

# COSH motivates teens to support the goal of a smoke-free Hong Kong



Many of Hong Kong's energetic and creative youngsters have been paying much more attention to public health issues over the past few years. In that respect, one obvious priority is to encourage people to quit smoking to help build a tobacco-free Hong Kong.

The "Smoke-free Elite Teens Programme 2022-2023" provides a platform and gives them the skills needed to get the message across effectively and, thereby, have a real impact.

Along the way, participants have gained a solid understanding of the health hazards of conventional cigarettes and of alternative smoking products (ASPs). The benefits of quitting have been clearly explained. And the series of activities has included life planning and mentor sharing sessions to inspire those taking part to pursue higher education and consider future career pathways.

The Programme, which began in 2012, is co-organised by the Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health (COSH) and the Education Bureau. The latest iteration, which kicked off in August 2022, attracted more than 200 students from 27 secondary schools and uniform group in Hong Kong. They threw themselves into a variety of online and in-person learning experiences. The activities included orientation events that

featured visits to the School of Nursing at the University of Hong Kong in August and physical camps in December. There were also workshops to develop different skills: problem solving, communication, teamwork, and project planning.

Of the teenagers who took part, some said they particularly enjoyed the outdoor team-building exercise, which required them to collaborate effectively to overcome multiple challenges. Others especially liked the "Smoke-free Theatre". It let them integrate newly acquired knowledge into their plays.

Each team was also asked to develop and organise activities to spread the smoke-free message. The aim was to engage fellow students, family members, and people in the community. It resulted in more than 170 fun-filled activities being held on campus or in the community, a 30 per cent jump from the previous year. It was also a chance for the participating teens to put their problem-solving skills to good use, and overcome challenges linked to pandemic-era restrictions.

All these efforts were duly recognised at a Showcase cum Sharing Session held on May 15. At the event, Henry Tong, COSH Chairman, said he was delighted by the Government's 30 per cent tobacco tax hike, bringing the retail price of cigarettes to HK\$74 per pack, and hoped it would cause heavy smokers to finally quit. He was also heartened to see more students were motivated to encourage other fellow students and the public to pay more attention to the hazards of ASPs.

Professor Lo Chung-mau, the Secretary for Health, also commended the efforts of the Elite Teens. "The long-term goals of the tobacco control policies are to eliminate tobacco products such that our future generation will not suffer from the temptation and the harmful impacts of tobacco use. Hong Kong is the one of the first regions across the globe to enforce the total ban on ASPs. The Government plans to launch the public consultation in order to formulate effective tobacco control policies," Professor Lo said.



Activities at the physical camp helped team spirit.

## Champion: St. Catharine's School for Girls



The members of the champion team were Lau Hiu-lam, Yu Sin-yan, Chau Tsz-yan, Lee Hang-ling and Leung Hoi-man. Targeting secondary 3 students, the team organised a school-wide Stamp Design Competition with the theme "Say no to ASPs". The best entry was printed onto customised limited-edition stamps in a collaboration with Hongkong Post Stamps. "Many of our activities specifically targeted Secondary 3 students because some at this age develop a curiosity about smoking," Lee said.

A primary school drawing competition was also held to highlight the hazards of ASPs. "When the students researched the topic, they naturally found out more about the harmful elements of ASPs. The competition helped to deepen their understanding," Chau said.

The best entry of this contest was printed on file folders. The team also went out to distribute file folders to passers-by in its smoke-free community promotion. "Every time people use the folders, they are reminded of the smoke-free message," Chan said.



## First runner-up: New Territories Heung Yee Kuk Yuen Long District Secondary School (Team 3)



Among team members Cheung Ho-ying, Chung To-to, Lin Chun-tung, Wang Ivy Yu-yin and Law Hei-nam, there was a consensus that the Programme let them harness the power of teamwork and collaboration. "At the beginning we were clueless about what to do," Cheung said. "Then we brainstormed for ideas and worked together to solve the problems. These skills can also be applied in daily life."

This spirit of collaboration helped the team to overcome various challenges caused by pandemic-related restrictions and their busy study schedules. "We were committed to this meaningful event and worked out an effective division of labour and equal distribution of tasks," Law said.

The most memorable aspect was an in-person meeting with Dr Hon Wendy Hong Wen, a member of the Legislative Council. Wang said, "We uploaded a video of the interview on to our IG account and appreciate that Dr Hong also uploaded it to her account to let the smoke-free message reach a wider audience."



## Second runner-up: Queen's College Old Boys' Association Secondary School



Families were the starting point for this team's smoke-free promotion efforts, which then extended to fellow students and the wider community. Team members Hung Mei-ying, Lo Yuen-ching, Lai Chung-hang, Lam Chun-sen and Wong Sau-yip organised activities at a youth centre to engage both parents and children. "We had observed that some parents smoke outside the school while waiting

to pick up their children," Lam said. "That's why we designed games for young children to let them see the health hazards of smoking."

Lai particularly recalled a handicraft workshop organised for some young children with special education needs (SEN) at a youth Centre. "It required more patience when we interacted with these kids," Lai said. "The workshop taught them to design attractive smoke-free messages on eco-friendly shopping bags. It was great fun. We wanted the participants to pass the smoke-free message on to their parents and urge them to quit."

The team applied their problem-solving skills at the planning stage. "Pandemic infections peaked when we were planning our activities, so we were concerned about the turnout," Wong said. "The solution was to organise more online activities to reach out to the public. These included regular posts on our IG account, an online survey, and a video on a tobacco-free Hong Kong uploaded to YouTube."



## Merit Teams:

- Queen Elizabeth School Old Students' Association Tong Kwok Wah Secondary School
- N.T. Heung Yee Kuk Yuen Long District Secondary School (Team 4)
- Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Mrs. Wu York Yu Memorial College (Team 1)
- Hong Kong Army Cadets Association (Team 1)
- HKTA Tang Hin Memorial Secondary School

The "Smoke-free Elite Teens Programme" 2023-2024 is now open for application.

For more details, please visit

[www.smokefree.hk](http://www.smokefree.hk)



Smoke-free Teens

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