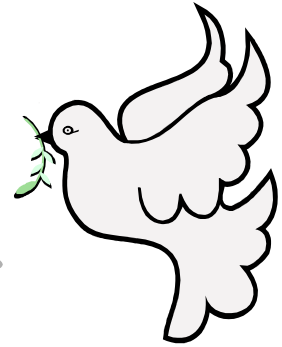




*Merry*  *Christmas* 



### Welcome to our final edition for 2007!

2007 has been an eventful year for our service with clients, projects and the QMS accreditation process; a sobering experience to say the least! Where has the year gone? Like a well used vehicle we are ready for a bit of time in the shop, a grease and oil change, tune up and perhaps a little tinkering to the more delicate parts!

Soon the "silly season" will be upon us, and before long a new year. Once again we will be off and running, like well oiled machines we know how to get the engine buzzing, but keeping it purring is a learned skill, at times requiring a period on the hoist for repairs to get us to our next destination.

Over the years we have become expert at mechanical first aid knowing exactly where to place the tape that will hold it all together, which prevents a blown gasket, allowing us once again to move along effortlessly to the next pit stop.

We envisage 2008 will be a prosperous New Year with challenges, rewards and FUN!!! We will be adding our own special ingredient to the mix and will return looking like the updated model.

**We would like to take this opportunity to wish all a very Merry Christmas and a Joyous & peaceful New Year and look forward to reconnecting in 2008. Best wishes.....All at CCPGS**

*Vrolijk  
Kerstfeest*



*Joyeux  
Noël*

**THE ADDICTION THAT FLYS UNDER THE RADAR ++++++**



I once asked a friend who is a mental health professional how often she assessed for gambling addiction; she said she had never done this in 12 years. This took me back a little as I knew she favoured a formal diagnosis in her practice and I regarded her to be an astute and thorough clinician. Her response gave course for me to probe a little further, *“In 12 years of practice not one client has ever disclosed information about gambling problems and you’ve never had to conduct an assessment for it.”* “No,” she shrugged. *“That’s interesting!”* I concluded. Gambling addiction is a bigger problem in Australia than illicit drugs, (Productivity Commission Report into Gambling 1999), yet it continues to go largely unrecognised and therefore untreated. Approximately 2.5% of the population have a problem with gambling and an additional 5 to 7 people are negatively affected by one problem gambler (IPART Report 1999). That’s about 15% of the population affected by the problem, yet we as a community seem to hardly notice it. How can this be?

There are some interesting explanations. In addition to it being a more culturally acceptable pastime than drug use, the very nature of problem gambling keeps itself well hidden from detection. Secrecy, dishonesty and lies generally go hand in hand with gambling addiction and the problem gambler is often a master of deception. It could be argued that all addicts cheat and lie to support their addiction. But because drug abuse or alcoholism is so visually noticeable it’s easier to see through the lies. While the problem gambler sits totally sober, giving false accounts of their day of abstinence, the substance user on the other hand, will be either slurring words or be so hyper they can barely sit still; making it harder to convince people of their sobriety. Other than checking bank balances, how can an outsider tell when a person is gambling too much? The problem gamblers’ lies so often go on undetected, therefore the deception works. And human nature as it is; if something is working well, we keep using it – and the more we use something the better we get at it.

Over time, deception and secrecy become woven so intricately into the gamblers life, fiction takes precedence over reality. It can be easy to condemn the problem gambler for all of this but living this double life is far from a pleasant existence. Problem Gamblers are trapped in a sad and lonely world of their own creation. It’s interesting, as a counsellor, to notice the problem gambler express such a huge sense of relief when finally their facade has been exposed and no longer do they have to live a lie. Still, the majority of those addicted continue their vicious cycle of deception without a word. The shame, guilt and stress of the compulsion leads to a need to escape reality, and so again they turn towards gambling - falling further into debt and further into desperation. The worse things get for the person, the harder it is for them to raise the matter. It’s generally not until a family member or friend become aware of several overdue accounts, (that they didn’t know existed), does the issue come to light. By this time it’s all too late, things are usually already out of control.

The average person seeking help through Central Coast Problem Gambling Service is around 40. Yet the group mostly affected by problem gambling, males 18 to 24, (Prevalence of Gambling and Problem Gambling in NSW, AC Nielson, 2007), are the least likely to get treatment. Most of our clients have stories of deep guilt from over half a life time of deceiving their friends and loved ones, their employers - and yes, even their therapists.

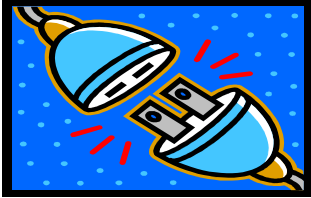
C Davidson.



**Before Withdrawing Money at Christmas**

- Stop**
- Take a Break**
- Organise your Priorities**
- Put into action**





## VISION

### 'Reality Unplugged'.....Fanciful Thinking.

All of us from time to time experience a tug o war of the mind "I want that car...no I can't afford it.....yes I can if.....no I can't because.....", push pull go the cognitive strings "blow it I'm having it and I'll worry about paying my bills later!.....I would never normally do this; should I?.....Come on stop being a goody two shoes have some fun!" Tension mounts as two conflicting thoughts battle it out...Cognitive dissonance is dancing or as the *Wikipedia* states 'the uncomfortable tension that may result from having two conflicting thoughts at the same time, engaging in behaviour that conflicts with one's beliefs. It can be the filtering of information that conflicts with what you already believe, in an effort to ignore that information and reinforce your beliefs'.

This reminds me of a problem gambler and their thinking; stuck in denial they justify their behaviour by using the theory of cognitive dissonance which is 'contradicting cognitions (thoughts) serve as a driving force that compels the mind to acquire or invent new thoughts or beliefs, or to modify existing beliefs, so as to reduce the amount of conflict between cognitions' (*ibid*). My belief is that this process is partially a subconscious one manifesting in the acting out phase, (gambling). *Wikipedia* states people usually have at least partial awareness of the information without having moved to full acceptance of it', therefore creating a state of denial.

So am I saying a problem gambler has no control over their subconscious and therefore their actions? No. Above is described the struggle one goes through when attempting to battle the positive and negative forces of the mind in order to create an action. Most people will overcome the conflict by acknowledging reality and coming to terms with their financial situation before spending money they can not afford.

Then there are problem gamblers who through conflicting emotional cognitions and feelings, can not without assistance come to a clear view about their financial situation and develop fanciful thinking about winning money. Unfortunately the gambling cycle promotes chasing losses and highlights the loss, this enables the person to go at times deeply into denial, believing they will eventually win back their losses, either by gambling more, when they feel lucky or believing the machine will eventually pay if they continue to play.

So there needs to be a major shift in thinking before a new behaviour can be reinforced. This is a difficult process for some. Family members and friends struggle to understand the difficulty. The gambler requires support without enabling behaviour from others to succeed. Success can and does happen. Many models and strategies can be used to assist, one is known as CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy). This approach is based on the concept that the way we think effects how we respond. It is about learning specific strategies enabling the person to think more realistically about life. The process is to identify and restructure negative irrational thoughts by replacing them with realistic, factually based interpretations allowing the person to think in a helpful fashion.

Assisting a person by working on an emotional level with them, addressing their inner demons and conflicts becomes necessary for a problem gambler to come to terms with their situation and take responsibility. When a person masters the ability to question their own thoughts and behaviours and replace them with more productive, positive actions and outcomes, becoming intentionally aware of their thoughts and actions within the moment, they develop mindfulness. This is a process of focussing ones awareness in the present moment, not allowing the mind to aimlessly wander, honing the clarity of the moment by acknowledging it mentally ,by listening to the minds usual commentary, informing you of present events of the moment. Mindfulness is a learned skill, it can be done any time even by focussing on the breath.

Mindfulness is useful with problem gambling thinking. Our service developed the STOP card which stands for S= stop, T= take a break, O= organise priorities, P= put into action. This tool is valuable having the person focus daily on their activities and thinking within the moment. It is carried on the person, taken out and read at regular intervals, focussing on each directive word and reflected upon for a short period. After a period an appropriate action or outcome is individually designed by the individual to fit into their daily routine which directs the person toward a more positive and productive action other than gambling. This mindfulness tool has proven to be of benefit and clients express positive thoughts about using it.

So who is actually driving the mind? Daniel N. Brown author of 'The Power of the Subconscious', appearing in ArticleWorld.net states "Thoughts are powerful forces of energy and can only come from your mind, and you should understand things do not just happen accidentally. Everything that happens in life happens for a reason. Since you are the only one in charge of your mind, you create the thoughts that create the circumstances in your life."

B. Schwetz





## VISION

“Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love”...Hamilton Wright Mabi.

### What happened to the role of elders?

I was having a conversation with some mates after our Tuesday night tennis game. David, who works as a supervisor for an electrical company, began to tell us about some issues that he was having with his apprentices.

David told us about a Monday morning ritual, after pay week, where he would be approached by different apprentices asking if they could borrow money from him to get them through the day.

David found out that his apprentices would spend their weekly wage over the weekend on card machines, drugs, alcohol and tattoo's.

While David was telling us this, he suggested his own solution to the problem, and that was to withhold some money from his apprentices each week so that when Monday morning came around, they would have money available.

David then responded with, “It's not my responsibility, I'm not their parent.”

This short story had me asking the question, is it just the role of parents to raise our youth or is it the role of a community?

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Having worked in the field of disabilities for eighteen years, a number of them as a behaviour management programmer, the above story would be considered as a challenging behaviour by the apprentices that would require some sort of behaviour management programme implemented by qualified staff who are working with the individual.

What David described is a form of behaviour management that could be affective in, not changing the behaviour, but minimising the harm that the behaviour causes.

This is not something that an individual will implement on their own, particularly a youth, but one that can be implemented by someone in our community who is mature, trustworthy and available.

Role models for our youth are everywhere, they can be found where we live, work and play, and it may be time for these role models to come forward to provide our youth with guidance and practical advice.

R.Rus.



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CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE:

[www.problemgambling.net.au](http://www.problemgambling.net.au)



## Client Stories.....



I hit my rock bottom about six years ago. I was living in my unregistered car in a park, I was homeless. I lost my marriage, my children, my home but worst of all I had lost me! I finally had to admit it, I was a compulsive gambler, an addict. I had been living the dream, I had it all; the house with a pool, the husband, the kids, financially well off; but I was so unhappy.

Gambling was my escape, I needed help and I knew I could not do it on my own. I attended a ten month rehab through the Salvation Army, it was the hardest thing I have ever done, it's not easy to look at yourself so closely, but I graduated and didn't gamble for almost two years.

Unfortunately I turned to gambling again to help me through a very bitter divorce. While gambling I didn't have to look at what was really going on in my life and before I knew it I was caught up again in the daily struggle of the compulsive gambler.

Today, my life is very different, I'm on an exciting journey of self discovery. I have my three beautiful children back with me and they are a big part of my recovery. I also have a weekly session with my counsellor at the Central Coast Problem Gambling Service, which is a huge and integral part of my recovery. I have also been taking part in some courses to help me discover who I am. There is still a long way to go but for the first time in a long time I am excited about the future.

Anon



How did it come to this, me, my wife and our five kids. A good job, plenty of money, we wanted for nothing. Two street machine Torana's, beautiful family car, life was great so far, that's where the good part of the story ends.

Then some pot, speed, heroin, but the most costly of the addictions was the button on a pokie. Both me and my wife, man, that computer game destroyed our life! First went money, job and the cars but wasn't the worst by far, worst of all, they came and took our kids. That's what it took to snap us out of it and thank God for counsellors and people like that. The fight for our kids still goes on.

(to be continued)

### Next Issue:

The Good Gambling Guide, what is it? Where you can get it.

Client stories.

Articles.

& More.

Something of interest? then send us an email:

[ccpgs@bigpond.com](mailto:ccpgs@bigpond.com).

If you have a story you would like to appear in our newsletter please email us or mail to

Central Coast Problem Gambling Service

P.O. Box 512, Woy Woy 2256.

All identifying names and places will be deleted for confidentiality purposes.