

Let there be light! Guest blog from stop smoking service manager

Brilliant account of a stop smoking service thinking about the true mission, showing curiosity, innovation and passion. I hope the other services are inspired to try similar... open minded experimentation (and evaluation) vital in public health. It's also a fine example of the [empathy and humility in public health](#) I called for recently.

Guest blog starts here...

By Louise Ross, [Leicester Stop Smoking Service](#) Manager

Note: views are my own and don't necessarily represent my organisation

I'm really proud of my Stop team: compassionate and experienced, and with genuine commitment to improving the health of some of the most disadvantaged people in our communities, we've always had really good sign-up and success rates... until the end of 2012-13. Something happened to the number of calls coming in, and it was like a shutdown that seemed to happen almost overnight. It was of course, e-cigs that had caused this falling-out of faith with what we traditionally offered. I did a straw-poll with my team, asking them to count the number of times e-cigs were mentioned by callers or service users. We had around 150 mentions in a two week period.

While everything seemed to be grinding to a halt, I saw the invitation to go to the e-cig summit in London, November 2013. I knew that I had to equip myself with better knowledge about the devices, their appeal, and why they had captured the imagination of smokers who wanted to change their smoking behaviour. I was intrigued to see people vaping indoors, and it was clear that there was no smell. I talked to vapers, who were so helpful when I asked naïve questions.

The summit was a turning-point for me. I went back to Leicester, determined to find a way to make an offer to Leicester smokers that enabled them to get the extra support that would help them stop smoking for good, while not getting ourselves in trouble for 'recommending' e-cigs.

We started talking to a retailer who has a shop near our office - we got him in to two team meetings to talk about his own use of e-cigs, and what his customers say. This was the team's own turning-point, and they were enthused by his sincerity and his genuine interest in the same things as they were - helping people avoid the real harms of smoking combustible tobacco.

Other supporters emerged, including key people in Public Health, a professor at Leicester University, a GP who wishes he could give them to all his smoking patients.

We ran a hugely successful E-cig Learning Forum in January, and one of the highlights was a Vapers' Panel, where Leicester vapers told the audience about their experiences, and answered a bombardment of questions from the floor. At the start, we did a polarisation check - how many of the 100 attendees were broadly in favour, broadly against, broadly on the fence. It was about a third for each. We did it again at the end, and almost all the audience voted in favour. The Chair (Professor David Simpson) said he'd never seen such a swing.

Between us, we have devised a plan that will not only encourage Leicester smokers to see my team, but will also give them better information about the option of using e-cigs, with an emphasis on 2nd generation models for better results. As a thank-you for taking part in a longer look at what happened after they finish seeing us, we're offering a £30 voucher to all service users who get to 4 weeks smokefree with e-cigs. This will give us some real insight into longer-term results.

We're just getting the info leaflet ready, and I'll share it very soon. I'm grateful to all the vaping tweeps I've met on Twitter who have helped me understand what I need to do.

Louise Ross

[@grannylouisa](https://twitter.com/grannylouisa)