

1♥800♦GAMBLER

News from The Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia

Special Anniversary Edition

www.ProblemGamblers.net

Problem Gamblers Treatment Program Marks Fifth Anniversary

West Virginia program helps more than 4000 callers; draws national attention

West Virginia's Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia is celebrating its fifth year of operation, and the program has earned national recognition for its innovative and successful referral techniques. The program, which started August 1, 2000, is funded by the West Virginia Lottery.

The statewide program operates the 1-800-GAMBLER help-line and treatment program for problem gamblers and their loved ones. The West Virginia program also responds to calls made from the (304) area code to 1-800-522-4700, the National Problem Gambling Help-line.

During the past five years The Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia has helped more than 4000 gamblers and their loved ones. Calls have come in from nearly every county and cover a wide spectrum of individuals. It is a national leader in helping to get problem gamblers into counseling and treatment services.

Callers to the problem gamblers help-line are provided general counseling assistance and offered free treatment opportunities with professional counselors and programs in their local communities. The help-line's professional counselor also assist callers with scheduling treatment with one of 85 statewide specially trained clinicians, as well as referred for group support and debt repayment assistance.

Unlike other states, the West Virginia program uses highly effective, proactive techniques to get callers connected with appropriate counseling services and treatment. The program is drawing

See ANNIVERSARY page 2

INSIDE

Primary forms of gambling	2
Meet our staff	3
Poster contest winner	4
5th year anniversary celebration	5
Therapist tops state in referrals	6
Face Behind the Voice	6
Holiday season may expose problem	7

Teacher hopes her story will help other addicted gamblers



Sandy Yakim, right, a recovered gambling addict relaxes on the beach with her sister Nancy.

by Sandy Yakim, Morgantown, WV

People come to gambling for different reasons, beginning with the entertainment aspect. And those of us who have developed an addiction may have started just that way. But then for different reasons the entertainment goes astray, and in my case it became a distraction – an ability to hide, relax and numb myself to the challenges of everyday life.

I had a great childhood. I grew up here in Morgantown and after the family moved on, I stayed here to teach school and raise my daughter, Erin. Being a West Virginia teacher, I have always had to watch my finances and work extra jobs to get my daughter through college and have a little extra money.

I had never gambled ...ever, until I took a trip to Reno with my mom to visit my aunt and uncle. They live in Reno and part of their entertainment is to gamble. This was about four years ago. I saved a little money to play and that was all I spent.

Then over the next few years I would visit Atlantic City on the way to my sister Nancy's in Cape Cod or stop off at Foxwood, once, for an hour to check it out.

Somewhere in the midst of these years my

step-dad died of cancer and my father died suddenly. I helped the family out in both situations by helping plan the funerals and speaking at the services.

Over the next few years my mom had a broken leg, a blocked artery and surgery for gall blander and a perforated hernia. And as a relaxation activity from school and running up and down the interstate to Charleston, I walked into one of the little casinos here in Morgantown. It wasn't hard....it was over on University Aveue as are many, many other little gambling spots. These video poker machines started showing up in 2000 and can now be found in at least 99 local establishments.

I started on the weekends after returning from my mom's and would just play for an hour and go home, always limiting the amount of money I spent to \$20 to \$40. Then I started stopping in during the spring of 2004 after school, and on the weekends I would drive around and visit some of the other places here in Morgantown and Westover.

My big fall into the pit came with the onset of summer 2004. I started out by visiting some of the local places each day. I actually took a class that lasted a week in the middle of all of this and at this point I would like to say that the gambling didn't interfere at all with my school responsibilities. I kept this as an after-school and weekend activity.

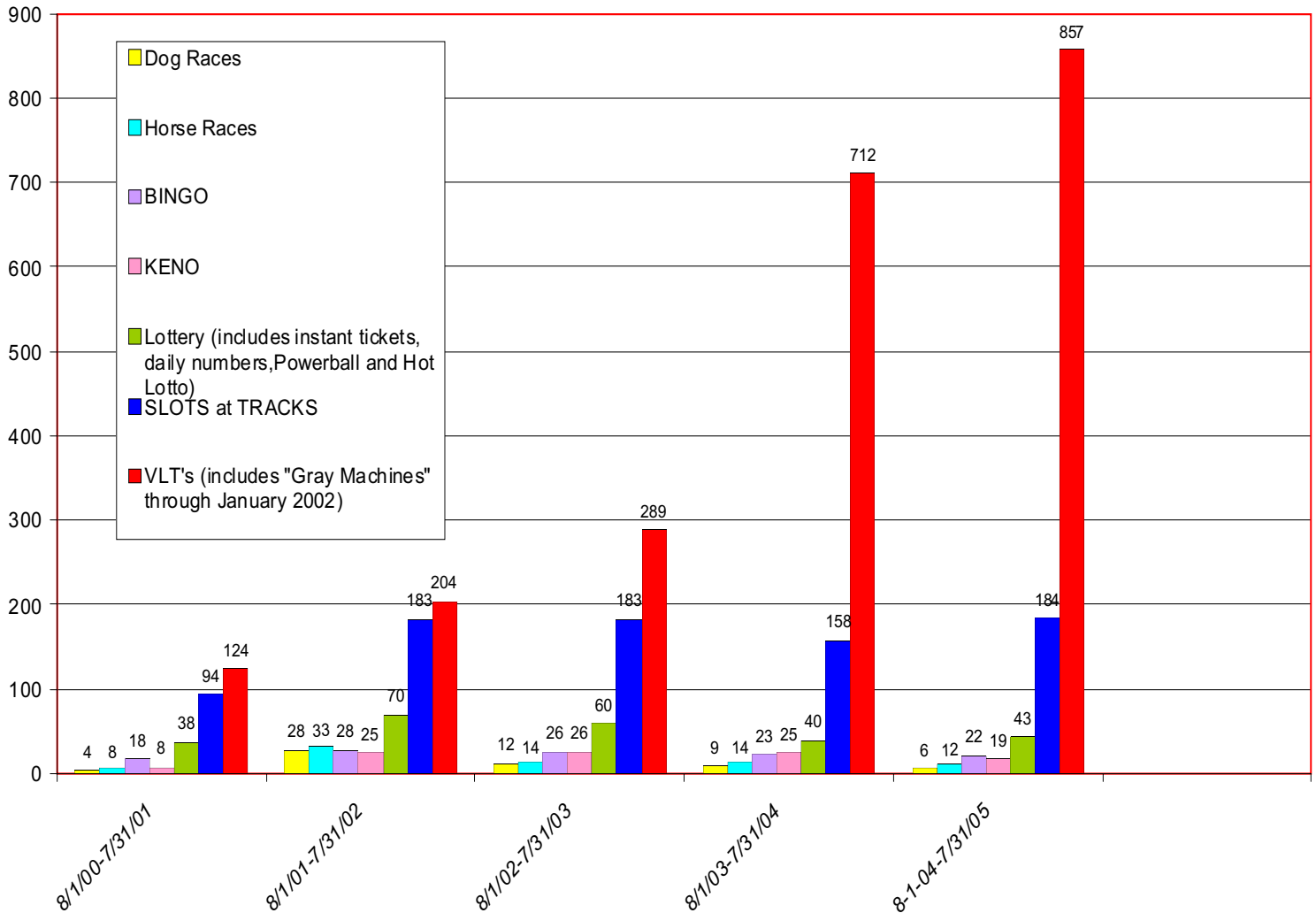
I started playing for fun, a chance to relax, visit with new people who had similar interests. We discussed wins and losses, family, travel, our health...everything! It was so much fun. But soon I was out of control.

I started going to the bowling alley everyday. I would have breakfast, get dressed and the excitement in my heart would begin. Would I win? Could this be my lucky day?

Even now as I think about it, I get excited. I am one of those folks who didn't win much. I did win \$300 one day and \$900 on another day but even though I filled out a deposit slip, I didn't take it to the bank but rather to the gambling establishments and lost that money. I went from gambling just \$40 a day to sometimes \$300. I went through my savings, sold coins and jewelry, took out a small loan to pay off my credit cards and spent that money and then began to use a pin number to take money out on my Discover Card. The company called me several times to find out if in fact I was the one

Primary Form of Gambling Problems reported to 1-800-GAMBLER

August 1, 2000 through July 31, 2005



ANNIVERSARY continued from page 1

national attention due to the fact that up to 75 percent of all West Virginians referred actually followed through and met with a clinician. This compares to successful referral rates of 10 percent or less in other states.

The Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia is providing outstanding service, said Keith Whyte, Executive Director of the National Council on Problem Gambling in Washington, DC, "Their innovative techniques have placed them in the forefront of the problem gambling field. I have worked with director Mia Moran-Cooper and her staff since the inception of this project and have been consistently impressed with their dedication to this issue and their dedication to their clients"

The objective of the West Virginia program is to keep the momentum going once someone has reached out for help, according to Program Director Mia Moran-Cooper. The therapeutic intervention begins during the initial telephone call with a thorough phone screening and counseling by a licensed, master's level social worker or counselor. Then a second outbound telephone line is used to schedule

free face-to-face diagnostic assessment and follow-up treatment for the caller with the nearest trained clinician in their geographical area.

"The signs of a gambling problem include spending more money and time gambling than intended, lying to loved ones about the gambling, chasing loss-

"I have worked with director Mia Moran-Cooper and her staff since the inception of this project and have been consistently impressed with their dedication to this issue and their dedication to their clients."

Keith Whyte, Executive Director of the National Council on Problem Gambling

es trying to win back money, and borrowing money from friends, family, credit cards, banks, pawn shops and credit cards, Moran-Cooper said, "It takes a lot of courage for someone to admit to a problem. We want to get them into help before they change their mind. Other states have called and ask us how we are so effective, and I hear a few of them are changing their gambling help-line and treatment operations to look more like West Virginia's."

According to W.Va. Department of Revenue Secretary and Lottery Director John C. Musgrave, the state's gaming industry considers West Virginia's problem gamblers help network program to be one of the best in the nation. "With passage of the Limited Video Lottery Act, we have been able to increase funding of the program by \$1 million in addition to the previously designated \$500,000 set forth in the Racetrack Video Lottery Act," Musgrave said.

The Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia is administered by First Choice Health Systems, Inc., in cooperation with the West Virginia DHHR Office of Behavioral Health Services, and is funded by the West Virginia Lottery.

At 1-800-GAMBLER, therapeutic telephone intervention and screening is provided by some of the country's most highly trained experienced staff



MIA MORAN-COOPER, BSW, LSW
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
200+ hours specialized training
Over 367 clients served



SHEILA MORAN, MSW, LSW
HELP-LINE SUPERVISOR
150+ hours specialized training
Over 1100 clients served



CINDY BLACK, MSW, LSW
CLINICAL COORDINATOR
200 + Specialized Training Hours
Over 670 Clients Served



STEVEN BURTON, MSW, LSW
CLINICAL COORDINATOR
112+ hours specialized training
Over 500 clients served



KATHLEEN O'NEIL, MA
CLINICAL COORDINATOR
60+ hours of specialized training
Over 226 clients served



JANE REYNOLDS, BA
CLINICAL COORDINATOR
50+ Hours Specialized Training
Over 280 clients served

New staff members

We have recently hired two new part-time clinical coordinators to assist with the increasing volume of callers.

Erica Abbott holds a Bachelor of Art degree in Psychology from Marshall University, where she is currently pursuing a Master's degree in school counseling.

Danielle Green holds a Bachelor of Art degree in Psychology from West Virginia State University.



ERICA ABBOTT, BA
CLINICAL COORDINATOR
35+ hours of specialized training



DANIELLE GREEN, BA
CLINICAL COORDINATOR
35+ hours of specialized training

Posters will alert WV teens to the risks of gambling



David Coulter, from Fayetteville High School designs winning poster out of 50 entries.

Nearly 300 middle schools and high schools across the state have received a poster that will educate students about the risks of gambling.

The poster was designed by David Coulter, a 17-year-old junior from Fayetteville High School. His design was chosen during a contest last year sponsored by The Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia.

"I never realized it was as big of a problem as it really is," said the student, who was encouraged to enter the contest by his high school art teacher. His design includes pictures of playing cards—an appropriate choice because poker and other card games are popular forms of gambling among adolescents. In fact, by turning on their televisions, teens can tune in to seven different channels and watch as their favorite celebrity takes their chances on winning.

David's winning design chosen by a panel of judges that included Steve Mason, Director of the Division on Alcohol and Drug Abuse for the Department of Health and Human Resources, Patty Pope, Executive Director of the West Virginia Amusement and Limited Video Lottery Operators Association, and WCHS-TV8's Brian Shields.

It's important to let students, their parents and educators know that gambling may place young people at risk, said Keith Whyte, director of the National Council on Problem Gambling. "I truly feel that parents and teachers have not been given the tools needed to help children make informed decisions regarding gambling," Whyte said.

Bruce Roberts, Executive Director of the California Council on Problem Gambling has been informed by local members of a 12-step anonymous support group of a rising number of teens present at their meetings. The key to getting teens help seems to be through their parents. Many of these youth are accompanied to the meetings by their mother and father.

The posters going out to 298 public and private schools in the state are meant to raise awareness,



said Steve Burton, clinical coordinator for The Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia. They include the 1-800-GAMBLER phone number that teens can call for information and help.

Most teenagers who gamble won't develop an addiction, Burton said. But teens need to understand the risks and consequences of gambling. An addiction to gambling can lead to a drop in grades, depression, alienation and thoughts of suicide, he said.

"The posters will help make people aware of a growing concern that has not gathered much public attention," he said. "It can be a very serious matter."

In 2004, the group surveyed public and private

high schools and middle schools in West Virginia and found that gambling goes on at many high schools and middle schools on a regular basis. Of high school and middle school administrators surveyed, 52 percent said they had seen gambling take place on school grounds. Sports betting and poker were the gambling activities most often reported in schools, Burton said.

Funded by the West Virginia Lottery, The Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia operates a 24-hour a day, 7-day a week, toll-free confidential help-line. By calling 1-800-GAMBLER, problem gamblers and their loved ones can get information and help, including consultation with a trained counselor.

Over 75 professionals attended celebration of the 5th Anniversary of The Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia



Dave McWatters, Highland Hospital; John Bianconi, Commissioner, WV-DHHR Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities; Steve Mason, Director of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, WV-DHHR Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities.



Crystal Kudlak and Jeff Wise, Consumer Credit Counseling Services.



Jimelle Rumberg, Executive Director, WV Psychological Association; Chip Urling, Owner, Image By Design.



Patty Pope, WV Amusement and Limited Video Lottery Operators Association.



Steve Burton, Problem Gamblers Help Network; Steve Mason, WV-DHHR Division on Alcoholism and Drug Addiction; Bill Light, Associates in Counseling and Psychology; Merritt Moore, WV-DHHR Division on Alcoholism and Drug Addiction.



Tom Resler; Rose Ann Hefner, Kanawha Pastoral Counseling Center; Myrtolyn English, St. Anthony School.



Nancy Tonkin, Tonkin Management Group; Sam Hickman, National Association of Social Workers-WV Chapter; Joe Deegan, WV Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors; Suzanne Thorniley, Putnam Counseling Center.

Northern panhandle therapist tops state with 150 client referrals



Virginia
Loew-Shellhammer,
LPC

Since completion of 30-hours of training in the diagnosis and treatment of problem gambling in 2002, Virginia Loew-Shellhammer, a licensed professional counselor and founder of Footsteps Christian Counseling in Wheeling, has accepted over 150 client referrals from the Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia. She was publicly recognized for her dedication to this field by the network at a recent continuing education conference at Tri-State Race Track and Gaming Center near Charleston.

Shellhammer acknowledged that working with problem gamblers and their families presents extra challenges.

"My very first referral attempted suicide because of gambling. Fortunately, she has responded well to treatment and is now progressing nicely", she said.

For many clients, Shellhammer has not only provides professional outpatient therapy but has helps coordinate with area food banks and churches to meet the basic needs of food and shelter when they have gambled away all their money.

"I have had widows who gambled everything and then were surprised to learn there was nothing left from life insurance and the sale of their home."

Shellhammer's most recent accomplishment has been to work the judicial system in the Northern panhandle to have gambling addiction recognized in their mental health court.

"Most of my gamblers do not have a prior criminal record yet it is common for them to pass worthless checks and steal money. They don't think of it as theft but as a short term loan they can pay back as soon as they win back their losses." With Shellhammer's help, those who commit crimes to support their gambling addiction may be offered treatment as an alternative to incarceration.

Shellhammer's dedication to the field of problem gambling goes beyond the role of a counselor. She has also played an active part in the formation of the West Virginia Council on Problem Gambling, a statewide advocacy group comprised of members of the gaming industry, the treatment field, the legal system, recovering gamblers and others concerned about this issue. She served as its President this past year and under her leadership, the Council bought \$1000 worth of books and videotapes about problem gambling for 10 state public libraries.

"A few years ago, I didn't give problem gambling this disorder much thought. Now, it occupies a lot of my professional time."

Face Behind the Voice

CINDY BLACK
MSW, LSW, CLINICAL COORDINATOR
200 + Specialized Training Hours
Over 670 Clients Served



"The best part of my job is knowing when someone calls our help-line, I offer them real hope and quality treatment."

Cindy Black has been at the network as a clinical coordinator since May 2001. She completed her undergraduate degree in social work at West Virginia State College and Master's degree in Social Work at West Virginia University.

It is her own 16 years of personal recovery from drug and alcohol addiction that has lead Cindy to professional work in the field of mental health and addiction since 1997. She recently celebrated the professional achievement of a seven-year dream with the opening of Rea of Hope, Charleston's first halfway house for addicted women in the downtown Charleston area. It is named for the woman Betsy Rea, who mentored Cindy through her addiction into recovery, and opened its doors last Fall.

Cindy has completed over 600 initial therapeutic interventions with problem gamblers and/or their loved ones on the help-line. Adding to that the pre and post appointment interventions, the ongoing treatment contacts as well as communications at six-months, one year and two years, Cindy has logged more than 1000 hours of clinical conversation with this unique client population. She states, "The best part of my job is knowing when someone calls our help-line I offer them real hope and quality treatment. Our recovery outcomes are very high; our client success stories are so many! Unlike other places I have worked, I don't leave my job every day wishing I could have done more."

Cindy's professional expertise goes beyond the help-line and treatment program. She has presented dozens of workshops on problem gambling, including the National Association of Social Workers West Virginia Chapter Annual Conference, the West Virginia Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors, The Probation Officers Association conferences and other community agencies. She has also served the secretary for the West Virginia Council on Problem Gambling, a statewide non-profit organization comprised of members of the gaming industry, the treatment field, law enforcement, gamblers in recovery and their family members, as well as other professionals interested in addressing the issue of problem gambling in the Mountain State.

Who might be at risk for developing a gambling problem?

Seniors

- More free time
- More disposable income
- Often will have suffered loss (death of partner, empty nest)
- May have physical pain, disabling condition
- Parkinson's drugs may increase the risk
- Considered to be common form of recreation
- May be bored, lonely or isolated

Youth

- Naive about the numerical odds
- Have had no educational program in school
- Gambling often used as fundraisers on school property
- Schools offer "Casino nights" as alternative to drinking
- Current television "poker craze" glamorizes gambling
- Unsupervised access to Internet
- May gamble due to peer pressure

College Students

- Access to on-line gambling right from their dorm room
- Colleges offer "Casino Nights" to offer alternative to drinking
- Often receive numerous credit card applications
- Poker-playing celebrities glamorize gambling
- Sports are everywhere at colleges and universities
- May be naive about the real odds

Women

- Have access to own money, credit, etc
- May be in unhappy relationship
- May have had unresolved issues with divorce, death, children
- May not have developed other social or recreational activities
- Considered now to be perfectly moral behavior for ladies



TEACHER continued from page 1

taking the money out or if my card been stolen! I told the guy that it was me and I proceeded to take out the limit on my card. As the middle of August came, I realized that the only money I had left was the money that I had put away in the credit union for the two summer months that I didn't get paid. So I started using it.

All the while, I was denying to my friends and family that I had a problem. I would put a smile on my face and laugh it off. I took one more loan out and by the time the school year started I had \$.47 left in my pocket and one credit card that I had not touched.

Your mind goes numb. You don't think about how much you have spent or you just try to ignore the mounting debt. It becomes a battle of wills. Ignoring what you know is happening to you and at the same time rationalizing that it will be fine and that you are still in control.

During this summer of 2004 I still called my mom each night as we had done for years. But sometimes I would be a little late or would run home from the bowling alley and then go back as soon as finished my call. At the time, this was quite exciting, like being a child and getting away with something. I had only been talking to my sister, Nancy, about once a week.

But finally, at my lowest point, August 30.....Nancy asked me if I was mad at her because I had not gone to visit her. That was my night to tell. I spilled my guts and cried and cried. She encouraged me to get help. I gambled one more day and on the evening of September 2, I called the Gamblers Hotline and talked to Steve Burton. For what seemed like two hours he calmed me down, gave me information and finally after much cajoling got me to accept an appointment with a counselor. That was the beginning of my recovery and the acceptance of my gambling addiction.

Friday evening, September 3, I met with my counselor, Jane Spraggins for several hours. She asked questions and let me talk and cry and then

we began working on practice sheets that made me take a long hard look at my addiction. We went through a series of questions that helped me identify the severity of my compulsive gambling and let me see how through a series of life's challenges, I had used the gambling as an escape. I met with her again four days later and we continued to delve into my reasons for gambling and also discussed money management. For several

“I have now been clean for over a year. I have money in my savings account. I can shop, a little bit. Life is good, I am happy, I have found my joy once again.”

*Sandy Yadkin,
former gambling addict.*

months following, we met weekly and as my confidence grew and I remained clean I began to recover the joy in my life and the fog began to lift.

Nancy and her fiancé Tim called me every night as they have continued to this day. They call themselves the SST (the Sandy Support Team). I will be forever grateful to them for their love and support.

As a way to replace my gambling I decided to go walking with my friend Sandy Brown. I was not going to divulge my secret but on our first lap around the Coliseum I told her my story. What a friendship we have and she kept my secret until I started to come out to my friends.

There was one more very important part of

my recovery and that was GA- Gamblers Anonymous. Jane had encouraged me to go to meetings as another integral part of recovery but I kept putting it off. I finally went to Stonewall Jackson resort where a counselors' conference was being held and they were having a meeting. I went with a fellow member and experienced my first meeting September 22, 2004. An important guest speaker was Arnie Wexler and his wife Shelia. He discussed his path to recovery and the support his wife had made to his remaining clean. They are a wonderful older couple, from New Jersey and they speak all over the United States. In January a very involved member of GA, Jane (different from my counselor) started a group here in Morgantown and I have participated in that group each week.

The power of GA is the support. We are all in the same boat although circumstances and stories are all very different. The one thing we all have in common is an inability to control our gambling. As one of our members said, "Gambling is an inadequate or inappropriate response to a life situation." Together we acknowledge that we are powerless over gambling..... but with the support of others and taking one day at a time and sometimes one hour at a time, we are regaining our lives and finding better ways to cope with a very insidious addiction.

I have now been clean for over a year. I have money in my saving account. I can shop, a little bit. Life is good, I am happy, I have found my joy once again.

The hotline is invaluable. They provide a shoulder to cry on but more importantly advice on help. If you let them, they will set up a counselor, send a packet of information and advise you on the location of GA meetings.

I will always be grateful to the Hotline and the supportive staff that works there. I enjoyed the follow-up calls at six-month and one-year intervals and I hope that I will be able to speak to them often over the years to come.

Holiday Season May Expose Gambling Problems

The 1-800-GAMBLER help-line has historically seen a spike in calls around the holidays. It might happen when problem gamblers realize they have wagered away all their money and have none left to buy gifts. Or the season's demands for extra cash may encourage problem gamblers to wager even more in hopes of making money when in reality they gamble themselves further into debt. Others call for help come in after the first of the year when problem gamblers acknowledge they have failed their New Year's resolutions to stop gambling.

The holidays also offer opportunities for secret gambling problems to become exposed to loved ones. The help-line receives any calls from family members who have just discovered that the gambler has spent all the money set aside for the children's Christmas presents and who now have nothing

to put under the tree. In one family, a woman discovered her father had stolen his grandchildren's wrapped gifts from under the tree, re-wrapped the empty boxes and returned the gifts inside to the store for cash. In another instance, a woman wrote a form letter to her family, telling them she had spent thousands of dollars gambling over the last few months, had nothing left for them but the gift of seeking help.

Family-related stress can also act as a trigger to send problem gamblers to the bars, bingo halls and racetracks as an escape during the holidays. Many of the callers to the gambling help-line say they gamble in excess because they are lonely, bored or stressed. These moods can be more common during the holiday season. If you or someone you know needs help with a gambling problem, call 1-800-GAMBLER for free confidential help.

WARNING SIGNS OF GAMBLING ADDICTION

1. Talks only about wins, not losses.
2. Gambles more often, for longer periods, for more money.
3. Hides gambling losses from family members.
4. Lies about gambling directly or by omission.
5. Uses gambling as a means to cope.
6. Gambling in spite of negative consequences, such as large losses or family problems.
7. Unexplained absence of household or personal items.
8. Withdrawal from friends or family

P O Box 2234 ● Charleston, WV 25333

Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia • Administered by WV-DHHR. Funded by

We help problem gamblers. Free. Confidential. Local.

1-800-GAMBLER

Your Lucky Number

She has a gambling problem.
Her dad.

1-800-GAMBLER
Free. Confidential. Local.

Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia • Administered by WV-DHHR. Funded by

New look for outdoor public awareness campaign

In November, 55 new billboards designed by The Manahan Group of Charleston were unveiled statewide. Because often a gambler with a problem is in denial, reaching family members is a primary goal of this round of outdoors ads. Loved ones who call 1-800-GAMBLER are offered free information and face-to-face counseling even when the gambler refuses to seek help for themselves. Billboards remain the primary method by which callers say they learned about the help-line.



Fifth year anniversary celebrated in November

The Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia celebrated its 5th year anniversary with a reception on November 14, in the Daniel Boone Room at 405 Capitol Street in Charleston. Special remarks were made by Commissioner John Bianconi, Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities, WV-DHHR. The event was sponsored in part by The Manahan Group.

See page 5 for more information.