

Family and friends of problem gamblers urged to seek help

The NSW Government's Gambling Help services invite the partners, family and friends of problem gamblers to attend a free information and assistance expo. The expo is one of the activities of Responsible Gambling Awareness Week (RGAW) and will be run from 17 to 22 May in the Long Room, above the Park Cafe in Redfern Park.

South Sydney Leagues Club Chairman, Bill Alexiou Hucker has come on board to support RGAW by working with HopeStreet's Inner City Gambling Counselling Service to provide gambling counselling for the duration of the expo. Counsellors will be available between 2.00pm and 7.00pm each day (no appointment is necessary). In addition to advice on gambling, counsellors will also be on hand to assist with financial and legal advice. All conversations will be treated with the strictest confidence.

"The recent Australian Productivity Commission Report shows that for every problem gambler, there are five to ten others who are significantly affected" said Sondra Kalnins from HopeStreet's Inner City Gambling Counselling Service.

Sondra expanded on the research above saying "It is usually someone in close relationship to a gambler who suspects there is a problem and wishes to provide support. However, recent research has shown that loved ones tend to underestimate the extent of the problem, as the gambler will frequently keep their full losses secret. As with many addictions, early intervention is the key. It is essential that appropriate help is sought as early as possible to help build coping strategies and avoid a crisis."

Sondra said "that as well as providing information about how to assist problem gamblers, Gambling Help services also provides much-needed support and practical advice for families and friends who are suffering the emotional, financial and relationship stress associated with the gambling addiction of their loved one."

The message from the Responsible Gambling Fund during RGAW for the family and friends of problem gamblers is:

1. Educate yourself on the signs and symptoms of problem gambling by calling Gambling Help on 1800 858 858 or visiting www.gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au. The more aware you are, the earlier you and your loved one can begin working on the problem; the better the outcomes are likely to be.
2. Gambling Help is here to help you as well as the problem gambler in your life. The impact on friends, partners and family can often be confusing and traumatic. Our counsellors are available by phone or live online 24 hours a day, and face to face in most communities in NSW. All counselling is free and confidential. We also financially support a free legal service based at Wesley Mission in Surry Hills which can be accessed by loved ones as well as problem gamblers. This service can be a great, practical first step in protecting your assets and dealing with legal troubles caused by gambling.