

Multnomah County Youth Problem Gambling

Parent Awareness Media Campaign

Final Report—July 2007

Introduction

Oregon Partnership was awarded a grant to design and develop a public education campaign aimed at parents to alert them about the risks of youth involvement in problem gambling, warning signs of problem gambling, actions to take and resources available.

Development

In order to develop a campaign theme, logo, and set of key messages, 3 focus groups were conducted by Patty Farrell of Farrell Strategies. There were two groups of parents and one group of youth. Screening criteria ensured a balance of ethnicity, sex, income and parent status. (See Focus Group report attached) The purpose of the research was to determine the frequency with which youth gambled, the knowledge of gambling frequency among parents, the knowledge of risks or harms from gambling by parents or youth, the knowledge of problem gambling resources and attitudes about gambling.

The focus group research revealed:

- Gambling was very common among youth. Every member of the youth focus group had been involved in some form of gambling usually sports betting or poker parties.
- Parents were unaware of the extent of youth gambling, but did know that youth were engaged in low-stakes poker parties.
- Parents did not consider poker parties to be harmful or wrong nor did they have any moral issues with gambling in general. None had established rules about gambling.
- When parents were given information about gambling prevalence and potential problems, they expressed willingness to talk with their children about these issues and warn them about risks. They had helpful suggestions about teaching youth about gambling risks.
- Neither parents nor youth were aware of problem gambling resources such as treatment programs or helplines. They were likely to turn to health professionals for help. They were skeptical about help resources sponsored by the Oregon Lottery. They viewed it as a conflict to offer gambling opportunities and then offer help to those who get in trouble.

Messages

While parents were resistant to believing that youth gambling is a critical problem needing strong action, they were quite willing to talk with their child about the risks and potential harms. As a result, a decision was made to focus on asking parents to talk to their children about this issue. Again, because parents did not see youth participation in poker parties as harmful, the theme: "Keep it a Game" was adopted. This theme emphasizes the line between a game and gambling. This theme recognizes that games played with others have a lot of value for development of social interaction, but that harm can occur when the line between a game and gambling is crossed.

To illustrate the theme, an artist was engaged to develop a logo to use with the tagline "Keep it a Game". The result is a very attractive illustration that plays off a set of poker cards. It is the basis for a striking print ad. (See attached ad artwork.)

Pilot Media Campaign

A pilot campaign was designed that featured the "Keep it a Game" ad as well as development of news articles. Ads were purchased in Portland Family Magazine, a tabloid format magazine that reaches over 40,000 parents. It includes articles helpful to parents as well as an events calendar so it has a long "shelf life." In the June issue, Portland Family published an article entitled, "Teaching Kids the Value of Money" under Pamela Erickson's by-line. Under the subject "Teach the concept of risk" there is a discussion of gambling. This was a suggestion that came from one of the parents in the focus groups.

A second feature of the campaign is a series of bus shelter ads. The ads are large and are seen by motorists, pedestrians and bus patrons. The ads were clustered in SE Portland to gain frequency of message. Oregon Partnership was able to secure at least 1.5 months additional exposure for these ads as a pro bono match. (They will leave them up even longer if they do not sell the space.) A press release was issued at the time the bus ads went up and garnered the interest of columnist Margie Boule who expressed interest in writing a column about this topic.

Other Avenues for Message Distribution

Oregon Partnership works with parents and schools on a regular basis. One of the products developed under this grant is a powerpoint presentation entitled, "Who Wants to be a Gambling Awareness Millionaire." This teaching tool, which uses a game show format, will be available for presentations in schools through Oregon Partnership's Youthlink program. In addition, Oregon Partnership is integrating the subject of youth problem gambling into parent programs which includes a "Parent Institute". We will offer an article on this subject to parent newsletters for the next school year.

Recommendations

As the focus groups revealed, the level of awareness of youth problem gambling frequency is low and concern is even lower. This suggests the need to focus messages to the target audience of parents on awareness. Many experts believe that the media is key to what people know about and consider important, that is, issues that appear more often in the media become more salient for people. (See *Voices for Change: A Taxonomy of Public Communications Campaign and Their Evaluation Challenges*, Berkeley Media Studies Group). Based on work on these issues in this pilot project we recommend the following:

1. Decide to focus a campaign on parents of middle and high school youth to make them aware of youth gambling frequency, potential risks, and the value of teaching risks to children.
2. Use the campaign theme “Keep it a Game” and illustrate the difference between a game and gambling. Recognize the important social value of playing games with others.
3. Provide tips on how to teach risk through newsletter articles, tip sheets and brochures.
4. Ask all parent education programs to integrate youth problem gambling into their program and provide suggested curriculum.
5. Seek a financial partner, such as a bank or credit union, which will pay the cost of materials to help parents teach personal finance. One of the topics would include risks of various investments and warnings about the risks of gambling.
6. Mount a major effort to gain media attention. Talk with and interview media reporters and executives. Seek opportunities on community and talk shows. Develop news stories and opinion pieces.
7. Evaluate efforts to increase media attention by counting media articles, stories, programs; by analyzing media framing (the number of stories that hit key points needed to increase target audience awareness); and by regular surveys of a segment of the target audience (e.g. Portland Family Magazine readers).
8. Recognize the barriers and work around them. It is hard to get parents’ attention because they are very busy and overloaded with work and family obligations. It will require creative ways to get parents to attend events, read material and pay attention. Because gambling issues are not on parents’ radar, this subject will have to be integrated into other efforts and issues. Attempts should be made to reach out to parents wherever they are in order to get their attention. For example, posters and brochures could be in grocery stores and doctors offices.

Oregon Teens and Parents

Perceptions of Teenage Gambling

**Focus Group Report
For Oregon Partnership**

December 15, 2006

Facilitator: Patty Farrell

OBJECTIVES

The state of Oregon and Multnomah County are planning a campaign to inform teenagers and their parents about the risks of teenage gambling.

To inform this campaign, Oregon Partnership held three focus groups: one with high school students in the Portland metropolitan area, and two with parents of Portland-area middle and high school students. The focus groups were intended to test the following:

Teens

- how much and how frequently teens gamble;
- attitudes among teens about gambling;
- awareness among teens of the risks of gambling;
- teens' receptivity to various messages;
- teens' receptivity to parental influence on the topic of gambling.
- where teens would turn if they or a friend had a gambling problem;
- awareness of the State of Oregon's gambling services.

Parents

- parents' awareness of teen gambling;
- parents' level of concern about teen gambling;
- parents' willingness to take certain actions to reduce gambling risks among their children;
- where parents would turn if their teen had a gambling problem;
- awareness of the State of Oregon's gambling services.

METHODOLOGY

Participants were recruited to reflect the racial/ethnic diversity of the tri-county area. In addition, both married and single-parent families were recruited. Each group represented a balance of educational backgrounds and professions. Marketing professionals were screened out, which is typical of most focus groups. Every participant had at least one middle school- or high school-age child living with them. The facilitator was Caucasian and mother of two teenagers.

The dates and composition of the focus groups are shown on the following pages.

Teens									
Tuesday, November 14th @ 7:30pm									
#	M/F	grade	age	school	ethnicity	income	parent marital status	county	spend free time
1	F	10th	15	Jesuit HS	Caucasian	\$100K+	married	Clackamas	social
2	M	12th	17	Jesuit HS	Caucasian	\$75-100K	married	Washington	intellectual, social, physical, community
3	M	11th	16	Jesuit HS	Caucasian	\$100K+	married	Multnomah	social, physical
4	F	10th	15	Lakeridge	Caucasian	\$75-100K	married	Clackamas	intellectual, creative, social, community
5	F	9th	14	Wilson HS	Caucasian	\$20-30K	single	Multnomah	social
6	F	10th	16	Century HS	Asian	\$30-50K	divorced	Washington	intellectual, creative, social, physical, community
7	M	10th	15	Park Rose	Caucasian	\$20-30K	married	Multnomah	creative, social, physical, community
8	M	11th	16	Cleveland	Caucasian	\$50-75K	married	Multnomah	creative, social
9	M	11th	17	Glencoe HS	Other	\$50-75K	married	Washington	creative, social, physical, community
10	M	11th	16	Wilson HS	Caucasian	\$50-75K	Married	Multnomah	physical, community social, physical
11	M	10th	15	Cleveland	Hispanic	\$75-100K	married	Multnomah	social,
12	M	11th	16	Grant HS	African American	\$50-75K	married	Multnomah	social, physical

Parents								
Wednesday, November 15th @ 8pm								
#	M/F	child's grade	child's age	school	ethnicity	income	parent marital status	county
1	M	8th	13	Middle	Hispanic	\$30-50K	married	Multnomah
2	F	9th	14	HS	Caucasian	\$20-30K	single	Multnomah
3	F	8th	14	Junior HS	Caucasian	\$30-50K	married	Washington
4	F	10th	15	HS	Caucasian	\$75-100K	married	Multnomah
5	F	11th	16	HS	Hispanic	\$20-30K	divorced	Washington
6	M	11th	16	HS	Caucasian	\$50-75K	married	Multnomah
7	M	10th	14	HS	Caucasian	\$75-100K	married	Multnomah
8	F	11th	16	HS	African American	\$20-30K	Single	Multnomah
9	F	11th	14	HS	African American	\$20-30K	married	Multnomah
10	M	11th	16	HS	Caucasian	\$50-75K	married	Clackamas
11	M	9th	14	HS	Caucasian	\$50-75K	divorced	Washington
12	M	7th	13	Middle	Caucasian	\$100K+	single	Clackamas

TEEN PERCEPTIONS OF GAMBLING

Prevalence: Gambling happens, but it is not a major activity for most teens

When asked to volunteer what teens do for fun, none of the participants suggested gambling. They spoke of Internet chatting, video games, sports and hanging out at parties. When pressed for activities at those parties, gambling was not offered up.

However, when teens were asked if gambling was something teens did, they agreed that it was, though it was perceived very casually, as “no big deal.” No one considered it a “wrong” thing to do or something they should conceal from adults. While they agreed most teens gamble at times, it was not generally regarded as a major form of recreation.

Every participant in the teen focus group said they had participated in gambling at some point. More than half said their gambling was focused primarily on poker parties or sporting events. More boys than girls were interested in gambling; the girls had tried it but were less interested.

We like poker night sometimes and I usually lose money.

Is craps considered gambling? ... Okay I do that then.

I was thinking like March Madness—everybody bets on that.

I actually bet a dollar today on who is going to win the civil war next Saturday.

Types of gambling

These teens were most engaged in poker games and betting on sports. One teen played craps. None of the teens was involved in Internet gambling, nor had they heard of friends who were involved. They saw that as an adult activity. A few enjoyed buying occasional lottery tickets (some said parents bought them \$1 tickets to give as gifts to friends.)

None of these teens was involved in high stakes gambling; most said they gambled between \$1 and \$20 a night. They agreed they would walk away after losing \$20. They acknowledged that the “pot” can get fairly high.

I have guy friends who play and they end up winning \$100. They'll get a bunch of their friends together and then there's like 10 or 15 of them and they each put in \$10 so each one of them walks away with a whole bunch of money.

Teens said sometimes there was alcohol at poker parties, but the two activities did not seem to be tied to each other.

Why teens gamble

Most teens said they gamble because it's something to do. Making money did not appear to be a major reason for gambling.

I guess cause it's something to do—the last time I gambled with a bunch of friends we were like jumping around and yelling and screaming—like yeah.

It's something to do—I don't think it's much of a money factor thing—at least for me it's not.

Just a reason to hang out with your friends, really.

Ethics of gambling

There is no stigma against gambling with this group. They are not afraid to talk about gambling, since they don't see it as a problem.

This group thought that gambling with friends was OK because someone they know who walks away with the money. They contrasted this to gambling at casinos, where the house keeps much of the money.

I think as teenagers when it's just your friends you know you can lose but if you lose it's just to one of your friends—you're not losing to a casino.

And also generally no one takes a cut of it like they will in a casino when you're gambling with your friends. If you win you win it all—it's not like five of those \$50 that the pot came out to goes to the casino—if it's friends all \$50 goes to the lucky friend who just happens to win it that time.

Yes—you actually know where it's going.

So it doesn't feel like you're just giving it away for nothing.

No one thought that laws against underage gambling were a deterrent.

I don't think it's wrong if you're just hanging out with your friends and gambling and having a good time. The cops aren't going to come busting your house—it's not something that seems would be worth it to do that.

I think that would want to make teenagers do it more.

Family gambling

Some said their families gamble as a recreational activity. Again, there was no stigma attached; this was not perceived as “wrong” or something that adults should be discouraging.

I play with my family—like poker mostly—just college stuff like that—never for very much money—just enough to make it worth doing because my parents don't really like to gamble if it's for nothing.

With my extended family we had a big poker tournament—it was like \$20 bucks to buy in and the winner walked away with like \$300.

At a friend of mine's house the parents—the adults have a thing and the little kids have their own little thing and the teenagers have their own little thing.

Yeah like me and my family go to this like Super Bowl party every year and my mom and dad buy some squares and then they buy me and my sister some squares just to share—we never win—my parents do but me and my sister never do

Awareness of problem gambling

Most of the teens were aware that adults can develop gambling problems; several had an uncle or other family member who had such a problem. They recognized it could be an addiction of sorts, though they had little sympathy for adults who gambled away their family's money.

When they experience success they feel they can succeed again so they just keep going and they continue to fail.

Once you're an adult and stuff it could affect more people like if you are betting big things and you had a family to support and you lose that then you are affecting your family.

They were not inclined to think of gambling as an addiction; while they had heard that some people can't control it, most thought it was something a person could stop if they wanted to.

I think it's looked at less seriously because with drugs they generally have some sort of addictive substance in them but with the gambling problem it's really just coming from you.

Like it's not even really a chemical dependency or anything so people don't really see it as so bad—not like, oh they're addicted to nicotine or something like that.

Only one teen said he had a friend who had suffered a major loss from gambling - he had gambled away his car. This story got their attention; most had not heard of such high stakes gambling among teens. Still, they didn't seem worried that this could happen to them or their friends.

I don't think anyone really thinks it will happen to them—I mean I don't think anyone is like—yep I'm going to grow up to have a gambling problem. It's just one of those things you don't really think about it actually happening to you until, Oh My God I have a gambling problem.

What Kirk said about that kid losing his car—if you're a teenager, losing your car sucks because you don't have your car but if you're an adult and have a family and you lose your car there are other people—like you might not be able to drive your kids to school or stuff like that because you lost your car gambling.

Few parents have talked about gambling

None of the teens' parents had set rules about gambling, nor did the teens appear to think that was necessary. Some said their parents had talked to them about problem gambling. They had no problem with their parents bringing up the subject and some thought it might be helpful.

My dad was telling me about stuff like that—people will lose and then they think that they can just win it all back so they will keep betting and betting and they keep losing and they end up losing a lot instead of just breaking even.

Statistics were not compelling

The teens were offered various statistics about problem gambling. Most were not impressed. For some, statistics just don't resonate. For others, the statistics were just not that compelling

One in 25? That seems kinda low.

If they or a friend had a gambling problem

All agreed they would talk to their friend if they thought they had a problem. Few had other solutions. They would not talk to school counselors; they would only talk to a friend's parents if they thought the problem was out of control.

They laughed at the notion of calling a 1-800 number; that was something that was too much like an advertisement on television.

Just the whole idea of calling the number and saying I have a gambling problem to someone I don't know.

Just like those commercials call 1-800 if you have a problem.

Suggested messages

When asked, the teens suggested messages that could be used in a teen gambling campaign.

I think if they said something like it may seem like you're doing something small now but it will escalate and you're four times more likely to become a serious gambler.

And I think also stories about teenagers losing stuff too—like the story about that kid losing his car—how even at a younger age you can still lose some big stuff. That way kids won't say—well I'll just do it when I'm younger and stop when I get older or something like that. That way you can just say it could have consequence like now. Because some kids think yeah my future is a long way off I'll worry about that then.

PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF GAMBLING

Prevalence of gambling

When asked what teens like to do for recreation, parents offered up all sorts of activities, from sports and video games to Internet chatting and reading. Several said their children like to go to parties. But when asked what goes on at those parties, no one mentioned gambling.

Even when prompted about gambling, most parents do not believe their children engage in gambling, at least not in any serious way.

They haven't really been around it that I know of and don't partake in it.

That's something that I personally probably wouldn't be talking to my middle schoolers about—because they wouldn't be exposed to it anywhere.

I know my son does like a football pool thing but I don't think it's for money—not yet.

A few said their children had engaged in harmless, low-stakes games. Most did not see anything wrong with this.

My daughters have gone to little poker games and stuff like that they have with their friends but it's all really mild—they are pretty bright kids—they are not going to get themselves in too much. We're talking nickels, dimes and dollar bills—nothing bigger than that.

We're talking about \$20 if they're lucky. Losing or winning \$20 would be big. At that point my daughter would say I'm out of that. I've got too much respect for my money to lose it on something like that.

One exception was a parent whose son had lost \$500 betting with a bookie.

He likes to gamble on football games and baseball games and he's pretty much learned that you gamble—you lose—it costs you lots of money and lots of privileges. The way it worked is—he went \$500 in debt in one weekend and he had to work it off.

This father's story was compelling to the rest of the group; for many parents in the group, it was the first time they had considered that teens can get into trouble gambling.

Adult gambling and its influence on teens

Parents were mixed about whether adult gambling behavior influenced teen behavior.

Poker parties are popular with adults now right—but I didn't realize the kids were doing it too and I think they want to be like the adults.

I have been to poker parties where there were a couple three adults starting out that I knew of and then younger kids my daughter's age came in and they were playing poker as well. It started with penny ante—dime ante and yeah—if he went through more than \$10 or \$15 in an evening that would be it.

It's like drinking—you start in—and you continue on there is the possibility of becoming an alcoholic—but if you're exposed to it by your parents or whatever it's acceptable.

After some discussion, most adults agreed that “casino nights” at schools that encourage gambling among children are inappropriate.

I was on my son's eighth grade graduation party planning committee and one of the things the parents came up with was to have a theme involving Reno or Las Vegas. So many parents found that theme objectionable, but there were other parents that thought it would be a neat party atmosphere. Ultimately, it got voted down.

They prefer conversations to setting rules about gambling.

All parents “absolutely” set rules about behavior with their children. Most common rules are about parties, curfew, drinking, drugs, sex, Internet use, cell phone use. No one had set any rules around gambling; it simply didn't occur to them.

After some discussion, they agreed that talking about the potential problems of gambling was probably more appropriate than setting rules.

Talking about gambling with teens.

While most had not discussed gambling problems with their teens, every parent said they were willing to bring it up. They agreed that controlling gambling required a combination of supervision and education.

Some parents said they had discussed gambling with their children.

We've had that conversation with both my middle schooler and his younger brother and treat it in the same vane as any other potential addictive behavior so it goes in the same category as alcohol and drugs and cigarettes. But it also comes into play I think legitimately in terms of how to maintain ones finances—to teach them as they get older the pros and cons of spending their money versus saving their money—the things they spend it on and the things they are saving for and having goals. I think it is somewhat akin to the same conversation as gambling as the same conversation about a credit card offer that you get in the mail when you go off to college. What are you going to do when you start receiving these—and debit cards or phone cards or cell phones or computers that they take to college—I think it's all part of teaching them appropriate behavior with regard to a large financial picture and the responsibility.

Parents agreed that stories can be effective in getting through to teens. For example, they teens should hear the story of the boy who lost \$500 to the bookie.

They also thought talking about adults who have gambling problems can open the door to talking with teens about the overall risks of gambling.

We have a gambler in our family. My son has an uncle that has been a life-long horse race gambler. And my son has viewed his uncle as sort of a transient life style. And I think it has sent my son a message indirectly without saying 'don't do this'.

They had several suggestions for parents in discussing gambling with their children.

Encourage (parents) to take the opportunity to discuss gambling when it comes up. When you see somebody buying a lottery ticket—going to a casino night at school when the topic is in front of you - is it time to bring it up?

Discuss with them that you have to be prepared to lose anything that you bet because the odds are against you. And you have to do it in a legal fashion and an appropriate setting.

I've discussed it with my daughter. (It's about) self-control... whatever you're going to do just make sure that you don't lose your self-control.

What adults would do if their child had a gambling problem

Parents agreed they would respond in a variety of ways if their child developed a gambling problem - ranging from talking with their teen to "going to the source" to shut it down.

Start talking to them.

I'd try to figure out where they are doing it—how they are doing it.

Try to figure out at what point it is happening and try to figure out how to shut that down.

Go to the source.

They are not afraid to look for help if their teen had a gambling problem.

Some parents said they would find a counselor through their health insurance or Employee Assistance Program. Others thought pediatricians would be a good source for information and referral. A few mentioned Gamblers Anonymous.

No one volunteered a telephone hotline. No one was specifically aware that the State of Oregon has free counseling service for gambling addiction. When one parent suggested that services were offered through the Oregon Lottery Commission, it generated a mostly cynical reaction.

I believe that the Oregon Lottery does have a large portion of the money (that) goes to these sorts of issues and they have resources that you can access through the lottery commission.

They probably have those things in the background gamble—gamble—gamble—what are those called?... Subliminal messages.

I don't think I'd go to them to do it.

It's like the cigarette companies that tell you to stop smoking.

I think it would be more popular if it was not associated with the Oregon Lottery—is this something they paid for or is this something separate.

When told that the Oregon Health Division provides the counseling, they were somewhat less cynical, though they still resented the fact that the funding came from the lottery commission.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Awareness about potential problems of teen gambling is quite low among both teens and adults. Concern about it is even lower. Teens who do gamble, and adults who are aware of teen gambling, do not see it as a problem or concern.

This makes the campaign especially challenging, requiring a three-part effort: 1) making people aware of the issue; 2) giving them reasons to care about it; 3) informing them about what resources exist to help.

Following are some recommendations based on the outcome of these focus groups.

Do not focus on “waking parents up” to the problem of teen gambling.

This strategy is unlikely to work because even if parents are awoken, they are unlikely to be terribly concerned about the problem. Unlike drinking or drugs, it is difficult to convince parents that occasional, low-stakes gambling among teens is putting them at risk, or will grow into a larger problem.

In addition, current statistics about rates of teen gambling are not very compelling, which makes the “wake-up call” even more challenging.

Don’t focus on gambling as a moral issue.

Most of these participants do not see gambling as inherently wrong, and are not concerned as long as it does not get out of control.

Deliver a simple message: Talk to your teen about gambling.

Parents and teens alike are open to the concept that teens need to be told about the risks of gambling, just as they would be taught the risks of any other behavior. Teens do not perceive this as a threatening or punitive discussion, particularly if it is described as a problem that happens to some people who let gambling get out of control.

One parent suggested gambling risk be taught as a financial management issue. Just as you would teach your child to balance a checkbook, teach them the financial folly of heavy gambling.

Tell stories.

Stories are powerful, and stories of major gambling losses are particularly so. Both parents and teens were surprised, and began to pay more attention to the topic, when they heard stories of problem gamblers.

While teens don't believe it can happen to them, they are still willing to listen to stories. And those stories will make them think again the next time they have an opportunity to gamble.

Inform parents about services available through their pediatricians, EAP programs or other medical providers.

Because most parents aren't aware of teen gambling, or don't perceive it as a problem, mass media messages about "where to get help" will not stick with them. When a parent does decide their child has a problem, most will go to their mental health providers. Get the information to these sources.

Avoid mention of the Oregon Lottery Commission in relation to gambling services.



PLAY IT SAFE

Talk to your child about gambling.
Keeping it a game is their safest bet.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY MULTNOMAH COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES AND OREGON PARTNERSHIP



TO LEARN MORE GO TO www.orpartnership.org



PLAY IT **SAFE**

Talk to your child about gambling.
Keeping it a game is their safest bet.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY MULTNOMAH COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES AND OREGON PARTNERSHIP.



TO LEARN MORE GO TO www.orpartnership.org