



**MAKE
SMOKING
HISTORY**

A GREATER MANCHESTER SMOKEFREE SPACE: **ALL NATIONS CHURCH - OLDHAM**

1. About the organisation

All Nations Church, based in Oldham, is a community-focused organisation that combines its role as a place of worship with a strong commitment to supporting local residents. The building is used both for church activities and by a wide range of community groups, including families, parents and baby groups, older adults, and people with varying health needs.

The organisation also hires out its space for external use, meaning a diverse mix of people regularly pass through the building and surrounding areas.

As Wana Shibemba, Ministry Support, explains:

"We are a church first and foremost, but we're also very passionate about the community... we use the building for things that promote community-focused engagement."

Creating a safe and inclusive environment for all users, particularly those who may be more vulnerable, is a central priority.



2. Why they chose to create a smokefree space

The decision to introduce a smoke and vape free space developed gradually, following noticeable changes in behaviour around the building.

Over time, the team began to see increased smoking activity and environmental impact:

"Over about a six to eight-month period, we noticed an increase in people smoking around the building... and also cigarette butts and vapes increasing quite a lot."

This began to affect how people experienced the space, especially those with underlying health conditions or sensitivities.

"Some people said, because they're recovering from certain conditions, they had to start thinking twice about exposure to smoke."

Feedback from families and vulnerable groups reinforced the need for action:

"The main concern was from people with young children... and also some elderly users recovering from cancer with reduced immunity."

Ultimately, the aim was to create an environment where everyone felt able to use the space comfortably:

"We wanted a baseline where everyone can use the building without feeling like they can't... so everyone feels included."

3. Their starting point

Before the policy was implemented, smoking was a common and visible part of the environment around the building.

"It would be pretty common to see people congregating just outside the entrance or fire exits and smoking there."

While the building operated with a general expectation of being smokefree, this wasn't consistently enforced or clearly communicated.

"We had a general no-smoking idea, but it wasn't explicit... you could potentially get away with it in some parts of the building."

In some cases, this lack of clarity led to behaviour that directly impacted others using the space:

"We had a few instances where people were smoking in the toilets... while others in the building were more susceptible."

What had previously been manageable informally became a growing issue that required a clearer and more structured approach:

"Something that hadn't really been a problem was now developing... so we needed something more clear."

4. How they used the Smokefree Spaces Toolkit

The Smokefree Spaces Toolkit played a key role in helping the organisation move quickly from intention to implementation.

One of the most valuable aspects was the ready-made design and messaging:

"I pretty much used the design as is... I didn't have to think about fonts or colours or visibility, it just worked."

The toolkit also supported planning and engagement, giving structure to what could otherwise have been a complex process.

"We used the checklist to figure out priorities... and the feedback guidance to get responses from users."

Importantly, it helped staff and volunteers feel more confident in how to approach conversations:

"There were some really helpful questions for staff members and different role play ideas. It gave us a framing of how to have conversations in a positive way rather than just saying 'don't do this'."

Overall, the toolkit reduced the burden on the organisation:

"It took a lot of the mental load away... we weren't starting from zero."

5. What they did

The organisation focused on a clear and highly visible approach, using signage and consistency to reinforce expectations across the space.

Signage was placed throughout the building and surrounding areas to ensure it would be seen repeatedly:

"We put signage in as many places as possible - the front door, inside, upstairs, toilets and the car park."

This repetition was intentional, helping to normalise the message and reduce the need for direct intervention.

"If someone sees it on the door, then again in the toilet and again downstairs, it reinforces the message."

Rather than relying heavily on announcements or enforcement, the team allowed the environment itself to communicate expectations:

"We let the signage do the talking rather than telling everyone upfront."

Staff and volunteers were briefed to support the approach, using signage as a reference point if conversations were needed:

"The signage gives volunteers confidence; they can point to something rather than feeling like they're challenging someone personally."

6. Community and staff reactions

Reactions to the smoke and vape free space have been largely positive, with minimal resistance or challenge.

"People are either happy with it or fine with it; we've not had anyone annoyed or antagonistic."

In many cases, the visibility of the signage has reduced the need for direct intervention altogether:

"In most cases, the sign has been enough... people just move away from the entrance without being asked."

The changes have also extended beyond regular users of the space, influencing wider behaviour around the building:

"There used to be groups in the car park... now I've walked through and there's no one there."

Feedback gathered from users reinforced this positive response:

"Around 78% said it felt cleaner and more welcoming, and everyone supported the smokefree space."

"WE'VE HAD REALLY ENCOURAGING FEEDBACK FROM OUR USERS. A LOT OF PEOPLE HAVE SAID THEY'D LIKE TO SEE IT IN MORE PLACES."

— WANA SHIBEMBA, MINISTRY SUPPORT

7. Impact and benefits

The introduction of the smoke and vape free space has led to a number of noticeable improvements in both behaviour and environment.

The physical space is cleaner and easier to maintain:

"We've seen much less cigarette and vape debris around the building."

There has been a visible shift in where and how people smoke:

"People are now smoking further away from the building, even if they still smoke."

This has created a safer and more comfortable environment, particularly for vulnerable users:

"It reduces secondhand smoke for people coming in and out, especially those more susceptible."

Importantly, the changes have influenced behaviour without requiring strict enforcement:

"People are more conscious — they're smoking in a more considerate way."

User feedback reflects this shift in perception:

"People said it feels cleaner and more welcoming since the signage went up."

8. Challenges and what they learned

Overall, the implementation process was relatively smooth, with minimal behavioural challenges.

"We didn't really have anything come up that the toolkit didn't already address."

Most challenges were practical rather than people-related:

"The biggest friction point was just getting the signage produced and installed properly."

The experience also highlighted different ways of approaching engagement:

"We didn't do a lot of pre-consultation... but instead had one-to-one conversations as things came up."

For this setting, that approach proved effective:

"Just putting it in place and letting conversations happen naturally worked really well for us."

"THERE'S BEEN A CONSCIOUS USE OF SMOKING BY PEOPLE WHO SMOKE, THEY'RE LESS LIKELY TO SMOKE NEAR THE ENTRANCE... THEY'RE MORE AWARE OF EVERYONE AROUND THEM."

— WANA SHIBEMBA, MINISTRY SUPPORT

9. What's next

The organisation plans to build on the smoke and vape free space by strengthening visibility and maintaining consistency. They also plan to share their experience with wider networks:

"We'll feed this back through the community health network so other groups can learn from it."

"FOR US THE MESSAGING HAS BEEN IMPORTANT, AND THE TOOLKIT REALLY HELPED WITH THAT. IT FRAMES CONVERSATIONS AS A POSITIVE AFFIRMATION OF THE COMMUNITY RATHER THAN AN ANTI-SMOKING MESSAGE."

— WANA SHIBEMBA, MINISTRY SUPPORT

10. Advice for other organisations

The key advice is to keep the approach simple, visible and supported across the organisation.

"I think from some of the impact we've seen, getting the outdoor signage up as early as possible would make a big difference."

Consistency across spaces strengthens impact:

"If multiple places use the same look and message, it becomes recognisable and more effective."

The toolkit is designed to remove barriers to action:

"Whatever barrier you think you have it's probably already solved in the toolkit."

And conversations should be supportive rather than confrontational:

"Let the signage start the conversation, then be ready to speak one-to-one if needed."

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