

Behind the Calls to the Problem Gambling Helpline

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(Green Bay, WI) – With a record 12,946 calls to the Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling (WCPG) Helpline in 2008, volunteers and professional staff were busy providing information and support to those who face gambling issues. But beyond the record number of calls, those who take the Helpline calls say it's important to realize the callers are real people with serious problems.

“Very often callers tell us that they are at the end of their rope,” said Rose Gruber, WCPG Executive Director. “Many are deep in debt and experiencing marital and family problems. They feel helpless and don't really know where to turn. Making the first call to the Helpline is a very important step.”

The Helpline call-takers are on the frontline answering calls from problem and compulsive gamblers from throughout Wisconsin. While all calls to the Helpline are confidential, the following are examples of just some of the Helpline contacts:

- A northern Wisconsin woman said her husband dreams about gambling and tried to commit suicide due to his gambling.
- An east-central Wisconsin man told WCPG that as soon as he gets his paycheck he blows it on gambling, he is filing for bankruptcy and is not getting along with his spouse.
- A south-central Wisconsin resident indicated that he lost his paycheck in one day of gambling and did not have enough gas to get home.
- A woman from western Wisconsin said she was looking for resources for her sister who is hospitalized following a suicide attempt. She said her sister has filed bankruptcy before and is trying to file again due to her gambling debt.
- A man called the Helpline because he was worried about his sister in northwest Wisconsin. He says his brother-in-law is hospitalized following a heart attack and his sister spends little time with her husband and took out a loan on her husband's life insurance policy for gambling money.

For many callers, Gruber says, dialing the Helpline is the first real admission of a problem. “With a gambling addiction there are few outward signs that you may see with other addictions,” Gruber said. “There's no slurred speech or the smell of alcohol. With gambling, close family members are often not aware of the situation until there are serious financial issues in the household.”

(more)

During an initial call, Helpline operators gather basic information to assess the caller's situation. Some callers are willing to share information on their situation, including how far they've gone into debt and what form of gambling they're involved with. "Others just want to talk to someone and get things off of their chest," Gruber said. "All of our callers receive information about treatment providers and Gamblers Anonymous chapters in their specific area of the state. Very often they are relieved to learn that help is available in their community."

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The Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling is funded by a public awareness grant from the State of Wisconsin and additional funding from donors, including Wisconsin Native American Tribes. The Council operates a 24-hour Helpline at 1-800-GAMBLE-5, distributes informational brochures, organizes an annual statewide conference, makes presentations on problem gambling and conducts training sessions for treatment providers interested in the special requirements for working with compulsive gamblers and their families. For more information, visit www.wi-problemgamblers.org.

If you or someone you know has a gambling problem, call the Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling Helpline at 1-800-GAMBLE-5 for confidential help.

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