

Interview with Faye Smythe

Interviewed by Lewis Whaitiri

As an ex-smoker, when you first started smoking did you think you would get addicted?

No, I honestly thought it was just fun, everyone else was doing it and it's just something that creeps up on you. You know, it's just one here, one there and suddenly you're smoking during the week as well. It definitely does creep up on you. I never thought that I would be a smoker but I turned into one.

Do you think for your reputation that it's a good thing to be smokefree?

Absolutely I think it's so cool. I'm really proud of myself for being smokefree and that's what's pretty cool yeah because I can look at myself and go 'hey you are that person that you wanted to be.' It's so awesome. My mum and my sister were so proud of me when I quit and it just made me feel so good.

Can you tell the difference between a smoker and a non smoker?

Yeah. Hands used to be a big thing for me. You can see the yellow on their hands around their nails, you can definitely smell it and teeth are a big one. Yeah it's a huge one eye. Smokers mouths are such a put off and after a while you can really see it in their skin.

Now that you've quit, do you notice the difference financially?

I'm a big shopper and I know there have been weeks, cos I'm really big on budgeting, I'll kind of take some money out of my shopping this week and get those shoes. It gives you more money to play with. I would take the money I'd spend on cigarettes and put it aside and then buy myself something really cool with the total at the end of the month. You know it's quite a bit of money. You don't actually think about it. You don't. It becomes such a necessity that it's something you don't question what you spend money on. It just becomes part of your groceries, it's quite bad.

What's the worst thing about smoking?

Um...have you ever heard someone try and breathe when they have lung cancer or emphysema? It's just... that's what I think of and because I already have lung conditions and as my mum always said, 'oh my gosh the child with the lung condition had to be the smoker.' Just knowing the damage that I've done may not show now but it eventually will.

So since quitting what have been the benefits?

Well, it's actually amazing I ran Auckland Harbour marathon last year, which was great and I'm going to do it again this year. If you ever try to run on smoker's lungs it's impossible, you can't get far. I mean your body might be strong but your lungs just won't let you do it.

I haven't got as sick as what I used to. I did get bronchitis but the difference in my recovery was huge. I was so surprised how quickly I recovered and how much gross stuff I didn't cough up this time. I had quite bad skin and usually you're very used to not being commented on so people are going, 'wow Faye, your skin looks amazing' and I'm really starting to notice it.

Do you have any friends that have tried to quit?

I'm actually in the process of trying to support and help one of my close friends stop smoking just because it's annoying every time we meet up for coffee and she smokes. I just said, 'you know, you're making it hard for me so let's just try and quit.' And her boyfriend would like to quit and yeah it just makes me remember how absolutely hard it is to make the decision. She was like 'I've really cut down this week' and I was like 'yeah but you've got to make a decision because cutting down is just teasing yourself.'

Any advice for say your friends or anybody else trying to quit smoking?

You've got to make a decision and you've got to see it and you've got to want it you know. The decision to not smoke is an empowering decision.

What do you think about people who have used services like Quitline to help them quit smoking?

Great, absolutely. I mean I was only a smoker for like 5 years or something but you've got people that have been smoking for 35 years. It's a big thing to lose and suddenly just drop. You do need to get help with stuff like that, like the nicotine replacement patches and the help lines. There are people that are there to help you and if that's how you need to do it then that's how you need to do it.

It was obviously a real achievement for you to quit smoking?

Absolutely yeah. I find that I'm a lot more productive with my time now. I actually sit down and think, 'when did I find time to smoke?' I realised that I would create my schedules around needing to have a cigarette and I just don't have time to smoke you know? Between all the things that I do and you know the hardest part at work is the downtime when you're not on duty so I just keep myself really busy. I started on Facebook so, you know, that keeps you pretty busy.