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PRESS RELEASE

GMFA'S STOP SMOKING COURSES RETURN FOR THE SUMMER

LONDON, 22 June 2009 – GMFA, the gay men's health charity, today announced the next dates for its highly successful stop smoking course for gay men in London. The courses are free to attend and the next two will start on 14 July and 6 August, each consisting of one evening session per week for seven weeks. Since they first began in 2001, nearly 1,000 gay men have attended the sessions, which have consistently achieved a higher success rate than the standard NHS courses.

Matthew Hodson, Head of Programmes at GMFA, says: "Often men have unsuccessfully tried to quit, using a number of alternative methods, and feel they have run out of options. However, with the right support, ditching the fags is entirely possible. What sets our approach apart, and why so many men find it so successful for them, is that it is tailored specifically to the experiences of gay men. The group is a fun way to get together with other gay men going through the same process, so it's easier for our smokers to keep coming to the group and, eventually, to quit."

Gay men have many shared experiences of smoking. The reasons we start smoking are often similar - such as wanting to belong to a group, to rebel, or to socialise on the gay scene - and, equally, there are common barriers to quitting. Unlike sessions designed for generic groups, there is the opportunity

to share these experiences to help you understand your smoking habits and to support you through the process of giving up. Many men have had a life-changing result:

- *"I attended one of the stop smoking courses...and am still off the fags - which I didn't really believe would happen - so thank you for that!!!"*
- *"I completed a GMFA Stop Smoking course in September 2007 and I am still a happy non-smoker. My thanks to the GMFA team for their help to achieve this life-changing result."*
- *"Just wanted to say that I am still off the cigarettes since attending your course...I haven't touched one and have just completed the London Marathon this year, which I definitely wouldn't have been able to have done this time last year."*

For the first three sessions, the course helps you to assess why you smoke and what you can do to help yourself to quit. There is also information on the various nicotine replacement therapies that are available and how to use them. At the third session, everyone quits together and for the rest of the course there is information on what to do if you relapse and how to refuse temptation, along with ongoing support from the group. Nicotine cravings typically last four weeks so, by the end of the course, you should be completely free.

Matthew adds: "After eight years of running these courses we continue to receive positive feedback and we're thrilled that we're able to help men this way. This is not about putting men under pressure. Most people arrive at our courses having made the decision that they want to quit and we give them the information, tools and support to achieve this and to go on to live happier, healthier lives."

To book a place on the course, visit: www.gmfa.org.uk/stopsmoking or call 020 7738 3712.

- ENDS -

About GMFA

GMFA was established in 1992 and is the UK's leading charity dedicated to gay men's health. GMFA's mission is to improve gay men's health by increasing the control they have over their own lives. We believe that the best health promotion for gay men comes from gay men themselves, and so we use the knowledge and ideas of our 170 volunteers (most of them gay men) to design and plan our thought provoking sexual health interventions. We have received international acclaim for our Sex and Sexual Health website (www.gmfa.org.uk/sex) which was visited by a third of London's gay men in 2006. Our other websites include a detailed listing of sexual health services available for gay men in London (www.gmfa.org.uk/londonservices), an information resource for HIV positive gay men (www.gmfa.org.uk/positive) and a guide to gay sports and social groups in London (www.gmfa.org.uk/theguide). All of our sites can be accessed at www.gmfa.org.uk. GMFA produce a range of advertising campaigns, leaflets, postcards and booklets. Independent surveys have concluded that our campaigns reach up to 60% of the London gay population and we are the most reliable agency at reaching gay men. In addition to this we distribute our own health magazine, FS, free to London's gay bars and clubs to further educate gay men about relationships, their bodies, general health and STIs. Over the last fourteen years we have provided courses for over 10,000 gay men, providing safer sex education, life skills and stop smoking courses. We currently provide a range of groupwork interventions across England and Wales. GMFA's has Big Lottery funding which has been used to create award winning sexual health interventions for Black gay men in London.

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