



Smoke Signals

Tobacco Use and People with Disabilities

In THE SPRING 2006 ISSUE of Abilities Magazine, CAILC introduced the Access to Recovery project – a project aimed at providing Independent Living centres with resources and training to support consumers and community providers in addressing substance abuse issues. In the Summer 2006 issue, we talked about the impact of prescription medications on the lives of people with disabilities.

During the needs-assessment phase of the Access to Recovery project, several focus groups were held across the country. From the opinions and experiences expressed by participants, it is evident that tobacco use is an issue of great concern to people in the disability community. Tobacco use can create or worsen health issues that a person may have. It can be a financial burden. Sometimes, people with disabilities are forced to breathe second-hand smoke from their caregivers.¹ These are all issues of concern.

So, why then do people smoke? A report by DAWN Canada (“Relief... At What Cost?”, 1995) looked at the issue of substance use/misuse among women with disabilities. Women who participated in the study reported that tobacco was the substance they used most commonly. They also reported that some of their reasons for smoking included low self-esteem, the need to “fit in” and addiction/habit. Issues of independence were also a factor because the women felt that so many other parts of their lives were out of their control, and at least tobacco use is something that they could control. Some women stated that smoking helps

relieve stress and offers a person some time to think about things.

Recently, there has been a lot of attention drawn to second-hand smoke because of media coverage of Heather Crowe – a waitress who passed away after a battle with lung cancer resulting from her exposure to second-hand smoke². Smoking is a growing concern in Canadian society. In efforts to support people on the path to becoming non-smokers, many resources are available online and through service centres. Some are listed at the end of this article.

Some Numbers

According to a report issued by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, addictions to tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs cost the Canadian economy \$39.8 billion in 2002. Of that, 42.7 percent (about \$17 million) is attributable to tobacco addiction³. In recent years, however, smoking rates among Canadians have declined and continue to do so. Rates dropped from 25 percent in 1999 to 20 percent in 2004.⁴

There are many initiatives underway to encourage and assist people to quit smoking. Canada’s federal, provincial and territorial governments are working to reduce the harm associated with smoking. Many have instituted restrictions and/or bans on smoking in public places, including restaurants and bars.

As part of the Access to Recovery project, we are in the process of collecting resources and materials related to substance abuse and disability for our network of IL centres. We will also be holding a “train the trainer” institute in fall of 2006 for representatives from our ILRCs. We’ll be writing more articles for Abilities during the project, so please check back for more information!

For further information about this project, visit www.cailc.ca, or e-mail substance_abuse@cailc.ca. To read previous articles about Access to Recovery, visit www.abilities.ca, select Abilities Magazine, then The Forum, and then the Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres.

For further information about tobacco use and resources to help you or someone you know quit smoking, you can consult the following resources:

- **Health Canada**, www.hc-sc.gc.ca
- **Quit 4 Life**, www.quit4life.com.
This is a great resource where people can keep track of their smoking and find tools to help them quit. They can set up their own profiles and take advantage of a personalized, four-week online quitting program.
- **Canadian Cancer Society**, www.cancer.ca
- **On the Road to Quitting— Guide to Becoming a Non-Smoker**, www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/pubs/tobac-tabac/orq-svr/index_e.html
- **E-Quit**, www.hc-sc.gc.ca. Choose “Healthy Living,” then “Tobacco,” then “Quit Smoking.”
- **Canadian Council for Tobacco Control**, www.cctc.ca.
- **Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse**, www.ccsa.ca.

1 DAWN Canada, “Relief... At What Cost?”, 1995

2 www.smoke-free.ca/heathercrowe/FAQ.htm

3 The Costs of Substance Abuse in Canada 2002, March 2006 (www.ccsa.ca)

4 Canadian Cancer Society, www.cancer.ca/ccs/internet/standard/0,3182,3172_13163__langId-en,00.html