



Guelph Soccer Scores A Tobacco-Free Policy – Summer 2010

Although having heard about tobacco-free sport and recreation, it wasn't until a Guelph Soccer employee spoke directly with a Public Health representative that they began to examine the issue closer.

After a short conversation, Guelph Soccer decided to apply for Play, Live, Be Tobacco-Free seed grant, which was being offered to help sport teams and recreational groups create and promote a tobacco-free policy.

On March 31st, Guelph Soccer received notice that they were one of the successful applicants. From there, things moved rapidly. A Health Promotion Specialist from Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health contacted Guelph Soccer on April 6th and offered support for promoting their new policy to their 4,000 members and the broader Guelph community. The initially proposed plan aimed to have the policy developed and approved within 2 months; however, recognizing the potential challenges of implementing a policy halfway through a soccer season, the association instead approved the policy within a week.

Promotion activities began immediately with the organization's website and letters sent to coaches and parents. Promotion also continued throughout the season with announcements; promotional give-aways, through a banner at events, and via newspaper and radio ads featuring Guelph soccer members. Postcards featuring Guelph Soccer members were also displayed in local sporting goods stores highlighting the organizations commitment to being tobacco-free.

In terms of community response, the newspaper ads generated a call to the health unit by an association that has subsequently developed a tobacco-free policy and anecdotal evidence via calls to outdoor sport associations by the health unit suggested awareness of the radio ads.

Following the adoption and ongoing promotion of the tobacco-free policy, Guelph Soccer issued its annual member survey to parents which included some questions regarding the new tobacco-free policy. Twenty-two per cent of approximately 2,600 families responded to the survey. Among the findings, was a large awareness factor (88%), and strong support of the policy (97%). The survey also found that the website, letters, and announcements were most effective in raising awareness of the policy with members.

"All in all," in the words of Executive Director, Alan Gould, "a very positive change to the club".

Submitted by Beth Watters, Health Promotion Specialist, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health