

My Experience With Gambling Disorder Screening Day

February 28, 2024

Editor's note: This op-ed was prepared by Debbie Thompson, Family Resource Network Director, [Pleasants County \(West Virginia\) Committee on Family Issues](#). We thank Ms. Thompson for hosting a [Gambling Disorder Screening Day](#) event in her community and sharing her experiences with our readers. The 11th annual Gambling Disorder Screening Day is set for Tuesday, March 12, 2024.



The more I work with Youth, as a [Youth Problem Gambling grantee](#) with [First Choice Services of West Virginia](#), the more awareness and concern I have for the increasing number of Youth spending far too much time gaming. I have a great fear of the problems that this can present as gaming turns to gambling. I work to convince the important stakeholders within my community to help prevent the progression into adult gambling. I work with a few students who

openly admit that they have “borrowed” their parents’ credit card and used it to cover online betting. This breaks my heart to hear!

A lot of my passion to help also comes from having a dear uncle who was a heavy gambler and lost everything he owned because of his addiction. I can remember him saying, “No one can help me!” I want to be one of those people who can make a difference in the life of someone who cannot control their impulses to gamble. There is hope...there are resources...one person can make a difference!

When offered the opportunity to set up a [Gambling Disorder Screening Day](#) event in our county, I jumped at the chance. The first question that came to mind was, *where can I go to reach the people who need help?* Living in a rural county, I opted to select our only local grocery market. I asked for permission to set up my educational display table and hopefully encourage customers to complete a [short problem gambling screening](#). Although the weather in March was a bit chilly, I

think it might have worked to my advantage. Many of the store patrons I knew. Automatically, they walked over to the display area to see what was going on and to say, "What are you into now...don't you know it's cold out here?" My friends' frequent visits attracted others to my display table. For most of the participants, this was their first experience being screened for gambling disorder.

We completed over 50 screenings in a short period of time. Something that was extremely important to stress with the participants was that the screenings were completely confidential. The majority of those who completed the screening had a positive result, which suggests that they might be experiencing a gambling disorder. Most readily admitted they knew they had a problem, but I was able to put them on a track to where they could receive counseling and education, should they accept the help.

Our screenings reflected a wide spread in terms of the ages of individuals participating. The majority of participants ranged from 35-55 years of age. Our youngest participant was a 19-year-old college student who admitted that he used a portion of his food budget for gambling. He told me he primarily spent his money on "scratch offs" but admitted that since starting college, he experienced a lot of peer pressure to risk more of his funds doing online gambling.

The eldest gentleman was 83 years old and his screening results were negative. I readily recall that more men screened positive than the women. We also had a non-binary individual participate. Afterward, I [shared my numbers](#) back to the Division on Addiction at Cambridge Health Alliance and First Choice Services of West Virginia.

It was a great day and I encourage all interested individuals to take the initiative and host a Gambling Disorder Screening Day event in their community. With the ever-increasing numbers of neighborhood gambling cafes and over-the-counter sales of lottery tickets, I fear that even in a rural county like Pleasants, our problems are just starting to trend upward! The younger generation often feel it is a "get rich quick" proposition. Most feel that buying lottery tickets is "innocent" and feel nothing harmful can come from making purchases. It can just be the start of a very overwhelming addiction!

It was wonderful to offer the brochures and other educational materials to those who needed assistance. I was most greatly pleased that I could also promote the services available through First Choice Services of West Virginia. They do

tremendous work in so many areas of addiction!

I challenge each of you reading this brief overview to step up to the plate and join with others as we work to assist those in need. It only takes one person to MAKE A DIFFERENCE. You just might be that one individual!

Best wishes to everyone who takes time out of your busy schedules to work to make the differences in your communities! I encourage you to be a blessing to others!

— Debbie Thompson, FRN Director
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