

FLIP SIDE

Association of Participating Service Users



GAMBLING & OTHER ADDICTIONS

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www.apsuonline.org.au

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The Machine

A few buttons you push, again

*There's no skill, free games a minor
thrill,*

Push, push, then try again

Really hard to stop right now,

Takes me to a different place,

Fills in hours quite well paced.

Entranced in vision, as if in a trance,

A cold straight stare, just a glance

Can't account for many days

Deep inside my secret stays.

What is the hold, the grip so tight?

Only a machine with a glowing light,

Feed it, feed it all the time

Never full a shocking crime.

They rob you in broad daylight,

Never held responsible for your plight

Colour, action & musical things

To drag you in and deliver the sting.

They need to go, far away

Those machines cannot stay

A victim will always be there,

A person with that narrow stare

We need to act to make it fair.

Throw them in the nearest tip

Celebrate life without their grip.

Sharon

Bad habits!

When I was using I saw gambling as just another bad habit. Added to using methodone, benzos, smoking dope and alcohol on a daily basis it didn't seem that big a deal. Like alcohol, as it was legal I was able to minimise the harm it was causing in my life with the justification that everyone was doing it.

Added to that was the fact that I was full of shit and had the real belief that I was a winner, one of the few percent that could and would beat the various systems and come out on top.

Sure I had some significant wins but I would have been better off diverting all the money I gambled over 23 odd years into a savings account and today I would be a wealthy man.

I have also learned that for me there is no such thing as easy money. In fact it's just the opposite. The easier the money the more trouble I seemed to get into. I was a full danger to myself and anyone else when I was cashed up. In fact, the bigger the wad, the bigger the drama.

I had a tendency to forget about my losses. How many times had I spent the last of my money gambling only to hang out like a dog because it meant I couldn't score smack etc? Worse was some of the stuff I had to do to maintain my addictions.

I remember being proud when walking in to what seemed like my several hundredth detox and telling the staff that I was really fucked up this time, I am addicted to absolutely everything! They just looked at me incredulously.

I know today I was just one of many issued up people to access AOD treatment services.

Eventually I pulled up. I completed another detox and with the support of a community of people, who had experienced the problems of addiction but were now living in the solution I stopped using. I am still drug free today. After a while of not using I had to address some other issues in my life, gambling was among them.

I did this with the support of people who had been where I was and weren't there any more. They had found a way to challenge their issues and appeared to be winning. Today my life is great!

I had an expectation with drugs, gambling and the lifestyle that it would be boring. In fact the opposite is true. I have found both value and meaning, two things I lacked for most of my life. This has allowed me to get on with and achieve some of my hopes and dreams.

I'm confident if I don't use and don't gamble that more of my dreams will come true!

Grateful for change.

Jase



An addiction (one of many)

Gambling is great fun. So many moods and emotions can flow through my mind at any one time: elation, excitement and anticipation. The heart murmurs as the horse race draws to the final conclusion. Gambling can occupy my time for so long. Time passes me by with little effort. I become well and truly unaware of time. I honestly don't see gambling as too much of a problem. Especially if money is monitored and I am doing so for entertainment. All this would work in my perfect world. The problem is, I have no perfect world when it comes to this disease.

I call gambling a disease as it affects the disease I have had to contend with since the age of twelve. I'm speaking of a mental illness. My nature is addictive. My whole family has that same prone condition to addictiveness. Luckily for them they are able to focus their ambitions in a more positive light. I do believe one can win quite easily on any form of gambling early in their first experiences.

For me, I was at the harness races with a couple of mates who considered themselves professional gamblers (this could be open to debate). I somehow managed to place an each way bet on the first race. I had no idea what to pick in the second so I asked a group of ladies for a tip. They said they just backed number eight every race. So I backed it. I was in the crowd watching these horses running around in a circle, not knowing which was my horse. It turned out to be a photo finish. I asked the bloke next to me who won whilst he was experiencing a rage attack. He said "the number f.....g eight. I showed him my ticket. "Did I win? He explained I had won a s...load. When I put the ticket on I accidentally put \$100 dollars each way on the horse. I didn't realise I could change the ticket so I paid the \$200. The horse was a roughie. It paid

\$68 for the win. Add that up. I had won quite an amount of money. At the time I was working in Sydney and earning a lot. It didn't bother me losing some money on gambling, as money didn't really have all that much meaning to me. It became a huge problem when I found myself on a low income not long after. If I won money, I would spend it, then eat into my own. I was actually much better off not winning because I was able to think twice on spending my own money. If I won, I would increase my bets and usually lose.

At this time I had access to my pay and would always spend every cent I had. Over the years I had met four beautiful women whom I adored greatly. Only one of them was a gambler. Looking back, I didn't treat any of them all that well. Gambling always came first. My partners put up with this for long periods of time until my love for lady lust got the better of them. I will admit, the lady who was a gambler had a very similar problem to me. She had inherited \$150,000 which we both spent in six months.

We were casino hopping all around Australia. Mind you, we won quite often, and usually a fair amount. We lasted together miraculously for three years after which the money was gone. Mind you, it was far from a simple, loving relationship. It was quite dysfunctional. We developed a co-dependency on each other, which was very volatile. I was living near Noosa at the time and my gambling problem was becoming that bad I had often thought of ending my life. I always found myself constantly thinking of how I would spend my money up to three days before my pay was due. I was constantly daydreaming at night-time of the poker machines spinning around in my mind. I owed quite a bit of money, mostly personal debts to friends and acquaintances. I always had every intention of paying the money back, but would never have the money. My relationship was on the rocks and I knew I had to end it, for both of our sakes. This was difficult. As usual, I hurt the poor lady deeply by vacating our place of residence and cutting ties with her. I had a mental health worker at the time

that referred me to a man by the name of Reverend Tully. His expertise was in the form of gambling recovery. I believe I would not have had a hope of being cured if I hadn't acknowledged and admitted to myself I had a gambling problem. Reverend Tully had written a self-help book called Breaking the Losing Run. He gave me a copy and we had counselling sessions every week. Breaking the Losing Run is now the model in which "breakeven" or "gamblers help" is based on.

I had returned to Bendigo and self referred myself to "breakeven" in Bendigo. What I hadn't realised was that my gambling problem was the symptom of other issues and problems I had in my life. I'm not really one for counselling (being a male and all), but my counsellor and myself made inroads into the things that I had trouble dealing with.

Gradually over the years I learnt to be kind to myself and treat myself as a good human being. I believe we all have good in us and we do bad things as a way of coping with difficult situations. It took fifteen years from when I acknowledged my gambling problem and managed to turn it around. Don't get me wrong. Once a gambler, I will always be a gambler. I can't walk into a pokie venue with one \$100 and expect not to spend it. Instead I have learnt the art of harm minimisation. I have minimised my cash flow to about \$100 a week. My bills are paid before I see the money (Centrepay, a bank account I can access easily).

Recently I have joined a peer support group that meet weekly. Because of my travel commitments, I haven't been able to attend regularly. This group first started with everybody being unacquainted. The honesty of the group is astounding. It is difficult to speak of my experiences to complete strangers, but this was not the case here. They are beautiful people. For the first time in my life I am able to speak openly and honestly. We are there for only one thing in common, being gamblers. Everyone's personal journey is different, but is respected with the uttermost dignity. This group gives

me hope. It shows me the sincerity and understanding I would have trouble finding elsewhere. I would recommend this group to someone who might be having trouble with gambling. Straight away, the knowledge that others have similar experiences, are not judgmental and have total respect for each other and their plight is very comforting.

Anon

B.E.A.T

B.E.A.T is the official name of the St Luke's Gambler's Help Peer Support Group, which stands for Believe, Enthusiasm, Attend and Triumph! We are located in Bendigo. B.E.A.T was established due to a strong need identified by people accessing the St Luke's Gambler's Help Program. With assistance from Gambler's Help Eastern, who also run a peer support group, we ran our first session in November 2009.

The aim of B.E.A.T is to reduce the harm and impact of problem gambling, whilst providing a safe and friendly environment that gives people the opportunity to:

Come together and share similar experiences;

Identify common needs;

Learn from one another as well as group activities;

Be supported and supportive;

Offer mutual understanding;

Practice relationships with others.

Marian Ruyter, Mette Hotker and Bree Hayes coordinate B.E.A.T, who meet weekly on Friday from 10am - 12.30pm. For more info: please call 54 481 000.

Light at the end of the tunnel

I am a compulsive gambler and you would not believe the problems I have created for myself and my family. Without my family, friends and counsellor's help I would have doubts of being here as I had thoughts of harming myself. As I only played the pokies it wasn't about winning. Instead it became a track for self torture as that was how I looked at it. I just sat there and didn't realise the problems I had created for my self. I was given a dog and it was only then that I saw a touch of light at the end of a very long tunnel. The dog gave me something other than gambling to focus my attention on and the counsellors and my family and friends also supported me in my battle. It's still ongoing and I can only say if you have a problem seek help. I myself would highly recommend St Luke's.

Anon

IT'S HAPPENED AGAIN!

You've come home – broke – to a partner or other family member who is fuming. They've just discovered that the bank account/wallet/purse has been raided – yet again.

People often describe their spouses, parents or siblings as their best friends. Is this how you treat your best friends? By lying to them and stealing from them? And yet you crave the rush you get from a win.

A gambling addiction, like other addictions, has been defined as a chronic relapsing brain disease that is manifested by compulsive behaviour.

It is a disorder of impulse control, the essential features of which are a chronic and progressive failure to resist impulses to indulge in behaviour that compromises or disrupts the gambler's life. Accompanying this are features such as mood disorders, stress related medical conditions and personality disorders.

The Australian Institute of Gambling Research estimates that between one and 3% of the population have a gambling problem that in turn affects the lives of several others.

Consequences range from relationship or family breakdown and bankruptcy to criminal activity, potential imprisonment and the possibility of self-harm. Many problem gamblers list stress, anxiety and depression as major symptoms of their gambling behaviour. They associate these symptoms with feelings of despair, dread and worthlessness.

Beyond Blue says that problem gamblers are more than 18 times as likely to experience severe psychological distress, four times as likely to use/abuse alcohol and twice as likely to be depressed as people without a gambling problem.

Alcohol and other drugs often go hand in hand with gambling as they reduce the inhibitions people may initially feel towards going on another splurge. The PubTAB is a good place to avoid.

The World Health Organisation says repeated gambling results in:

THE SUN SHINES EVERY DAY

I hear the bird's morning song
As I sit on my step
Sipping my coffee brew
Something has changed in me now
I seem 'aware' of all that I do.

I dreamily take in my surroundings
I breathe in the fresh cold air
A soft breeze is blowing and
It gently plays with my hair.

Yet, my evil foe still lurks behind
Intruding in my thoughts each day
But I quickly remind him
Your in the past now!
And it is there you have to stay!

I then bring into focus
Food in my fridge and cupboards
The sound of money jingling in my purse
And I know life is better now
Since I broke the wicked curse
I am living in the present now
Working through my problems in a kind
More caring way
And the places where I visit now
The sun shines every day.

JEN



APSU (Association of Participating Service Users)

APSU believes that people who use alcohol and other drug treatment services are the reason the system exists; their needs, strengths and expertise should drive the system. APSU is run by service users for service users and has an active member base. We invite you to join us in having a say. APSU membership is free, confidential and open to anyone interested in voicing their opinions & ideas on the issues facing service users today. We need your help to give us all a fair go. To become a member please fill out the form below or go to: www.apsuonline.org.au

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

I wish to become a member of APSU and I would like to:

Receive the quarterly APSU FLIPSIDE magazine

Be sent information on how to become involved

I am a: Service user Service provider

Family member Other

How did you find out about APSU? _____

Language spoken at home: _____

Cultural identity: _____

Age: 16-25 25-35 36-45 46-65 over 65

Other issues:

Physical disability

Mental health

Visual

Hearing

Speech

Acquired brain injury

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/Suburb: _____ Postcode: _____

Phone: _____ Mobile: _____

Email: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT: All personal details obtained by APSU will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purposes outlined above. Personal details will not be given out by APSU members.



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Changes in receptors in the **reward area** of the brain (that acts like a car's accelerator). These result in **euphoria** (a high), a **memory of the behaviour that led to it**, and **hypersensitivity to that behaviour** expressed as "a need".

Occurrence of metabolic changes in the part of the brain that is the **inhibitory centre** (that acts like a car's brake) result in **impaired control and increased responsiveness** to environmental cues.

What can we do about it?

Stop the behaviour;

Seek treatment for withdrawal;

Learn relapse prevention skills;

Accept the need to:

Stay alive and establish order into one's life;

Pay off debts - economic, social and psychological;

Learn skills and take responsibility;

Get support – from family, friends or social groups.

A social support group such as **Gamblers Anonymous** is often most attractive to those who have alienated family and friends and thus cannot rely on them initially for support. Members can assist one another by working together to maintain abstinence.

It promotes:

WELLNESS - both mental and physical;

HOPE - for the future;

RESILIENCE - to deal with what life has to offer/ deliver;

SELF DIRECTED CARE - by regaining control over one's life, health and direction.

For Jane

When I look at you

I feel my shame.

So peaceful you are,

what a painful gain.

Disturbed I am

At the deep thought of your loss.

My heart aches imagining

If our paths had never crossed.

This feelings getting stronger now,

uncomfortable, and so hard to bare.

How brave you've been,

To have come this far,

On such a journey of despair!

Your loving thoughts

Have taught me much...

To be Positive and Grateful, and

to love all I touch.

You've reminded me to have courage to face

the demands inside.

So gladly I'll walk any path,

Knowing I have

You,

By my side.

I Love You Jane xox

Carla

PERHAPS THIS IS THE ANSWER?

A few years ago I found myself at the bottom of a deep dark hole. I didn't want to be there. I tried to take the easy way out. But I didn't succeed... For me, it seems there never is an easy way. So instead of being in that dark hole I was instead at the bottom of a huge, tremendous mountain-one that I had to climb.

And so my journey and my search began. At first there was only me and the going was tough. I encountered personal loss, tragedy and grief. The questions I asked were: Why me? There is no God? Why? What have I done to deserve this? I was alone. Then I met Laurel or Major Campbell of the Salvation Army and she joined me on my journey.

So now there are two of us on that mountain slope. Laurel became part of my journey or did I become part of her journey? Once again I started the climb. Many obstacles were thrown in my path and in some instances I felt that I was being trampled on, pushed down that mountain. Tested perhaps? Could I get up and go on or should I just give up? Is this journey worth the effort?

But then I discovered that the questions I asked myself had changed. Instead of: Why me? It became: What am I here for? What is the answer? There has to be a reason.

And through Laurel I met Nari and Stu and they became participants in my journey and in my search and my climb up that mountain. So now there were four of us on my mountain and I wasn't alone. And once again Nari and Stu joined me on my journey but was I also part of their journey too?

Then along came the Thrift shop and my attendance at church. And here I found all of you. So now my mountain is becoming crowded as everyone here becomes part of my life and my journey. The climb is getting easier and I am getting stronger as each day goes by. Here at Eaglehawk and together with the Salvation Army and its members I feel that I have come home. And as I write this perhaps I have part way found the answer.

I started a journey alone. Many joined me on my journey. At times I thought my journey had ended but then a new one began. As people joined my journey perhaps I become part of their own journey. And if we link it all together maybe the answer is we have become part of God's journey.

Anon





A GENIUS, YOU OR ME?

Lonely, desperate, wanting the answer

Avoiding wanting, distracted by unfamiliar sounds

Knowing it exists, not wanting to know

Suddenly amused, relevant to the loneliness

Noticed storm clouds brewing

Seeing the man, knowing the simplicity

Laughing, being the annalist,

Good humor, seeing a similar pattern evolves

Being a man watching, laughing

The distraction a clue why analyse,

What I already know?

Being simple is the key

To being me

After all, Einstein was mad

The genius in me...

Anon

The Boy who cried wolf

My career as a gambler began innocently enough. From a young age, I would accompany my father to the racetrack. Perhaps my memory is selective, but I do remember his wins more vividly than his losses. When I demonstrated more interest than my brothers in the "Sport of Kings", he began placing small bets on my behalf: a sort of adjunct to my pocket money. When his selections won I pocketed the profit; when they got beaten he absorbed the loss. What a sweet deal! I couldn't lose.

In high school, my friends were impressed by my hobby. I ran a book on the Melbourne Cup and simulated race calls in class. Once I looked old enough, I visited the local TAB after school and on weekends to place bets myself. My father once found me in there on a Sunday morning when I was supposed to be doing homework. He was aghast. Pocket money and meagre earnings from part time jobs didn't allow me to bet as much as I wanted to and, besides, I wasn't too fond of honest work.

I began stealing from my parents. They knew what was going on, so my denials became boring and pathetic. I turned 18 and then 21 and then 25, but not much changed. I struggled to hold down a job, drank alcohol to excess and became hopelessly depressed with my lot in life. My friends and my younger brothers were busy getting on with their lives. They were pursuing careers and relationships and I was mired in self pity and disappointment.

I pondered suicide. If successful, everyone would realise how badly I'd been treated and feel profound regret; if not I would at least get the mother-load of sympathy which I deserved! My attempt was unsuccessful, and my parents paid off my debts and blamed themselves.

This became a regular pattern, and like the boy who cried wolf, people stopped coming to my aid. To their credit, my parents pledged their love and emotional support on the condition that I seek help and receive treatment for my addiction. I entered Rehab and was introduced to the fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous.

At my first meeting, I listened to others describe stories similar to my own. Stories of guilt, loneliness, regret and self hatred brought about by compulsive gambling. But many seemed to have rebuilt their lives from seemingly hopeless situations on the foundations of collective strength and adherence to spiritual principles. In short, being a compulsive gambler was not a symptom of weakness or dishonesty, but a disease centred in the mind which could be arrested by a simple program of recovery.

Like the Gamblers Anonymous members I heard on that first night, I have managed to build a new life with meaningful relationships and healthy interests far removed from my earlier troubles. I feel as though I can do almost anything in this world except gamble safely.

Cam.

My last Cup

No longer a slave to the poker machines

For finally, I have broken their wicked spell

And each time temptation tries to lure me back

I just remember 'my living hell.'

The tangled web of lies, 'constant' and ugly deceit

Sleepless nights of 'frantic worry'

'No food left to eat.'

The fear of opening up my mail box to find another

'I can't pay it bill'

Eventually they stole it all

No longer giving me 'that thrill.'

The tormented thoughts of 'self hatred'

Of the longing to 'simply die'

Empty, guilt filled nights

'No tears left to cry.'

'Yes', in the beginning the pokies helped me feel

'Exhilarated, happy, content and alive'

The 'sounds of lights, the free spins'

'So much pleasure' I derived.

The atmosphere 'most welcoming'

Giving me a sense of security, comfort

I felt a 'warmth all around'

And as the coffee, cakes and biscuits flowed

I felt 'so safe and sound.'

The endless 'jackpots' and 'giveaways'

I actually believed I had the 'Midas touch'

But in the end I lost all sense of reality

And 'my self, pretty much.'

And all of my old friendships

I had pushed aside 'long ago'

I think to myself...'if only' I knew back then

'What today I now know.'

I remember clearly that day

When I finally reached into 'my last cup'

'I looked down and saw it bare'

And I realised in that moment

'What I needed, I would never find it there.'

Jen

