

30<sup>th</sup> March 2012

Committee Secretary  
Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT

**Submission :        WAKING FROM THE NIGHTMARE**

It lasted for a long time. A few years have passed, since we, our addicted son and our other children emerged from a long, dark tunnel.

Over the previous years – nearly 20 – it was a roller-coaster ride. First came shock, then disbelief, when we first became aware of the extent of our son's gambling addiction. Then followed anger, frustration, lack of sympathy and fear; a fear that his debts and depression would lead to something terrible.

He had no savings and no other assets and marriage was only a remote possibility. To feed his addiction, he stole money from his employer and was consequently sacked. Hopes were raised when he soon acquired a new job but they were again dashed as he lived a lifestyle he could not afford. He was in the grip of depression. Loss of friends ( he didn't pay back money leant), changes in accommodation, withdrawal from family, lack of communication with us and knowledge of his occasional drunken behaviour caused us to be suspicious and angry. How could this happen to our son? He was a contradiction of his former self. We were at a loss to find help for him, let alone interest in the problem of gambling addiction.

We were shocked when he told us that he had stolen cash from his employer's petty-cash. The employer knew of our son's addiction when, at his interview our son informed him that he did not want to handle cash as he had a gambling problem!

He became desperate and walked into a bank and asked for a personal loan of \$10,000.00. He was simply asked if he had a job, which he did, and his request was granted! This money went to chase his losses on the Poker Machines.

He was well nourished with alcohol while playing the pokies. Today, at our local club, they announce "if you would like a drink from the bar, just press the blue button on the right of your machine and it will be brought to you".

It was only when we became involved with Gam-anon, and then with the Gambling Impact Society, that we began to feel a real sympathy for him; his inability to control his urge to gamble; to gamble till it hurt. The friends we made, and still have, all victims of out-of-control gambling in one way or another, helped us tremendously; they gave us strength and helped us to understand, forgive and love our son, unreservedly, again.

We had never doubted that, at times, he did try to rid himself of the urge to gamble but, overwhelmed by the desire to play the pokies (loneliness was always there), and having no one for support and not believing anyone could step in and help him, it was all downhill into further difficulties.

His siblings wanted to help him to get back on his feet; first his sister, then his brother. This worked well at first but then promises of rent were continually broken which greatly impacted on the financial commitments of his siblings who had mortgages to pay. We could not stand by and watch our

daughter's life ruined and we supported her in her having to tell him 'to go'. Tough love! Things went well for a time but the gambling hadn't stopped.( albeit less so), as we later found out, and soon a real crisis developed – a more critical one.

Living so far away from him; he in Sydney and we in the Shoalhaven and lack of access to professional help, disempowered us, completely, or so we thought.

Then, despite all the hurdles, red lights and brick walls, a light appeared unexpectedly at the end of the dark tunnel. While living in his brother's house he managed to cope, somehow, for a while, but then he was unable to pay the rates and electricity bills. Added to this, the car that he was using to get to and from work and to do his job, belonged to his boss who was about to sell it. Without a car – the means to look for a job and get to work - and unable to pay his debts, our son faced this crisis: unemployment, mounting debt, deeper depression and, dare I say it, possibly the gutter and even worse.

This was not only a crisis point for our son; it was a crisis for us, too. He was our loved son, after all, and we did not want his problem to further impact on our family. We had told him previously that we wouldn't give him any further money but, nevertheless, he rang (a rare event) and told us of his problems, hoping we would change our minds.

Giving him money was not an option. After much soul searching however, we told him what we would like to do to help; he was to send to us his household bills, which we would personally pay by cheque, and then we would arrange to buy his boss's car which he had been using. He was overwhelmed. He couldn't believe what we were about to do. We felt great relief and satisfaction in the belief that we might be responsible for "slaying the monster", at last.

Our plan, hopefully, would not only save his job, but help with his mental well-being and, perhaps, save his life. We could only hope that our plan would work.

Since then, 2003, the gambling has stopped, he's always had a job, he's regained some self-esteem and confidence, he is happy and part of the family again and takes great pleasure in being with his niece – a five-year old. I think she sees him as a grandfather! However, our son still lives his life for today; tomorrow is not to worry about (except for us) and he has virtually no assets. We, being old, worry about what the future holds for him. At least, the scourge of pokies, and the pain, is a thing of the past, we hope.

To survive from the gambling labyrinth, with its lures, enticements and gimmicks, has taken its toll, and the Clubs Industry is to be condemned for the misery it inflicts on society.

Survivors; a Father and Mother, and a Beloved Son.

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We thank you for this opportunity to forward our experience in the hope that, likewise thousands of families will see their children, and grandchildren, protected by mandatory pre-commitment gambling reform. To know a problem gambler is to know that voluntary commitment does not and will not work. No wonder the Club Industry wants the latter – Blind Freddie can see that!