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## Mary Campbell, Kathleen McManus, Maura O'Neill and Michelle Friel

### Western Trust school-based health improvement interventions prevent smoking and other unhealthy lifestyle behaviours

The Health Improvement Department Western Health and Social Care Trust (Western Trust) provides schools-based health improvement interventions that offer an opportunity to prevent children starting to smoke and other unhealthy lifestyle behaviours.

#### Literature Review

Each year in the UK, smoking causes more than 120,000 deaths of people aged 35 or more, 20% of deaths at all ages, and more than 25% of deaths between 35 and 65 ... it remains the largest single preventable cause of death and disability in the UK (Raw et al, 1999). In Northern Ireland, it is estimated that approximately 3,000 people die each year from smoking related diseases, accounting for over 84% of all lung cancer deaths within the region (Rehabilitation Sciences Research Team, 2003).

The settings approach has arguably offered health promotion the conceptual base that has allowed practice to be pursued across a significantly broader canvas (Whitelaw et al 2001).

A recent review by Thomas & Perera (2008) assessed the effectiveness of school-based programmes in preventing

children and adolescents from starting smoking and demonstrated evidence that school programmes incorporating social influences models can affect smoking behaviour in the short term.

The earlier children become regular smokers, the greater their risk of developing lung cancer or heart disease if they continue smoking into adulthood (Muller, 2007). According to Tyas (1998), adolescents who begin smoking at younger ages are more likely to become regular smokers and less likely to quit. Children have a higher risk of smoking if their best friends and siblings smoke.

#### School-based health improvement interventions

The Health Improvement Department work with teaching staff and school nurses to deliver a school based intervention to prevent smoking and other unhealthy lifestyle behaviours. The programme, which has been delivered to over 2,700 pupils in 18 schools throughout 2009, is underpinned by social learning theory where the young adults are persuaded to develop the skills and commitment to resist cigarettes.

The three week programme targets 12-13 year old students and aims to:

- Prevent smoking
- Raise awareness among the young adults about health and well being issues and empower them to make healthier, informed choices about diet, benefits of exercise and effects of alcohol on the body
- Raise awareness on positive mental health, self esteem, problem solving, stress management and resilience

### Impact of the intervention

The immediate impact of this course suggests that students significantly increased knowledge about the dangers of smoking, impact of drugs and alcohol and other unhealthy lifestyles. There is also evidence to demonstrate that school-based programmes provide an environment for influencing knowledge and equip young people with the skills to make healthy lifestyle choices.

### Future Work

This school-based health improvement

intervention continues to be rolled out to schools in the Western area. A consideration is that parents and families will become involved as well as prefects/class counsellors to act as peer support for younger pupils. A follow-up comparative evaluation will be carried out in two years when these students are in year 11.

#### References

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# Young People Surveys

nationally recognised for over 33 years

"We're very happy to commission another survey from you. Our colleagues in School Improvement are dead keen to work with us on this." "During our last LA Inspection, we were flagged from our Tellus data as having a bullying problem. We could demonstrate with our SHEU data -- which had a much better sample size and coverage of the authority -- that we did not have the problem they suggested. The Inspectors went away happy and we are definitely surveying again with SHEU in 2010." - Local Authority Senior Adviser

For more details of the Schools Health Education Unit's Young People Healthy Lifestyle surveys please contact Angel Balding - email: [angela.balding@sheu.org.uk](mailto:angela.balding@sheu.org.uk)  
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