

Tasmania's Problem Gambling Strategy

A submission by the Tasmanian Gaming Commission

**Gambling Inquiry
Productivity Commission
PO Box 80
Belconnen ACT 2616**

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Introduction

In 1973, Tasmania's first casino was established at Wrest Point Casino in Hobart. A second casino, Country Club Casino, opened in 1982. Gaming machines were introduced into the two casinos in 1986.

No recognised studies were undertaken in those early years into the negative impacts that casino gaming may have had on the community, however the casino operators made donations to the services identified with the treatment of problem gambling.

In December 1993 the Tasmanian Parliament passed legislation permitting the extension of gaming machines beyond casinos, but not before considerable public debate and a Select Committee Inquiry.

Because of concern about the negative impacts that the increased opportunity for gambling might have on the community, the *Gaming Control Act 1993* made provision for the establishment of the Community Support Levy, to be derived from a portion of the profits of the machines in hotels and clubs. In accordance with the legislation, 50 per cent of the Levy must be directed towards prevention and rehabilitation of problem gambling, community education, research and other health services.

The introduction of gaming machines into hotels and clubs was not, however, to occur until 1 January 1997. The intervening period was used by the Government to develop strategies to ensure that any increase in the prevalence of problem gambling following January 1997 was minimised and that services would be available for those who developed problems.

Integrated Gambling Policy for Tasmania

In July 1995, the Government released its "*Framework for Developing an Integrated Gambling Policy for Tasmania*", which sought to establish a cooperative approach between the Government, the racing and gaming industries and the community towards social issues of common concern. Such a coordinated approach was seen to provide the best opportunity to manage the full range of issues (including social problems) facing the Government.

While the immediate impetus for the review of gambling policy was the impending introduction of gaming machines into hotels and clubs, the Government chose not to isolate gaming machines as a separate issue, but took the opportunity to step ahead and adopt an integrated approach to gambling policy.

The goal of the integrated gambling policy is to maximise the benefits from legal gambling while minimising the impacts of any negative social consequences.

The policy outlined a number of strategies needed to assist the prevention and management of the negative aspects of gambling, including education, an active industry response by way of responsible advertising and patron care, and the establishment of direct services. It recognised, however, that further research was required to firstly understand the extent and nature of problem gambling in Tasmania, and secondly to determine an appropriate service delivery structure, based on experience elsewhere.

Administration of Problem Gambling Policy

The Tasmanian Gaming Commission was identified by Government as the most appropriate body to oversee and monitor the development of an integrated proactive gambling policy, and was given the task of administering the Community Support Levy and making recommendations to the Treasurer on the allocation of funds to appropriate projects and services.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) was also recognised to have a major role to play in the development of problem gambling services. Programs funded by that Department would also feel the impacts of any increase in problem gambling. DHHS was therefore integrally involved in the development of the problem gambling service structure for Tasmania.

Ultimately, DHHS is likely to take over responsibility for the administration of problem gambling services, with the Gaming Commission to remain involved to ensure that the integrated approach between Government, industry and the community continues.

Research

During debate on the gaming machine legislation in Parliament, the Government committed to undertake research to ascertain the current level of problem gambling in Tasmania for use as a baseline against which movements in the prevalence of problem gambling could be measured over time. During 1994, Associate Professor Mark Dickerson of the Australian Institute of Gambling Research (AIGR) was asked to undertake a survey of a sample of Tasmanians to identify the level and social impact of gambling and to establish a database for use in future research and longitudinal surveys.

The report found that gambling was an important leisure activity for many Tasmanians, and developed a profile of regular gamblers. It concluded that the prevalence of problem gamblers in Tasmania at that time was probably in keeping with the prevalence level identified in the national study in 1991 - that is, approximately 1.16 per cent of the adult population, or about 3 180 individuals.

A follow up study was undertaken by the AIGR in November 1996 to identify any changes that had occurred since 1994, and to set a base against which the impact of the extension of gaming machines into hotels and clubs could be measured.

This second report indicated that, while there had been an increase in participation over the two year period, the actual prevalence of problem gambling had probably remained about the same. However, based on responses to questions about people's intentions to play gaming machines, Dickerson predicted that the prevalence of "at risk" players could rise by up to 25% post 1 January 1997, with the increase in the demand for problem gambling services being significantly greater.

A "Healthy Communities Survey" is currently being conducted by DHHS, across 25 000 members of the Tasmanian community, which includes a small set of questions relating to problem gambling. The results of this survey will provide additional information relating to the nature and prevalence of problem gambling in Tasmania.

Planning for the Development of Problem Gambling Services in Tasmania

As mentioned previously, the Government's integrated gambling policy recognised that Tasmania was in a position to learn from the experiences interstate in the development of problem gambling services and strategies.

During 1996, the Government funded Anglicare to undertake research into approaches adopted elsewhere, and propose appropriate preventative and response services for problem gambling in Tasmania. The resulting report, entitled "*More than Just a Bob Each Way - Tasmania takes the gamble out of service delivery*" was completed in June 1996 and proposed a systematic approach to the development of services.

The report recommended:

- a multiple service approach through established agencies;
- flexible referral networks between direct and indirect service providers in the area of problem gambling;
- a central telephone number to provide easy client access, information and referrals;
- a long term community education strategy which focuses on promoting responsible gambling through preventative programs; and
- ongoing research and evaluation to ensure effective service delivery and accountability.

These recommendations have formed the basis of the Government's strategy in establishing services under the Community Support Levy.

In the initial year of funding, given the limitation in the funds available and the uncertainty of demand, efforts were concentrated on the establishment of a help-line, the provision of counselling and group support services and the development of a community education program. Funding for current services expires at the end of 1998. An evaluation of those services has just been completed.

The secretive nature of problem gambling may result in increased demand on financial and relationship counselling, emergency relief and other welfare services that can not be directly linked to problem gambling. Future funding may be directed through DHHS to current welfare and health services being directly and indirectly impacted by an increase in problem gambling.

Establishment of Break Even Services

G-line

A key element of the approach adopted was the establishment of a telephone help line, providing a single entry point to funded services, and offering a 24 hour contact for those people experiencing difficulties as a result of gambling.

The Government and industry therefore held discussions with the Addiction Research Institute in Victoria for the possible extension of the G-line number to Tasmania. G-line had a number

of advantages over the establishment of a dedicated help-line for Tasmania. These included professionally trained counsellors with experience in dealing with problem gambling issues, a pre-existing infrastructure and an independent provider. The cost of establishing, and then operating a similar service for a population the size of Tasmania's was prohibitive, and the Government accepted the opportunity to purchase the G-line service on a fee for call basis. There was hope at the time that this could also be the first step in a national approach to gambling and the collection of national data about problem gambling.

The G-line service commenced operation in Tasmania on 1 January 1997, when gaming machines commenced operation in hotels and clubs. That contract has been extended to the end of 1998. Evaluation of the G-line service is soon to be undertaken.

Counselling and Group Support

In November 1996, the Government called for applications from interested organisations wishing to develop services for problem gamblers, to be based on the framework identified in the Anglicare report. Three organisations were then shortlisted, and further discussions took place to finalise the service structure to be adopted.

Funding was approved in April 1997 for GABA, Anglicare and Relationships Australia to establish (or in GABA's case, continue) services for problem gamblers, under the recognisable banner of *Break Even*. An estimated \$500 000 was made available from the problem gambling portion of the Community Support Levy.

GABA was a pre-existing group support organisation for problem gamblers, established in 1990. It had previously received funding from the Federal Group and the Gambling Industry Group. Group support was recognised by the Government as an important aspect in the treatment of some problem gamblers and their families. In addition, GABA already had a well established client base, and it was decided to provide funding to enable it to continue its service in the north, south and north-west of the State.

Anglicare and Relationships Australia were both selected to provide professional counselling services - Anglicare in Hobart, Burnie and Devonport and Relationships Australia in Hobart and Launceston, with both providing outreach services as required. It was viewed as important to provide clients with a choice of services, and also considered inappropriate to establish one organisation with total responsibility for delivering problem gambling services.

It has always been the intention of the Gaming Commission to allow for a process whereby the Break Even service could grow with demand, rather than have demand grow to fit the service. Additional counselling was purchased from Relationships Australia during 1998 in Launceston and Hobart to satisfy demand.

Training and Professional Development

Relationships Australia has been given responsibility to co-ordinate professional development and support for those working in the area of problem gambling - both professional counsellors and volunteers working with GABA.

Community Education

In addition to the provision of counselling services, Anglicare has been provided with funds to employ a part-time community education officer to undertake a Statewide community education program. The program is aimed at increasing awareness of problem gambling and the Break Even services (including G-line), and to promote responsible gambling to prevent problems occurring.

Activities to date include community service announcements on radio and television, cinema advertising, brochures, features in local newspapers and, commencing shortly, G-line stickers in taxis and advertising on "Shop-a-Dockets".

While in the main fairly low key, the impact of these initiatives is starting to materialise, with calls to G-line gradually increasing. An intensive promotion of the G-line service is shortly to commence which will create greater exposure of the G-line service with the numbers of calls to G-line expected to correspondingly rise.

Financial Counselling

At present, no funding is provided from the Community Support Levy for financial counselling for problem gamblers, primarily due to funding restrictions and difficulties in predicting demand. However, Anglicare currently receives funding from the Department of Health and Human Services to deliver financial counselling services of a general nature. The Break Even services are able to refer clients to Anglicare's financial counselling service, and Anglicare has undertaken to monitor demand to determine appropriate service levels. Future funding is likely to be provided through an extension of the problem gambling service agreements.

Industry

Integral to the Government's integrated approach to problem gambling is the cooperation of the key members of the gambling industry. The Gambling Industry Group was first convened in March 1995 to address the issues of responsible advertising, patron care and codes of conduct. The Group includes senior representatives from all players in the Tasmanian gambling industry, including the Federal Hotels Group (the major operator in Tasmania in both casinos and hotels and clubs), the TAB, the Australian Hotels Association, Tattersall, the Registered Clubs Cooperative Society Ltd and the Tasmanian Gaming Commission.

Since its inception, the Group has undertaken a number of projects to promote responsible gambling and the responsible service of gambling.

One of its first initiatives was the development, distribution and funding of a Responsible Gambling brochure, which is available in casinos, TABs and gaming venues around the State. This brochure is currently being updated and will be available for distribution in December 1998.

Members also played an active role in the investigation of options for the establishment of a problem gambling help-line in Tasmania, and helped pave the way for the introduction of G-line in January 1997. The Group funded and distributed posters and business card sized cards promoting the G-line service to all gambling venues.

A major step in the Group's development of its problem gambling strategies was the commissioning of Anglicare to undertake research in relation to best practice in patron care. The study included an assessment of patron care activities elsewhere in Australia and a series of interviews and focus groups involving gambling industry staff and employers, problem gamblers and employees working in the community welfare sector.

The final report, *Patron Care Policies and Programs for the Tasmanian Gambling Industry*, made a range of recommendations in relation to patron care practices, advertising, and training for industry staff. The majority of these recommendations have been implemented by industry, with key initiatives including:

- the development of a Gambling Code of Practice, displayed in racing and gaming venues Statewide;
- the development and implementation of an Advertising Code of Ethics, covering both the gaming and racing sectors; and
- the development of a Responsible Service of Gambling Course (through the AHA) which commenced in March 1998, for delivery initially to employees in gaming machine venues, but also to be adapted for presentation for staff employed in TABs. The Responsible Service of Gambling Course is funded jointly by the Community Support Levy and industry sponsorship. As of 15 September 1998 over 550 gaming staff had completed the course.

The Industry Group has demonstrated a desire to work with service providers in the task of minimising the negative effects of gambling. The Group provided funding to GABA until funding was secured from the Community Support Levy, and is keen to maintain links with each of the organisations funded to provide services under the Government's problem gambling strategy.

Most recently, the Industry Group has led the development of new self-exclusion procedures for casinos and gaming machine venues. The process is a variation of the approach developed in Victoria by the AHA, and has the advantage of encouraging gamblers to make contact with counselling and group support organisations by requiring someone from one of the Break Even services to witness both the self-exclusion contract and any request by the gambler to lift the self-imposed ban. As at October 1998 14 people had negotiated a contract through the Break Even services and the AHA.

Experience to date

Uptake of Gaming Machines

The initial uptake of gaming machines in Tasmanian clubs and hotels was less than originally expected, and certainly lower than that experienced interstate. This can be attributed to a number of factors, including the previous exposure of Tasmanians to continuous forms of gambling, the bet limits placed on players, and the Gaming Commission's requirements in relation to the placement of machines in areas separate to public bars.

By 30 September 1998 the minimum requirement of 1250 machine placements in hotels and clubs had just been met. This number was specified in the Deed between Government and Australian National Hotels Pty Ltd, the gaming operator.

This slower than anticipated uptake meant that initial funding available through the Community Support Levy was limited, thus reinforcing the need for a gradual implementation of problem gambling services.

Demand for Services

This approach has been vindicated by the level of demand experienced by the Break Even services to date. The Break Even services have been collecting their own minimum data set as required by their individual contracts. This data collection provided the Commission with client statistics and in some instances full demographic analysis. This data has been used for the services evaluation which took place in October 1998. The following extract of the evaluation provides a summary of service usage from July 1997 to 30 September 1998. A list of the services and their contact addresses is attached.

Co-ordination of services

Under their Service Agreements, the three funded Break Even service providers are required to coordinate their services and approaches. Monthly meetings have enabled them to share information, develop (with Government) data requirements, service standards and referral procedures, and to participate in the planning of staff development and community education initiatives.

The cross-referral of clients between GABA, financial counsellors and behavioural counsellors provides a range, and in many cases, a combination of approaches, to assist in the treatment of problem gamblers, and recognises the value of both professional counselling and group support.

Feedback from counselling services has indicated that many of their clients do not front until they are desperate and near suicide. Effort must be put into ensuring that problem gamblers seek help prior to getting to this stage.

All organisations, but particularly GABA, have benefited from this association. GABA, whilst experienced in the delivery of group support services for problem gamblers, has had to come to terms with a new, more specialised, role and the demands of a government funding agreement. This has set a number of challenges for the largely volunteer organisation, but GABA has shown considerable progress in adapting to the changes, with the support of the other Break Even organisations.

The Future

The Commission completed its evaluation of the problem gambling services in October 1998 and recommendations have been made for the continuation of the existing services. However, it has agreed to tender for the development of a community education program and a marketing strategy for the services. Lack of awareness of the individual services, the name and

meaning of the term “Break Even” and the awareness of G-Line as part of the network has been evident in the last 12 months.

Difficulties exist, as with any anonymous help-line service, in evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the service, and some effort and cooperation is needed by the Addiction Research Institute and the funding bodies in the near future to address these issues. G-Line will run a full Tasmanian promotional campaign in November 1998 to raise their profile; the results of the success of this campaign will determine its funding beyond June 1999.

Summary

By adopting the strong aspects of the approaches elsewhere and being flexible with providing additional funding when required during the first year of operating, the Tasmanian problem gambling services approach has proven very sound.

That is not to say that our approach, and the service structure implemented, is faultless. Many refinements are still required. But in Tasmania we have a service structure that many other States with much longer experience of gambling are only now developing.

We consider that the Commission’s proactive approach, whilst presenting some difficulties (for instance, in anticipating service demand levels) has meant that Tasmania will be well placed to cope with any increases in problem gambling as a result of gaming machines, but will also hopefully prevent many of these problems arising.

Industry’s contributions and co-operation so far, and the dedication and professionalism of those working with problem gamblers in the Break Even services, are promising signs for the future.

ATTACHMENT

Statistical Overview

From the first funding period of July 1997 to the end of the review period of October 1998, Break Even services provided face to face services for **192 clients**.

These clients, both problem gamblers and those affected by problem gambling, attended either, personal/family therapeutic counselling at Relationships Australia and Anglicare Tasmania, or group support meetings with GABA.

Clients came from around Tasmania. The highest number originated from Hobart, followed by clients from Launceston and then the North West Coast. The following is a summary of the numbers attending or telephoning each service:

Relationships Australia has counselled 79 new clients during the period May 1997 to 30 September 1998. Over a total of 919 counselling sessions, 293 sessions were held in Launceston, 467 in Hobart with 159 “not kept” appointments being recorded.

Anglicare has counselled 40 new clients from May 1997 to 31 August 1998 with an average counselling program of 6 sessions per client giving an estimated counselling load of 240 sessions.

GABA has had 73 new members from April 1997 to 31 August 1998 with 1 740 attendances in all at their weekly meetings held in Hobart, Launceston and Ulverstone.

GABA has had a total of 377 gambling related calls over this period with an average of 12 new callers per month.

G-Line has recorded 215 phone calls with a Tasmanian area code, from July 1997 to 30 September 1998 (Figure 9).

Of these calls, approximately 10% (22) have contacted Break Even problem gambling counselling services. (Figure 8). The number of G-Line referred clients to Break Even counselling services have declined significantly since June 1998 despite an increase in actual Tasmanian phone calls to the service.

Data Limitations

A restricted client data set has been analysed for the purpose of this evaluation. An agreed minimum data set will be gathered from all funded services for 1999 onwards.

GABA has collected new and continuing client numbers, with breakdown on client status such as “gambler” or “gambling affected persons”. Anglicare has collected the minimum data set, with a high percentage of “unknown” responses and Relationships Australia has collected a

clean minimum data set. G-Line has collected a highly detailed set of client data with an average of 30% “unknown” responses.

Demographic Analysis

For the purpose of this summary, demographic data has been taken from Anglicare Tasmania and Relationships Australia only. Correlation analysis has not been available. This will be on line for 1999, including an historical analysis for the current 1997-1998 figures.

Country of Birth

Data from all Break Even Services in Tasmania, including the statistics from G-Line, show that 99% of clients were Australian born.

Gender

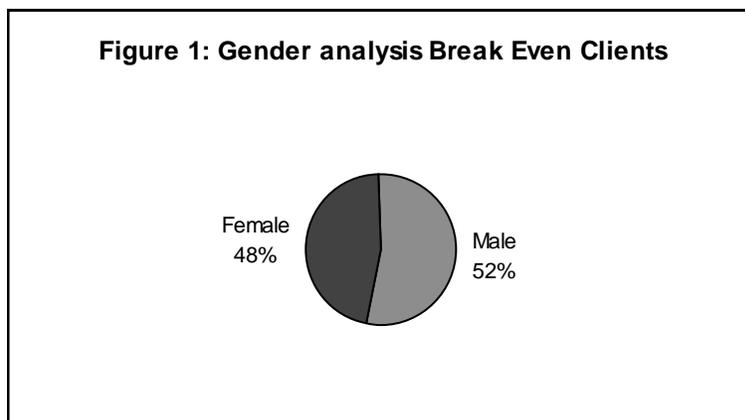


Figure 1 gives the known (n=103) gender break down of clients attending problem gambling counselling in Tasmania, during the last 16 months. Since June 1998 however, the numbers of females attending counselling has significantly surpassed male clients.

Age Range

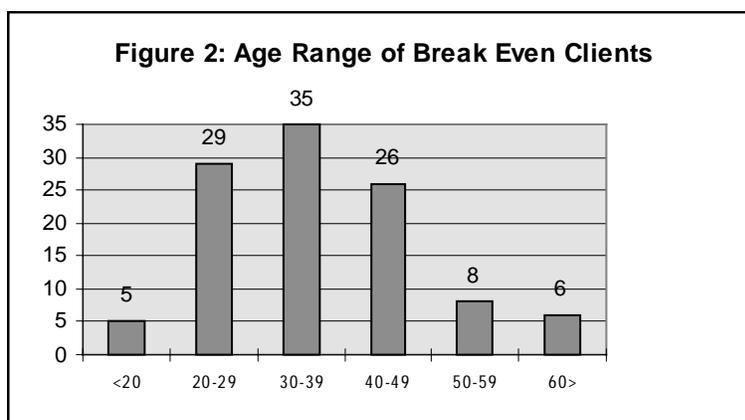


Figure 2 gives the known (n=109) age range of clients attending problem gambling counselling in Tasmania, during the last 16 months. 59% (64) of these clients were aged between 20 and 40 years of age.

Marital Status

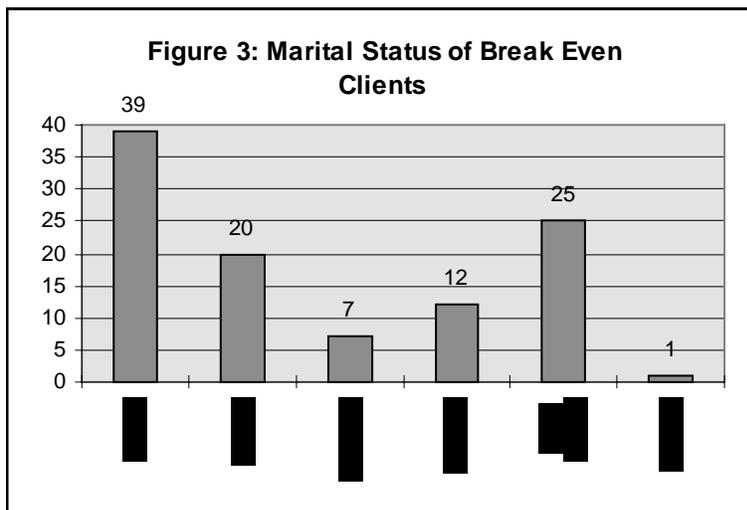


Figure 3 describes the known (n=104) marital status of clients. Of these, 57% (59) were either married or in a defacto relationships. 24% (25) had never been married.

Living Arrangements

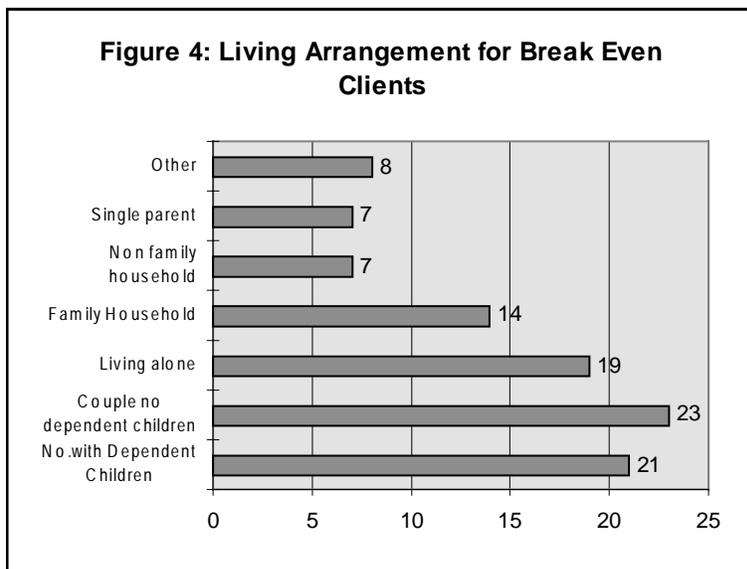


Figure 4 shows how the clients describe their living arrangements (n=99). “Family household” could be chosen by children within a family, or retirees living with siblings. A “Non family Household”, includes those sharing a house such as students or non related residents. 49% (49) of these households did not have dependent children living with them and 42% (42) were households with dependent children.

Occupation

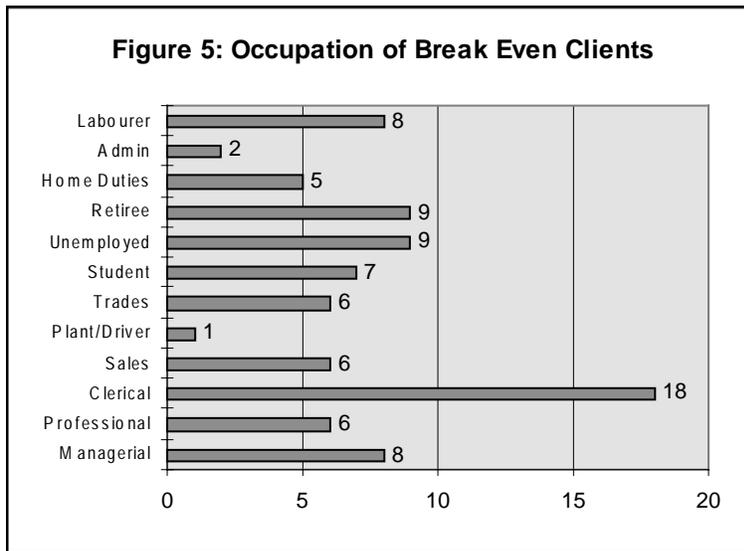


Figure 5 gives the known data for occupation of Break Even Clients (n=85). The majority 65% (55) of clients are employed, with those in clerical positions showing greatest representation.

Income Range

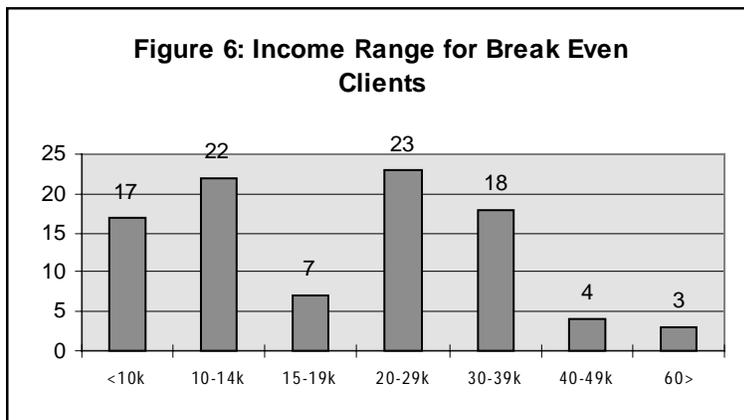


Figure 6 displays the known income range of Break Even clients (n=94). The average range of income correlates with the most common occupation type evident in *Figure 5*. However it can be said that 73% of the clients with a known income range, have an income below \$30 000 and 50% of the clients with known income ranges have an income below \$20 000.

Preferred Gambling Activity

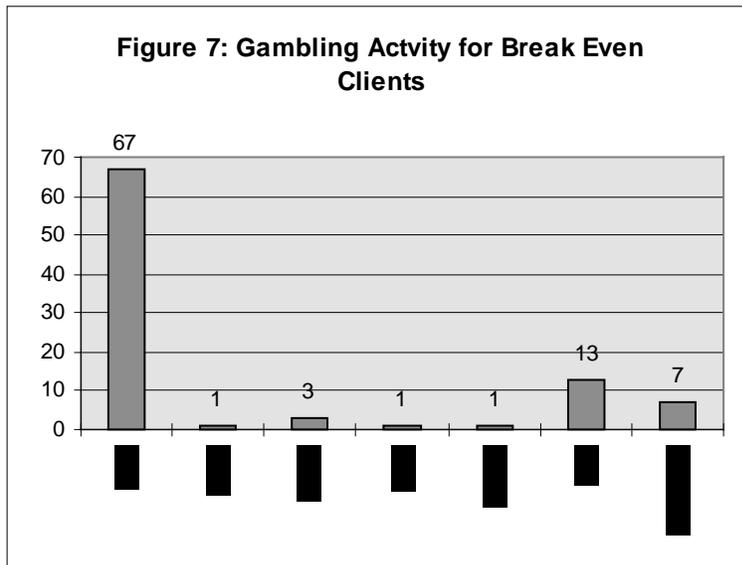


Figure 7 shows the known (n=93) preferred type of gambling of Break Even clients. Of these, 72% (67) use electronic gaming machines (EGM) and 14% (13) TAB. The growth of clients preferring EGMs is significant over time, with the prevalence of those preferring TAB, presenting at counselling, diminishing.

Referral Source

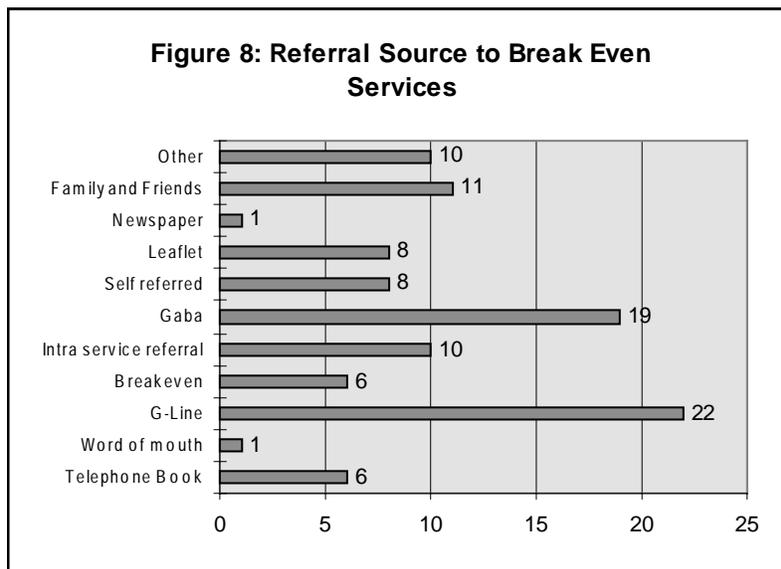
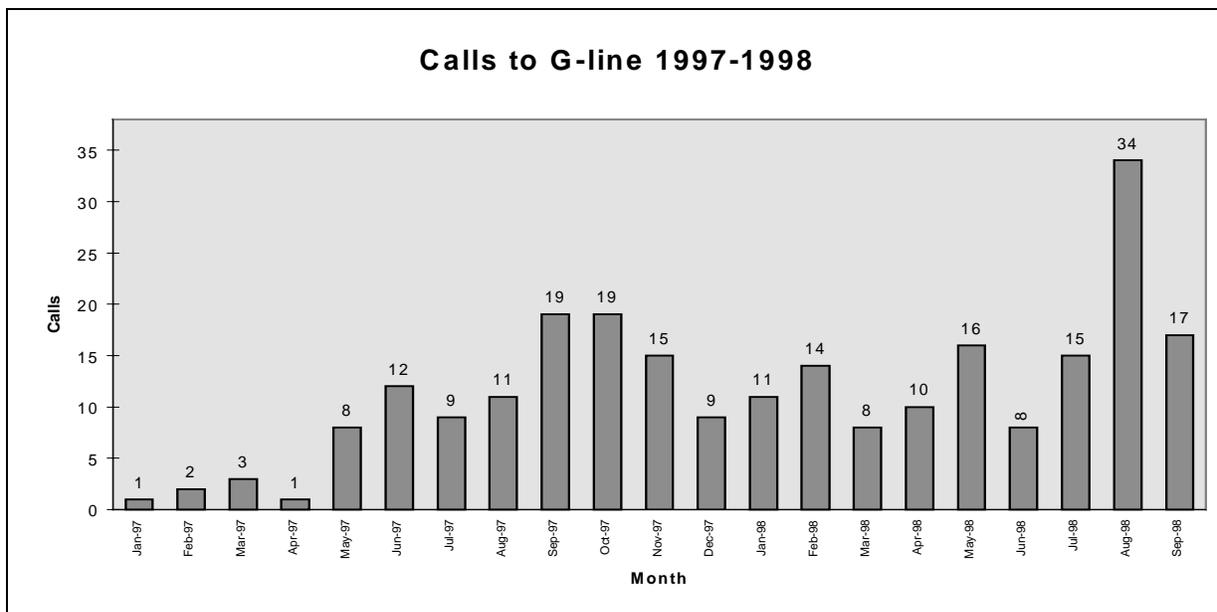


Figure 8 shows where clients stated they had heard, or found out, about the Break Even counselling service (n=102). G-Line the 24hr counselling and referral service has referred 22% (22), the most clients overall to Break Even services, with GABA referring the second highest number 19% (19). Since June 1998, GABA has referred most clients to all services with G-

Line's referrals declining significantly. There has also been an increase, since June, of referrals coming from 'intra service referral', other Break Even Services and "Family and Friends".

Figure 9: G - Line calls from January 1997 to September 1998



G-Line 24 hr call trends

The number of calls to G-Line has fluctuated over the months and the demographics also show monthly variances, however the following statements summarised the G-Line customer:

- More Gamblers than family/relatives are making calls;
- More females than males are making calls;
- The majority of those making calls asked for Problem Gambling Services;
- Of those calling, Gaming Machines are the main form of preferred gambling;
- Most callers were in the 20-40 year age range;
- Most of those calling were informed of the service through the G-Line pamphlet/card/poster; and
- The majority of callers were from the Hobart region

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Hobart

Relationships Australia 306 Murray St Hobart Tasmania 7000
Therapeutic (personal, family, addiction) counselling

Anglicare Tasmania 18 Watchorn St. Hobart Tasmania 7000
Therapeutic (personal, family, addiction) counselling

Gambling and Betting Addiction Inc. (GABA) C/- 199 Invermay Rd Launceston
Tasmania 7250
Support Group and Referral Service

Launceston

Relationships Australia 192 Charles St Launceston Tasmania 7250
Therapeutic (personal, family, addiction) counselling

Gambling and Betting Addiction Inc. (GABA) C/- 199 Invermay Rd Launceston
Tasmania 7250
Support Group and Referral Service

Burnie

Anglicare Tasmania 9 King St Burnie Tasmania 7320
Therapeutic (personal, family, addiction) counselling

Devonport

Anglicare Tasmania 2nd Floor Days Building Best St Devonport 7310
Therapeutic (personal, family, addiction) counselling

Ulverstone

Gambling and Betting Addiction Inc. (GABA) C/- 199 Invermay Rd Launceston
Tasmania 7250
Support Group and Referral Service

Outreach

North West Coast *Anglicare Tasmania* 9 King St Burnie Tasmania 7320
Therapeutic (personal, family, addiction) counselling

East Coast *Relationships Australia* 192 Charles St Launceston Tasmania 7250
Therapeutic (personal, family, addiction) counselling

State Wide

Community Educator *Anglicare Tasmania* 122 Elizabeth St Launceston Tasmania 7250

G-Line Addiction Research Institute P O Box 127 Ormond Vic 3204

24hr Free Call Counselling and Referral Service