



# SCOTLAND'S CHARTER FOR A TOBACCO FREE GENERATION

## Never too young to quit smoking

As Chief Executive of Youth Scotland I am really pleased to have been given the opportunity to act as a Champion for Principle 6 of Scotland's Charter for a Tobacco-free Generation.

***“Any young person who smokes should be offered accessible support to help them to become tobacco-free.”***

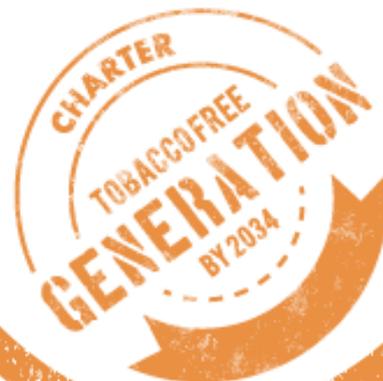
While smoking rates for young teenagers and children have seen a very welcome, and consistent, decline over the last 30 years, we also know that smoking is a habit learned in childhood. We know that two-thirds of smokers start before they are 18. Most of them say they regret having done so. We also know that every day in Scotland, a classroom full of young people take up smoking – that's **13,000** young Scots each year.

Community based youth work plays a vital role in nurturing and supporting young people as they make the transition into adulthood.



Ian McLaughlan is Chief Executive of Youth Scotland, he has a wealth of experience working with young people and is Charter Champion for Principle 6:

***Any young person who smokes should be offered accessible support to help them become tobacco-free.***

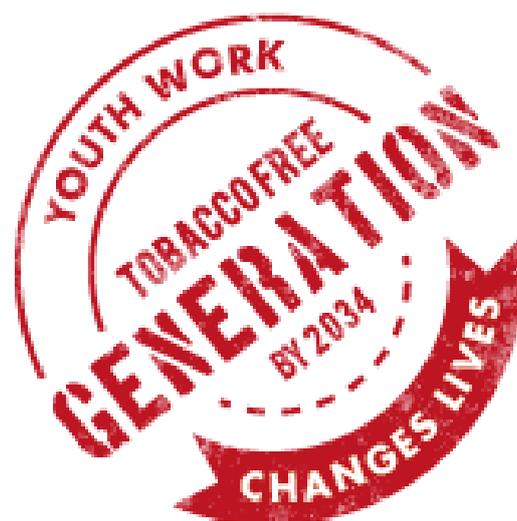


### Youth work:

- builds young people's self-esteem and self-confidence
- develops young people's ability to manage personal and social relationships
- creates learning opportunities for young people to develop new skills.
- encourages positive group atmospheres
- builds the capacity of young people to consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control
- helps young people to develop a 'world view' which widens horizons and invites social commitment.

This means that youth workers, in their position as trusted and positive role models, have a vital role to play in supporting and encouraging young people to make healthy and informed choices and decisions on smoking and tobacco.

We can see from recent studies of teen smoking that smoking can sometimes be more of a solitary pastime, with many young people finding places to smoke on their own and seeing it as a form of coping strategy to help them through stressful situations. Taking aside the myriad of reasons why young people start to smoke, smoking at such a young age could suggest real problems for the child at home, or it could be a manifestation of some other serious psychological stress.



Whilst young people are still exposed to smoking imagery in the media, it is encouraging that tobacco is no longer marketed directly, packs have been made less attractive and we have seen a real effort to reduce shop sales to under-18s. Schools and youth groups have developed education programmes to help young people make healthy and informed choices.

**The largest concentrations of young smokers are to be found amongst those experiencing poverty. It is in these same areas where higher concentrations of adult smokers are often found.**

While the huge range of factors that shape and influence the choices that young people make about smoking are as individual as every young person, the extent to which it is prominent, normal or accepted around them plays a crucial part. Under such circumstances, the role of youth work in supporting young people to make informed and reasoned decisions about their health is incredibly important.



*We should no longer look at smoking in the young as just something that they will inevitably copy and become addicted, but that it is a behaviour bound up in their life experience, part of a cultural coping mechanism and one of a number of behaviours associated with poverty, lack of opportunity and low self-esteem.*

Scotland's Charter for a Tobacco-free Generation sets out six principles in order that our next generation can grow up free from the problems caused by smoking. This final principle, to provide support to young people who have started smoking, should not be an add-on to our push for a tobacco-free generation; it ought to be part of the culture change continuum we are trying to create.



Most importantly whether we work in youth work or community learning & development, family services, schools or primary care we should be signing up to Scotland's Charter for a Tobacco-free Generation and thinking really hard about how our service can ensure that young smokers are shown the compassion that is needed to help them to be free from a dangerous addiction that has such devastating implications for their health, wealth and future wellbeing.

[WWW.ASHSCOTLAND.ORG.UK/CHARTER](http://WWW.ASHSCOTLAND.ORG.UK/CHARTER)

[www.youthworkessentials.org/youth-tobacco.aspx](http://www.youthworkessentials.org/youth-tobacco.aspx)