

Alun Williams is Chairperson of Guernsey Adolescent Smokefree project - A charity whose aim is the reduction of the incidence of smoking amongst young people in Guernsey. He is also the island's Lifelong Learning Manager

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Size doesn't matter - Evidence does

Guernsey recently voted to ban all smoking in enclosed public and working places. One of the biggest contributors, that demonstrated the impact the smoking campaign was having, was the strong evidence-base from monitoring smoking levels amongst young people.

Towards the end of March 2005, the UK media attention was focused on the forthcoming election and Prince Charles and Camilla's wedding.

As a result, most people will have missed a major social change that stands to affect the health of thousands - Guernsey in the Channel Islands voted to ban all smoking in enclosed public and working places.

For those of us working in education and health promotion in the island this is a minor miracle. Guernsey is not renowned as a radical, progressive community. Its political leaders are fiercely independent and stubbornly determined to follow the island's particular destiny when implementing legislation. They are also notoriously cautious, preferring to wait and learn from others' experiences.

Perhaps the greatest surprise was that such a small community could introduce such an enormous change. Up to now it has been larger territories such as Australia, New Zealand, USA and Ireland that have driven through anti-smoking measures.

Guernsey Adolescent Smokefree Project

One of the leading organisations to champion the legislation was the local charity GASP - Guernsey Adolescent Smokefree Project. At GASP our aim is to reduce the incidence of smoking amongst young people in Guernsey and we have spent some time analysing why Guernsey has become the first area of the UK to go smokefree.

Certainly, we have unique characteristics in Guernsey. There is a real sense of community and a desire to look after our population; our politicians are accessible and therefore, persuadable. In this case, small is beautiful. We knew that we could make changes independently of other countries.

However, one of the biggest contributors to our success was the strong evidence-base from which we could argue our case. Research monitoring smoking levels amongst young people in Guernsey demonstrated the impact our smoking campaign was having in the island.

Health Promotion Unit

The island's Health Promotion Unit worked in association with the Schools' Health Education Unit in Exeter: between 1997 and 2004 researchers regularly carried out health-related behaviour questionnaires in Guernsey. The surveys covered various topics including fitness, alcohol, drugs and eating patterns. A key element was tobacco.

Surveys

The surveys were statistically robust, allowing us to benchmark with other communities. We also made a point of asking the same questions year on year which enabled us to make longitudinal comparisons.

The following information was elicited from the surveys:

- Patterns of smoking amongst young people
- Reasons for smoking and not smoking
- Attitudes to smoking
- Intentions to stop or continue smoking

The findings have been positive:

- The numbers of young people reporting that they had smoked at least one cigarette during the last seven days is less than half the students who smoked in 1997 (in this year the island's package of non-smoking initiatives was introduced)
- Among year 8 students only a third as many youngsters had smoked compared to their 1997 contemporaries

Female runners in the Guernsey Smokebuster cross country series



- Nearly twice as many young people smoke in the UK as in Guernsey
- Only 3% of year 6 students think that they will smoke when they are older
- 10% fewer families smoke than in the UK

Such statistics have had a positive impact on our project. For example:

- We have been able



Alun Williams proudly demonstrating one of the 5000 car stickers on the island persuading parents not to smoke around children

to make regular reviews of our policies and working practices in the light of the changing evidence

A particular example is our work with girls. Initially, we saw little impact on the numbers of girls who smoked. We analysed and dissected the reasons why girls were continuing to smoke and came up with a plan of action:

- To liaise with other organisations to review best practice in working with year 10 girls
- To review GASP's work in schools to

ensure that lesson plans take into account the needs of this age group

- To work in our secondary schools so that peers and female role models can raise issues about smoking
- To work with the island's sports community to promote healthy lifestyles through initiatives such as women in sport

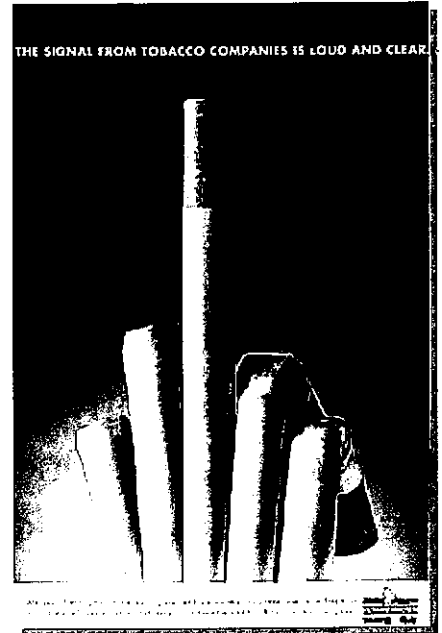
We could then monitor the outcome and we were gratified to be able to report a significant decrease in the numbers of girls now taking up the habit.

- It has enabled us to refine our work. The evidence showed that those young people who were most

likely to smoke were often disaffected and outside mainstream school activities. As a result we focused much of our work on a detached youth work project involving students who excluded themselves from school-based activities.

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Although it was important to link our practice with an evidence-base it was equally significant that we could use reliable data to



The tobacco industries approach to young people

demonstrate that our work was having a positive impact.

We were never backward in sharing the latest evidence. It was especially helpful that we began to be the subject of national interest. When the Guardian looked at our results

they described our work as 'the most successful anti-smoking campaign in recent times'.

OK, that's a slight exaggeration, but who cares? It simply meant that the local community knew that something special was happening in Guernsey.

Islanders could take special pride in our achievements, and be predisposed to accepting our smokefree message.