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Cut Films: challenging young people to make films to help discourage their peers from taking up smoking

A national anti-smoking charity, The Deborah Hutton Campaign, is commending a series of young film makers and their schools for their innovative short films created as part of the groundbreaking new *Cut Films* competition, to help discourage their peers from taking up smoking.

The Deborah Hutton Campaign is a registered charity working in harmony with existing government and charitable initiatives to reduce the prevalence of smoking among young people.

Deborah Hutton

The charity has roots in very personal events. It was recently set up after Deborah Hutton, who was health editor of *Vogue* fashion magazine for more than twenty years, died of lung cancer, aged 49, as a result of smoking in her teens and twenties.

Her husband, Charlie Stebbings, a leading UK film director, and eldest daughter, Romilly, are now spearheading The Deborah Hutton Campaign and *Cut Films* competition to help ensure that her message encouraging young people not to smoke lives on.

Charlie Stebbings says, "The number of people who smoke has come down significantly, but there are still too many teenagers starting smoking and getting addicted. I want to give young people a voice to explore and convey the messages that they think will stop other young people from smoking."

In England today, there are over 2 million fewer adult smokers than there were a decade ago, yet this year alone, it is estimated that thousands more people in England will start smoking. The majority of these will be under the age of 18.

The launch of *Cut Film* coincides with the Department of Health's new Tobacco Control Strategy (published February 2010) which highlights the need 'to stop the inflow of young people recruited as smokers' as the first of its three key objectives, including a specific focus on reducing the smoking rate among 11-15-year-olds to 1% or less, and the rate among 16-17-year-olds to 8% by 2020.

Cut Films closely supports this Government ambition, providing an extremely timely, creative and cost-effective initiative which empowers young people to choose a smokefree future, and to encourage their peers to do the same.

Cut Films pilot

The project was piloted in nine schools and one Youth Club between September and November 2009, the project challenges young people to research, write and produce a short film about the dangers of smoking, and then to publish them for other young people to view on YouTube and Facebook via the *Cut Films* website: www.cutfilms.org.

A number of different approaches were used to deliver the project within schools - it was offered both within the curriculum as part of a range of key stage 3 core subjects,

as part of GCSE and BTEC media studies courses, and as an extra curricular school club.

Evaluation

Karen Ford is a Trustee of the Deborah Hutton Campaign, and an independent consultant in health research and policy.

Karen says, "I originally got involved in the project on a personal level because I was friends with Deborah and wanted to support her family after she died, as well as through a professional interest in the project".

Karen was a scientific advisor to the Department of Health with more than 25 years experience. She oversaw an external evaluation of the pilot phase of *Cut Films* based upon research with teachers and students from each of the participating pilot schools and youth groups.

She comments, "We know that 14% of 15 years olds in this country smoke, and of the estimated further 250,000 people who will start smoking in the next year, most of these will be teenagers. Today there's a stronger argument for developing youth targeted campaigns as part of a wider tobacco control strategy, and our findings from the film project underline again the need for a youth-centred approach."

Karen explains, "Young people who took part in the film project felt the approach created a strong environment for them to find their own voice on the issue of smoking, and get the message about the consequences of smoking out to their peers. Some young participants who were reportedly non-smokers also suggested that the film making process did help persuade them not to take up smoking."

"One of the most positive aspects to emerge from the pilot was the enthusiasm of the young people for the project, with a high level of satisfaction and sense of achievement being expressed amongst both teachers and students. The competitive aspect was a real incentive to participate."

"Research already suggests a link between low aspiration and motivation, and increased smoking and other risk taking behaviours amongst young people. Feedback from the project showed that it provided a platform for learning new skills, raising esteem and building confidence in some of those students, which is a great spin off benefit."

"Measuring whether *Cut Films* actually impacts directly upon smoking rates amongst young people is a much longer term question. However, what we do know from the evaluation is that it positively engaged young people, enabled them to find their own voice on the issue and empowered them to get their views across to their peers - so in that respect, it achieved its main objective very effectively."

Karen adds, "Smoking prevention requires a multi-faceted intervention approach and there has been a gap in the direct targeting of young people until now. I think that working in synergy with other policy measures, *Cut Films* can help to plug that gap and provide part of the solution."

Young people comment

Some comments from young people involved in the project:

"Making the video put us off the idea of smoking, discovering others' views on it took the appeal away". (Male, yr. 10)

"Usually it's adults telling you about smoking, but this is your own ideas." (Female, yr. 12)

"It's important to have our own voice. It made it easier to know we just had to say what we thought. We don't know what adults want to see but we do know what we want." (Female, yr. 9)

"We learnt a great number of new facts when researching; obviously the cost shocked us the most (Female, yr. 10)

"Our aim was to get young teenagers to

see the effects of smoking and all the harmful chemicals involved, to try and help them understand that it's not a good idea to smoke because of the dangers - most don't know what's happening when they smoke." (Female, yr. 9)

"It made me think beyond the fact that cigarettes are bad for you. I went home and told my parents the things in a cigarette." (Female, yr. 9)

Teachers involved in the project reported that it provided them with a flexible, effective and user-friendly teaching resource for educating students on the issue of smoking, and without lecturing them, closely supporting their PSHE delivery.

In addition, many teachers found that the project improved the self-esteem and self-confidence of participants and promoted a high level of engagement from disaffected students.

Winning films

The winning films were premiered as

part of a special Awards Ceremony in March to an invited audience of the charity's key supporters and stakeholders, during which each of the young film makers and their schools received an award for their film presented by Film Director, Kevin MacDonald. Winning schools included: Wirral Grammar School, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School and Highbury Grove School, both in London.

The Deborah Hutton Campaign is delighted by the quality, diversity and creativity of the films that have been produced as part of the project and most of all, by the energy, enthusiasm and dedication with which all of the young people have taken part in the campaign and embraced its messages.

Building on the learning and results from this successful pilot, we are now working towards rolling out *Cut Films* as an annual competition for all schools from Autumn 2010, with the aim of inspiring many more young people to communicate with their peers on this important message about not smoking.