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Engaging young people with film to encourage them and their peers not to smoke – The *Cut Films* project

Although the uptake of smoking in the United Kingdom (UK) has fallen dramatically in recent years, the fact remains that an estimated 207,000 young people start smoking each year (ASH, 2015). Of these, around one-third to a half will go on to become established smokers within a few years of initiation and most smokers start before the age of 18 years (ASH, 2015). Risk factors for smoking vary from socio-demographic factors such as age, ethnicity and parent socio-economic status (Tyas and Pederson, 1998), individual behavioural factors such as self-esteem, stress and lifestyle (NHS, 1999) and media influences such as film, TV, computer games (Cranwell *et al.*, 2015, 2016a, 2016b; Lovatto, Watts and Stead, 2011; Morgernstern *et al.*, 2011; National Cancer Institute, 2008; Surgeon General, 2012). Importantly environmental factors such as parental smoking, peer smoking, peer attitudes and norms towards smoking also play a key role in youth experimentation with smoking (NHS, 1999; Tyas and Pederson, 1998).

The *Cut Films* Project

With a strong focus on environmental factors, particularly peer smoking and perceptions of peer attitudes towards smoking, *Cut Films* is a UK national charity that works with young people under the age of 25 years, training them to make films around the problems associated with smoking and tobacco. These films are then entered into an annual film competition judged by health professionals, academics working in health-related research, filmmakers, young people and *Cut Films* trustees. The aim of the project is to change young people's perceptions of smoking through the use of peer influence, and to deliver a strong and targeted tobacco education and social

and technical skills building programme to young people across the UK. The history of *Cut Films* has been previously reported in *Education and Health* (Shaw, 2010).

Since 2010, the charity and the project, under the direction of former *Cut Films* Director, Emma Wrafter, has introduced a team of specialist *Cut Films* filmmakers who are also experienced in working with young people. These specialists now deliver the filmmaking and tobacco education workshops. In 2013, Lewisham, Harrow & Barnet, Hackney, Buckinghamshire and Ealing Public Health commissioned *Cut Films* to provide workshops to schools, colleges and youth clubs in each respective area. As a result, over 4000 young people and 352 films made were entered into the competition during that first year. The specialist youth workers also lead on social media campaigning in their local areas; engaging young people through platforms such as *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Facebook* and *Snapchat*. Since the recruitment of the youth workers, the project received a 'Highly Commended' award during the Charity Awards in 2014 managed by Civil Society Media's annual award programme, was shortlisted for the Guardian Charity Awards 2014 and was a finalist for the Third Sector Awards 2015 and won the GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) Impact Awards in 2015, managed by the King's Fund. Katie Pinnock, Director, UK & Ireland Charitable Partnerships at GSK said:

"It can be hard for young people to fully understand the dangers of smoking. This project shows real innovation in tackling this difficult issue, using film making to encourage young people to identify their own reasons not to smoke and explain it to their friends. The work it does in schools is particularly effective – it speaks a

language young people can understand and relate to. Its reach is impressive - what the charity achieves for its small size is fantastic!"

To expand the national reach of the project, *Cut Films* merged with The Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation (RCLF) in 2015, the UK's only lung cancer charity. Paula Chadwick, chief executive of RCLF, said this about the merger:

"*Cut Films* has done some incredible work educating young people about the harmful impact of smoking and the practices of the wider tobacco industry. As we mark our 25th anniversary, it's crucial that we continue to find new ways to engage audiences intuitively with impactful messages and this move will allow us to harness our collective strengths to that end. Not every lung cancer diagnosis is linked to smoking but the link cannot be disputed nevertheless. We look forward to working with the *Cut Films* team to prevent the next generation of potential lung cancer patients."

Since the merger *Cut Films* piloted a Cancer Research UK (CRUK) funded feasibility project titled: "*Cut Films*: Evaluating a filmmaking and social media peer education intervention to prevent the uptake of smoking among young people". The project was carried out with joint lead investigators: Adam Crosier and Dominic McVey (Word of Mouth) Professor Marcus Munafò (UK Centre for Tobacco and Alcohol Studies, University of Bristol) and with collaborators Karen Ford and Emma Wrafter (*Cut Films*). The study assessed the feasibility of recruiting schools and youth clubs onto the project, as well as cotinine testing (spit testing) of young people as part of proving the effectiveness of the intervention. Cotinine testing detects whether or not there has been exposure to tobacco smoke through measuring nicotine levels in the body. The delivery element of the study took part between November 2015 and June 2016, the results will be published in early 2017.

In 2016, *Cut Films* increased its scope internationally by joining the European Network for Smoking and Prevention, as well as delivering the first ever EU Smoke-Free Youth Network funded by Erasmus+, which is the European Union programme for education, training, youth and sport. The project was run in partnership with *No Excuse* and *Smart Ungdom*. *No Excuse* is a youth activist project based in Ljubljana, Slovenia, which works on promoting social engagement and

creating young activists in areas of public health. *Smart Ungdom* is based in Sweden and utilises activities to engage young people in tobacco and drug prevention work through local associations. In April 2016, eight participants aged 13-21 years from each country gathered in London to learn about tobacco, campaigning, filmmaking and attended a demonstration outside the British American Tobacco Annual General Meeting (BAT AGM). The purpose of the demonstration was to highlight the issues surrounding tobacco, from health aspects to child labour, to all shareholders in BAT. In July, the group gathered once again in Ljubljana, Slovenia, developing skills in campaigning, advocacy, presentation and debating. Ismael Sesay (13), who took part in the project, said: "It's been really good, we've been doing a lot of filmmaking, getting to know each other and I've been doing a lot of editing. Going to the BAT AGM Day of Action was something new, as I had never protested before or interviewed an MP. It's been very fun and educational!" Further, Kyra Morrison (17) said: "I feel the project has gone well because I've had the chance to work with new people, learn new skills and developed interaction skills."

The Intervention

The *Cut Films* project has been developed to work flexibly across a variety of settings and can be adapted for incorporation into various curricula. The project understands the demands placed on teachers and thus tries to reduce the barriers to uptake of the project by being flexible in its delivery offering weekly sessions, one-day workshops or after-school clubs. The implementation of specialist youth workers also reduces the demands placed on teachers. The project has been applied throughout Upper Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, after-school clubs as well as colleges. It has been applied in Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), Media, Internet and Communications Technology (ICT), Drama and English classes. The project also works well in youth group settings ranging from evening youth clubs, holiday clubs, and young carers' associations to special needs groups such as Mencap, a UK charity for people with a range of learning disabilities.

All workshops begin with a short quiz on tobacco issues ranging from the health dangers of smoking, shisha, and peer pressure to child

labour. The specialist youth workers then work with the young participants to develop their ideas into a two-minute advert, the brief being to "create a film that will convince your friends to not start smoking". Participants are taken through the filmmaking process beginning with research then scripting, storyboarding, filming and, finally, editing. The films are all entered into the *Cut Films* annual film competition resulting in local and national awards held every year.

The project follows an evidence-based approach utilising the Theory of Change Impact Model (Weiss, 1995). This model was developed in the 1990s as a way to model and evaluate comprehensive community initiatives. The model first identifies the problem and the goal, and then 'fills in the gaps' between identifying the target audience, the activities, assumptions, and outcomes. The problem addressed in the *Cut Films* project is that 207,000 young people start smoking every year, with the goal being a reduction in the smoking rate of young people leading to a world where no one smokes. Each session is evaluated through an entry quiz and through an exit evaluation administered and collected from every participant and teacher/youth worker involved. The average collection rate for evaluations is around 73% (3,329/4,500 based on year 2014/2015 workshops). The initial quiz is completed by all project participants and collected by the youth workers, the evaluations are completed during the final session.

Impact: changes in smoking attitudes and educational value

The results from the 2014/2015 workshops suggest that 95% (130/137) of teachers believed that young people learnt something new about tobacco/smoking, 84% (116/137) identified that they also learned something new, 66% (90/137) said students learned filmmaking skills and helped students think creatively, and 61% (84/137) saw an increase in teamwork. Further, 96% (1895/1973) of young participants said that the project was a good way to learn about smoking, 95% (1874/1973) said they identified that they had learned something new during a session, 90% (1776/1973) felt that the project had influenced them not to consider smoking in the future. Finally, 86% (1697/1973) said they felt 'a bit more' or 'much more' confident talking about smoking.

Impact: Teacher and Young People comments

Some of the comments from teachers involved in the project:

"*Cut Films* offers an excellent opportunity for young people to interact with each other whilst also being involved in a creative project. Film and media only continues to have an increasing impact on our lives, it's wonderful we are teaching young people how to use this positively through *Cut Films*." Ms Brocki (*Hackney New School*)

"This has been an extraordinary project combining a year 7 PSHE unit about smoking with film and editing skills. The students and staff involved were highly motivated and learnt so much more than if they had been sitting in a classroom. I cannot recommend it highly enough."

Gabriella Nocivelli (*Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School*)

Some of the comments from young people involved in the project:

"I always knew smoking is bad but the project made me realise that it's horrible and it ruins many lives. "

Female, 11 (*Rooks Heath College*)

"They have inspired me to spread the message to not smoke" Male, 17 (*NCS*)

"Winning a National Cut Films Award is so good because it has given me strength in believing in myself"

Jacob Gherson, 15 (*Barnet Mencap*)

"Winning a National Cut Film Award means more to me than just the achievement of winning, but being able to work with my peers in such an expressive and creative way is something we do not get to do often in school. It has helped me develop my film making skills as well as my ability to cooperate and listen to others."

Melisa Curri, 14, (*Hackney New School*)

"We want to make a difference to all ages and help them realise it is not cool or fashionable to smoke, as you are not just affecting

yourself."

Maddi Galloway (Harris Academy)

"Through this project we have learnt how smoking is harmful to the human body and why it is dangerous. We hope our video has a huge impact on young peoples' lives."

Rebekah Finney/Amelia Mason, 13, (Thistley Hough Academy)

The Competition and Awards

Each year the competition culminates with the local and national awards ceremonies to celebrate the young people's achievement and to recognise the contribution that they are making to a smoke-free society. All film submissions are judged by local and national professionals from health, filmmakers, academics working in health-related research, *Cut Films* trustees, as well as young people. The judging categories are based on age (Under 11s, 12-15, 16-19, 20-25) as well as a Young Judges' Choice, Popular Choice Winner and an Overall Judges' Choice Winner. The Popular Choice winner is the film that

has received the most votes through our bespoke voting website. The young participants can increase votes on their films by sharing it in their schools, online campaigning and through friends and family. This is a key part of the intervention. The winning films vary each year, in 2014 the film '[£55.90](#)' won the Overall Judges' Choice; a film on how much money the average person spends on cigarettes and how they could otherwise use this money (Figure 1 below).

The most recent winners of the 2016 competition was Harrington Primary School with their film '[Intelligent Life](#)' which features an alien coming to earth to discover what earth offers, stumbles upon a cigarette and leaves as soon as it learns about the dangers of smoking (Figure 2 below). Importantly, as a result of the skills learnt from engaging in the workshops, some of the young filmmakers have gone on to pursue a career in filmmaking. For example, Shanil Kawol, who entered in 2014 with his film '[Road to Hell](#)' (Figure 3 below) now runs his own film production company '[Kindsense](#)' and has since made other films that have also won awards.

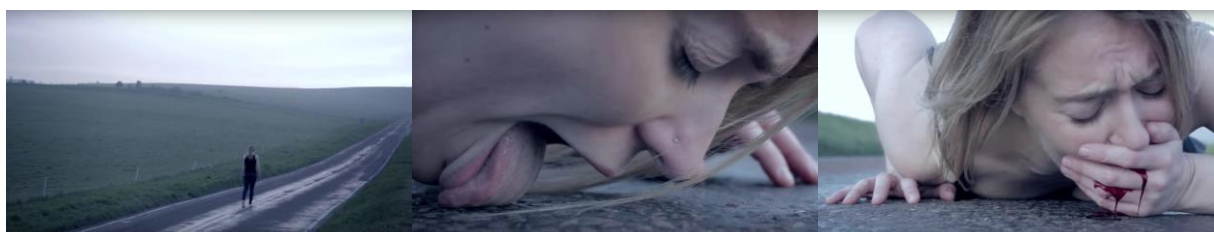
Figure 1: £55.90 by Arty Films (Screenshots from the stop motion animation film on the cost benefits of smoking, Overall Judges' Choice Winner 2014)



Figure 2: Intelligent Life by Harrington Hill School (Screenshots from the film exploring the health effects of smoking using an alien as the main character, Overall Judges' Choice Winner 2016)



Figure 3: Road to Hell by Shanil Kawol (Screenshots from the film exploring the chemicals in a cigarette and the power of addiction, National Winner 20-25 Age Category 2014)



Conclusion

The *Cut Films* project provides a multi-faceted intervention approach to educating young people in the UK not to smoke. The strengths of the intervention are such that it not only exploits the power of peer-to-peer influence but also reduces the demands placed on teachers in providing tobacco related education. Further, it is a valuable tool to support transferable social skills development; the intervention requires a high level of peer-to-peer participation, ideas generation, sharing and decision making. It also provides technical and creative skills training that are essential for the film-making process. The intervention has proven to be versatile and can easily be integrated within a range of curriculum topics and very useful for teachers to hang their session aims and objectives on.

Challenges and future work

The *Cut Films* project is a highly scalable model that centres on the power of peer-to-peer influence to help reduce the uptake of smoking in young people. The intervention is unique and highly engaging, creative and both young people and teachers find it to be both educational and fun. However, the main challenge, as with all charities, is maintaining the economic feasibility of the project. Future work will therefore focus on rolling out the project across more UK regions.

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