

Council June 2009 Report

Executive Director, Donald Weinbaum and Managerial Assistant, Jeff Beck attended the annual conference of the National Council on Problem Gambling in Indianapolis, Indiana from June 24th through June 27th. It was a great opportunity to renew old friendships, make new friendships and learn state of the art approaches and techniques for treatment, research, policy and prevention. The Council was an active participant in the Affiliates Committee, Helpline Committee and Education Committee. Jeff was elected to the Board of Directors of the National Council on Problem Gambling.

There were many interesting presentations. One by noted Canadian Researcher, Jeff Deverensky, reflected that parents of children aged 12-18 ranked gambling last on a list of 13 problem behaviors for youth. His study indicated 59 % of parents surveyed gambled with their children, and 52% of those parents said underage gambling could escalate into a gambling addiction. This suggests that parents do not correlate participation in gambling activities with their children with the potential risk involved. Dr Jon Grant presented on psychosocial treatment of pathological gambling, featuring a brief six (6) session format of Cognitive Behavior combining imaginal desensitization and motivational interviewing. Don Feeney presented a keynote on shame, stigma and public perception of gambling, with its implications for prevention and awareness. A major highlight was a session on gambling court – presided over by Judge Mark Farrell. This is a diversionary program in New York for first-time gambling offenders. The Court held five vignettes. Unknown to the audience the fifth case was actually real and fourteen members of the person's family came to watch his graduation and see his sentence expunged. He received a standing ovation from the audience.

The Council continued its training and outreach programs. June featured a 6-hour LCADC training on compulsive gambling and a keynote Legislative Breakfast address in Essex County. There were six (6) presentations to senior citizens (705 attendees) and two high school presentations (136 attendees). In addition there were training for clients of ISP (Intensive Supervision Program) and a presentation at a drug/ alcohol rehab.

We also continued efforts to increase awareness about compulsive gambling within the substance abuse, mental and criminal justice systems. During the month, the Council submitted comments to the Alcohol and Drug Counselor Committee of the State Board of Marriage and Family Therapy Examiners supporting their proposed rule changes, which will require six (6) hours of training in compulsive gambling for all new counselors. Additional input was provided to the Task Force on Co-occurring Disorders regarding the need to ensure availability of screening and direct services for problem gamblers and family members across the entire human services system.

In June the Council planned for a number of new public awareness campaigns, designed to begin in late June and extend through the summer. These included placemat announcements in diners, on airplane banners, cards on buses and trains, and posters on train platforms. We believe there are many problem and pathological gamblers who do not seek help; the hope is that repeated sightings of 1-800-GAMBLER® advertisements may trigger a phone call for help or allow loved ones of gamblers to seek out help for them and/or the compulsive gambler.

June 30th marked the end of our fiscal year. Reviews of expenditures took place and next year's grant application was submitted to the Division of Addiction Services.

Interesting Research of the month: Do you think stress makes someone more likely to gamble? Nicole Lighthall of University of Southern California Davis School of Gerontology found that men under stress are more likely to take risks while women moderated their behavior under stress and was less likely to take risks. Only in stressed conditions were there significant differences between men and women.

In June there were 69,768 hits to the 1-800-GAMBLER® website. There were 16,032 visits to the site. The Council received 144 crisis/intake calls on the 1-800-GAMBLER® helpline, resulting in referrals to treatment agencies and Gamblers Anonymous. Some of the interesting calls included the following:

A call was received from a cross-country truck driver seeking help and Gamblers Anonymous meetings. It was suggested that he go on-line at libraries to look up meetings in the various states he was driving to.

An individual called after his girlfriend had asked that gambling information be sent to her. She shared the information with him. He recognized himself as a compulsive gambler and was motivated to seek help. Sometimes the significant other can be of help by providing relevant information.

One caller stated that all his family assets had been stolen by Bernie Madoff and that he saw gambling as the only way to get back the lost monies.

One woman called and stated she was sunning at the beach and looked up and saw an airplane with the 1-800-GAMBLER® banner and decided to call to get help for her husband.