

Displays under a cloud in anti-smoking debate

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Cassandra Feaunati has several smokers in her family, but the New Plymouth secondary school student proudly defends her own smoke-free status.

Cassandra (18) has been selected as a Cancer Society Smoke-free Youth Ambassador. She recently travelled to Wellington to urge politicians to ban the retail display of tobacco products. The Sacred Heart Girls' College deputy head girl was one of six youth ambassadors chosen to present a submission to the Health Select Committee last month.



"It was just something that I wanted to get involved in, because my family has quite a lot of smokers in it," Cassandra said. Her parents kicked the habit some time ago but a number of her extended family members still smoke.

"I think it's awesome to have the youth ambassadors. Young people are more likely to listen to other young people." Cassandra hopes a ban on tobacco displays, could one day lead to a ban on sales. During her submission to the committee Cassandra talked about the positive impact she believed banning displays of cigarettes and tobacco products in all shops, would have.

"We talked about some experiences and people we knew who have suffered from diseases of smoking. "They said afterwards they were emotionally touched by our submission." The Cancer Society says a recent study shows 45% of New Zealand smokers agree cigarette displays at the checkout make it harder to quit - 34% say displays triggered impulse buying. Many smokers and non-smokers support a ban on tobacco displays, says Cancer Society tobacco control adviser Belinda Hughes.

"Having cigarettes sold from under the counter won't stop all smokers from smoking, but it will help those who are trying to quit," Ms Hughes said. She is also concerned about the impact retail displays have on children. In June a 20,000-signature petition on banning tobacco displays was presented to Parliament. Cassandra is keen to campaign locally before she leaves for Otago University next year to study health sciences, where she hopes to continue her Cancer Society ambassador role.