



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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A Big Win for Washington

Problem Gambling Prevention Efforts Will Grow in 2009

NOTE: National Problem Gambling Awareness Week is March 1 - 7, 2009. For local information and news resources, visit www.evergreencpg.org . For National information and news resources, visit www.npgaw.org .

Some call it the "hidden addiction." Compulsive and problem gamblers are almost always hard to spot, until they hit rock bottom. The grandfather or grandmother involved in Internet gambling (illegal in every state, including Washington) may rack up thousands of dollars in debt that is not apparent to family members until the elder loses a home to creditors, or they die from stress or self-neglect. The spouse who takes four hours to make a quick trip to the store may be hiding a gambling addiction that only becomes apparent when he or she is arrested for embezzling thousands to support gambling activities.

For most people in Washington State, gambling is an enjoyable and well-controlled form of entertainment. In virtually every community, however, a small percentage of players lose control each year and fall into a pattern of compulsive or problem gambling.

Leaders in providing problem gambling treatment, training, and awareness programs and services in Washington State are not waiting for better economic conditions to expand problem gambling awareness. The time for growth in awareness is now.

"Gaming is an important industry in Washington State," notes Maureen Greeley, executive director of the Evergreen Council on Problem Gambling, a private, not-for-profit organization. "It provides thousands of jobs and millions in revenue." Economic hard times, she notes, create an ideal environment for growing problem gambling awareness programs because awareness messages provide a counter-balance to the allure of a hoped-for big win. "The government and industry leaders we work with want gamblers to be aware that gambling has the potential to be addictive; they want people to gamble responsibly and enjoy gambling for recreation and entertainment."

"We have strong support from numerous partners, including multiple Tribal Nations, the recreational gaming industry, treatment providers, and key state agencies," she adds. ECPG collaborates regularly with various Tribal representatives, the Washington State Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse, Washington State Gambling Commission, and Washington's Lottery.

Studies have documented that problem gambling produces powerful brain chemistry that, in some

individuals, makes it difficult to resist the urge to gamble. Extensive studies have documented that up to two percent of adults are pathological or compulsive gamblers. An additional one to two percent are problem gamblers. Problem gambling is defined as gambling in a manner that causes significant disruption to regular life activities. Consequences can include extreme debt, broken relationships, home foreclosures, job loss, severe depression, anger issues, legal problems (including incarceration when problem gamblers steal to support a gambling habit), and suicide. Many people have been helped through problem gambling counseling (referrals in Washington are available through the 24/7 Helpline: 800.547.6133) or support through Gambler's Anonymous (visit www.evergreencpg.org for Washington's list of GA meetings).

In addition to treatment services (state-funded treatment is available), several key prevention and awareness initiatives are under way to help minimize the impact of problem gambling in our state (see accompanying list). Initiatives include the Western Regional Conference on Problem Gambling Awareness (May 1-2, 2009, at the Hilton Hotel, Vancouver, Washington); Responsible Gaming Program for Tribal Casinos; proposed Therapeutic Justice for Problem Gamblers (Gambling Court, similar to Drug Court); Youth Problem Gambling Awareness and The Arts Grant Program; and School-based Problem Gambling Awareness Curricula.

For more information, contact Rhonda Stone, Community Education Coordinator, Evergreen Council on Problem Gambling, at 360.352.6133 or rstone@evergreencpg.org.



The Evergreen Council on Problem Gambling is dedicated to increasing public awareness of problem gambling, expanding the availability of services for problem gamblers and their families, and encouraging research and programs for prevention and education. Established in 1991 as a private, nonprofit organization, the Council provides statewide confidential support through its 24-hour Problem Gambling Helpline (800.547.6133) and public awareness, education, prevention, training, and resource development services. Visit our website at www.evergreencpg.org.

STORY IDEAS

Problem Gambling Prevention Efforts for 2009

Call Rhonda Stone at 360.352.6133 for Information and Additional Contacts

Focus on the Future May 1-2, 2009

3rd Annual Western Regional Conference on Problem Gambling Awareness

The public is invited to attend this two-day conference hosted by organizations in Washington and Oregon and featuring top experts from the United States and Canada. Scheduled for May 1-2 at the Hilton Hotel in Vancouver, Washington, the conference will include four special tracks for: clinical/research, culture/community, prevention/outreach, and the gaming industry/legal professions. The registration cost is only \$75 for both days and includes continental breakfast and lunch each day. The Evergreen Council on Problem Gambling (ECPG) and the Oregon Council on Problem Gambling are hosting the event. For information, visit www.evergreencpg.org.

Responsible Gaming Program for Tribal Casinos

This new program is designed to help tribal gaming authorities, tribal casino management, and tribal councils proactively address Responsible Gaming issues within the communities they represent and serve. ECPG's Responsible Gaming Program uses multiple media platforms to engage casino staff,

casino guests, and the general public with information.

Therapeutic Justice for Problem Gamblers

Problem gambling is an illness recognized by the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association. Presently, problem gamblers caught stealing or embezzling to support their habits often serve jail time without treatment. ECPG is working with government officials to propose a "Gambling Court" pilot project (similar to Washington's Drug Court). Mandated treatment would be a key part of the program.

Youth Problem Gambling Awareness and the Arts Project

To initiate student-to-student problem gambling awareness, Washington State's Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse (DASA) developed a grant program whereby junior high and high school student groups applied for funding to be used to develop problem gambling messages through the Arts. DASA is managing the grant program and funding three of the four grants, Educational Service District 113 is providing coordination and support services, and ECPG is providing information on problem gambling to student groups as well as funding for one of the four projects accepted in 2009. Scheduled to be completed by May 1, the projects will employ a mix of music, rap, hip-hop, and drama. Contact DASA Problem Gambling Program Manager Linda Graves at 360.725.3813 for information. The student programs receiving funding include:

🎧 **Cascade Family Counseling for Sterling Middle School**, East Wenatchee, Washington
Contact: Martha Flores @ mvflores1999@msn.com or 509.741.0156

🎧 **Gear Up With Music**, Olympia, Washington (funded by the Evergreen Council on Problem Gambling)

Contact: Todd Denny @ info@todddennyMVP.com or 360.866.7140

🎧 **Interagency Academy Youth Ensemble**, Seattle School District, Seattle, Washington
Contact: Amy Rider @ amy.rider@yahoo.com or 206.484.5911

🎧 **Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD)**, Oakland Bay Junior High, Shelton, Washington

Contact: Gerald Apple @ GeraldAppl@yahoo.com or 360.480.5330

School-Based Youth Problem Gambling Awareness Curricula

Several states across the country, including Oregon, have successfully implemented school-based curricula for problem gambling awareness. The message: gambling is a legal form of recreation that, for a small percentage of the population, can be as addictive as drugs or alcohol. ECPG is presently working with advisory groups around the state that include educators, students, parents, and representatives from Tribes, government agencies, and treatment and legal professions to create Washington State's first school-based curricula designed to help students avoid problem gambling.

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