

*I'm just pleased someone
asked me if I was
interested in quitting*

...

As part of Cancer Council NSW's Tackling Tobacco Program, we asked a group of people to share their stories about quitting smoking with the help of social and community service organisations.

We hope they serve as inspiration for what can happen when someone dares to ask the question:

“Have you considered quitting?”



Struck by car at age 10
Left in a coma for 3 months
Living on a pension
Has over 70 KISS records
Quit smoking
...

I'm Ace!

Ace quit smoking some time ago.
He no longer runs out of puff
walking Lou, his dog.
(Lou is really pleased.)



"Quitting smoking has made me feel
happier... because that was one
of the things that was holding me
back." Ace



Ace

When Ace was 10 years old, he was struck down by a car, while on his way to pick up his bike from the shop. The accident left him in a coma for three months, and caused permanent physical and mental damage. He now lives in the Blue Mountains, with his dog, Lou, and his collection of KISS records.

Ace started smoking when he was in his early teens. He tried to quit without support several times, but did not succeed. It wasn't until he was offered nicotine replacement therapy, and an invitation to attend a quit smoking group at the Vale Street Centre, a recreational centre for people with mental illness, that he finally kicked the habit.

Did you know?

Smoking increases poverty: quitting frees up money for essentials, social activities or little luxuries.

2 days	\$20	Go to movies Take kids to local pool
7 days	\$70	Buy some new shoes Get some DVDs
1 mth	\$300	Have a weekend away Pay off some bills
6 mths	\$1,800	Have a family holiday Bond for a new place Buy a computer
1 year	\$3,650	Get a second-hand car Buy new furniture

"Once you've done it, it seems easy. But actually getting round to do it, that was the hard part. But once you've done it, it's easy." Ace

What changed after you'd quit?

A bit more money, and I could walk up town without stopping. And walking my dog got easier, you know.

If someone had given you the chance to quit smoking sooner, would you have taken it?

Getting the support group really helped, really helped a lot ... if I'd had the gum alone, I wouldn't have done it. If I had the support alone, I wouldn't have done it. I needed both together.

Would you say it was one of the hardest things you've ever done?

Once you've done it, it seems easy. But actually getting round to do it, that was the hard part. But once you've done it, it's easy.

How do you stay smoke-free?

Just walk the dog, appreciate life, you know. Like every time you wake up, you think to yourself, "Oh great, another day, I can't wait. What am I going to do today?" It's about finding out what makes you happy, and doing that. For me, it's my dog, you know, and my life, and my collection of stuff.

Has quitting smoking changed the way you feel about yourself?

Quitting smoking has made me feel happier. I mean, I've always known that you can do anything you want. But actually quitting smoking did make me feel good, because that was one of the things that was holding me back.

How would you describe yourself?
Oh well: loud. I'm a romantic at heart, you know.

Do you smoke?
Well, I've had one cigarette since quitting. I mean that was just so foul that I couldn't, I took about two drags and put it out.

What led you to quit smoking?
Money. I mean it'd be about 20 bucks a packet. I remember when 25 cigarettes cost me about \$2.50, but that was back in the good old days. BH. Before Howard. And I wanted to smell nice, because of the girls.

Did the nicotine replacement therapy help you?

The NRT was great. I got a carton of those packets of chewing gum, a big carton, and I chewed about three-quarters of it. After chewing that, I could give up smoking.

How did you feel when you had finally quit?

Well, I was coughing heaps, getting all the crap out of my system, you know. It really makes you think, "What am I putting into myself?" I'm putting all this crap into myself, you know.

Lives with schizOphrenia
Housed in supported accommodation
Takes painkillers for arthritis
Enjoys baked bean sandwiches
Smoke-free 12 months

...

I'm Gaye

Gaye quit smoking 12 months ago.
With the additional money in
her pocket, she has purchased
several new frocks.



“I think everyone should be given the opportunity to quit, in particular those ones, because of the disadvantage they have. I mean, why add to the affliction?” *Gayle*



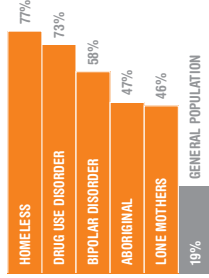
Gaye

Gaye quit smoking one year ago. Since then, Gaye's sister, as well as her sister's friend, have also decided to quit.

When Gaye moved to Sylvanvale Foundation Raynton House, she met Lesley, a drug and alcohol counsellor. Lesley invited Gaye to participate in a quit group, and provided her with nicotine gum and patches. With this help, Gaye quit, after being a smoker for more than 40 years.

Did you know?

Smoking rates amongst the most disadvantaged groups are much higher than among the general population.



What radio programs do you like?

I like the current affairs. I like the ones on people's lifestyles, documentaries. I like to listen in to the other programs too, because the people laugh a lot. They sound so happy and carefree.

When you were a smoker, how many cigarettes did you smoke each day?

I started off with 10 when I was in my 20s. I worked my way up to about two large packets a day ... I felt as if I was actually chained by my throat to an ashtray. I had that feeling once. And I thought, "No, I can't take any more of this. I want to give it away."

How did you manage to totally quit?

I'd been cutting down, then I thought, "Well, why not go along to the clinic?" I had help. I didn't do it without any help. I went to the clinic here with Lesley, I listened in to what various people had to say. I thought I'd give it a try with the patches and the gum, and I found that although I thought it wouldn't work, it did.

What was the hardest thing about quitting?

Giving up going out where there are people that do smoke.

How did it feel to no longer be around cigarettes, and the people who smoke them?

To me it was more a private struggle. It was a psychological sort of thing, like a dependence.

Like if you're used to having your baked bean sandwiches every Saturday afternoon, you're not going to want to go without them, especially if you like them. You would feel angry and you would feel hurt, I think. That's the way I'd put it anyway.

How important were the relationships you developed with the quit smoking group participants?

I think that it was a very important thing to have attended actually, and to have gone every week was very important. And it's not the little certificate on the wall that I was so worried about getting, but actually staying in with the group, and hopefully striving towards giving this thing away and succeeding.

Did quitting smoking destabilise your schizophrenia?

I think it might have helped in a way. I think it's given me more confidence in myself, that I can actually achieve that as well, as I'd set out to do in the first place, but couldn't quite achieve by myself.

Do you think that people in disadvantaged groups should be given the opportunity to quit?

I think everyone should be given the opportunity to quit, in particular those ones, because of the disadvantage they have. I mean, why add to the affliction?

Would you have succeeded in quitting without the support you were offered?

Probably not. I don't think so. I think it has had a big and profound effect.

"I felt as if I was chained by my throat to an ashtray ... And I thought, 'No, I can't take any more of this.'"
Gaye

Multiple heart surgeries
Two strokes
Overcame drug addiction
Amateur photographer
Smoke-free 4 weeks
...

i'm Vic

Vic quit smoking 4 weeks ago.
He no longer wakes up feeling like
a “shit sandwich” and feels good
telling people he’s stopped.



"I didn't expect someone to
take an interest in my smoking.
Everyone's got advice ...
but no one's ever said, 'I'll go
through this with you.'"
[Vic](#)



Vic

In 2002, Vic was flown from Gosford to Sydney in a helicopter, to undergo emergency heart surgery. After his surgery, he tried to stay off the cigarettes, but it wasn't until recently that he was able to rid them from his life.

Vic volunteers at the Haymarket Foundation in Sydney, where he helps people recovering from drug and alcohol problems. Last month, he walked into the clinic run by the foundation, and to his surprise, was asked if he wanted help to quit smoking.

Four weeks ago you decided to quit cigarettes for good. What prompted that decision? My cardiologist reading the riot act to me. Common sense and logic prevailing. Just sick and tired of being sick and tired of coughing every morning and feeling like a shit sandwich. An opportunity arising where this program was offered to me. That all came into place at once, and it just did the trick.

What was it like to be offered help?

"I didn't expect someone to take interest in the smoking. Everyone's got the advice to stop smoking. They wave the finger and the 'tsk tsk tsk', but no one's ever said, "I'll go through this with you".

"It makes me feel better about myself. I'm not coughing in the morning when I get up ... I feel good about telling people I've given up smoking." **Vic**

How has smoking impacted negatively on your life?
My fitness. I've nearly died through heart disease. I've had two strokes. It's made my breath stink. It's an expense now that I'm on limited funds.

How has quitting smoking positively impacted on your life?

It makes me feel better about myself. I'm not coughing in the morning when I get up... I feel good about telling people I've given up smoking. And if I can do this, I can do anything. Almost.

What do you think about the perception that using nicotine might help people with mental illness or other addictions?

Frog poo. I cringe when I see homeless people picking up smokes from off the street: it makes me sick in the stomach ... no one should be forced to do that. See, when I first gave up heroin, and other drugs too, people in the program advised me: "Don't worry about giving up smoking just yet, get over this first". And I thought, "You beauty, there's another excuse to keep smoking. It's been advised."

You run a support group for people in recovery from drug and alcohol dependence. How does it feel to be helping people?

It's great. It's my way of giving back. I've been taking all my life from society, whether it be legally or illegally. The last five years or so my life's done a complete turnaround, and I want to give back as much as I can. A bit late in life, but if I can change one or two people along the way, I've done well.

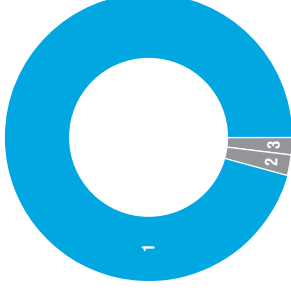
What are the financial implications of quitting?

I've got about an extra 70 bucks a week in my pocket ... it just means I can go to the movies now a bit more. It's another incentive not to smoke. I might see two movies, three a month now. Thanks, Mr Nicotine.

Anything to add?

Don't give up on the hopeless. Don't. Please don't. I was hopeless. A lot of people will say, "What a waste of money". But don't give up. Don't give up on giving up.

Did you know?
Smoking is responsible for most drug-related deaths in Australia.



- 1 Smoking 89%
- 2 Alcohol 6%
- 3 Illegal drugs 5%

Background in teaching

Eligible bachelor

Has two goldfish

Starts each day with a cigarette

Helps others to quit

...

I'm Graeme

Graeme is a community sector worker and a smoker himself. He was initially reluctant to get involved in the Tackling Tobacco Program but came to embrace it.



"... a lot of people are looking for help ... We are in the best place to be able to offer the support, and to be able to offer that genuine support is so important." Graeme



Graeme

Graeme works as a Play Facilitator at the Newpin Fathers' Centre in Bidwill. When his manager approached him about implementing the Tackling Tobacco Program to help the dads quit smoking, he felt sceptical about whether it was worth running and concerned it could be a waste of the fathers' time.

Since then, his attitude toward the program has completely changed. He has seen many centre members and co-workers engage with the program, and now not only invites new members to participate, but seeks to join those who are travelling along the road to quitting.

What kind of qualities do you need in order to work with kids?

I think empathy is a big one. We are working with attachment issues with children and their families. A lot of the kids have been removed from their parents, or have been put into foster care. They've suffered a lot of trauma ... a lot of feelings of rejection.

Why are you in this line of work?

Well, I consider myself a pretty sensitive guy, and so working with children with special needs that have been through different types of abuse and stuff like that, it just fits me, you know. I think that I do have a lot to offer here, more than anywhere else.

What's the most rewarding part of your job?

Seeing the blokes connect with their children. For example at Christmas time, we had three dads who don't normally get access to their children, all come here, and just to see them flourish, you know, to see some of the dads afterwards, just the emotion that comes out of them ... that's about the best thing.

"As a smoker, I definitely did not want to be a hypocrite or to be heavy with them ... now they're all bugging me about my smoking because they're all trying and I'm not." Graeme

Initially, how did you feel about the Tackling Tobacco Program?

It really was something I saw as just another hoop to jump through. I thought, "I will offer it to the dads, but I won't force them to do it". But to see how much the dads really wanted it, it really blew me away. As a smoker, I definitely did not want to be a hypocrite or to be heavy with them, and it's sort of turned around the reverse where now they're all bugging me about my smoking because they're all trying and I'm not.

Has your involvement in the program affected your own interest in quitting?

I procrastinate a bit when it comes to this sort of subject; I just keep putting it off and saying, "Oh yeah, I'll deal with it tomorrow", but I have moved myself from not wanting to give up to wanting to give up.

What would you say to other caseworkers who might be sceptical about members' interest in the Tackling Tobacco Program?

I think that they would be very surprised to hear that a lot of people are looking for help, that they are looking for genuine help, not just a message on a packet saying: "You're doing the wrong thing", or an ad on TV that makes you change channels. We are in the best place to be able to offer the support, and to be able to offer that genuine support is so important.

The Tackling Tobacco Program was started by Cancer Council NSW in 2006.

It encourages social and community service workers to become involved in reducing the harm that smoking causes amongst disadvantaged groups with the highest smoking rates.

When it comes to smoking, the most important question you can ask a client is: “Are you interested in quitting?”

To learn more about helping your clients quit, to access free training and resources, and read more stories, please visit:

askthequestion.com.au
or call us on (02) 9334 1478.

*Have you asked
the question?*

askthequestion.com.au

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