

# Gamblers Help Northern Gambling Profile

May 2011



## Responsible Gambling Awareness Week



Responsible Gambling Awareness Week 2011 is being held from 23 – 29 May 2011. The week aims to raise community awareness of the importance of responsible gambling practices. The week's key messages of knowledge, balance and control promote responsible gambling behaviour at a personal, venue and community level and to encourage individuals to seek help to minimise gambling related harm.

### Vietnamese Community Forum: Understanding the Pokies Knowledge, Balance and Control Tuesday 24 May 2011

This forum will discuss responsible gambling, assisting people who may have become isolated because of their gambling behaviours and bi-lingual help services available to the Vietnamese community.

The event is a joint initiative with Department of Justice and is hosted by Gambler's Help Northern, Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union, the City of Yarra, and the Centre for Culture Ethnicity and Health.

**Key Note speaker:**

Cr Alison Clarke (Mayor City of Yarra)

**Event Ambassador:**

Thanh Bui - (former Australian Idol candidate)

**Gamblers Help Northern:**

Anh Nguyen (Vietnamese Bilingual Counselling Service)

**Richmond Recreation Centre**

11-15 Gleadell Street 11am - 1.30pm

**To book contact:** emel.akcay@bchs.org.au

## RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING AWARENESS WEEK

gambler's help 1800 858 858 [www.gambleaware.vic.gov.au](http://www.gambleaware.vic.gov.au)

Responsible Gambling Awareness Week is a partnership between industry, local government, the community sector and the Victorian Government.

A Victorian  
Government  
initiative



Banyule Community Health  
GAMBLER'S HELP NORTHERN

21 Alamein Road, West Heidelberg, VIC 3081  
Tel: 1300 133 445 Fax: 9459 9241



**BANYULE**  
Community Health

# Client Satisfaction with Problem Gambling Counselling at Gamblers help Northern

Research into the effectiveness of psychological treatments provided by services like Gambler's Help tends to focus on the outcomes of interventions. In other words, has the intervention reduced the gambling and the distress that might have been associated with that behaviour. In our case this information is secured using questionnaires that are given to clients at different times throughout treatment; when the client first attends (T1); upon completion of counselling, (T2); 3 months post completion of counselling (T3) and; 6 months post completion of counselling (T4). These measures might tell us what happened as a result of the counselling, they don't tell us what the client actually experiences during the process.

At Gambler's Help Northern there has been a 10-year history of measuring our client's satisfaction with the quality of problem gambling counselling services they receive. The results of the most recent of these surveys have just been compiled and show that clients were extremely satisfied with all aspects of the service elements surveyed. The surveys were distributed to all attending clients by their counsellors over a 6-week period. Twenty-eight out of sixty people who were given surveys responded. Clients were invited to rate their experience on a scale of 1-5. Many of them (18 in total) also offered their own comments about the counsellors, which included statements like: "gives me hope for the future"; "very helpful and switched on"; "the only person I can speak to"; without GHN "I would not be here today".

In summary, the client satisfaction survey offers an insight into the client's experience of their counsellor and the service overall. Our clients are telling us that: they feel supported, listened to; sessions are purposeful and helpful and instil hope for the future. Whilst not directly linked to outcome, these experiences suggest we are providing a positive platform from which the desired changes around gambling can be made.

## Northern Primary Care Partnerships Problem Gambling Prevention Initiative

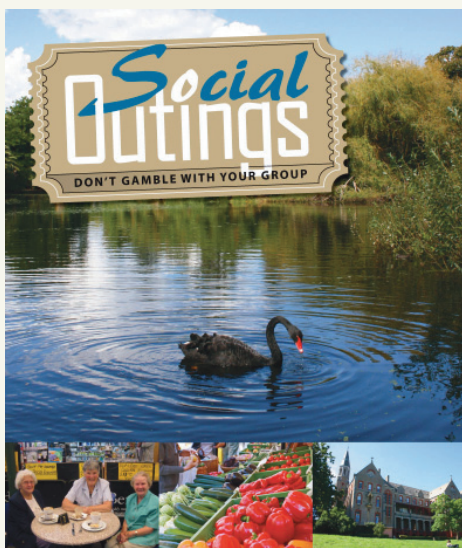


It is with great pleasure that we recently found out that the Primary Care Partnership project will receive funding in 2011/12. This means that we will be able to continue to work closely with Gamblers Help Northern to implement initiatives to reduce gambling related harm in Melbourne's northern suburbs.

One very exciting project that we have been involved in over recent months has been the publication of the Social Outings guide – a valuable resource full of alternatives to gambling. This resource was developed in direct response to feedback we received from groups that it is sometimes difficult to organise low cost outings. We hope that this guide goes some of the way to meeting this need. The guide is being launched at the Darebin Intercultural Centre on 12th May 2011.

In coming months the PCP will be furthering our preventative work with a particular focus on the neighbourhood house and local government sectors. With respect to local government, the PCP has been an active participant in the development of a northern framework for undertaking social and economic impact assessments – we hope that this framework will be a model for use throughout the State.

**To know more about any of these activities or if you would like to work with us in reducing gambling related harm, please contact Susan Rennie, Problem Gambling Health Promotion Advisor at the NEPCP, [susan.rennie@bchs.org.au](mailto:susan.rennie@bchs.org.au) or 9450 2633.**



## Children Gambling: What do we know? What should we do?

As part of our new occasional discussion series, the Responsible Gambling Advocacy Centre (RGAC) recently hosted a session that resulted in a discussion paper "Children and Gambling: What do we know?"

The paper notes that there are many ways in which gambling can impact upon children including how they are exposed to it. In the paper, we provide a synthesis of research over the last six or so years focusing on the actual practices of children gambling.

We found that a great many children in Australia and overseas had experience in gambling while still under age. The good news was that this high level of exposure on its own was not a substantial factor putting them at risk. Adolescents, particularly males, tend to experiment in transgressive behaviours, especially around the age of 15, but for many this was just a passing phase.

However, for the group of children that gambled regularly, and who were gambling past the age of 15, high risk was apparent and was higher than for adults. Much of this stemmed from their lower levels of cognitive development; making them more susceptible to the enticements and fantasies offered by gambling and its presentations in the media.

We also looked at the impacts of parental modelling, the particular risks presented by the online world, and the ongoing normalisation of gambling. Our paper summarises the recommendations for policy and practice that come out of the literature and raises points for argument and further analysis.

**Further feedback is welcome, please call or email. Contact RGAC by email on**

**[info@responsiblegambling.org.au](mailto:info@responsiblegambling.org.au) or call 9602 3302.**

**More information is on our website at**

**<http://www.responsiblegambling.org.au/publications/discussion-papers>**

# Innovative Treatment Research in Gamblers help Northern

## Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Problem Gambling – A Pilot Study.

As part of his Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at Monash University, John Callanan (Problem Gambling Counsellor) is conducting a study to investigate the efficacy of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) for problem gambling using an eight-session pilot. John is working in conjunction with the Problem Gambling Research and Treatment Centre and Gambler's Help Northern to effect this.

One of the so-called third wave of behavioural interventions, ACT approaches the difficulties around problem gambling from a different perspective to other cognitive behavioural methodologies. Instead of trying to stop the thoughts, feelings and urges that often underpin the gambling behaviour, ACT instead works on helping the person accept these internal experiences, separate from them and choose behaviours that are in line with more important, self-determined meaningful activities. We believe this approach may be more in tune with the harm minimization philosophy applied to problem gambling in Australia and able to not only address the unique cognitive (thinking) biases associated with problem gambling but also provide alternate meaningful behaviours to gambling. The aim is not to supplant CBT or other informed, client focused treatments or interventions currently employed in the service; it is to offer a cost effective alternative that might appeal to a different group of problem gamblers.

We expect the intervention will demonstrate:

- A reduction in three indices of gambling behaviour/activity namely, frequency, duration and expenditure.
- A reduction in psychological distress.
- The reduction in gambling is the direct result of the hypothesized mode of action described by ACT, in other words, the change was achieved by the mechanism of action intended by the therapist.

We hope to recruit up to a maximum of 30 participants and anticipate the data capture to take between 4 to 6 months. Anticipating ethics approval in early May, we hope to start the pilot early June.

In summary, current thinking around interventions for problem gambling is beginning to focus on the differences in the individuals who present and of the paucity of empirically based treatments available to cater for that variability. We believe ACT can offer such an alternative, one which is aligned to harm minimisation, addresses the addictive nature of gambling by promoting more adaptive, equally attractive options and still addresses the unique cognitive biases associated with the phenomenon.

## Case Study – Vietnamese Bilingual Problem Gambling Service at Dame Phyllis Frost

The proportion of Vietnamese female prisoners in Dame Phyllis Frost Correctional Facility has been steadily increasing with a growing number of women incarcerated for gambling related crimes. Here is one typical story.

Ms. Nguyen\* is a forty something, divorced, mother of three who came to Australia in the 1980s as a refugee. On arrival in Australia, Ms Nguyen poured all her energy into work and making money. After 20 years of hard work and gaining financial stability she began to have some free time. However, her English was poor, and she found it difficult to participate in 'mainstream' activities, so she and her friends began to frequent Crown Casino where there are many Vietnamese speaking patrons and staff.

Gradually, the monthly visits became weekly, then daily, and what began as a way to socialise quickly became a daily ritual –and what seemed initially harmless had escalated into a gambling problem. Not being able to limit time or the money spent gambling, Ms. Nguyen's hard earned fortune disappeared seemingly overnight. Not content with losing, she returned day after day in the hopes of winning back her losses.

After a period of time, she had gambled away her savings and now she and her children were facing homelessness. Furthermore, because of all the time spent gambling, she lost her job and was now receiving Centrelink payments. Despite all this, Ms. Nguyen still chased that one big win. She began to borrow money from her friends and when that avenue was exhausted, Ms. Nguyen turned to loan sharks.

As Ms. Nguyen recalls, 'the loan sharks are friendly and easy going as a means to gain your trust. They buy you food and drinks and make you feel as though they're there to help you. The first time I borrowed money, I borrowed \$2000 and with that, I won and was able to pay back the debt plus interest and still have money left over. But, thinking of all that I had lost, I was not satisfied and kept gambling, hoping that I would win more. That was the beginning of my relationship with loan sharks. I borrowed another \$2000 and another and another. Before I knew it, I had amassed a \$20,000 debt'.

Ms. Nguyen says she didn't know what to do. 'I couldn't even pay the interest – they were charging \$500 per week – let alone any principal and so the debt kept getting bigger and bigger'. It was at this point that the loan sharks gave her an ultimatum – either pay back all the money or house-sit for them for 9 months and they would wipe off half the debt. In light of facing homelessness, house-sitting wasn't a bad idea and it was a way for her to buy time. So she agreed. Not even 2 weeks into house-sitting, she realised there were cannabis crops at the house. There was a police raid, and Ms Nguyen was arrested. 77 cannabis trees were found and she was sentenced to 2 ½ years imprisonment with a non-parole period of 20 months. Nearing her release date and reflecting on these events, Ms. Nguyen says that she 'regrets having fallen into the trap of gambling and wished she had been able to have the foresight into potential consequences' and that 'this was a very big lesson in life from something that I believed started off as just a bit of fun'.

\*Name has been changed

Please contact **Anh Nguyen on 9450 2680** for any further information or to make a referral.

## VSW Program Report

After being trained and inducted to an inch of our lives over the past six to nine months, Stuart and I are now out in Venue Land delivering training to venue staff and management. We have developed five training modules with the assistance of Gambler's Help City around 'Knowing Your Gambler's Help Service', 'Identifying the Signs and Symptoms of Problem Gambling', 'Self Exclusion', 'Approaching Patrons Exhibiting the Signs and Symptoms of Problem Gambling' and 'Knowing Your Venue's Code of Conduct'.

We have provided training to at least a dozen venues and over 200 staff in the northern metropolitan region and the responsible gambling message seems to be well received by the participants at the training sessions. We have a lot more training sessions booked over the next few months and we are looking forward to getting out to these venues and spreading the word.



**Stephen Paul**  
Venue Support Worker

# AGL “Warts and All” Forum

According to recent analysis conducted by the Energy And Water Ombudsman Victoria (EWOV), energy prices are likely to continue to dramatically rise in the future. Therefore, many energy retailers are trying to improve their approach to assisting clients who are experiencing temporary or long-term financial difficulties.

AGL, one of the largest energy retailers in Australia, have just hosted a forum with financial counsellors, where they invited feedback from financial counsellors on how they could improve their approach to dealing with vulnerable customers who are experiencing difficulty paying their bills. The forum was facilitated by Sue Fraser (Kildonan Family Services).

The main issue was how to provide appropriate assistance and support to clients to get back on track with their energy bills. Customers may fall behind in their bill payments for any number of reasons including:

- loss of or change in income,
- serious illness, disability or death in the family,
- separation, divorce or other family crisis, or
- other personal reasons (such as problem gambling, family violence or addictions).

The AGL Hardship Team answered questions about how they would approach specific case scenarios, and were provided with important feedback on how financial counsellors think that their approach could be improved.

**The AGL hardship program, “Staying Connected” can be contacted on 131 245. If you are a customer of AGL, they will assist you with a short term or long time payment plan that is affordable, depending on the customer’s situation. While the client is engaged with Staying Connected their gas/electricity will NOT be disconnected.**

## Who Are We?

The Peer Connection Program operates from Banyule Community Health Service, located in the north west region of metropolitan Melbourne. The program operates as part of the services delivered by Gambler’s Help and is staffed by trained volunteers who have all successfully managed their own issue with gambling.

The broad aims of the program, which commenced in 2006, are to provide a telephone-based, confidential, peer support service to those recognising their own problem gambling behaviour and family members affected by their problem gambling behaviour. The volunteers offer an effective alternative to professional counselling to clients who prefer to talk to someone who has “been there” and who they believe can relate more directly to their experiences.

The team is made up of 18 volunteers who travel near and far to the Peer Connection offices located in Rosanna to make their weekly calls. People who recognise they have a gambling problem or who are coping with a close family member’s gambling, and want to speak to someone who has had a similar experience, phone the Gambler’s Help Northern Intake service. Some details regarding the difficulties being faced by the caller (the client) and their particular requirements for talking to a volunteer are recorded. They are then matched with the most appropriate volunteer and a time is arranged for the volunteer to phone them.

## And What Makes Us So Special?

To us, our volunteers are superstars and we tell them so every chance we get. Each Friday a Peer Connection Bulletin is sent out to all our volunteers. This is our chance to touch base and fill them in on what’s been happening in the program since they were last in. Our volunteers have informed us that receiving the program bulletin each week not only keeps them better informed on what’s happening but it also makes them feel more valued and part of the team. However, we want to go that one step further and really send a loud message that, “THE VOLUNTEERS IN THE PEER CONNECTION PROGRAM ARE A CUT ABOVE THE REST!”



### Ready and waiting to take calls!

Great news! The Gamblers Help Peer Connection Program has recruited 7 new volunteer Peer Support Workers to join the team. We now have over 20 volunteers!

All our Peer Support Workers have successfully managed an issue with gambling, being either their own or a significant others. They can share their story and offer hope for others thinking there is no way out with gambling...

The Peer Connection Program accepts self referrals, as well as supported referrals from professional practitioners wanting to support the role of counselling sessions, i.e. Problem Gambling Counsellors, FC’s and Community Health Workers.

Referrals can be made to the Peer Connection Program by calling 1300 133 445 or emailing PCIntake@bchs.org.au for a copy of our referral form.



## Gambler’s Help Northern Services spread across the North:

Gambler’s Help Northern provides problem gambling counselling and financial counselling for individuals, couples, families and friends affected by gambling.

### Services offered in:

Coburg, West Heidelberg, Broadmeadows, Epping, Sunbury, Northcote, Craigieburn and Greensborough.

**To refer a client or make an appointment contact 1300 133 445**

### FREE PROBLEM GAMBLING INFORMATION

- brochures / cards/ posters
- language specific material
- self help information
- speaking engagements
- provider education training and professional development

### Contact Community Education Team:

Emel Akcay 9450 2081  
Kate Little 9450 2080



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