

The Signs of Our Smoking Times

With the national rate of smokers on the continuing decline, more people are trying to give up the habit as sales of products to help them quit skyrocket. As a result, a number of clubs are now hosting quit smoking sessions at their venues for both patrons and staff, as well as offering innovative ways to help people live a healthier life. *Club Life* recently attended a session to find out more about what your club can offer.

BY MONIQUE LISA

Each year, the holiday season sees booster quit campaigns and quitlines going into near meltdown when it comes to smoking. And then there are the countless New Year's resolutions to finally kick the habit as more people search for a means and way toward living a healthier life. 2008 is no different except that the brakeless train of declining smoking continues to pick up more speed, with recent quit rates being higher than a decade ago. →



While pessimists talk of a hardening of the remaining smokers, all evidence indeed points the opposite way. The notion that only hardcore smokers remain founders when we see that quit rates have not decreased, smoking prevalence continues to fall (in fact, only 17.4% of adults smoke every day), the average number of cigarettes smoked per day has fallen in recent years by about 20%, and about one in four smokers no longer smokes every day. Even the number of people asking their doctor for help to quit smoking has dramatically risen, while the demand for nicotine replacement treatment products subsidised through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) is also expected to increase since the recent announcement of Champix as part of a list of new drugs added to the Federal Government scheme which makes listed drugs cheaper.

These are all facts that can no longer be disregarded. The fact is, if present rates of decline continue, we may actually see smoking survive for only 15 to 20 years. So, will smoking ever go the way of public spitting or snuff-taking? Who really knows? But what we do know is that smoking is softening...not hardening; and, a number of clubs are starting to embrace this fact by providing assistance to both patrons and staff through a combination of innovative workplace agreements and available course programs. You could say that these are the signs of the times, and something your club needs to consider when planning your business for the future.

A few months ago, *Club Life* highlighted a workplace agreement that the Murwillumbah Services Memorial Club entered into with its entire workforce, and which has now been considered as probably one of the most innovative agreements developed for the club industry.

The agreement was developed to enshrine much of the existing positive culture that has developed amongst the employees, as well as the positive relationship that exists between management and staff. The agreement

has also been developed in a way that will assist in retaining current quality employees, while potentially attracting other quality personnel to apply for any future vacant positions at the venue. But more specifically, the agreement also places a focus on employee health and welfare, where the provision of a two-month allowance incentive to encourage employees to quit smoking is now on offer along with the elimination of smoking breaks as a further incentive for staff to achieve a fitter and healthier lifestyle.

Parramatta Leagues Club is another venue actively embracing innovative ways to help patrons and staff kick the habit too – the club is planning to conduct a number of sessions this year that will be open and free to all staff and their families to attend about giving up smoking. The club is also reviewing the possibility of rolling out a program for its members as well. The club also has a 'Quit Smoking Program' which offers each staff member \$250 to have treatment to quit smoking. And realising that one program doesn't fit all, the club also sponsors a range of treatments as long as they are recognised by a qualified medical practitioner.

"Whilst changes to smoking legislation will no doubt have a negative impact on a business, we have also considered that this is an opportunity for our club to promote quit smoking programs to our staff and members," explains Group Human Resource Manager Jane Grosvenor. "You are turning a negative into a positive, so we definitely haven't been doom and gloom about it."

Revesby Workers' Club is another venue that's found an innovative approach to our smoke-free times, having teamed up with a local pharmacist to help more members quit. If a member decides to join a quit-smoking program, the nearby pharmacy will provide a 10% discount. Expect more to come too.

Most, if not all, smokers know the dangers and most really want to give up. Call Quitline and you'll learn that nicotine replacement therapy coupled with a support network is the preferred

quit method. Every committed long-term smoker will agree, the thought of quitting via any method is a scary and painful one. Or is it really?

Balmain Leagues Club is another venue that's powering towards a truly smoke-free future by offering one of the fastest-growing programs around the world – *Allen Carr's Easyway*. This program is the only method that removes the desire to smoke. By removing the desire, it removes the conflict. With no conflict, the whole quitting process is made easy and, for many people, extremely enjoyable and empowering. The Allen Carr clinics are the most successful smoking cessation clinics in the world and if your club is looking for a program to make available in your area, this just might be it. In fact, this program will shortly become available in another club in Sydney's west, with more planned later in the year.

Billionaire businessman Sir Richard Branson, along with other high-profile celebrities including Sir Anthony Hopkins, Ashton Kutcher, Ellen DeGeneres and most recently 2Day FM's Jackie O, have all used the *Easyway* technique to successfully quit. There's even a long list of impressive corporate clients including Virgin, Telstra, Guinness, BP, British Airways, BMW and so the list goes on. Developed in the UK by the former five-pack-per-day chain-smoker, Allan Carr, his *Easyway* seminars are sprouting up across the globe at a rapid rate.

Carr teaches that, contrary to their perception, smokers do not receive a boost from smoking a cigarette: smoking only relieves the withdrawal symptoms from the previous cigarette, which in turn creates more withdrawal symptoms once it's finished. In this way the drug addiction perpetuates itself (in fact Carr, together with others in the medical profession, believes this is the underlying mechanism of all drug addiction). He asserted that the "relief" smokers feel on lighting a cigarette, the feeling of being "back to normal," is the feeling experienced by non-smokers all the time. So that smokers, when they light a cigarette, are really

trying to achieve a state that non-smokers enjoy their whole lives.

If this was the case, then I needed to go along and find out for myself. As a hardened smoker for 31 years, I've attempted to quit several times without success, so what had I got to lose other than the habit? Born into a heavily smoking family, I embraced the habit at a very young age. And, working in the entertainment and media industries, I was in clubs most nights, the perfect vocation for a hardened smoker, back in those days. My first quit attempt was with acupuncture. Patches, inhalers, gum and lozenges followed. My continual failings I contributed to my work. When the laws changed, my habit and I were banished outdoors. Some would say it was too late because the smoking was so deeply ingrained.

My mother's lung cancer diagnosis was another sudden wakeup call for me. I made her a promise: When her treatment starts, I would quit. Panic set in when the chemotherapy commenced the following morning. Two smoke-free days later, I became the perpetrator of an uncharacteristic road rage incident, and it was clear I needed help. So, I took up Nicorette gum and walked away from my career to nurse mum for the final six months of her life. Eight months in total and a few glasses of wine led to a single puff, which lead to an entire cigarette, which ultimately lead to a pack and the rest is history.

By this time, doctors began to prescribe Zyban to smokers, an anti-depressant drug that for reasons unbeknown to science had the side effect of quitting smoking. I replaced my addiction with panic attacks and a personality change. After much pleading from my partner I gave up on Zyban.

And, so it was with some scepticism that I attended the *Allen Carr Easyway* seminar at Balmain Leagues Club. As already mentioned, the pamphlet read "...the *Easyway* method is the only method that removes the desire to smoke. By removing the desire, we can remove the conflict.

With no conflict, the whole quitting process is easy and, for many people, extremely enjoyable and empowering." It's all just too good to be true.

Easyway's NSW director Natalie Clays welcomed me at the club, and handed me an A4 sheet and a questionnaire as another fifteen eager people arrived. It's not admitted in any Allan Carr documentation, but the *Easyway* method is medically known as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy – an umbrella term for many different therapies that share common elements: Modifying cognitions, assumptions, beliefs and behaviours, with the aim of influencing disturbed emotions. In our case, the stress a smoker goes through at the thought of not smoking.

In general, the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy approach has become widely used to treat various kinds of neurosis and psychopathology. It includes questioning and testing cognitions, assumptions, evaluations and beliefs that are unhelpful and unrealistic. In the *Easyway* case, Natalie asked us to recall our first cigarette, our favourite cigarettes, what we liked about smoking and what we would miss once we've become a non-smoker. We listen to everyone talk about their experiences, while Natalie proceeds to challenge these experiences and beliefs and demystifying the addiction itself. It's hard to imagine that after a 31-year relationship with cigarettes that I was learning something...but I was.

Those in attendance had similar personality traits: All were over the age of 35, all people persons, all comfortable talking in public, social drinkers, social people, and all with a sense of humour... there were definitely no shrinking violets in this group. We were however from different walks of life – public relations, marketing, a pilot, car salesman, theatre nurse, and drug and alcohol councillor, along with the old-school ocker guy, an Eastern Suburbs socialite, a self-confessed chain-smoker, and a beauty therapist.

As the day went on, the pennies were dropping. We had a break every hour for cigarettes. These were truly bombshell

moments and by the third break most of the crew weren't interested in going outside. Natalie encouraged us all to take the smoke break, telling us, "It's an important part of the process." For the old-school ocker, the chain-smoker and myself, no encouragement was required. But by the second last smoke, the old-school ocker and me were left teetering on the 'not convinced' fence.

As the day progressed, we were warned of our last cigarette break. Everyone happily threw their smokes into a pile on the floor. Even the old-school ocker had seen the light. I, on the other hand, snuck an extra one before bowing to peer-pressure and tossed my pack in. We were asked how we felt – everyone was excited and confident about their newfound freedom except me, but Natalie wasn't concerned. "Just give it a try, don't put too much pressure on yourself and see how long you can go for", she explained. To my complete shock and horror, I survived the entire festive season and it's now February as you're reading this and I still haven't smoked. It seems that I simply just don't want one. What's more, I've found that I am enjoying working in clubs this new energy that I have. So, if I can do it, believe me when I say anyone can...and still enjoy a night out at their local club. ■

As clubs look toward the future of living healthier and embracing their local communities in innovative ways, if your venue is looking to incorporate programs such as those found at the Murwillumbah Services Memorial Club, Parramatta Leagues Club, and Balmain Leagues Club, then perhaps you might consider the Allen Carr Easyway. For more information, contact NSW director Natalie Clays on 1300 785 180 or email nsw@allencarr.com.au. This is a sign of our times, and whether we like it or not, smoking is increasingly becoming a thing of the past.