



SYDNEY
PROBLEM
GAMBLING
CENTRE



**Report on the
Sydney Problem Gambling Centre
Fairfield NSW**

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Prepared by Suzy Brownlee
for The Salvation Army

CONTENTS

PART 1 – PROBLEM GAMBLING IN REVIEW

- 1.1 Overview
- 1.2 Problem Gambling Defined
- 1.3 Gambling in Australia
- 1.4 Gambling by State
 - 1.4.1 Gambling Trends in NSW
- 1.5 Gambling by Type
- 1.6 Tricks of the Trade
- 1.7 Problems Associated with Gambling
- 1.8 Gambling and Poverty
- 1.9 Legislation
- 1.10 Gambling and Government Revenue
- 1.11 Reasons for Increased Gambling Spend
- 1.12 Gambling Odds
- 1.13 Other Problem Gambling Services

PART 2 – THE SYDNEY PROBLEM GAMBLING CENTRE (SPGC)

- 2.1 Background
- 2.2 The Objectives of the Sydney Problem Gambling Centre
- 2.3 Services offered at the SPGC
- 2.4 Staffing at the SPGC
- 2.5 The Client Base
- 2.6 Number of Clients Contacting the SPGC
- 2.7 Geographic Area of Client Base
- 2.8 Number of Consultations
- 2.9 Types of Problem Gambling
- 2.10 Where People Gamble
- 2.11 Related Issues such as Suicide, Crime and Domestic Violence
- 2.12 Problem Gambling by Profile
 - 2.12.1 Gender
 - 2.12.2 Age
 - 2.12.3 Marital Status
 - 2.12.4 Employment
 - 2.12.5 Nationality
- 2.13 The Counselling Process
- 2.14 Group Therapy Sessions
- 2.15 Integration of Financial and Alcohol-related Services
 - 2.15.1 Alcohol
 - 2.15.2 Illegal Drugs
 - 2.15.3 Financial Problems
- 2.16 The Las Vegas Connection

PART 1 – PROBLEM GAMBLING IN REVIEW

1.1 OVERVIEW

This report has been prepared in consideration of the first year of operation of the Sydney Problem Gambling Centre at Fairfield in Sydney's western suburbs. The Sydney Problem Gambling Centre is a joint venture between The Salvation Army and Fairfield RSL, and is located in the central business district of Fairfield. It aims to provide help to problem gamblers, their families and the wider community from the local area and beyond.

The Sydney Problem Gambling Centre (SPGC) opened on the 31st October 2005, and since then has answered over 400 phone enquiries, conducted 561 counselling sessions and of those who continue with counselling, has reported a 50% success rate in radically altering the behaviour of the problem gambler.

A number of patterns and trends have emerged following one year of operation:

- Most clients come from the areas immediately surrounding the SPGC, however enquiries are received from as far a field as Cronulla, Wagga Wagga and even Queensland.
- Whilst clients range in age from 18 to 70, the majority of people seeking help for problem gambling are in the 36-46 year age group.
- Of all people in counselling, males represent 65%-70% of all clients, although the number of female clients is on the increase.
- 80% of all people counselled admit to some form of alcohol abuse. Most of these are men.
- Approximately 20% of all clients assessed admitted to suicidal thoughts.
- There are very few clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds attending the SPGC, the majority of clients are non-indigenous Australians.
- Most enquiries are made by family members, not the gambler.
- Most gambling problems are related to poker machines in clubs and hotels.

- The number of people making enquiries continues to increase, as does the number of new consultations, there is also an increase in number of people who remain 'on the books'.

From the data, problem gambling appears to be on the increase, based on consultation and enquiry data 2 in 3 gamblers are Australian men with partners who use poker machines at clubs and hotels.

While this report focuses on problem gambling in Sydney and NSW, the issue as it affects Australia as a whole, is also considered.

1.2 PROBLEM GAMBLING DEFINED

Problem gambling can be defined as a compulsive act done in the belief that it will cure financial problems, improve quality of life or relationships or help to manage work issues, rather than a fun activity that is indulged in occasionally.¹

Typically a person with a gambling problem will hide their habit, while spending more money than intended. They may have control issues or illusions of control. Such a person will often visit gambling venues far more often than intended, and may also take on more serious behaviours such as borrowing money (sometimes in illegal ways), losing interest in everything other than gambling, looking for excuses to gambling, chasing loses.²

The Salvation Army Recovery Services reports that gambling becomes the centre of a person's life, to exclusion of all else. Normal judgement becomes virtually impossible in the later stages of the addiction. Problem gambling can be equated to being sucked into a whirlpool, the more you gamble, the further you get sucked in.

Problem gamblers are difficult to identify, because the symptoms of the addiction are not visible, such as with alcohol or drugs. Further, The Salvation Army points out that the problem gambler becomes adept at concealment and deception, while doing whatever is necessary to feed their addiction.

The trigger for gambling is often a big win at a young age, and gamblers then seek to replicate the feeling of success that comes from such a win. Many problem gamblers don't really understand the nature of probability associated with their gambling, and may superstitiously believe they are fated to win.³

1.3. GAMBLING IN AUSTRALIA

Statistics show that Australia has an estimated 293,000 problem gamblers, although this figure is probably greater if the newly released statistics for 2004-2005 are taken into account, as these show around an overall 2.9% yearly

increase in all forms of gambling throughout the country. The figure for NSW may be even higher as NSW holds the dubious honour of having both the highest spend per capita, and highest spend on poker machines anywhere in the country.⁴

Australians have a reputation as both enthusiastic and innovative gamblers. This is underlined by the fact that the automatic tote is an Australian invention and internet gambling has been legalised and regulated in Australia since 1996.⁵

The Salvation Army has found that it is not part of the Australian culture to admit that gambling can be a problem for society. Families and businesses, however, are suffering greatly as a result of gambling, and the recent statistics released confirm this view.

For example, in September 2006 the Bureau of Statistics revealed that in the period 2004-2005 Australians lost a huge 18.8 billion to gambling, a figure that represents around 2 % of the national economy.⁶ Additionally the Insolvency and Trustee Service Australia says gambling or speculation caused approximately three per cent of bankruptcies in 2002-03.⁷

Contributing factors to the massive increase in gambling spend focus on low unemployment and rising wages. In addition, greater gambling options might be another reason for the increase.⁸

It is a little reported issue, but constitutes a major problem, particularly as governments are becoming reliant on gambling revenues. However, it should be noted that in 2004-2005, 76,848 people were employed in the gambling industry, with 59.5% of these people working in clubs, pubs, taverns and bars.⁹

1.4 GAMBLING BY STATE

1.4.1 Gambling Trends in NSW

The Bureau of Statistics recently revealed that NSW residents are the biggest gamblers in the Country, spending an average of \$1196 per adult on all forms of gambling, and a larger amount of average household income on gambling, spending around 0.5% more than the national average.¹⁰ Victoria runs a close second with \$1134 per adult, but the disparity between another states is shown in the figures for Western Australia (\$490 per person); \$725 in South Australia and \$853 in Queensland.

NSW residents spend a disproportionate amount on gambling, compared with the proportion of adult population. NSW contributed 40.1% to Australia-wide net takings for gambling, whilst its estimated resident adult population is 33.4%.

1.5 GAMBLING BY TYPE

Pokies dominate the gambling market throughout Australia, with the exception the Northern Territory (casinos are dominant) and Western Australia, where gaming machines are not allowed outside the Casino. Whilst gaming machines are most heavily concentrated in the ACT (accounting for approx 75% of all types of gambling), over the last decade per capita expenditure on pokies has increased in all states and territories.¹¹

It is clear from research that gaming machines far outweigh any other form of gambling in Australia.¹² This is confirmed by the experience of staff at The Sydney Problem Gambling Centre, where 80-90% of clients are addicted to gaming machines (see below). Throughout Australia, people spent over 8.7 billion on gaming machines in 2004-2005, over \$1 billion more than during 2000-2001. The average net take per annum from one poker machine is currently \$46,300.¹³

According to the Australian National University (ANU), a number of trends relating to gaming machines have emerged throughout Australia.¹⁴

- When Star City opened in Sydney poker machine spend decreased proportionally in NSW. However, since then, gaming machine expenditure has increased steadily over the last few years;
- While the use of poker machines as increased, spending on lotto and other lottery products as declined over the same period;
- Gambling on the “track” has remained stable over the last few years;
- Spending on sports betting has increasing slightly over the past few years.

Internet gambling is on the rise in Australia, and the reported increases in sports betting may well be related to this growth. Latest figures show an annual 11.8% rise from the period 2000-01 to 2004-05, representing net takings of \$114 million.

Between 2000 and 2005 all forms of gambling, with the exception of on-course totalisator saw an increase in spending. The largest proportional increase was at the TAB, which saw a 26.6% increase. However, betting off-course (TAB) on the horses represented only 12% of all gambling activity, with poker machines far ahead of any other form of gambling, accounting for 55.7% of activity throughout the country.¹⁵

1.6 TRICKS OF THE TRADE

There are many strategies that are used to engage gamblers, and given that gaming machines represent the preferred choice for gamblers, gaming providers go to great lengths to ensure that people stay at those machines for as long as possible.

Some of these strategies, including new machines that pay “little wins” frequently; venues that operate courtesy buses so that people can drink without worry (which of course lowers inhibitions and increases the gambling spend); and locating ATMs conveniently so that people can access more cash.

At a recent industry conference, one Sydney newspaper revealed that operators aim to maximise profits using a variety of strategies. Gambling is actively encouraged by altering lighting, machine and club layout and music to keep gamblers at the machines.¹⁶

1.7 PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH GAMBLING

Historically there has always been some form of gambling occurring in Australia, but the proliferation of gaming machines seems to indicate huge problems for both current and future generations if action is not taken to reduce gambling.

One of the major problems is that people are losing more money than ever on gambling, when compared with their spending on other necessary items. Research tells us that gambling expenditure has grown at a faster rate than the national household disposable income (HDI). For example, Australian gambling expenditure in 1978-79 was 1.49% of HDI, compared with 3.12% of HDI in 2003-2004.¹⁷

As a greater percentage is spent on gambling, it must be asked whether the money being diverted from essentials such as food or housing.¹⁸ The Productivity Commission also found that gaming machines in NSW, Vic and SA are more densely placed in poorer areas, which indicates that the people less able to afford to gamble are doing so.¹⁹

Other reports show that gambling spend (\$17.60 per head) is greater than expenditure on fuel or cars (\$17 per head) and is almost equal to that spent on clothing (\$18.50 per head).²⁰

Children are also being increasingly affected by gambling. A newspaper report in Melbourne stated recently that the Victorian government is taking action after studies revealed that “heightened levels of parental gambling were associated with greater frequency, earlier onset and elevated incidences of problem gambling in children”.²¹

1.8 GAMBLING AND POVERTY

The Productivity Commission reported in 1999 that for each problem gambler, five people are affected. Therefore around 1.5 million Australians are currently suffering as a result of problem gambling. For many of these people, suffering translates to poverty. Welfare groups advise that there are two factors that

characterise gambling and poverty – the socio-economic status of the gambler, and the type of gambling undertaken.²²

Wealthy people are able to sustain losses more easily because they proportionally gamble less of their total income, and have reserves of income and assets to fall back on. People from lower socio-economic have no such reserves and a small loss can often mean they have cannot fund their basic needs until their next pay packet.

People in higher-socio economic groups also tend to use forms of gambling where skill or knowledge is involved – for example horse-racing. Poorer people will play gaming machines which involves pure chance, thereby accruing larger losses with little return.

One of the greatest issues centres on poorer people who gamble compensation money, and then have no income because they are not entitled to government benefits. Without income support, these people can and do end up homeless or in shelters.²³

1.9 LEGISLATION

The Gambling Legislation Amendment (Responsible Gambling) Act 1999 NSW contains certain obligations that gambling operators in New South Wales must follow, including the responsible management of gambling, whilst more specific requirements for registered clubs are found in the Registered Clubs Amendment (Responsible Gambling) Act 2000 NSW and associated Regulations.²⁴

The legislation was a result of the 1998 Productivity Commission inquiry into Australia's gambling industries. This inquiry showed that the expansion of commercial gambling since the 1980s, particularly gaming machines had resulted in alarming levels of problem gambling and social harm.²⁵

However, the Federal Government has taken a more liberal view of internet gambling, overriding State and Territory governments to provide a legalisation of internet gambling, ensuring that Australia is a global leader in online betting, providing both virtual gaming and internet betting on sports and races.²⁶

A recent report of the effectiveness of gambling legislation and responsible gambling strategies in NSW showed that people believed that clubs were not doing enough to address problem gambling.

Recently, a NZ problem gambling foundation commented that the law should come down hard on poker machine operators who stand by addiction forces their clients into crime.²⁷ It appears from the experience of the Sydney Problem Gambling Centre and recently released statistics that such a move should also be called for in NSW.

1.10 GAMBLING AND GOVERNMENT REVENUE

ANU reveals that since 2000, taxes and levies on gambling have steadily increased by 6.2% each year. Governments currently receive over \$5.6 billion from gambling revenue. Revenue from gambling taxes has more than doubled since 1980s and now provides approximately 12% of state generated tax revenue.²⁸

Taxes are affected by the number of gaming machines in a particular state or territory. Therefore, the Western Australian government receives a smaller proportion of tax from gambling than other State governments, because it does not allow gaming machines outside the Burswood Resort Casino.²⁹

1.11 REASONS FOR INCREASED GAMBLING SPEND

There are a number of reasons for the increase in expenditure (and subsequent losses) relating to gambling.

- These include accessibility to gambling 24 hours a day, mostly at local venues, but also online.
- Lack of skill required for gaming machines, as opposed to gambling at the track.
- Opportunistic gambling. People may attend a venue for a meal, and end up gambling.
- Irrational beliefs and failure to understand the odds, which makes people more likely to gamble.³⁰

1.12 GAMBLING ODDS

Many gamblers are unaware of the odds when they are gambling, leading to false expectations and hopes of winning. People fail to realise that they cannot win on gaming machines, where the minimum payout is 85%, so for every \$100 spent on the machines, \$15 will be lost.³¹

There is also a widespread belief that a gaming machine might be 'due' for a win after a series of failures. However, each spin is entirely independent, and the chances are the same whether you move machines or stay put.³²

The odds of winning the top prize on poker machines can vary but may as poor as 1 in 33 million.³³ This can be compared with one change in 1.6 million of being struck by lightning; or picking a trifecta at random in a 13 horse race, which is 1715 to one; whilst the odds of rolling seven with two dice is 5 to 1.³⁴

1.13 OTHER PROBLEM GAMBLING SERVICES

There are a number of organisations providing a variety of services to problem gamblers, these include:

- Liverpool Hospital, which has a facility connected to the psychiatric unit.
- A facility in Bankstown.
- A multicultural unit at Parramatta, which provides help and support to people of non-English speaking backgrounds.
- St Vincent's Hospital in Darlinghurst, which also has a gambling unit.
- Wesley Mission has a number of gambling services located throughout Sydney and the regional NSW.

2. THE SYDNEY PROBLEM GAMBLING CENTRE

2.1. BACKGROUND

The Sydney Problem Gambling Centre is located at 1/5 Barbara Street, Fairfield, in NSW.

The SPGC first opened its doors on the 31st October 2005 and is an innovative joint initiative, the first of its kind in Sydney, between The Salvation Army and Fairfield RSL. The partnership was established as a response to the increasing issue of problem gambling in Sydney, and is part of The Salvation Army's on-going commitment to combating the devastating effects of gambling on individuals, families and society.

Fairfield RSL became involved after General Manager of the Fairfield RSL Anthony Sobb was inspired by the Las Vegas Problem Gambling Centre and the work of Professor Bo Bernhard from the University of Nevada. Harvard graduate Professor Bernhard is one of the world's leading experts on problem gambling, and encouraged Mr Sobb by highlighting the importance of awareness and education.

The Salvation Army commends Fairfield RSL on its involvement. At the concept launch of the Sydney Gambling Centre, Gerard Byrne, of The Salvation Army's Recovery Services, said that both The Salvation Army and Fairfield RSL want to help people, and the RSL has been very forward thinking in supporting the SPGC. He stated that Fairfield RSL Club Board its management and staff were impressive in their commitment and passion.

Anthony Sobb believes that the issue of problem gambling has to be tackled head on, because 'just as no publican wants a pub full of alcoholics, a club does not want a club full of problem gamblers.' The motivation to help problem gamblers comes from seeing people in distress, such as the 70 year old woman who has gambled away her food money. Mr Sobb and the RSL staff have recognised that there is a need to help those who are developing, or have developed, gambling problems.

2.2 THE OBJECTIVES OF THE SYDNEY PROBLEM GAMBLING CENTRE

The objectives of the Sydney Problem Gambling Centre are to offer a dedicated service for problem gamblers and their families to seek help.

- To provide a free service that deals specifically with people who suffer from problem gambling.
- To provide a holistic approach to problem gambling, incorporating The Salvation Army's Moneycare and community service programs.

- To work in liaison with the Las Vegas Problem Gambling Centre.
- To take immediate pressure off clients and secure their financial situation so that they can concentrate on overriding issues relating to problem gambling.
- To treat clients with proven methods derived from the latest scientific research.
- To collate data and information relating to problem gambling.
- To assist in the education of the community about problem gambling.

2.3 SERVICES OFFERED AT THE SPGC

The Sydney Gambling Centre offers a number of services to clients, including:

- An information service
- A referral service for clients with complex needs
- Telephone counselling
- Individual counselling
- Relationship Counselling
- Financial Counselling
- Relapse Prevention Counselling
- Practical Gambling interventions
- Education Groups
- Therapy Groups

2.4 STAFFING AT THE SPGC

The Sydney Problem Gambling Centre is staffed by a mixture of full and part-time staff, each with different areas of expertise. No referrals are required, and the staff endeavours to arrange appointments as soon as possible after initial contact is made. The operating hours are 9am-5pm Monday to Friday, but after hours contact can be arranged by appointment if necessary. Additionally, a Moneycare advisor from The Salvation Army is also onsite three days a week to provide financial counselling to clients.

2.5 THE CLIENT BASE

Clients are referred to the Sydney Gambling Centre in a number of ways.

- Fairfield RSL offers contact information to its customers.
- Salvo Care Line provides referrals to the SPGC.
- The largest number of referrals comes from G-line, which is a facility used by a wide range of health and allied services.

- There is a Salvation Army Community Services office located next door to the Sydney Gambling Centre, which refers clients who are identified as having a gambling problem.
- There are a substantial number of clients who self refer.

2.6 NUMBER OF CLIENTS CONTACTING THE SPGC

For phone enquiries, the SPGC staff logs each call, including the area the call is coming from, the type of call and outcome. For enquiries in person, similar data is obtained.

Staff at the SPGC has found that the number of enquiries (both by phone and in person) received each week varies, depending on factors such as public holidays and seasons. The figures show that during Christmas and Easter, the SPGC took less calls than at other times. School holiday periods, such as during June 06, show less enquiries. Additionally, Centre staff advises that the media and major events can also influence the number of people seeking help for problem gambling.

Additionally, there was a marked increase in enquiries during the period Dec 05 – Jan 06, which may be a result of advertising and the service becoming known in the problem gambling communities.

The time of year seems to affect the statistics in relation to the profile of people involved in consultation. For example, 70% of people who approached in Jan 06 and 83% in Feb 06 were single, but in Dec 05 and March 06 around 50% of consultations were with married people. But over the year to date 2005, most people were married (54%) or de-facto (12%). 2006 YTD figures show single people of a higher proportion but this may change as the year progresses.

2.7 GEOGRAPHIC AREAS OF CLIENT BASE

The Sydney Gambling Centre has logged calls from all areas of Sydney and beyond since beginning operation. Enquires have come from the Central Coast, Cronulla, Picton, Wagga and even Queensland have been taken.

However, the majority of clients attending the SPGC come from local suburbs, including Fairfield, Blacktown, Berala, Bossley Park, Canley Vale, Greystanes and St John's Park.

In general around 75% of all clients come from the outer western suburbs of Sydney. Around 20% come from the inner west, around 5% from southern suburbs, the CBD other areas. In recent months there has been an anomaly increase in clients from the inner west (50% in July 06, 77% in Aug 06), with only around 30% from the outer west area.

Given the location of the Sydney Gambling Centre in Fairfield, however, the number of callers who become ongoing clients tend to be those in south west, mainly due to accessibility.

2.8 NUMBER OF CONSULTATIONS

During the period up to August 2006 the SPGC conducted over 500 counselling sessions. The figures show sessions have increased fourfold since Dec 05.

2.9 TYPES OF PROBLEM GAMBLING

The SPGC found that poker machine addiction represents as much as 80-90% of all problem gambling cases logged. In the period Dec 05-Mar 06, for example, 87% of all clients presented with addiction relating to gaming machines. The figures recorded represent higher totals than the state average.

Other forms of gambling clients undertook were greyhounds (track), blackjack (casino) and trotting (pub tab) but poker machines continue to present the most substantial problem area.

2.10 WHERE PEOPLE GAMBLE

SPGC staff reported around 55% of clients gambled at registered clubs, with 25% at hotels, and 10% at casinos and 10% at tab and on course. Figures show that gambling at clubs (usually on pokies) has increased from Jan 06, peaking at 71% in April 06.

2.11 RELATED ISSUES SUCH AS SUICIDE, CRIME AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

22 of the 124 people assessed to August 2006 at the SPGC were classified as potentially suicidal, with 50 of 124 people stating they were on medication for depression or had taken such medication in the past.

Of the 124 people assessed to August 2006, a small number were found to have committed a crime in order to fund their gambling addiction. According to staff, the trend towards crime to fund gambling appears to be increasing.

2.12 PROBLEM GAMBLING BY PROFILE

2.12.1 Gender

Of the problem gamblers seen by the SPGC around 80% are male and 20% female. The SPGC is also seeing a trend towards increased problem gambling in women.

2.12.2 Age

The SPGC advises that most clients are middle age to later age group, additionally staff are starting to see an increase in older females aged between 50-60 years, and in younger people aged 18-20 (around 20% of consultations).

Statistics show that the age of clients accessing the SPGC varies with each month, in some age groups quite widely. The 36-46 year old group, for example, represents around 40% of clients, with the exception of March-April 06, when the figure rose to 65% and 72% respectively. June 06 also saw a substantial increase in consultations for 25-35 year olds, countered by a figure of 0% for 36-46 year olds. The 55+ age group figures for consultation are between 6-15%.

2.12.3 Marital Status

Single people represent the majority of clients at the service (59% of clients from Jan06-Aug06). The percentage of clients who are married is around 30%, with fluctuations of married people presenting for consultation in March 06 (59%) and May 06 (39%).

De facto consultations are usually nil, however in the period April-May 06 the figures were 29% and 16% respectively.

2.12.4 Employment

The profile of the problem gamblers assisted by the SPGC varies radically, from bankers, to retirees, to the unemployed. Educational standing or social status does not prevent a problem gambler from engaging in self destructive behaviour to feed their addiction.

2.12.5 Nationality

There is not a large diverse cultural mix of clientele attending the SPGC, with the majority of people seeking help being Australian Caucasian and a smaller number of people from ATSI and Middle Eastern backgrounds (approx 10% in period Dec05-Mar06).

2.13 THE COUNSELLING PROCESS

The Sydney Problem Gambling Centre believes that for the client, the first major hurdle in the process of overcoming gambling addiction is walking through the door of the SPGC. People are personalised at the service. Each counsellor works closely with each individual, and feedback has shown that this ensures that the client feels safe enough to continue the relationship. Once they have achieved this initial relationship of trust, the client is assessed, usually by an addiction worker, who will nominate the appropriate therapeutic counsellor.

The client will be asked their reasons for coming to the SPGC and what is important to them in terms of their recovery. Exploration of underlying or coexisting, in particular, problems with alcohol, that will need to be addressed prior to, or in conjunction with, counselling for problem gambling will occur.

SPGS counsellors also provide tips to assist client to achieve cessation of gambling. These tips include avoiding gaming venues, going straight home after work, reducing their daily limit on ATM cards or even cutting up the ATM card.

Clients are encouraged to attend the support group sessions at the SPGC. In addition, counsellors attempt to demystify the issue of gambling by providing facts and figures on the probability of winning and losing.

2.14 GROUP THERAPY SESSIONS

The Sydney Problem Gambling Centre offers a therapeutic group meeting for all those affected by gamblers and gambling.

There are meetings for gamblers and for their families, which the SPGC reports are proving extremely beneficial for the understanding and limitation of problem gambling. Currently there are 10 couples who attend a course of 7 weeks on Wednesday mornings.

Additionally there are group sessions open to problem gamblers who use the counselling services of the SPGC. According to the SPGC, these are providing invaluable support for clients, in dealing with isolation and fear associated with problem gambling. Each session open and closes with the Serenity Prayer, as a way of helping to restore the clients' faith a little bit each time.

2.15 THE INTERGRATION OF FINANCIAL AND OTHER SERVICES.

The Sydney Gambling Centre takes a holistic approach to problem gambling. In addition to its primary focus of helping problem gamblers, the SPGC is quick to identify those who have underlying or associated problems and to provide a link to appropriate services.

The availability of the financial counsellor is a bonus for clients. Many, if not all, experience significant financial hardship due to gambling and the assistance of the financial counsellor in sorting through the clients' financial situation is a critical component of the service.

Welfare and social support services are also available via The Salvation Army Fairfield Corps Social Service Centre located next door to the SPGC.

Additionally referrals to other agencies are conducted as needed. There is a culture of 'seamless service delivery' at the SPGC, which ensures that maximum positive results for clients can be achieved.

2.15.1 Alcohol

80% of gamblers report drinking while gambling, and 20% have some form of problem with alcohol abuse (binge drinking or alcoholism, for example).

The majority of SPGC clients reporting alcohol problems are male with most women reporting that they do not drink at all while gambling.

2.15.2 Other Drugs

Centre staff observes that those who present for gambling problems rarely admit to using other drugs, making it difficult to ascertain whether drug taking is associated with gambling in the same way as alcohol.

2.15.3 Financial Problems

One in five problem gamblers borrow money without paying it back, making the integration of the Moneycare financial counselling program invaluable for clients of the Sydney Problem Gambling Centre.

Tony Devlin (Territorial Consultant for The Salvation Army's Moneycare program) says that counsellors work to take the immediate pressure off clients and to help clients secure their financial situations so that they can concentrate of the overriding issues.

Of those who present with financial problems, it is often those who have only been gambling for a short time who have serious financial issues, because a chronic addict has learned, to some degree, to "manage" the addiction.

2.16 THE SYDNEY GAMBLING CENTRE AND THE LAS VEGAS CONNECTION

The establishment of the Sydney Gambling Centre in late October 2005 was influenced by the work of the Professor Bo Bernhard and the Las Vegas Problem Gambling Centre.

Compared with treatment options for other addictions, such as drugs and alcohol, problem gambling diagnosis and treatment in Australia ran a poor second, therefore the assistance from the successful Las Vegas Problem gambling Centre in the establishment of the SPGC was invaluable.

The Las Vegas Centre has treated thousands of addicts and provided extensive research that significantly influenced understanding of problem gambling.

Professor Bernhard, a prolific researcher and speaker on the issue of problem gambling, noted in November of 2004 that 'Australia has a real issue with problem gambling – just as in the US.'

In fact, NSW has the highest number of electronic gaming machines per head of population anywhere in the world, which indicates the extent of the problem in NSW and highlights the need for expert help both for government bodies and gamblers.

ENDS

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³² The Age, October 20, 2003, David Campbell, ‘So the pokies are ‘fun’? You’ve got to be joking Mr Tattersalls’

³³ Stats from www.gamblingwatch.org.nz

³⁴ Gambling statistics from Professor John Croucher, Statistics from MUNews May 1999 ANU online