

HAMLIN CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS OPPORTUNITIES IN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES



In late September, NPGA and Hamline University jointly hosted a forum on gambling trends and gambling addiction within the immigrant community. This was an opportunity for NPGA to shine a light on recent research it funded and to engage treatment providers, researchers and community members in a larger conversation.

The research was conducted in 2018 by Dr. Serena King of Hamline University in collaboration with the Minnesota Lao Assistance Center. The research was based on a convenience sample survey to better understand the impact of problem gambling in the Lao community. [Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling that involves the sample being drawn from a part of the population that is easily accessible. This type of sampling is most useful for pilot testing.]

This study was prompted after focus groups conducted by Russell Herder marketing agency and DHS indicated that gambling was an issue within the community, although no data on gambling behavior had ever been collected. Dr. King's study provided a first-time look into the gambling experiences and attitudes within the Lao community.

There are inherent challenges when studying an immigrant community that make a traditional assessment of prevalence difficult. This includes language and the interpretation of cultural differences as to how mental health issues are defined



Yussuf Shafie



Dr. Jennifer McCleary



Dr. Serena King



Nway Linn

and typically treated. Addiction is widely misunderstood and extremely stigmatized. Additionally, the approach to a health issue is viewed within the context of mind, body and soul, not just as a physical ailment. As Dr. King and the Lao Center proceeded with the study, it became clear that a truly representative sample could not be achieved; therefore, a convenience sample was used. In this instance, people referred to the study were likely known in the community as gamblers and may have skewed the results to be higher.

The conference also offered an opportunity to reveal the early results of the NGAGE survey, the first national study to examine gambling attitudes and experiences. Don Feeney, president of NPGA and the NGAGE survey analyst, presented the findings. The survey was funded by the National Council on Problem Gambling and conducted in November 2018, prior to all but two states legalizing sports betting. The study included specific sports betting questions and will serve as a benchmark as

more states move to legalize sports betting.

The forum included a presentation by Dr. Jennifer McCleary, co-founder of the Karen Dependency on Chemical Health Collaborative, as well as a panel addressing addiction services provided to southeast Asian and Somali community members. The panelists included Sunny Chanthanouvong, executive director of the Minnesota Lao Assistance Center, Don Feeney, president of NPGA, Nway Linn, treatment director at Amherst Wilder Treatment, and Yussuf Shafie, chief executive director of Alliance Wellness Center.

The engaging forum drew attention to the need for greater adaptation of cultural differences among treatment providers. Each provider stressed the need for better translation resources, a better understanding of mental health cultural norms within specific communities, and more education.

You can view some of the conference presentations by visiting www.NorthstarProblemGambling.org/lao-study-presentations



Susan Sheridan Tucker
Executive Director
NPGA

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Importance of Building Our Voice

Autumn is the time when many healthcare conferences and corrections transition fairs take place around the state. NPGA attends many of these gatherings. We're available to provide resources, promote services and sometimes to simply listen.

I receive a wide range of comments and questions when exhibiting. Some healthcare professionals share concerns over the apparent rise in problem gambling and seek information. Some individuals share stories of their own struggle and eventual path to recovery, while others whisper about family members who are deep into their addiction and refusing help. I also hear from offenders within the corrections system who admit they have gambling issues and regret there are no services available until their sentences are completed. Still others voice their prevailing doubts and disbelief about the existence of gambling addiction, claiming that it's simply a bad habit or a moral failing, a belief recently confirmed in the NGAGE survey.

As I digest all this, I immediately think of our strategic plan and the ways in which NPGA can advocate for elevating the delivery of problem gambling services. It's a conversation I'd like to have with all of our stakeholders, which includes you.

As an alliance, we're only as strong as our weakest link. Therefore, as an organization, we strive to include all points of view that have some touchpoint with gambling and problem gambling. How can we elevate a system that struggles to gain enough acknowledgement that gambling disorder is a real addiction? Even within the Minnesota Department of Human Services, problem gambling is not fully acknowledged as an addiction or mental health issue; instead, it's housed under Adult Services.

Minnesotans are fortunate that some state funding is set aside from gambling tax revenue to support treatment, research, education and advocacy. However, it's clear to me that we need to have a stronger voice if we are ever going to get this addiction out in the open.

One means of building voice is to stake a claim in the ground and declare your support. To facilitate this, NPGA is reinitiating its membership program. We are teaming up with the National Council on Problem Gambling to offer joint memberships. By becoming a member, you help us build our collective voice and our ability to counter the persistent denial that gambling is an addiction — both here in Minnesota and as well as nationally. Please review our member benefits offerings and consider a level that will allow you to lend voice to our work.

With gratitude in serving this community,

Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance is a nonprofit agency whose mission is to help those affected by problem gambling in Minnesota. We do this by promoting awareness and understanding of the issue via our website, newsletter, community education programs, sponsorship of the Minnesota State Conference on Problem Gambling, and training of professionals in preventing and treating problem gambling.

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NCPG UPDATES INTERNET RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING STANDARDS



Photo by John Formander on Unsplash

The National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) published its revised standards on Internet Responsible Gambling in late September. The standards, which are posted on the NPGA website, address the possibility that a certain percentage of those who gamble online will develop serious gambling problems.

The NCPG feels the most ethical and cost-effective response to gambling addiction issues is a comprehensive public health strategy that includes prevention, education, treatment, enforcement, responsible gambling, research and recovery services. Responsible gambling standards are an important aspect of this approach. The goal of the Internet Responsible Gambling standards is to help guide discussions among all stakeholders on internet gambling, including operators, regulators, advocates and the public.

In 2012, the NCPG reviewed internet responsible gaming codes and regulations from around the world to develop the standards. The final recommendations come from the NCPG's experience in problem gambling issues, empirical evidence, existing international codes and feedback from experts in the field, including operators,

vendors, regulators, researchers, clinicians and advocates. The standards are continually evolving, as internet gambling-related legislation, regulation and technology are rapidly being introduced. It is intended to apply across all platforms (including web, desktop, mobile, app and any other device that can be used for internet gambling).

The NCPG recommends that operators, vendors and regulators consult with experts in the problem and responsible gambling field during the development and implementation of internet gambling. The NCPG also advocates that a portion of all gambling revenue should be dedicated to reducing the social costs of gambling addiction.

Responsible gambling policies and programs are designed to prevent and reduce potential harms associated with gambling. They often incorporate a diverse range of initiatives designed to promote consumer protection, improve community and consumer awareness and education, and provide referrals to treatment and recovery resources.

A complete list of recommendations can be found on the NPGA website. NCPG recommends that all responsible gambling programs include the following components:

- Overall organizational policy that makes a clear commitment to responsible gambling and identifies expectations for corporate leadership
- Revenues to support the reduction of social harms
- Dedicated staff to implement responsible gaming policies
- Trained floor staff
- Provide safer gambling information and tools to enable customers to make informed decisions
- Players have ready access to gambling history and can receive live updates on time and money spent
- The site should allow for limits and, when reached, play is stopped
- Having policies in place that can assess and handle players in distress, making appropriate referrals
- Self-exclusion is available and no more than three clicks away from engaging
- Best practices for an inclusive self-exclusion option is made available

The new Internet Responsible Gambling standards can be found at www.NorthstarProblemGambling.org/2019/11/internet-responsible-gambling-standards

DEALING WITH HIGH-RISK BEHAVIORS IN CHILDREN: WHERE CAN PARENTS BEGIN?



Photo by Alvaro Reyeson on Unsplash

It can be hard for parents to teach their children about high-risk behaviors. Here are some helpful suggestions:

- **Take advantage of teachable moments to initiate discussions.** This includes things such as when a child sees gambling-oriented toys in a store or within a video game, when parents serve alcohol to their guests, when watching a movie and someone is abusing drugs, etc.
- **Parents can start by being well informed.** Check out these websites for problem gambling: NorthstarProblemGambling.org, ncpgambling.org, and youthgambling.com.

- **Provide honest and accurate information**
- **To the extent you wish to disclose, answer questions about your own past.** There is no right or wrong rule about what to share, but disclosing some information provides an opportunity to discuss risks involved in these actions. Regardless, parents still have the right to have expectations of abstinence in high-risk behaviors for their own children.
- **Actions speak louder than words.** Parents are role models and children learn from what they see. If parents are abusing alcohol, drugs, gambling or tobacco, they need to seek help.
- **Know that it is very common for adolescents to experiment and to take some risks.** Teens experiment for any number of reasons: to satisfy their curiosity, because it feels good, to reduce stress, to fit in or to feel grown up.
- **If you suspect your teen is abusing substances or gambling,** remember to stay calm, keep the lines of communication open and don't confront your teen while under the influence of a substance.
- **Parents should not be afraid to ask for help.**



NPR TURNS SPOTLIGHT ON LOOT BOXES

The nature of loot boxes was the subject of an interview by National Public Radio. The feature shined a light on several important aspects of loot boxes, including how they work, how they're a challenge for regulators, their explosive growth and the risk of addiction that they create. The content

of the interview can be read at www.npr.org/2019/10/10/769044790/loot-boxes-are-a-lucrative-game-of-chance-but-are-they-gambling. As this issue of *Northern Light* went to print, the FTC's decision on whether it will regulate video/social casino games had yet to be determined.



GAM-ANON CONFERENCE SHOWCASES HOPE AND UNDERSTANDING



Photo by Evgeni Tcherkasski on Unsplash

The gambling recovery community met for its annual GAM-ANON conference in mid-October. The theme for the weekend was hope, and there was much of that expressed in the stories people shared and the presentations that were made.

The conference attracted people from all over Minnesota and other surrounding states. It's an opportunity for those to

recommit to their recovery, to share their stories and to enjoy fellowship.

The conference emphasized that stories of recovery are powerful and essential. The stories demonstrated to newcomers that a beautiful new life is possible and showed family and friends of compulsive gamblers that change is possible when working a program of recovery, one day at a time.

The Gam-Anon conference provided an extremely welcoming environment characterized by a readiness to express gratitude for being in recovery and for a community that continues to offer understanding and support. The full list of Gam-Anon meetings around the state can be found at www.gam-anon.org/component/mtree/minnesota?Itemid=228.



NEWS HEADLINES

The **holiday lottery campaign** will run from November 28 to January 12, 2020.

A blue-ribbon commission has been designated by Governor Walz to devise an **action plan for DHS's future**.

Keep on eye out for DHS's new RFP for new treatment providers. This should open soon and most likely close in February.

The **next problem gambling treatment provider meeting is scheduled for January 22** from 10 a.m. to noon. If you're interested in attending, please contact Susan Sheridan Tucker at [sst@northstarproblemgambling.org](mailto:ss@northstarproblemgambling.org).



NPGA's **new annual report** can be found on our website.

We are trying to **expand our network through social media**. If you don't already follow NPGA on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn, please do so.

NPGA rolls out **joint membership plan with NCPG**. Visit www.NorthstarProblemGambling.org/membership-levels/



LAO STUDY HIGHLIGHTED IN MINNPOST

The Lao study and Northstar were featured in a lengthy article in the *MinnPost* in mid-October. The full article can be viewed at www.minnpost.com/mental-health-addiction/2019/10/study-of-problem-gambling-in-mns-laotian-community-suggests-the-need-for-fresh-treatment-approaches/.

★ IN THEIR OWN *Words*

Danny's Story

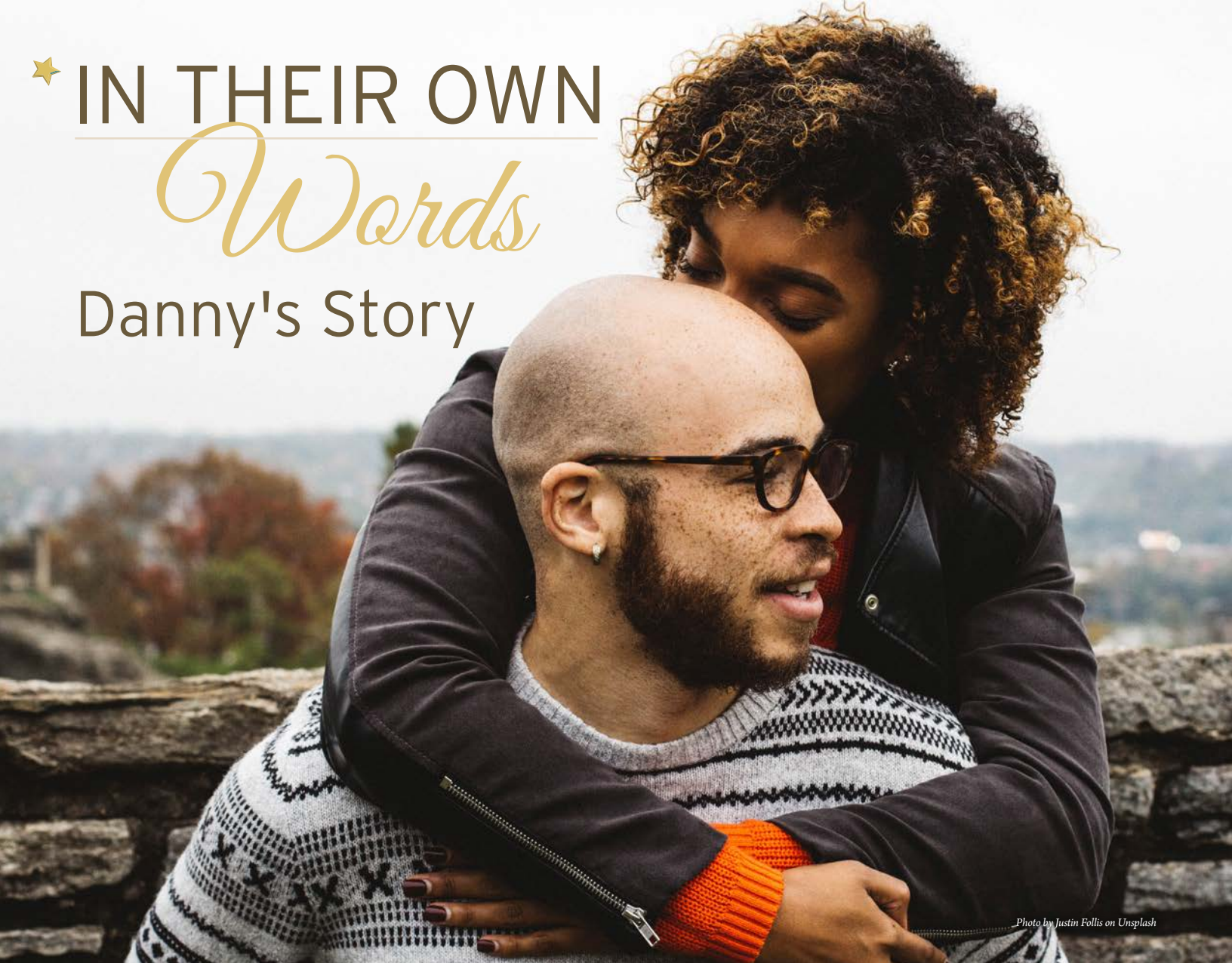


Photo by Justin Folis on Unsplash

I continued to gamble but became increasingly secretive in how I did it. I would invent meetings during the day so I could gamble.

If there's anyone you'd think would have their radar up about gambling addiction, it would be me. After all, I did my master's thesis on the psychology behind gambling and casinos. It just shows how insidious the addiction can be.

My first exposure to gambling was when my older brother, who I idolized, invited me out to Las Vegas shortly after I turned 21. Later, after he started working at Mystic Lake, I went to see him and started playing blackjack. The worst thing in the world happened to me: I won.

After the win at Mystic Lake, I returned to graduate school in Albuquerque. Given that my brother and I spent a lot of time talking about gambling, it seemed like a good topic for my research thesis. My graduate advisor signed off on the idea and I subsequently

made numerous trips to the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, the mecca of research about gambling and casinos. However, I spent most of my time there gambling rather than doing research.

After completing my graduate degree, I took a job in Moorhead. However, the transition was hard for me between the change in climate, an unexpected breakup and the lack

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The worst day
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of friends in a new city. I found myself very lonely, stressed out and depressed. I learned that I could escape the stress by going to a nearby casino.

I went often and began to notice that my personality really changed when I was losing. I remember slamming my hand down on the table after a losing hand, resulting in the pit boss coming over and telling me to settle down. I finally checked out a local GA meeting in Fargo but decided — at that time — that they were a bunch of losers.

I continued to gamble but became increasingly secretive in how I did it. I would invent meetings during the day so I could gamble. But because the casino smelled like an ashtray, I had to bring a second set of clothes with me. I changed out of work clothes shortly after leaving the house and would change back into them before arriving home.

Things got more chaotic after our first child was born. Not only was I freaked out about being a dad, but my son had special needs. My stress level was very high, and I was now going to the casino one to two times a week.

By this point, I wasn't sleeping. I was sitting up at 2 a.m., staring into space, wondering how I had gotten myself into this mess and how I could ever get out of it. The words in the GA combo book ... "prison, insanity or death" ... well, let's just say that they make a lot of sense to me.

Several events finally shook me up enough to seek some help. One of those was when my brother, who I'd long suspected had a gambling problem, pawned my father's complete coin collection that was worth a significant amount. Another was when a longtime friend, in response to my unexpected disclosure that "I have a terrible gambling problem," simply stated the obvious: "You have to stop."

I got up the nerve to do something about my problem in June of 2011. I went to a GA meeting — even lying about that to my wife — and started seeing a gambling counselor. My counselor strongly encouraged me to tell my wife, suggesting I might be surprised at the support she might offer.

My wife was predictably furious, sad and confused when I told her everything. However, she had a friend in GA (who helped me get to GA), so she was also understanding of the possibility of recovery.

I am thankful to GA and to my family. I am convinced that if my family didn't hold me accountable, it wouldn't have worked.

I last stepped foot inside a casino in June of 2011, and here we are in 2019. I'd like to say that life has been sunshine, lollipops and rainbows since then, but obviously it hasn't. It's been difficult, but I can honestly tell you that the last place I would ever want to visit right now is a casino. The worst day in recovery is better than the best day gambling.



Share a Recovery Story

Stories of recovery from compulsive gambling provide hope to those currently struggling with the addiction and their families. If you or someone you know would like to share your story, please contact Linda at linda@NorthstarProblemGambling.org or (612) 424-8595. Your identity will not be disclosed.

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No-Cost Treatment Available in Minnesota

Minnesota provides treatment to problem gamblers and their families at no cost. For more information, call 800-333-4673 (HOPE) or visit NorthstarProblemGambling.org/Find-Help.



Northern Light

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**Changing Problem Gambling Behavior through:
AWARENESS • EDUCATION • RESEARCH • ADVOCACY**

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