



A GREATER MANCHESTER SMOKEFREE SPACE: SIGNPOST FOR CARERS - STOCKPORT

1. About the organisation

Signpost for Carers is a long-established charity based in Stockport supporting unpaid carers across the borough. Based at the Heaton Centre, the organisation hosts a range of smaller charities, community groups such as art groups, a stop smoking clinic, training sessions and room hire. The site includes a busy car park and a public right of way leading to the attached library, meaning the outdoor space is used by a wide mix of people every day.

As CEO, Bethan Kelly explains:

"We've been running for 40 years. Alongside being our base, we're home to a number of smaller charities because we provide low-cost rental space and room hire. We have a lot of community groups, meetings and training facilities that people access day-to-day."

The organisation's values include creating a welcoming, safe and healthy environment for staff, volunteers, carers and the wider community.



2. Why they chose to create a smokefree space

The idea of becoming a smoke and vape free space emerged from a desire to support community health. As a busy community hub with a wide range of visitors, Signpost wanted to ensure the outdoor environment reflected its values.

Bethan explained:

"We're engaging with so many different people day-to-day, we really wanted to make sure that this was a safe and welcoming space that promotes positive health and wellbeing."

The organisation also hosts the local stop smoking clinic every Monday, which made the smokefree initiative feel aligned with their wider purpose:

"We thought it was a real way of supporting that as well... we wanted to get behind that initiative."

There was also a growing sense that visible smoking near the entrance could send the wrong message to visitors and the community:

"When one person is seen outside smoking regularly, especially being a public right of way, it insinuates to people that it's okay - that we allow smoking so close to our entrances."

3. Their starting point

Before the policy was implemented, smoking in the outdoor space had become increasingly noticeable.

"It was an increasing issue, which was surprising because I don't see people smoking as often in other community spaces now. But here, it was something I was acutely aware we had to challenge."

Staff smoking and vaping breaks had also become more social:

"We had a number of staff who smoked and vaped, so there was an increase in them going outside together. It became more of a social thing, a group activity rather than something people did independently."

There were also occasional issues with local schoolchildren gathering to smoke near the steps after school.

4. How they used the Smokefree Spaces Toolkit

For Signpost, the toolkit's digital assets were the most valuable element.

"The digital assets were the main thing for us; the signage was what we used most. We made sure the posters were positioned in people's day-to-day journey as they entered the centre, so people could visually see the change."

The toolkit also gave the initiative legitimacy and helped frame it as part of a wider movement:

"Because it's a GM initiative, it felt like it had more weight behind it than just being my decision as a non-smoker. It felt like something of benefit to sign up to."



5. What they did

Signpost took a structured but straightforward approach to implementation.

They began by identifying who needed to be involved: the CEO, business manager, buildings and facilities worker, and the comms and marketing lead.

Communication and marketing were the first priority:

"We sent specific emails advising that we'd joined the initiative to staff, volunteers, hirers and tenants. We notified the library so they could put signs up too. We did a social media post, and then we put the signage up."

The full process took around six to eight weeks, timed to coincide with team meetings and updates to hirer information packs.

6. Community and staff reactions

Reactions were largely positive, with many staff welcoming the change.

"People said previously, every time we opened a window, especially when it gets warm, that it would smell. So, for non-smokers it's been a really positive change."

People who smoke were also generally accepting:

"Everyone was quite accepting. Once it was in place, people just got on with it."

Visitors and partner organisations responded well too:

"The stop smoking clinic were happy about it. They said they appreciated the support and that it aligned well with the work they do here."

Staff also recognised the wider benefits for the environment and community:

"People have commented that the space feels cleaner and more welcoming. It's made a noticeable difference."

"I'VE SMOKED SINCE I WAS 14. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME SOMETHING HAS GENUINELY HELPED ME REDUCE IT."

**— LOUIS,
ADULT CARE SUPPORT SERVICES MANAGER,
SIGNPOST FOR CARERS**

7. Impact and benefits

Several clear benefits emerged quickly.

A reduction in antisocial behaviour:

"Since becoming a smokefree building, we've really noticed a reduction in antisocial behaviour, especially in the school holidays and outside of school time when young people would congregate and smoke socially."

A reduction in social smoking and an increase in productivity:

"Another added benefit that we've seen as a result of this is staff productivity. We had a number of staff that would go out together for a smoking break, but now they're having to go off site that's not happening, so it's meant that we're seeing a lot more productivity and breaks less frequently."

"I GO OUT A LOT LESS NOW. BEFORE, I'D GO OUT SEVERAL TIMES A DAY, BUT NOW IT'S MAYBE ONCE — EVEN JUST AT DINNER TIME. THE SIGNAGE REMINDS ME I SHOULDN'T BE SMOKING AND SHOULD TRY TO GIVE UP, SO IT HAS AN IMPACT ON ME WHEN I DO GO OUT."

**— STEVEN,
ADULT CARE SUPPORT SERVICES
ADMINISTRATOR, SIGNPOST FOR CARERS**

A decrease in litter:

"We've seen a decrease in litter, not just cigarette litter but bottles and general rubbish where people used to congregate."

8. Challenges and what they learned

The main challenge was ensuring consistent communication across a complex site with multiple tenants and volunteers.

"We relied on our tenants to cascade to their staff. We're not on site in the evenings, but we haven't seen anything on CCTV to indicate the policy isn't being adhered to."

Another challenge was supporting staff to feel confident when approaching people who were smoking on site:

"One challenge we did encounter was if people did start smoking on site, having to have a potentially challenging conversation with them."

To address this, the team used the toolkit to build confidence and prepare for real-world interactions:

"To support staff members in feeling confident to engage with people when they were smoking, we used the toolkit to run through a few scenarios and situations. It helped us think about how you could say it in a way that wasn't confrontational but proactive and supportive, while still making sure people understood the initiative and the reasons behind why we were becoming a smokefree space."

9. What's next

We know that behaviour change is an ever-growing process; Signpost plans to maintain the smokefree space by keeping signage fresh and continuing to challenge smoking on site.

"We'll make sure that when signage gets weathered, we replace it, and that people don't go back into old behaviours."

They will also continue reminding staff and hirers as part of routine communication.

"PEOPLE HAVE NOTICED THE SIGNS. WE'RE HOPING IT HAS A POSITIVE IMPACT. WE'VE GOT A LOT OF CHILDREN HERE, SO YOU WANT TO SET A GOOD EXAMPLE — THEY'RE THE ONES BREATHING IT IN."

— STEVEN,
ADULT CARE SUPPORT SERVICES
ADMINISTRATOR,
SIGNPOST FOR CARERS

10. Advice for other organisations

Bethan encourages other organisations to see smokefree spaces as an opportunity to strengthen their culture, improve their environment and support wider wellbeing goals.

"I would say it really does support your wider initiatives around health and wellbeing. It helps promote conversation around health and lifestyle and ensures you're creating a really welcoming and friendly space for community use."

She also emphasises the value of clear communication and consistency:

"Make sure everyone understands why you're doing it and what the benefits are. Once people see the difference it makes, they really get behind it."

And finally, she highlights the importance of embedding the change into everyday practice:

"Keep the signage fresh, keep reminding people, and keep challenging where needed. It becomes part of the culture really quickly."

WITH THANKS

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FOR CARERS

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