



# Students make it Uncool to Smoke

Students from Kapiti College in Raumati have been showing other colleges and health professionals how to combat youth smoking. Students have developed their own smoke-free strategic plan, which includes a peer-led quit smoking programme believed to be unique in New Zealand colleges.

Since the beginning of the college year, over fifty students have been through this programme. 70% have quit smoking permanently according to Mark Hammond (17) who has led the initiative. He was the main presenter at the recent smoke-free open day held at the college. Over 100 attendees, including teachers and students from schools across the Wellington region and Hawkes Bay, public health organisations and district health boards participated.

The smoking levels amongst students is not a major issue for Kapiti College and is similar to other colleges. "We believe around 5% of Year 9 students smoke but as a school we want it to be zero", says Tony Kane, Principal.

The college has a smoke free policy at all times for students (and staff). If students are caught smoking on school grounds or in college uniform, they are given the choice of joining the Anti-Smoking Planning Action Workshop (ASPAW) or following the traditional route of detentions and telephone calls to parents. 95% of student smokers choose ASPAW.

The ASPAW programme was developed by students and is run by students who act as mentors to students who smoke. They concentrate on the issues which effect young people like having more money and better skin by quitting smoking rather than the health aspects which their research has shown does not motivate students to stop. Students are encouraged to spend the money they save by not smoking on buying things to reward themselves like a new top, make-up or DVD.

Jordan Kerr (13) was one of the first students to join the ASPAW programme and quit smoking as a result. He started smoking when he was 11 because he thought he looked cool smoking. "Now I think it is stupid to smoke. There is no good reason to start", says Jordan. As a rugby player, Jordan noticed how much further he could run after he quit smoking. Jordan is currently supporting his mother to give up by sharing his ASPAW booklet and his own experience of quitting.

Mark has had lots of success stories and is impressed by the reasons some students want to quit. "One boy told me he had to quit as his younger brother thinks smoking is cool and he didn't want his brother to start".

Mark and his group of ten mentors keep in touch with all the students going through the ASPAW programme and continue to monitor them after their three sessions. They challenge any students they see smoking on the school field.

Peer pressure certainly is working here. A student was recently overheard by one of the college's new ex-smokers saying "I can't be bothered smoking at school now – it is too much hassle".