

Problem and Compulsive Gambling 2-Question Screening Tool

Gambling is a recreational activity for many. But for some, it can become an obsession. If you think that you, or someone you know, may have a gambling problem, ask these questions:

1. Have you ever felt the need to bet more and more money?
2. Have you ever had to lie to people about how much you gamble?

Answering "yes" to one or both of these questions suggests an issue deserving further assessment.

For more information about problem gambling or where to get help, visit www.nojudgment.com or call the 24-hour, confidential Helpline, (800) 333-HOPE.



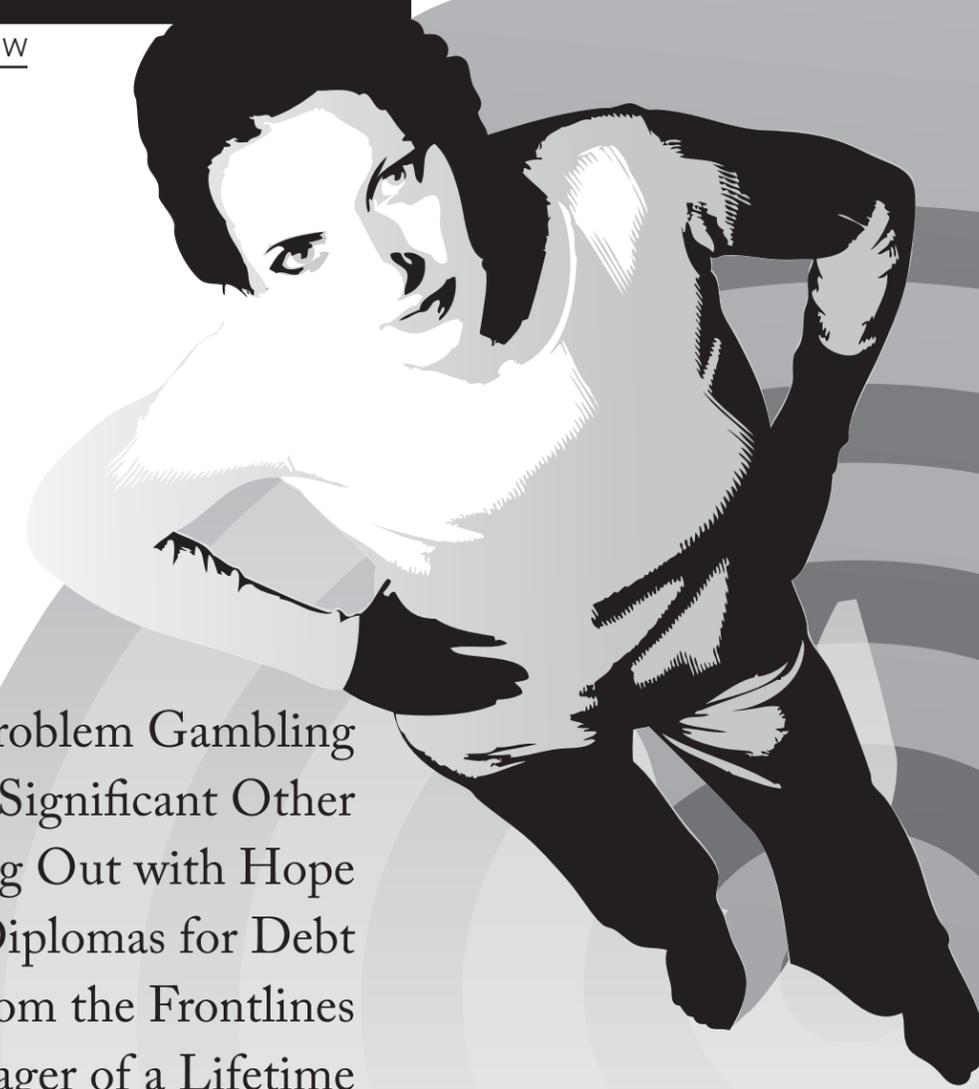
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MINNESOTA PROBLEM GAMBLING

2009 ISSUE OVERVIEW

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The Significance of the Significant Other
Reaching Out with Hope
Trading Diplomas for Debt
Lessons from the Frontlines
The Wager of a Lifetime
A Narrative of Hope
Lights, Camera, Take Action
Same Problem, Different Battleground



MINNESOTA PROBLEM GAMBLING

RESOURCES

There are numerous resources for information about problem gambling and where to access treatment.

Minnesota Problem Gambling Program

www.nojudgment.com

Free referrals and informational materials.

www.beatthebet.com

Information for college and high school students and teachers.

www.beatthebet.com/parents

Educational material for parents.

(800) 333-HOPE

Free, confidential helpline offering information and treatment referrals.

Northstar Alliance

www.northstarproblemgambling.org

National Council on Problem Gambling

www.npgaw.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 5

Minnesota Statewide Gambling Awareness Conference

Theme, location, speakers and agenda to be announced.

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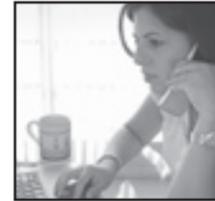
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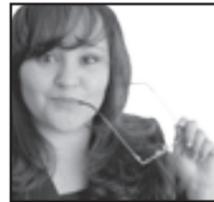
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What Can YOU Do to Help?

Gambling is both highly visible – and readily accessible – in our society today. For most people, betting money on games is a harmless recreation. Yet for an estimated 2.3 million American adults, the risk and excitement of the wager has become an addiction. According to the National Council on Problem Gambling, another five to seven million adults have serious gambling problems and perhaps 15 million more are at risk, meaning that they are exhibiting at least two recognized symptoms of problem gambling.

There are many resources available to Minnesotans who are having, or know someone who has, a gambling problem. We hope you'll find the information on the following pages helpful. What else can you do? Here are a few suggestions:

- Ask a local problem gambling treatment provider to visit your church or community association. (Go to www.nojudgment.com to find one in your area.)
- Help your high school principal, counselors and health teachers know that free curriculum materials and inservice sessions are available.
- Talk to the young adults in your life about problem gambling and wise risk-taking.
- Provide information on problem gambling to your office's human resources director for use in an upcoming employee newsletter.
- Attend the spring Minnesota Problem Gambling Conference.
- Go online and watch the winning entries from the Minnesota Problem Gambling multimedia competition: www.videostobeattheodds.com.
- Encourage medical clinics, senior centers and more to include information about problem gambling in their lobbies.

Minnesota Problem Gambling Program

The Real Costs of Problem Gambling

When Employees Have a Problem, Companies End Up Paying

According to the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, one in three problem gamblers says their condition negatively affects their work performance, and the National Gambling Impact Study reports it costs the U.S. society approximately \$5 billion annually. Yet, as an addiction that displays little or no outward signs, problem gambling often goes unnoticed in the workplace until its effects become unmistakable.

"Most of the time, a company finds out when an employee is caught embezzling money," says Isabelle Duguay, manager of the Minnesota Problem Gambling Helpline. "Coworkers and human resources personnel are generally not looking for compulsive gambling in employees, so they don't see the issue until it's too late."

Companies can feel the effects of problem gambling in many ways. A problem gambler will miss work or show up tired after late nights spent gambling on the Internet or at a casino. Employees may gamble during work hours, using company resources like phones and the Internet. Productivity suffers as gamblers focus more on outside activities than on work. An addicted employee may even quit just to cash in a retirement plan.

"The majority of the problem gamblers we see have at least some college education and are highly skilled workers," reports problem gambling treatment provider Sandi Brustuen of Project Turnabout. "So when those employees end up leaving for various reasons, that hurts companies big time."

Often, problem gambling leaves its mark in much more devastating ways. "We had one woman who embezzled from her employer three separate times and then moved on to a different company. When it's someone working for a small company and they take a couple hundred thousand dollars, it's going to have a huge impact," explains Brustuen.

The Perfect Storm

Sometimes, the effects of problem gambling – including lost productive time – meet in a way that doubles the negative effect on workplaces. The FBI estimates that in excess of \$2.5 billion is wagered on the NCAA Tournament each year. Career information specialists www.Vault.com estimates 57 percent of employees participate in "March Madness" office pools. All that time spent on pools costs employers \$1 billion over the course of the 19-day tournament, according to the National Council on Problem Gambling.

It's no wonder, then, that according to Duguay, nearly one half of all employees report that gambling negatively impacts workplace productivity. "Harmless March Madness office pools are often catalysts for some people to start betting because they get a taste of the world of gambling. Many of these individuals will become addicted to the action, the thrill of winning and, eventually, may become problem gamblers."



A Chance to Help

In addition to increased chances to gamble in the workplace thanks to events like March Madness, spring can also bring the perfect opportunity for employers and employees to begin recognizing the signs of problem gambling in themselves and others. Duguay explains that during March and April, calls increase from people needing help to stop or control their sports betting, meaning this time of year brings with it enhanced sensitivity to the issue.

Human resources organization www.HR.com reports:

"Many employers fail to consider compulsive gambling a troubling employee issue because, too often, they are not trained to recognize the warning signs of a gambling addiction. In fact, managers and corporate executives are often surprised to discover how prevalent problem gamblers are in the workplace."

Duguay agrees: "While problem gambling isn't always the first thing that comes to mind when an employee displays problems at work, employers need to better understand the addiction and how to spot warning signs."

For this reason it is essential that treatment providers, HR professionals and problem gambling treatment providers keep employer education at the forefront of their awareness activities. Free informational materials for employers, available at www.NoJudgment.com, can be effective tools for increasing awareness in the workplace.

The Significance of the Significant Other



An Often-Overlooked Key to Problem Gambling Recovery

Those closest to a problem gambler are often hardest hit by the addiction. Thankfully, they are also many times the most effective force for change in a problem gambler's life, the one most likely to get the person in contact with the help they need. For this reason, it's no wonder that fully one-third of the calls to Minnesota's Problem Gambling Helpline are from those affected by someone else's gambling problem.

Consider the story of one problem gambler's spouse. She tells of living with a husband whose gambling addiction was kept so secret that she was unaware until one day when he sat across the kitchen table and told her the truth. "It was a complete shock. One minute you know what you've got in your life that's secure and then all of the sudden they tell you, 'no, we don't have any of that anymore.' I had no idea he was even gambling. I was certain it was an affair."

The pattern is very familiar to many treatment providers, and as Duluth-area provider Paulette Beck explains, this is a critical time for both the gambler and spouse.

"The spouse is extremely important in the recovery process. Their involvement has a direct bearing on the quality of recovery both for the gambler and the rest of the family."

Even more essential at the beginning of recovery, however, Beck stresses the importance of providing for the needs of the spouse: "I believe very strongly that the family of a problem gambler not only needs, but has the right to, their own information, healing and support."

The first issue she addresses with the spouses of problem gamblers is resources. "Because you may not get all of the truth from the

gambler, you need to ensure the family is not in any danger: that they have heat, utilities and food. Once that is taken care of, you move on to protecting the family's financial resources."

The step of securing family finances is essential because, according to Beck, it is also a key component to the gambler's recovery. "In the beginning, the gambler needs someone they can trust to hand over the finances to. It's not necessarily that the gambler is not responsible, or that they should have no say in the family budget, but that it's critical that they do not have access to cash. If the spouse is willing to take over the finances, that support is phenomenal for the gambler."

Talking to a problem gambler about their issue can be difficult for those affected by the addiction. For that reason, the Minnesota Department of Human Services Problem Gambling Program has created a video designed to assist with such discussions. The video is called *Conversations*, and it takes a look at five scenarios.

A mother, an employer, an adult son, a wife and a friend all give moving and instructive examples of how to approach the subject with someone they care about and suspect may have a problem with their gambling. The stories stay true to the experiences of many. Problem gamblers are evasive, defensive and even dishonest in the face of confrontation. The affected others display the proper techniques in dealing with these situations, focusing on the concrete, affirming the person and detailing the steps toward recovery that they would like to see occur.

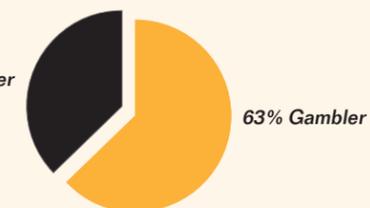
The video is available at no charge from the Minnesota Problem Gambling Program. Go to www.nojudgment.com to order a copy and for access to other materials free of charge.

Minnesota Problem Gambling Helpline

During FY 2008, the Minnesota Problem Gambling Helpline (800) 333-HOPE received an average of 334 calls per month. Of these, 120 calls were requests for referral or specific information about treatment services.

- 40.6 percent were between the ages of 35 – 50 years old
- 44 percent were men and 56 percent were women

37% Spouse, employer or other



Percentage of calls by type of caller in December 2008



To obtain a copy of "Conversations", a DVD featuring helpful ways to approach a problem gambler with messages of hope and help, contact: Minnesota Problem Gambling Program at (651) 431-2250 or kathleen.porter@state.mn.us.

HOPE

Reaching Out with

An Inside Look at the Minnesota Problem Gambling Helpline

Sometimes, the most important piece of a problem gambler's recovery is knowing where to turn. For this reason, the Minnesota Problem Gambling Helpline is a crossroads for many problem gamblers, the point at which they find the help they need.

Helpline counselor Pat Jessie often finds herself there at these critical, life-changing moments. "Gamblers call when they feel their gambling has gotten out of control or they are in severe financial difficulty. Family members and friends call when they recognize their loved one has a problem."

As do all of the Helpline's counselors, Jessie holds a master's degree in counseling and various certifications including the PCGC (Problem and Compulsive Gambling Certification). Her training allows her to administer problem gambling assessments with callers in order to determine an appropriate level of treatment and to make referrals based on their needs.

Jessie spends much of her time on the phone educating callers about the various aspects of problem gambling and its stages. One of the most important messages she gives is that "recovery is a process and that relapse is not uncommon. But, with proper treatment and a foundation of support, many problem gamblers can successfully recover."

Jessie cannot emphasize enough the importance of this final point about the essential nature of effective treatment in a problem gambler's recovery. "The work of treatment providers across Minnesota is critically needed. They provide an invaluable service to the gambler, the gambler's family and the community at large. They are helping to build a positive future for many Minnesota families."



Jessie also fields many calls from those affected by someone else's gambling problem. More than one-third of callers are those worried about another's addiction to gambling.

"They are often concerned about talking with their loved one about their problem, so we counsel them on how to confront the gambler and the appropriateness of doing so."

Jessie explains that one large hurdle she works with them to overcome is recognizing that the problem is not their fault and that they are not the only ones dealing with the issue.

"We help them to normalize their feelings of anger, disappointment, sadness and lack of trust," she says, adding that the Helpline counselor then refers the caller to the many resources available, from a local Gam-Anon chapter to trained treatment providers throughout the state. Just as they do for the problem gamblers themselves, Jessie and the others at the Helpline are ultimately focused on getting the individual in touch with the long-term, in-depth assistance they need.

The Minnesota Problem Gambling Helpline is a 24-hour confidential resource that has been helping problem gamblers and those closest to them for more than a decade. Through the efforts of the many counselors like Pat Jessie, thousands of callers to date have found the assistance they need to begin the recovery process. Those affected by problem gambling are encouraged to call the Helpline at **(800) 333-HOPE**.

Trading Diplomas for Debt

Adding Up the Costs of Gambling on College Campuses

The average college-age problem gambler will lose \$30,000 this year and accumulate as much as \$25,000 in credit-card debt, according to the California Council on Problem Gambling. The Minnesota Department of Human Services reports that 14 percent of Minnesota college students have – or are at risk for developing – a gambling problem. In fact, 18 percent of college men can be defined as having a gambling problem ("Gambling and Other Risk Behaviors on University Campuses." *Journal of American College Health*), making them the most at-risk population in America. If an epidemic of problem gambling is to be avoided on our campuses, help is needed now.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services Problem Gambling Program is launching a campus initiative aimed at helping students keep their gambling in perspective. The campaign looks at the realities of gambling and problem gambling and encourages students that choose to gamble to do so wisely. Campaign materials also direct students to resources and treatment should their gambling get out of control.

The issue of gambling on college campuses becomes more complicated when it involves sports and student athletes. National Collegiate Athletic Association regulations prohibit student athletes from betting on any sport that the NCAA sponsors, including professional sports. Despite the risk of losing their eligibility to play, student athletes do so anyway: 35 percent of male athletes and 10 percent of female athletes gamble on sporting events. Scarier still, the NCAA reports that 5 percent of football players admit they have taken money to play poorly, know someone who takes money or have provided inside information to someone.

Part of the problem for college and university administrators attempting to reduce athlete

gambling is that the methods used to gamble have changed. "The Internet has made it easier than ever for student athletes to place bets, providing easy access, virtual anonymity and essentially no supervision," says Rachel Newman-Baker, NCAA director of agents, gambling and amateurism activities.

Once students make it to the Internet to gamble, they have a harder time than their non-athlete counterparts in controlling their gambling: 15 percent of college athletes are either problem or pathological gamblers ("Problem and Pathological Gambling among College Athletes", *Annals of Clinical Psychiatry*). For this reason, the Minnesota Problem Gambling Program has devoted a special section of **www.BeatTheBet.com** to educating student athletes. Because, according to one NCAA study, fewer than 50 percent of college athletes say they know the NCAA rules on sports gambling, a good deal of the microsite deals with the regulations and consequences of betting on sports. The site also explains how easily gambling can lead to addiction. Athletes are encouraged to watch out for the signs of a problem in themselves or others and are given several places to go for help.



Lessons from the Frontlines

What Treatment Providers Are Seeing and Doing Across the State

As with any social condition, the dynamics of problem gambling are always changing. Thankfully, Minnesota's 83 treatment providers are constantly looking for new and effective ways to help problem gamblers. A look at the work of two treatment providers – one from the metro area and one from greater Minnesota – gives a valuable glimpse into the techniques employed by those in the field.

The Changing Face of Gambling Addiction.

A good deal of the problem gamblers seen by Nancy Anderson of Gambler's Relief in Burnsville defy conventional stereotypes. Many of the people she works with are women, and many rarely, if ever, enter a casino. "The trend has been more women coming into treatment. We're also seeing more Internet gamblers," reports Anderson.

Anderson also notes the unique motivations and difficulties for these gamblers. "I think more women are gambling these days because they find it a safe place to go for entertainment or to compensate for their loneliness or boredom. Internet gambling is often harder to come to grips with for the gambler because it's not like they are going into an actual casino several nights a week."

One of the most important tactics Anderson points to in dealing with these and other particularly difficult situations is to set limits. "Money is not something they can have. We tell them they have to set limits on their access. That's why it's so essential to have the support of those around them, to help them limit their access to money."

Healing the Whole Person.

Rochester-area treatment provider Christina Pristash takes a view of gambling and other addictions that may at first seem surprising to other treatment professionals. "What has worked well in my practice is focusing on body and mind awareness. Helping people become more in tune with their body and their needs, cravings and desires."

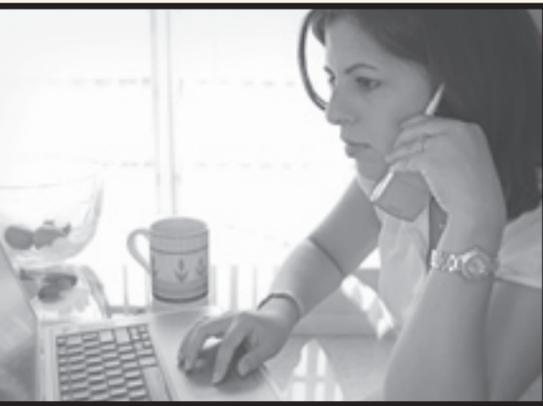
Pristash describes a common dynamic in gambling problems: "people are not aware of the true need or desire that they are attempting to satisfy with their gambling. The problem is that gambling only seems to work, but it never really meets the need. So I teach them to be more knowledgeable about themselves to satisfy the actual need."

Problem gamblers are very responsive to the technique. "People are surprised by the results when they start to think along those lines. They sometimes say they can hear me in their heads as they go along with their week, being aware and accountable for what they do to meet their needs." Pristash points to one woman's recovery in particular: "One client realized that whenever she carried tension in her neck, she would go to the casino to relieve it. But if she did other healthier things to release the tension in her body, the temptation felt more manageable and the likelihood of her gambling dropped."

Another correlation Pristash is excited to explore with her clients is the connection between gambling and other addictions. "One woman originally came in with a gambling problem, but she thought she was only a social drinker. Once she realized that alcohol made her more likely to gamble, she was able to give it up, along with gambling and smoking. She is even now tackling weight loss." The client is a particularly moving story for Pristash as she has agreed to help others by speaking at training sessions.

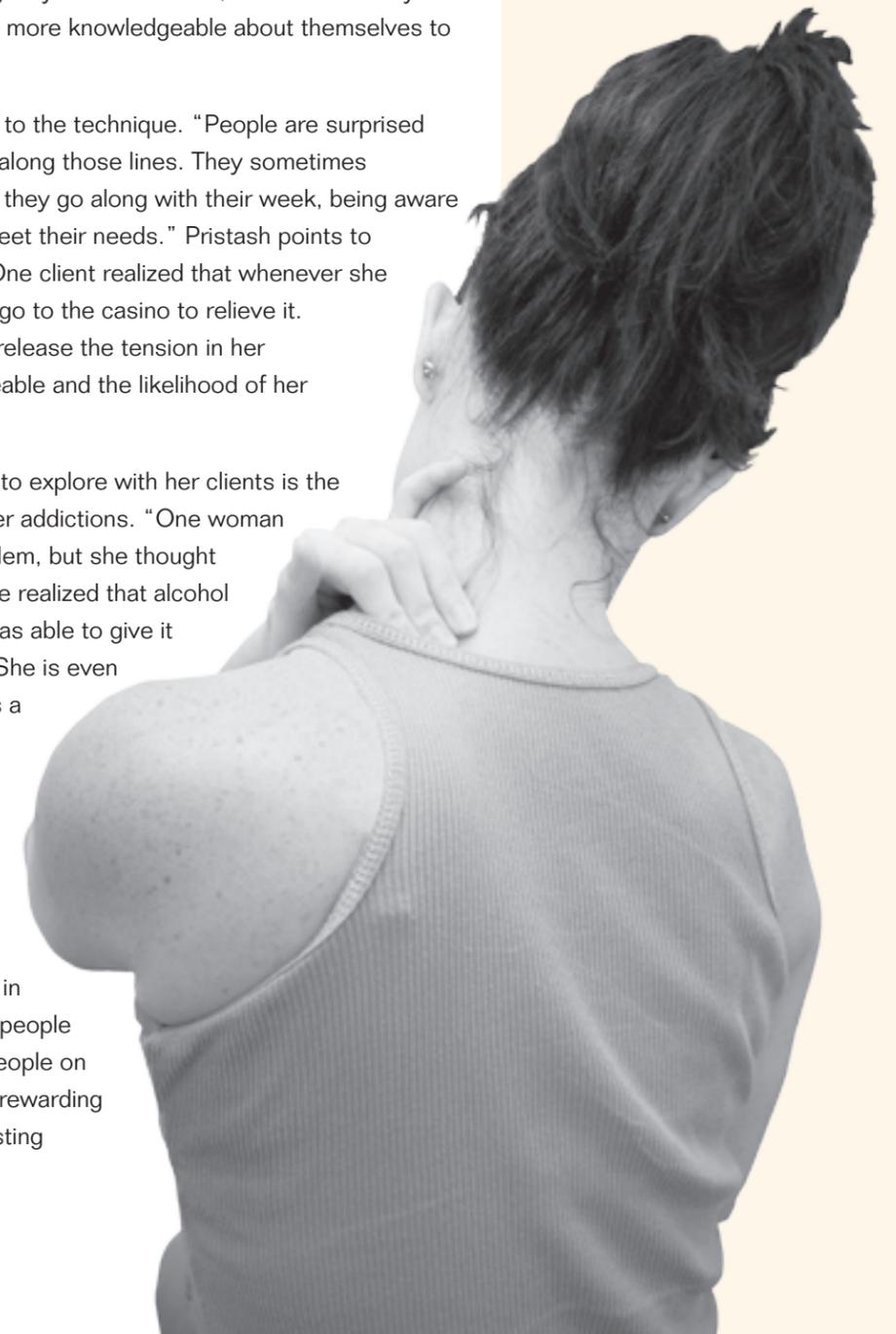
Above all, Pristash is encouraged by the improvement she sees in the lives of problem gamblers through the treatment efforts of herself and others in her field. "I'm just amazed at how well people respond to treatment. We work with people on making a lifestyle change and it's very rewarding to see people go with it and make a lasting commitment to recovery."

To locate a treatment provider in Minnesota, go to www.nojudgment.com or call the toll-free helpline at **(800) 333-HOPE**.



"The trend has been more women coming into treatment. We're also seeing more Internet gamblers,"

Nancy Anderson of Gambler's Relief in Burnsville



The Wager of a Lifetime

Teaching Teens the Realities of Gambling



4% – 8%

MEET CRITERIA FOR A GAMBLING PROBLEM

10% – 15%

AT RISK OF DEVELOPING A PROBLEM

TEEN RATES FOR PROBLEM GAMBLING ARE HIGHER THAN FOR ADULTS.

Approximately 4%–8% of kids between 12 and 17 years of age meet criteria for a gambling problem, and another 10%–15% are at risk of developing a problem.

(National Council on Problem Gambling)

Recognizing that parental involvement is one of the most important influences in a young person's decision-making process, a key element in the efforts to reduce teen problem gambling is a website targeting parents directly.

www.BeatTheBet.com/Parents

Though high school students are as many as three times more likely than adults to develop a serious gambling problem according to the Youth Gambling Association, many parents, teachers and counselors wrongly assume that laws against gambling among minors mean the situation is under control. Nothing, unfortunately, could be further from the truth.

University of Minnesota problem gambling researcher Randy Stinchfield, Ph.D., reports that more than half of all Minnesota high school students surveyed say they have gambled in the past year. And Minnesota teens play the lottery more than twice as often as teens in the rest of the country.

With experts estimating that as many as half a million American high school students may be addicted to gambling according to ABC News, the Minnesota Department of Human Services Problem Gambling Program has launched several proactive initiatives aimed at raising awareness of problem gambling among teenagers and their parents. The intent is to give teens the tools they need to think wisely about gambling, to recognize the signs of a problem in themselves or others, and to seek help from a variety of sources.

Recognizing that parental involvement is one of the most important influences in a young person's decision-making process, a key element in the efforts to reduce teen problem gambling is a website targeting parents directly. The new site, www.BeatTheBet.com/Parents, takes parents on a virtual tour of the issue, beginning with an opening presentation demonstrating that problem gambling can affect anyone. Then, visitors can find essential information about problem gambling and its warning signs, including advice on how to talk about the issue. Parents can

also send an E-mail inviting someone to take a 20-question self-assessment quiz that offers an easy way to help students consider their gambling habits and whether they may be on the road to a problem.

The site's main message is that it is critical that parents know how to help their kids make good decisions regarding gambling. An essential key is keeping the lines of communication open. The more parents talk to their kids, the better they are able to assess when there might be a problem. Also, open dialogue allows parents to talk to teens about the realities of gambling and the consequences of risk taking. Above all, parents can help their kids most by being a good role model of responsible behavior when it comes to risky activities like gambling.

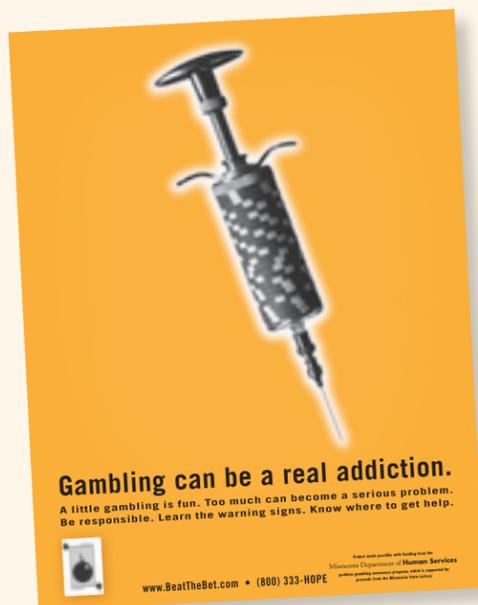
Another key turning point for young people learning to make lifetime decisions is the instruction they receive in high school classrooms. After a successful pilot program tested in two Minnesota schools last year, problem gambling curriculum developed by the Minnesota Problem Gambling Program was provided to 1,185 health teachers across the state.

The curriculum (shown at right) was designed to empower teenagers, affirming that gambling choices are truly their own. The three 30-minute lessons run the gamut from explaining gambling realities to inviting students to discuss what they would do if presented with specific gambling- and money-related scenarios.

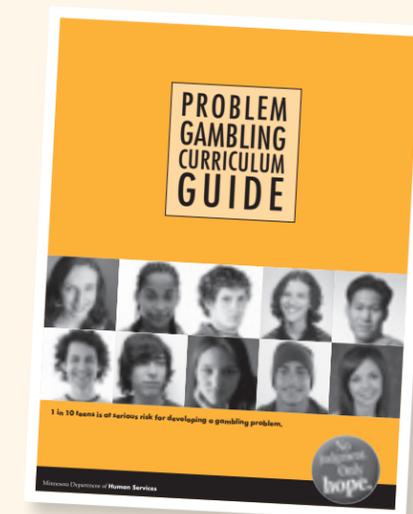
The curriculum was also sent to high school counselors along with a poster proclaiming the message: "Problem gambling is a real addiction." The poster's striking image cuts through the notion that problem gambling can be ignored in the face of more visible "real" addictions. The hope is that, armed with an accurate idea of gambling's realities, students will be better equipped to confront this life-changing issue.

Teacher In-Services

In an effort to raise awareness among educators, letters have been sent to curriculum directors around the state inviting them to consider including a presentation from a treatment provider during teacher in-services. A PowerPoint containing powerful facts about the issue, short video clips and important information designed to teach educators how to deal with problem gambling among their students is available for treatment provider use and can be requested from the Minnesota Problem Gambling Program.



Above poster is being used in Minnesota schools.



A Narrative of

HOPE

For Native American Problem Gamblers, Telling the Story Is Key

“My personal story has become my most effective tool.”

*Thelma Wang,
Assistant director of Indian Child Welfare and problem gambling treatment provider on Minnesota’s White Earth Reservation*

The dynamics of problem gambling on Native American reservations have a habit of defying previously held assumptions. For Thelma Wang, assistant director of Indian Child Welfare and problem gambling treatment provider on Minnesota’s White Earth Reservation, one of the most important myths to dispel is that easy access to casinos on reservations creates a unique temptation for Native problem gamblers. “It’s not really a casino issue. It’s deeper. If they can’t get it here, they’re going to go somewhere they can.”

One issue that Wang thinks hits Native Americans especially hard is a tendency to trade one addiction for another: “They sober up and go to gambling. Of course everybody says, ‘At least he’s not drinking.’” Wang then finds that because problem gambling is making up for another dependency, it can be particularly difficult to show the person that there is a problem when they feel so vulnerable about falling back into the previous addiction.

Another issue Wang believes is especially prevalent is a common misunderstanding about the nature of gambling. “Native Americans are exceptionally prone to the belief that they are going to hit it big. They really do believe they are going to win.”

For this reason, Wang finds a crucial step in working on problem gambling with Native Americans is telling the true story of gambling addiction. At a problem gambling conference held last September at Shooting Star Casino on the White Earth Reservation and attended by Native Americans and social workers from around the region, Wang and others shared their stories. “People were amazed to find out that some of the people they knew were problem gamblers. It was eye-opening for people to see and hear the extremes to which problem gamblers will go to keep it a secret. And that was the purpose of the event, to make the public aware of how bad problem gambling can get.”

Wang considers opening people’s eyes to the reality of problem gambling to be the most powerful weapon in treating it. “People are caught off guard when I tell them my story, that I’ve been sober and gambling-free for 13 years now.” Indeed many of the problem gamblers she speaks with feel a sense of hopelessness and are incredulous that Wang has been recovered for so long. “They’re amazed at that. So my personal story has become my most effective tool.”

This story is dedicated to the work and life of Thelma Wang, who passed away on Feb. 27, 2009. The White Earth Nation and the people she served will always remember the dedication she showed to social causes throughout her community.

Lights, Camera, Take Action

Minnesota High School Students Shed Light on Problem Gambling



Gambling has become mainstream entertainment in our state. Not only have a reported 83 percent of Minnesota adults gambled within the past year, statistics from St. Cloud State University indicate that some 80 percent of teens bet money on various games. Not all of this play is recreational, however. According to Youth Gambling International, 4 to 8 percent of teens between 12 and 17 years old are considered to be problem gamblers, with an additional 10 to 14 percent at risk of developing a problem.

To help educate teens about problem gambling, the Minnesota Department of Human Services Problem Gambling Program launched a unique competition called Videos to Beat the Odds. The project invited Minnesota high school and college students to submit short videos addressing a straightforward question: “If you felt a friend or family member had a gambling problem and you had only 90 seconds to address the issue, what would you say?” In creating the videos, students were encouraged to utilize a wide range of resources concerning this frequently progressive addiction.

In its simplest form, the competition’s message was that, for most, gambling is entertainment. At the same time, however, it is important to understand that for some, recreation can become an obsession. Funding for this important project came

from the Minnesota Problem Gambling Program, which is supported by proceeds from the Minnesota State Lottery.

Response to the competition was substantial. Educators and students from high schools across Minnesota submitted original videos. A panel of communication professionals and problem gambling experts then had the difficult task of choosing the best videos from a strong field running the gamut from moving documentary-type entries to hard-hitting fact-based videos.

Winners were selected based on three criteria: relevance to the competition theme, creativity and overall presentation/technical quality. Feedback from the judges as well as the students and educators involved was overwhelmingly positive. The videos are available for viewing on the competition website, **www.VideosToBeatTheOdds.com**, and hosted on YouTube in order to increase exposure.



Same Problem, Different Battleground



The Brave New Web of Gambling, Addiction and Hope

For the first time in history, every stage of a gambling problem can be played out entirely in the home – or on the job, or in a coffee shop or dorm room. Teenagers can get their first taste of gambling at scores of Internet poker sites that do a poor job of excluding minors. College students can develop serious problems and rack up substantial debt online. At the same time, new initiatives involving such tools as social networking portals offer web-based problem gamblers a chance to recognize and talk about their problem and also to seek help.

Going Online for Gambling

Bringing in almost one-fifth the revenue of commercial casinos according to the American Gaming Association, the online gaming industry has become an established player in the gambling world. According to the most recent estimates, Internet gambling in the United States draws annual revenues of nearly \$6 billion, with an estimated 8 million American gamblers participating in online wagering of some sort, according to Christiansen Capital Advisors.

It is unclear what long-term effect the Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act passed by Congress in 2006 will have on the industry, but according to technology-watchers ZDNet, the most recent statistics on U.S. search engine traffic from February and March of last year show interest in online gambling is only growing among U.S. citizens. In fact, online gaming had the third largest growth rate of any search category.

Today's gamblers no longer necessarily associate betting and wagering with traditional brick-and-mortar casinos. As with many other aspects of their lives, there is an exciting and convenient outlet waiting for them online.

Unfortunately, these web-based gambling venues offer teenagers in particular one significant advantage over their real-world counterparts: a lack of restrictions. One Federal Trade Commission study found that most gambling sites had no effective mechanism to block minors from entering. Most had inadequate or hard-to-find warnings about underage gambling prohibitions, and 20 percent had no warnings at all.

Going Online for Help

With the online gaming industry as hard to monitor and control as it is, these trends can seem disheartening. Thankfully, there are also several highly effective tactics being used online to target web users that may have a problem with their gambling – online or otherwise.

Recognizing that search engines like Google are a primary means by which at-risk gamblers seek out gambling opportunities, the Minnesota Department of Human Services Problem Gambling Program has begun to use online ads to present a message of hope to those who need it most.

When Google users in Minnesota search using terms like “problem gambling help,” in addition to organic results related to their request, a short ad typically appears inviting them to find out about free, confidential help at the **www.NoJudgment.com** website. There are also ads targeted at teen and young adult gamblers that direct them to **www.BeatTheBet.com**, where they can learn more about responsible gambling and find resources should they have a problem.

Several of the keywords for the various ads – both those aimed at adults and students – are designed to reach those who may not yet be seeking help. For instance, “college sports betting” and “casino gambling” are search terms used to attract those that are searching for online gambling avenues and may be particularly in need of problem gambling messaging.

In response to the overwhelming popularity of online social networking among young adults, the Minnesota Problem Gambling Program has identified these sites as an ideal way to interact with this at-risk population. For these reasons, a Facebook page was created to give visitors a chance to view content related to problem gambling and to discuss the issue with their peers. Features include images of awareness posters, videos from the Videos to Beat the Odds competition and links to resources and treatment. Unlike traditional advertising, engagement on the Facebook page is user-initiated and benefits from the credibility of user-generated content.

Initial response to both the Google Adwords and Facebook initiatives has been significant. Since the campaign was launched in February of 2008, the Google ads have received over 17,000 viewings, with an above-average click-through rating (a measure of the percentage of viewers that actually click on an ad).

The Facebook results have been even more encouraging. An ad campaign on Facebook is strategically placed to drive traffic to the page, and with an average of 56 visits a day – the majority of them first-time visitors – the page has received thousands of views since its inception last October. Using the very medium that was previously the exclusive territory of the gambling industry, hard-to-reach at-risk populations are now receiving the message of hope.



www.nojudgment.com

HELPFUL WEBSITES

There are numerous online resources for learning more about problem gambling and its treatment. Here are just a few. . .

www.nojudgment.com

Minnesota Department of Human Services
Problem Gambling Program

www.beatthebet.com

Information for college and high school students

www.beatthebet.com/parents

Information for parents

www.videostobeattheodds.com

2009 Minnesota Problem Gambling
multimedia competition

www.facebook.com/pages/Problem-Gambling-Support/30698398385

Minnesota Problem Gambling Facebook page

www.youtube.com/user/beatthebet2

Minnesota Problem Gambling YouTube page

www.northstarproblemgambling.org

Northstar Alliance

www.npgaw.org

National Council on Problem Gambling