

Case study: Rotorua

1.1 Background

Rotorua District Council has adopted a smokefree outdoor public spaces policy for its Redwoods Forest area and all council playgrounds. The policy was launched in December 2008. Signs are displayed as a reminder to remain smokefree in Redwoods Forest and in parks and playgrounds. The policy was initiated and driven by Toi Te Ora – Public Health (Toi Te Ora), following the successful implementation of a smokefree outdoor policy in Opotiki.

The policy aims to normalise non-smoking and encourage positive role modelling to young people in Rotorua and will be community-enforced. It will allow residents to provide an encouraging environment for families and make Rotorua a cleaner and healthier place to live.

1.2 Implementation

The Rotorua smokefree project was promoted to councils as part of Toi Te Ora's *Social Environments' Territorial Local Authority Engagement Strategy 2007*, which outlines actions to build effective relationships with councils. The smokefree project was identified as an organisational policy change with health gains councils could implement.

1.2.1 Approach to council

Toi Te Ora's Social Environments Team for Rotorua identified the most effective Council contacts and approached them formally. A series of meetings was then held with Council staff and management where Toi Te Ora staff presented the background for the smokefree project, supported by facts, and advocated its benefits.

Research results were presented showing there was considerable public support for smokefree parks, particularly around children's playgrounds. Staff had the Cancer Society's latest national survey data showing that two-thirds of New Zealanders support the expansion of smokefree to outdoor areas children use. Seventy percent of New Zealanders support local councils making their events completely smokefree.

1.2.2 Initial responses

Most Council members were supportive of the project, but a minority spoke against it. Toi Te Ora members found they had to be prepared with robust evidence

supporting the benefits of smokefree outdoor public spaces to deflect these comments. An example of this was:

Why do we need smokefree public places?

Smokefree parks are all about protecting children and young people. Research has shown that increased smokefree environments will contribute towards fewer young people beginning to smoke – the less they see smoking, the less 'normal' it will seem.

1.2.3 Policy development

Agreement in principle was reached over a smokefree outdoor spaces policy, however, and Toi Te Ora worked with Council staff to develop it. Toi Te Ora was prepared with substantial research which helped minimise the amount of work and time council staff would need to devote. The policy took around three months to complete from start to finish.

1.2.4 Policy adoption

In May 2008 the Rotorua District Council adopted the smokefree outdoor public spaces policy. The Council unanimously voted to ban smoking in the city's 76 playgrounds and in the council-owned Tokorangi Triangle in the Whakarewarewa Forest.

1.2.5 Promotion

Once the policy was adopted, actions were undertaken for marketing and the policy launch. The official launch of the policy took place in December 2008. Signage was installed, and a media campaign and communications plan was prepared. The communications plan includes a Frequently Asked Questions document to help clearly explain the policy's benefits.

1.3 Evaluation

A team has been formed to evaluate attitudes towards smokefree outdoor public spaces prior to the policy's launch. Toi Te Ora members are carrying out the evaluations which include a number of surveys undertaken within the community. The team will also be assessing the quantities of cigarette butts in relevant outdoor spaces in order to do a comparison post-launch. A further evaluation will be carried out following the official launch, and again one year after that.

Opinion polls published in the *Rotorua Daily Post* already suggest a positive response to the policy and there appears to be widespread support, even amongst smokers.

1.3.1 What worked well

The project plan prepared by Toi Te Ora has proved to be thorough and efficient. The team has been prepared and able to do everything required by Council from start to finish. Even though a Toi Te Ora staff member left unexpectedly during the course of the project, well documented resources and information meant replacements were able to step in and take over seamlessly.

Consistent and regular communication between Toi Te Ora staff and Council staff was also essential to the success of the policy.

1.3.2 What didn't work so well

It was observed that more intersectoral support could have benefited the project. Stakeholders in the community could have been better informed about what was happening and invited to align what they were doing with the smokefree policy.

1.4 Suggestions

The following suggestions to health promoters working on smokefree policy implementation come from a key member of the Toi Te Ora Social Environments team:

- Make sure you have a proposal to suit your specific council. Each project and policy needs to be tailored to individual councils and linked to their particular community outcomes.
- Know your information – this comes from thorough planning and research. Know what you're going to say about costs and always back statements up with figures.
- Evaluate so you have data to show what has or hasn't been achieved.
- Be prepared to answer questions about cost. Know the dollar value of the signage compared with the dollar value health cost of actual tobacco related illness to the local community (rather than national figures).