
THE FRESH AIR PROJECT

OTAGO & SOUTHLAND

BACKGROUND

Smokefree outdoor areas decrease people's exposure to second-hand smoke and help to denormalise smoking. This is supported by international and local examples of outdoor dining environments being made Smokefree by regulation. In Otago and Southland, support given to the hospitality sector for Smokefree outdoor dining by the healthcare sector was not consistent or supported by formal evaluation.

OBJECTIVE

The Fresh Air Project Otago & Southland was designed to support cafes and restaurants to voluntarily make their outdoor dining areas Smokefree in identified pilot areas from 1 November 2018 - 31 March 2019 to help meet the government goal of a Smokefree New Zealand by 2025.

METHODS

In Dunedin, Queenstown, and Invercargill, 20 cafes and restaurants were supported to introduce Smokefree outdoor dining throughout the duration of the pilot with resources, advice and promotion.

Data was collected through:

- 1) Semi-structured interviews with venue owners/managers
- 2) Customer feedback forms
- 3) Monitoring of engagement with promotional tools

FINDINGS

CAFE AND RESTAURANT OWNER INTERVIEWS

One venue closed down mid-pilot (for reasons unrelated to the project) bringing participating venues to 19. **The top 3 reasons for participating in The Fresh Air Project Otago & Southland included:**

- 1) To reduce second-hand smoke drift (21%)**
- 2) To create a more pleasant environment for customers and staff (19%)**
- 3) To create a healthier environment for customers and staff (16%)**

For businesses, talking to and upskilling their staff was the most common preparation for going Smokefree. This was supported by resources provided by The Fresh Air Team.

Venues differed in their levels of promotion and communication about the project. Offering different options was important for venues so that the promotional signage and messages fit in with their business values and business model. Some venues even decided to create their own outdoor signage. All felt that support provided by The Fresh Air Team was 'just right'.

The 3 main impacts on business included:

- 1) A decrease in smoke drifting inside (84%)**
- 2) An increase in pleasantness of the outdoor area (79%)**
- 3) A decrease in smoking-related litter and clean-up (63%)**

Other impacts included a decrease in the number of complaints from customers about others smoking (32%), and a slight increase in the use of their outdoor areas (16%). The majority indicated that there was no change in business revenue (63%) or customer numbers (58%).

Despite some challenges **100% of pilot venues stated that they would continue to have Smokefree outdoor dining** areas at their cafe or restaurant after The Fresh Air Project pilot had ended.

CUSTOMER RESULTS

1542 customer responses were received, with **94% in support** of Smokefree outdoor dining.

When asked if the change to Smokefree outdoor dining would affect their return:

67% of people would be more likely to visit again

29% said it would make no difference

3% of people would be less likely to visit again

There were small variations by town/city. Supportive comments reflected a desire for fresh air, general support for the initiative, and the beneficial effects Smokefree outdoor dining had on people's health.

PROMOTION ENGAGEMENT

The positive messaging and community collaboration had a large impact on the success of the project. While momentum was used from success of the national Fresh Air Project, support from local councils, the Otago Chamber of Commerce, and participating businesses were key to local success. Each promotional method had different strengths and weaknesses, and using a combination was beneficial.

Some venues approached the team to sign up after the pilot had started, and many others were happy to join the movement to promote Smokefree outdoor dining. **There are now 45 venues with Smokefree outdoor dining featured on the Fresh Air website.**

DISCUSSION

The Fresh Air Project Otago & Southland evaluation provides businesses and local government with practical local evidence that becoming Smokefree in outdoor dining areas can work and be beneficial, not only customers, but also for hospitality venues and their staff.

Businesses were mindful of any changes that might impact on their reputation, popularity, and profitability. Some businesses received a small number of negative reactions from customers, but mid- and post-pilot findings showed that this was rare. Those who did receive negative feedback chose to remain Smokefree because they felt like it was the right thing to do, and many felt they had done the hard work already with making the change to Smokefree. Results found that Smokefree outdoor dining has positive effects on business; including reduced smoke drift, a more pleasant outdoor area, and reduced smoking-

related litter clean up. Furthermore, the pilot found that Smokefree outdoor dining had minimal impact on business revenue. A Smokefree outdoor dining policy would help to even the playing field and remove the risk for the hospitality sector.

Evidence from the customer feedback forms found a large percentage of customers supported the change to Smokefree outdoor dining, and many were more likely to visit again. There were only slight variations between cities. Negative responses on social media were more common.

Collaboration and positive branding contributed hugely to the success of the project. Building on the success the Fresh Air Project had in other regions of New Zealand helped to build momentum for change. However, participating venues and community project supporters played a valuable role in helping to communicate messages in a positive and empowering way in the Otago & Southland region.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation provides local evidence of support for Smokefree outdoor dining from both businesses and public. Smokefree outdoor dining has a role to play in achieving the vision of a Smokefree Aotearoa by 2025. Many owners and managers supported a "level playing field", where the risk was removed completely for businesses. The pilot was resource intense and for greater sustainability a broad collaborative approach is needed. **Therefore it is recommended that Queenstown Lakes District Council, Dunedin City Council Invercargill City Council, and local government in other areas of New Zealand, implement 100% Smokefree outdoor dining into policy.** Ultimately, the introduction of 100% Smokefree outdoor dining into New Zealand's Smokefree Environments Act would ensure all New Zealanders have access to healthy Smokefree environments.

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This report was written by The Fresh Air Project Otago & Southland Team:
Komal Suratwala, Emily Nelson, and Jo Lee from the Southern District Health Board.
Bridget Forsyth, Sophie Carty, Diana Power from the Cancer Society of NZ, Otago &
Southland Division Inc.

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