schools* competition participating schools were monitored for compliance with the following rules: no smoking inside the school; no cigarette butts on floors or in baskets and no smell of smoke on the premises; presence of visible no smoking signs in every room; no teachers or members of staff smoking in the school yard; school involvement in tobacco-related health promotion projects. Schools which adhered to all five rules were awarded a *Five-Star School* certificate.

Smoke-Free Homes competition: families in the school received an invitation to keep their homes smoke-free and were asked to sign an undertaking. All respondents who agreed to sign a contract will receive a *Smoke-Free Home* certificate signed by the local health authority in the coming school year.



Smoke-Free Homes logo

Tobacco Health Warnings competition: To celebrate World No Tobacco Day 2009, we organised a competition around the WNTD theme, in which pupils involved in tobacco prevention projects were invited to participate. About 300 pupils took up the invitation and created their own tobacco health warnings using watercolours and sponges. From the hundreds of paintings created, two were awarded a prize.

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WNTD 2009 activities

The majority of families involved responded positively to all activities and campaigns. Many parents attended the meetings (more than 50%) and children reported a high level of satisfaction with the activities, sometimes saying that parents' attitudes towards smoking had changed. The schools involved will continue the project and campaigns next year. All participating schools were awarded five stars. Parents also expressed their interest in continuing the activities. This positive early feedback has been stimulating and encourages us to continue and improve activities next year, trying to involve new classes and schools and also sharing our experience at regional level.

Contributed by Alessandro Mantovani & Andrea Finessi, Adria Local Authority, Veneto Region

COMMUNITY PROJECT IN MĂNĂȘTIREA, ROMANIA

The community selected for the intervention was Mănăstirea, a village located some 100 km to the south-east of Bucharest in the south of Călărași County, between two major towns Oltenița and Călărași.

A community group was established as part of a larger health project that had been developed in 2002, which was one of the main reasons for selecting this community. It had been involved in a major community development programme developed by a company based in Northern Ireland and whose main beneficiaries were the Ministry of Public Health and local authorities. At the end of that project, Mănăstirea was awarded the title *European Village*.



Community Group participants

The community group members were given some initial training by the programme team and guidance from the CDH worker. Their common purpose was to bring about lasting improvements in their community, which was demonstrated by working together to identify the health and social problems within the community as well as undertaking practical tasks, such as clean-up campaigns, restoration of wells and improvement of footpaths.

The first project activity was to reactivate the community group. After conducting initial training with the local co-ordinator, meetings took place with CG members for the purpose of providing information and backing up the local steering group. Initial activities involved community workers, a local steering group (including local authorities) and general practitioners. The community group received training to conduct a baseline survey during weekly meetings; this study comprised a sample of 232 households. The questionnaire was translated and adapted into Romanian and then re-translated into English in order to verify its accuracy. 97.8% of respondents also gave their consent to take part in another survey.

The project kicked off with a major community launch event (with participation by local authorities) on World No Tobacco Day, 31 May. 140 local residents

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participated in the launch, which was also attended by local dignitaries (including the mayor and vice mayor), county public health authorities, GPs and representatives of the Romanian Network for Smoking Prevention (RNSP). A range of materials were available at this event: the Romtens Newsletter (covering workplace health promotion issues with a special focus on tobacco) and the Mânăstirea Community Health Newsletter (which was developed specially for this project), two posters (one specially for the event), T-shirts, leaflets, flyers and other HELP campaign promotionals.

The public meeting highlighted the effects of smoking and ways to protect adults and children from exposure to tobacco smoke. The RNSP President spoke about tactics used by the tobacco industry to recruit young people and the effects of tobacco on children. Specific health promotion messages included: "For the sake of your children's health do not smoke indoors" (Dr. Cătălin Petrencic, General Practitioner, Mânăstirea); "Once you quit smoking, your body starts changing dramatically with visible and significant health effects" (Sorina Iancu, Mânăstirea Community Group Co-ordinator).



Public meeting in Mânăstirea

After the project launch community workers and GPs received training on how to deliver messages on the effects of tobacco to the community. 100 community members participated and were given information on topics such as the health effects of tobacco, children's health, maintaining good health, the impact of smoking on the human body, the benefits of adopting a healthy lifestyle and living in a smoke-free environment (including homes).

A health education campaign is also due to be launched in schools, which will include information sessions for both teachers and children and also a painting competition for children.

One of the main lessons that we have learned is that the methodology of community involvement used in this project can help empower individual community members and the community as a whole.

Contributed by Eugenia Bratu, Romtens Foundation

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