

Interview with Drew Neemia

Interview by Lewis Whaitiri

How would you describe your smoking status?

Never smoker.

Do you think smoking is as common now as it used to be?

Nah not at all, I think it's starting to die out, which is definitely a good thing. I had quite a few mates who used to smoke but now they're doing their best to give up really. I don't know what's changed but maybe it's not as cool as people thought it was back in the day.

Do you think smoking is socially acceptable these days?

Not at all. I don't think smoking is acceptable now. Like I said before, a lot of people used to think it was cool to smoke but it's just not any more. I think a lot of New Zealanders are starting to realise just how much of an effect it has on your life. Cancer killed all of my grandparents, from smoking you know. So it's like definitely tearing families apart and stuff like that so I think people are just finally starting to realise that fact.

Why do you think some young people still take up smoking today?

I think maybe a lot of peer pressure has to do with it. It's the same old, same old, like just trying to fit in with the crowd. People want to feel part of the gang and so it's something that they feel like they have to do or they should at least try. I guess it's personal preference really but I've never felt pressured to try anything like that. It's like drugs for me as well though, I've never done any drugs, I've seen what it could do and that's why I've never tried it you know.

Do you have any friends or whanau who smoke?

Yeah my brothers still smoke and all that stuff and I could either go one way or the other and so I just went the complete opposite and so just never touch the stuff. I also try and think about the people that are around me as well you know, because second hand smoke is just as bad as smoking.

Is it ever uncool to refuse a cigarette or choose not to smoke?

Nah not at all. I've refused it many times. I think it's cool if you do refuse to be honest.

What do you think smoking says about a person?

Maybe that they don't have control. I find that people who smoke it does take control of their life and I've got a mate who I actually saw in desperation pick a butt out of the gutter and light it up because he was out of cigarettes and I just looked at that and I was like, 'Bro that's totally got control of your life and it's gross.'

In your opinion what's the worst thing about smoking?

I just think that the consequences of smoking are what's really bad because not only are you affecting yourself but you're affecting everyone around you. If I'm outside and someone

lights up next to me then yeah my immediate reaction is to pretty much get it out of my face because I don't want that crap to be honest.

Would you go out with a smoker?

No, actually my ex-girlfriend was a smoker and that's why she's my ex-girlfriend. I definitely wouldn't go out with a smoker, it's a huge turnoff to me to be honest.

Do you think you can tell a smoker from a non-smoker?

Yeah, you usually can because you look at their skin. I mean that's the first thing you look at when you meet someone, is their appearance. That sounded really shallow but yeah you know you can actually see the wrinkles around their mouth and around their eyes. Their skin's horrible and their teeth, their oral hygiene's pretty shocking.

Have you ever supported family members to quit?

We supported dad when he went cold turkey. I think to help support someone trying to give up smoking would be to give them positive comments every now and then you know, it's not easy and if you see them making progress then definitely let them know because who doesn't want to get positive comments?

So it was a real achievement for your dad?

Yeah and now I think its nine years since he's given up and it actually makes him sick to even have that smell around him. Giving up smoking is a real achievement.

Do you think using support like Quitline and nicotine products is a sign of weakness?

Not at all, I think whatever you can do to give up, go for it. I'm a very big family man and I don't want smoking to come in between my family you know.

Do you have any views on the tobacco industry?

Do I have a view? Yeah, you guys are assholes that's about it really.

So why don't you smoke?

Because I actually enjoy life you know. I want to spend as much time as I possibly can with my family and friends.

Do you think you'd ever start smoking?

Definitely not. I would never start smoking, it's just something I'd never do.

What are the benefits of being smokefree?

I definitely have a lot of energy. I play a lot of sport in my job as well. I do sport, dancing, boxing, like everything I pretty much do in life requires me to not smoke.

What do you think it would take for New Zealand to be a smokefree country?

I reckon I would be happy to get rid of it altogether from clubs to be honest not even have an outdoor area where they could smoke cause you see them, they all just migrate outside. I'd be stoked really to get rid of smoking all together.

What do you think of smokefree marae?

Definitely. I mean you know you really set an example for the youth and you look at any place like a marae and it's not something that you want the youth to look up to. Smoking is not a good look.