

Fall 2010

Gambling: The Hidden Addiction

Elizabeth, age 52, has spent years battling an addiction. Like all addicts, she tried to stop. Like all addicts, she lied to her family. She sometimes lost track of time. Her addiction caused her to have problems at work and in her marriage. But Elizabeth doesn't drink or do drugs. You can't smell her addiction, or find any hint of addiction in her appearance. Elizabeth was battling what is sometimes called a hidden addiction-problem gambling.

Elizabeth is typical of a lot of problem gamblers in West Virginia. She spent her early years taking care of her kids, and when they grew up and moved away, she had extra time on her hands. She was a responsible member of the community and had held the same professional position for seven years. She started out occasionally going to the local racetrack, but then moved to what she called "the little mom and pop places with machines." She said the other patrons became a surrogate family-always there for her when she'd had a bad day. She had a couple of early big wins and she "started chasing that rush." Soon, she had spent her savings, used credit cards, had the gambling establishment "hold" checks for her, and had gambled away a car loan. *She was \$32,000 in debt. Her husband had no idea.*

When she needed extra money, she took a part-time job

working in a video lottery establishment. She knew for sure then that she wasn't alone in her addiction. *"People would come in there and spend all their money...I remember how kids who had been left in the car would come to the door and try to get their parents to take them home. Their parents would give them a bottle or a cracker and just tell them to go back to the car and wait. They just knew they were going to "get lucky" soon. It was all so sad"*

Elizabeth knew she needed help. She saw a billboard for The Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia, and she called 1-800-GAMBLER. She was immediately linked with a counselor in her area. She didn't have to spend months in counseling, but she was able to use the tools the counselor gave her to work through her addiction. *Elizabeth called our office recently to let us know it had now been a year since she gambled.* She said she wanted to tell her story so others like her would know it is possible to stop gambling and reclaim happiness.

This caller went on local radio show WRNR in Martinsburg to tell her story on-air. It takes a lot of courage to do that, but we know this is the sort of outreach that helps the most. If you are interested in telling your story, call us at 1-888-696-2517 or e-mail Sheila@1800gambler.net. We will maintain your confidentiality.

Addicted Parents Put Their Kids at Risk



This Summer, a California couple left their newborn infant alone in the car while they gambled. Two weeks later, a Connecticut couple left their two children in the car while they gambled at Foxwoods Casino....a Philadelphia man left his toddler alone in the car so he could play slots...all were arrested; some lost custody. Over the summer at just one casino there have been 6 documented instances of kids being left alone in a car,

These children survived, but others have died when left in hot cars. Steve Burton, director of the Problem Gambler's Help Network of West Virginia, says that people with a gambling addiction are of special concern when it comes to this sad type of event. *Continued on pg 5*

Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia Staff

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Visit our website,
1800GAMBLER.net
for up to date news
on our program,
and more detailed
information about
help for problem
gamblers in
West Virginia



Professional Clinicians: The Key to Our Success

Christa Aucremanne, MA, MSW, LICSW

The therapists who work within our network are the heart of our program, so we like to feature one in each of our newsletters. Christa Aucremanne has been with our network since 2009, but she has been providing therapy for substance abuse and mental health issues since 2000. She sees clients at her private practice, Creative Interventions, in Morgantown.

What do you find most challenging about treating problem gamblers?

The denial that surrounds stock market gambling. Lots of these folks really believe they are making money, despite all evidence to the contrary, or all evidence that they are continuing their addictive cycle. I am also saddened to witness the despair and hopelessness people feel around their gambling problem. They don't know this really is treatable and people really do heal!

What do you find rewarding about treating problem gamblers?

When gamblers and their families find serenity. When they are able to achieve freedom financially and really begin to rebuild the trust and intimacy in their relationships. There is no greater reward!

Have you found any one thing that seems to work best in treating problem gamblers??

Persistence. It is never too late to get it, no matter how many times one "recycles" through the addiction. Persistence, diligence, and a willful obstinacy to never give up.

What similarities/differences have you found between problem gamblers and substance abusers?

The "drug-delivery" system. People recovering from many other addictions can just avoid their drug delivery system- bottles, bars, bags, bowls, whatever. But when money is what allows the user to access the buzz, it is more complicated. On the other hand, the preoccupation, compulsion, and beliefs can be very similar across addictions. And of course, surrender is the key to any recovery start. When any recovering person really accepts where they are and what is required, they have more serenity.

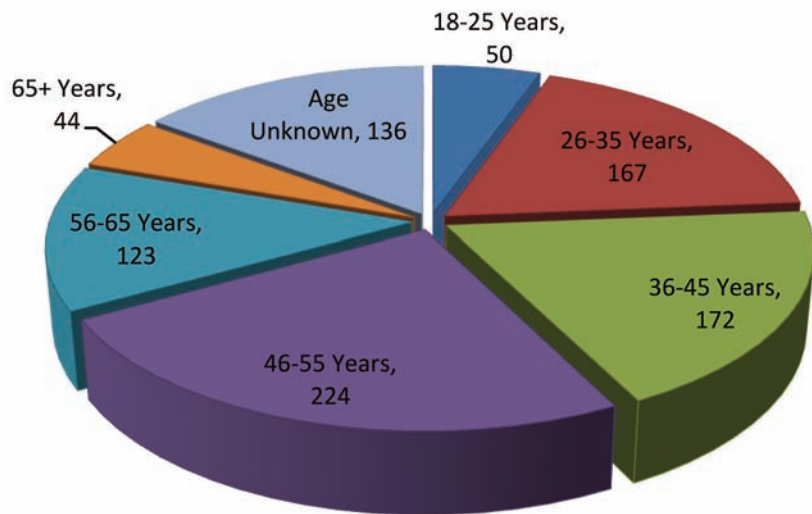
What do you spend your time doing when you're not treating problem gamblers??

I have an adorable almost-3-year-old son, Patrick who gets most of my free time. I also exercise regularly, and just finished my second 5K race! I love to read, write, and listen to music as well. As a family, my son, husband and I love to camp, hike, and play with our 2 dogs.

Statewide Data Fiscal Year 2010

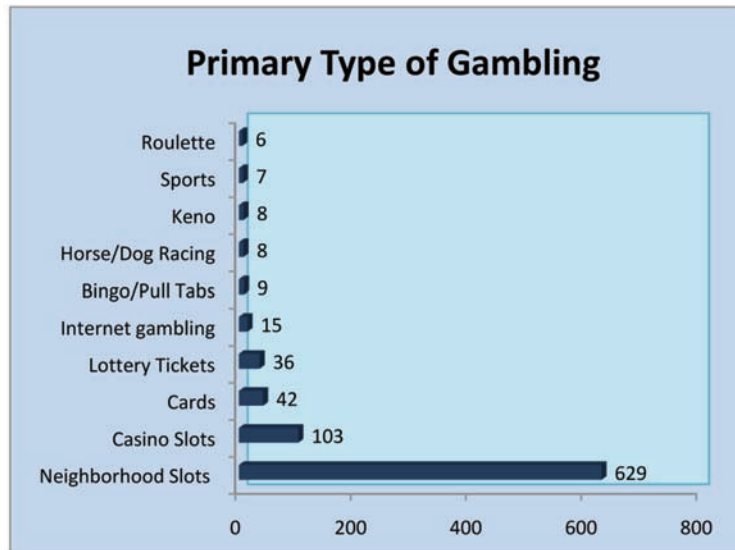
Last year, 931 people from West Virginia called 1-800-GAMBLER asking for help with a gambling problem. Since the program’s start 10 years ago, over 9,000 people have received help from 1-800-GAMBLER. This number does not include those who attend GA or counseling on their own, and many studies show only about 10% of those who need help with an addiction ever seek professional help. The National Council on Problem Gambling estimates that about 1% of the population may be classified as a pathological gambler, and another 2-3 % may have a gambling problem.

Age of Gambler



Many people think of gamblers as young people playing poker, or older people playing Bingo, but most of our callers are closer to the middle-age range.

Primary Type of Gambling



The chart shows how many callers in FY 2010 cited each type of gambling as their game of preference



Gambling too much?

Now there's a **NEW** way to get the **HELP** you need.

A Counselor is available.

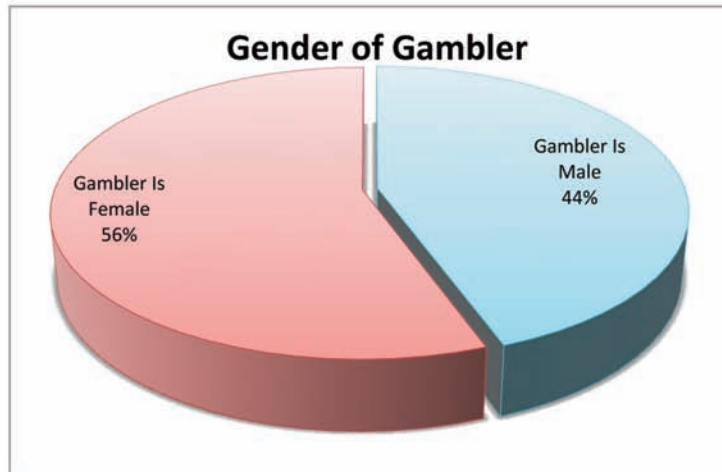
Chat Live Now!



Chat free online with a professional counselor at 1800gambler.net



The Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia



Each year the gender gap among our callers widens, with women outnumbering men. In most states, male gamblers are more common.

We asked people who attended an appointment with one of our counselors last year how gambling had affected their family.

- 123 said their spouse had threatened to leave them over the gambling
- 139 admitted gambling had made it difficult to provide for their family's basic needs
- 98 said they spent less time with their family
- 9 admitted to leaving their kids unattended so they could gamble
- 29 attributed domestic violence in the house (towards kids or spouse) to gambling
- 87 said they had to cancel a vacation
- 76 said they missed a family event

Of those who called the helpline in FY 2010, over half worked full or part-time. Around 35% of callers classified themselves as retired, on disability, unemployed, or "homemakers."

73% of people who called 1-800-GAMBLER in FY 2010 were problem gamblers....the other 27% were people seeking help for a loved one with a gambling problem.

7% of people who called 1-800-GAMBLER in FY 2010 were suicidal



Problem Gamblers Help Network Staff Gloria Kirk and Kathleen O'Neil share a laugh with summer intern Nick Gordon at our advanced counselor training at Stonewall Jackson Resort



Congratulations to Jim Keefer of Martinsburg. He was named 2010 Counselor of the Year by the Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia

Addicted Parents Continued...

“A gambler’s obsession with the game may lead them to take extreme out-of-character actions,” explains Burton. “About a third of problem gamblers who have called us have small children at home, and many admit to leaving their kids alone, either in a car or at home, to gamble.”

“Spending more time gambling than planned is a common symptom of gambling addiction,” continues Burton. “Helpline callers often tell us that they only meant to play for a few minutes, but then they lost their money and felt they had to stay longer to try to get their initial investment back. Alternatively, they may “hit” for some money, and feel compelled to continue playing those credits, hoping for a bigger win.”

The Problem Gambler’s Help Network of West Virginia counselors work with gamblers to make sure that if they relapse, they have a plan for a safe place for their children to go. Anyone with a gambling problem, or who has a loved one with an addiction, should call 1-800-GAMBLER for help.



Self-Help Guide

**Problem Gamblers
Help Network
of West Virginia**

www.1800GAMBLER.net

Self help manuals for gamblers and their loved ones are now available online at 1800gambler.net



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10 Years

The Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia has been helping West Virginia families for over 10 years now. We have helped over 9,000 people dealing with a gambling addiction.

Jennifer,

I just wanted to thank you and your staff for helping me turn my life around,-it's unbelievable that it has been 2 years and I'm still clean ,thanks to your help and your program.

Lord knows I would have gambled the money away. I did not realize that I had such a problem until I called to get help. Now I tell everyone I know there is more to life than machines. I would get my paycheck on Saturday and be broke on Sunday, most of the time losing everything I owned. The only thing I had left was personal belongings, enough money to get gas to get to work and because of the addiction I had to stay with a friend.

At this point life was not worth living anymore. I was depressed, lost all my friends, lost interest in my hobbies and did not care if I even woke up. Some nights I went to bed hoping I would not wake up. I had hit rock bottom and knew I had to do something. Driving to work I saw your sign. I told myself I did not need help and kept driving. The next day I was depressed and I saw your sign again and called. Thank God- I did it changed my life. You all got me the help I needed at no charge -thank God because I did not have any money to pay- I lost it all. Now 2 years later I am clean, I have money in the bank a beautiful wife a loving family and getting ready to buy a home. I never knew the difference that 1 phone call could make in a person's life but calling you sure did and I thank you for all you have done for me. Life is wonderful!

You just have to make one call- it's not easy but worth it. Once again I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Anything I can do to help please let me know.

Sincerely,

AN EX-GAMBLER



WHEN THE GAME MEANS MORE TO YOU THAN IT DOES TO THE PLAYERS, IT'S TIME TO STOP BETTING ON SPORTS. IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE A GAMBLING PROBLEM, CALL US TODAY FOR FREE CONFIDENTIAL HELP.



The Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia

This is a real letter one of our callers sent and gave us permission to publish. We are proud of our helpline staff and counselors for doing such great work!