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### **THOMAS QUILTS FOR REAL**

by Meagan Shand (BSc. Health Promotion) and Maureen Maher (BSc. Health Promotion)

I had tried to give up smoking a number of times, but it didn't work because I wasn't committed to quit.

I had seen all the stories and gory ads on TV, but none of that made any difference.

An employee at my work, who was well loved, had died of cancer from smoking. A few people at work committed to giving up, so I decided I would too- our work place was very supportive.



We put our names on a notice board at work, firstly we chalked up how many days we had not had a cigarette. We would take breaks together and instead of going down stairs for a smoke, we would all go to the staff room and sit together, have a glass of water or coffee and talk.

When I decided to give up I told my GP, my social worker and my employment coordinator. They were very supportive, and telling other people made a difference, because they would ask about how I was going and give me positive reinforcement and encouragement. The lady at the supermarket was also giving up so we used to talk and encourage each other.

Once, I did have a smoke with some friends when I'd had a few drinks. It took me about a week to get over it- not physically but emotionally- just the fact I had gone back on my commitment to myself.

The challenge is staying stopped. You don't really have anyone watching you and saying you are bad if you smoke- only yourself. I was very attached to smoking; it was a huge part of my life - my whole day revolved around it. I just told myself I was going to and I wanted to prove to myself I could do it.

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At home I put away all the ashtrays and stuff, and when I felt like a cigarette I'd make myself a cup of green tea, I found something to replace the behaviour. Sometimes when I was craving for a smoke I would go outside on my balcony as if I was going to have one and just mime the action, take a few deep breathes and then come back in.

The down side of giving up was putting on weight, but once it was explained that the weight gain is about my metabolism changing, I felt Ok about that. If I had known about the weight gain I would have started up exercise while I was quitting. I have joined a gym now.

Now when I am riding my bike or running for a bus I don't get so puffed, when I was smoking I would really feel it. My sense of smell and taste came back over a long period of time.

The greatest benefit is that my hair and my clothes don't reek anymore, people have told me my skin looks clearer.

The highlight was about 3 months into it, when I realised I had really stopped this time around. I had given up and it felt good doing something for my physical health – but more because it was for real , I had really done it- I had done what I had said I would.

I would tell others who want to give up smoking a few tips:

- Find at least 3 people or more who want to give up too and be in contact regularly to talk about it and encourage each other.
- Tell your GP or health professional, and seek encouragement from positive people.
- Start exercising while you are giving up,
- Also do whatever works for you- if it's not working try something else

I have given up for 3 years now and have learnt that if I stick with something I can do it, and if I can do that- I can apply that to a whole other bunch of stuff in my life too.