

Ex-smoker Profile: Yvonne Barrett

Yvonne Barrett (Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe) is the executive director of Ain Dah Yung (Our Home) in St. Paul

How long did you smoke? I smoked for 12 years, starting in high school in the mid 1980's. At that time smoking seemed to be more acceptable. Schools had unofficial smoking areas where teachers knew kids smoked between classes.

What inspired you to quit? I've lost three close loved ones to lung cancer. The first was my mom in 1997. She was sick for about six months and was continually misdiagnosed until 2 weeks before she passed on. The doctors thought she had TB and the treatment wore her down. By the time they realized it was lung cancer it was too late. Watching someone you love and adore die from lung cancer is excruciating. As I spent my final moments with my mom I made a commitment to stop smoking. It took 6 months, but in the summer of 1997 I bought my last pack of Marlboro Lights.

What were your barriers to quitting? We all have patterns to when we smoke. A couple of mine were smoking when I was talking on the phone or when I was around other smokers. I took breaks at work to smoke. After I quit I still took breaks but had to stay away from the smoking area. So I went on walks with another co-worker who had quit smoking, too. When I was around other smokers I had to constantly do "self talk" to get through not asking for a cigarette.

How has your life changed? Pretty much right away I could taste my food. I could smell things better. I lost that dusty smoke smell on my clothes, hair and in my house. I don't wake up coughing every morning. I am saving money by not smoking. When I smoked, cigarettes were about \$2.50 or \$3.00 a pack. I can't believe how much they cost now! I don't get sick as much anymore. When I decided to quit, I waited until I had a cold because I didn't like smoking much when I had a cold. It made it a little easier. Also, most importantly, my thirteen year old daughter, Mika, lives in a smoke-free home. She has a better chance of not smoking later on because of my choice, and my husband's, not to smoke.

Any advice for people trying to quit? You can do it if you put your mind to it. It won't be easy but if you can get through the first few days you are home free! Find alternatives to smoking. Find supportive people. My

inspiration is another aunt of mine, Marie Reed who lives at Fond du Lac. She smoked for 50 years and gave it up. 50 years! She gave up drinking too. Because of those decisions she is going on her 84th year. Don't give up of yourself. It may take 2 or 3 tries at quitting.