

An Independent Evaluation of *The Filter*:
Executive Summary and Key Messages

Andrea Meek, Dr Lisa Hurt and Dr Aimee Grant

Institute of Primary Care and Public Health, Cardiff University

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Executive Summary

Existing research

In 2009 a comprehensive review of evidence relating to young people and smoking was published. Few studies were identified which focused specifically on smoking prevention or cessation interventions for young people, and the majority of the existing evidence focused on school-based programmes. The researchers searched for Cochrane reviews and peer reviewed literature from 2009-2015. There was little research on the acceptability and effectiveness of training professionals who work with young people to deliver smoking prevention and cessation messages. There was also a dearth of evidence regarding the effectiveness of direct youth involvement in smoking prevention and cessation programmes. Evidence relating to online health promotion and young people focused primarily on educational programmes involving highly structured content, with very little evidence regarding a less formal approach.

Research design

A multi-faceted process evaluation of The Filter was undertaken. First, tweets sent to or from The Filter Twitter account were subjected to thematic analysis. Second, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with The Filter staff, professionals who had undergone training from The Filter and young people who had either interacted with The Filter online or as part of face-to-face workshops. Finally, surveys were developed based on the findings of the interview study, which asked professionals and young people about their experiences of all elements of The Filter programme.

Results: Training for professionals working with young people

The Filter training team reported that initially they designed and delivered training based on the key tobacco topics identified in Wales. This was later amended, to include smoking cessation training, and bespoke training packages. Professionals who took part in interviews reported that they valued this flexible approach to training courses and had put some of the techniques they had learnt into practice in their work with young people. This was found to be the case by professionals who took part in the online survey. Professionals also reported that the training was relevant, enjoyable and gave them new knowledge about smoking.

Results: Youth development, education and smoking cessation support

The Filter developed a workshop-based approach to transmitting tobacco control and smoking cessation messages, which was delivered to small groups of young people in their own communities. The Filter staff reported that delivering these sessions was unproblematic, and all respondents identified a very strong rapport between The Filter staff and young people. The range of activities included in workshops was also identified as a key way of sustaining interest from young people, and visual aids were identified as particularly engaging. Some young people suggested that their interaction with The Filter had changed their planned behaviour in relation to smoking, or encouraged them to cut down or quit if they were existing smokers.

Results: Online health promotion

The Filter team shared tobacco control messages via a wide range of online platforms. They have achieved some level of success in terms of reach on The Filter website and potential reach on Twitter and Facebook. However, it was not possible within the confines of this research to understand if these users fit within the target demographic for the intervention, and how much overlap there was between The Filter face-to-face services and online services. The Filter staff reported that the intervention was deliverable by using a flexible approach, including the use of multiple and changing online platforms. It was not possible to understand how acceptable this intervention was to young people, as only one of The Filter's followers agreed to take part in an online interview, and only 11 respondents to the online survey had interacted with the online resources. The evaluation of social media based interventions has been acknowledged to be a challenging area (Bailey et al., 2015) and this low response does not mean that the intervention is not reaching the targeted individuals, but that the individuals were not willing to take part in a brief evaluation.

Conclusion

To carry out this evaluation, we were given full access to The Filter team and their contacts in order to gather samples for the interviews and surveys. The Filter team were adaptable in their approaches to training and the use of social media over the course of the project, ensuring smoking cessation and prevention information was maintained as up to date and relevant. Professionals noted the rapport the Filter Team developed with young people was excellent. The training provided was of high quality and professionals were able to use what they had learned from The Filter when working directly with young people. Young people liked the visual aspects of The Filter and they preferred the informal youth work approach to school based sessions on smoking. The use of The Filter social media platforms and online resources was encouraging, showing maintained growth over the course of the evaluation period. Online resources were reported to be used by the majority of professionals taking part in the evaluation, however, engaging young people in the evaluation of The Filter via social media proved challenging. The data in this evaluation suggests that The Filter is a service which is feasible to deliver. The methodology of this evaluation did not allow the researchers to examine the effectiveness of The Filter in terms of smoking prevention or cessation.

Key messages

Existing research

- Although there are many evaluations of smoking prevention and cessation programmes, including several specifically designed to target young people, few have been empirically validated.
- School-based programmes are still heavily favoured, with one programme using peer supporters within schools in the UK suggesting a 22% reduction in the odds of becoming a regular smoker (odds ratio 0.78, 95% confidence intervals 0.64, 0.96).
- Smoking prevention and cessation training programmes for professionals working with young people and the use of novel technologies as a platform for engaging young people in discussions around their health and health behaviours are well-accepted. Data on their effectiveness is still lacking.

Research design

- Qualitative interviews, quantitative surveys, analysis of social media content and service user metrics were used to examine how deliverable and acceptable The Filter was to professionals and young people.
- Due to the methodology of the evaluation this study could not assess the effectiveness of The Filter in terms of smoking prevention or cessation.

Training for professionals working with young people

- A dedicated team from The Filter provided individually tailored and interactive training sessions on smoking prevention and cessation for professionals working with young people in Wales.
- The Filter approach was valued by professionals. Training was reported to be high quality, relevant and enjoyable.
- Professionals reported being able to use the training with the young people they worked with as part of services they were already delivering.

Youth development, education and smoking cessation support

- The aims of The Filter team were to provide a service which was young person friendly, branded to appeal to young people, non-judgemental and informal. Alongside this, the service aimed to be educational and to allow relationships to be built between The Filter staff and the groups they worked with.
- The visual aids used in workshops by The Filter (pig's lungs, smoking images, tar jars) were reported to be impactful by young people and professionals.
- Professionals noted that the high degree of rapport between The Filter staff and the young people was important in the effective delivery of the smoking prevention and cessation messages.
- Few young people engaged with the advice line, but this service was used by some professionals.

Online health promotion

- Usage of The Filter website and social media platforms was reasonable, but it is not possible to conclude whether this was made up of The Filter's target audience
- Targeted messaging by The Filter social media team had limited success in engaging individuals in conversations about tobacco use.
- Professionals reported using The Filter website following training by The Filter team.
- Engaging young people in an evaluation of The Filter via social media was challenging.