The **Spartans Community Football Academy** has endorsed Scotland’s Charter for a Tobacco-free Generation to reduce the harm caused by smoking and pave the way to a generation free of tobacco by 2034.

**Background**

Over the last decade, The **Spartans Community Football Academy** has been working with the local community and partners in North Edinburgh to deliver programmes and initiatives that have a lasting positive social impact.

**ASH Scotland**, in partnership with **NHS Lothian** have been working with **Spartans Alternative School** to provide practical support to improve their tobacco education and to develop a tobacco-free policy for the school.

The Alternative School at Spartans provides young people who are at risk of exclusion from mainstream education or who may find school a challenge, an alternative place to learn, grow and develop. Students attend the alternative school twice per week for 1:1 support on subjects including Maths and English in addition to physical activity sessions. There is a focus on self-reflection, personal development and fostering a **growth mindset**.
Lothian Tobacco-free Schools Project
Support was provided to Spartans Alternative School for the tobacco-free project in the following ways:

- small grant funding
- access to free resources and support
- access to time and expert advice from an ASH Scotland Development Officer

The project encourages schools to reflect on the practical realities at their school to come up with solutions unique for their setting.

At the beginning of the project each school carries out a review of their current approach to tobacco and identifies key areas for action and improvement.

Following the review process, Spartans Alternative School has really embraced a focus on smoking prevention activities and supporting pupils who smoke to consider cutting down or quitting.

The **tobacco-free schools approach** puts an emphasis on pupil welfare, health and wellbeing rather than discipline. This fits well with Spartans teaching philosophy which is underpinned by the 'building a bridge of trust' model and nurturing young people.

We know that the young people taking up smoking tend to be from more disadvantaged backgrounds and most likely to drink alcohol, smoke cannabis or engage in other risky behaviours. If pupils are smoking because they are using it to deal with feelings of boredom, stress or anger they are unlikely to respond to punishment and instead need nurture and support.

**Building capacity**

Staff first needed to feel comfortable about raising the issue of smoking with young people. Teaching staff and support staff at Spartans had opportunities to engage with relevant training, access to resources to enhance their knowledge and confidence of addressing tobacco issues with young people.

Staff members at Spartans were already aware of their role modelling influence. Around No Smoking Day, youth work staff made attempts to quit and/or reduce their own smoking. All staff have been incorporating tobacco prevention messages into their programme delivery.

ASH Scotland’s new **Tobacco-free Schools Resource Pack** has some really useful resources and classroom activities to help keep tobacco education relevant and make connections across different topics areas.
Pathways to stop smoking support

Creating a supportive environment for people who want to quit smoking is an important part of Spartans tobacco-free policy. Emma Easton (school manager) met with a smoking cessation advisor from NHS Lothian who guided her through the referral options to stop smoking support for pupils, their families and staff.

Incentives to stay smoke-free

The school manager was clear from the start that the policy development process would be student-led and guided by solutions identified from young people themselves. They decided to use the project funding as an incentive to encourage Spartan's students to engage with the project. The incentive scheme was led and designed by the young people themselves; they could earn points each week for any of the following activities:

- encouraging a peer not to smoke during the school day
- engaging in a smoking prevention activity e.g. video, research or class activity
- having a discussion with a member of staff about smoking
- choosing to miss a smoking break or to go longer between cigarettes.

The young people made suggestions around how to deal with smoking at break times, they introduced personalised targets and a peer-buddy system to encourage them to be smoke-free whilst at Spartans. They each received a gift voucher for successfully participating in the project and earning points. The alternative school plans to build on this model and create tighter criteria to repeat the scheme next term.
Challenges

“The pupils engaged with the project and took it very seriously, but the issue is that teenagers at that age feel invincible in every aspect of their life so it is difficult to change overnight. We hope our tobacco-free policy will help create the right environment to support young people to stay smoke-free or consider giving up.”

*Emma Easton, School Manager*

Schools are busy places with lots of competing priorities, course materials to cover and assessment deadlines, alongside other therapeutic work taking place at Spartans. It could be difficult at times to balance the project with other priorities. It helped to build the incentive scheme into the structure of the school day and make links with existing topics.

Although no smokers have quit entirely just yet, most have tried to cut down and non-smokers felt the project helped them ward off any peer pressure to take up the habit. Talking to pupils rather than introducing sanctions helped to build positive relationships.

**Next steps**

Spartan’s Alternative School are keen to keep tobacco education on the agenda and support young people to lead smoke-free lives. They’re continuing to offer young people incentives to stay smoke-free, making education on tobacco issues part of their programme and are strengthening their partnerships with local stop smoking services, to ensure young people can access support to quit.

Spartans Alternative School signed up to Scotland’s Charter for a Tobacco-free Generation and beyond the smoke-free schools project they will continue to take steps towards [Scotland’s 2034 smoke-free target](http://www.ashscotland.org.uk/schools).