

# Gamblers can be helped, says study

By Rebecca Gardiner

A new study into gambling addiction suggests that intervention programmes are making headway in the fight against problem gambling.

Research at Auckland University's Centre for Gambling Studies has shown that the majority of New Zealanders involved in gambling intervention programmes find they are a significant step to recovery.

The centre receives substantial funding from the Ministry of Health and works closely with the Gambling Foundation of New Zealand to evaluate the services available to problem gamblers.

Research coordinator at the centre Lisa Campbell is positive about the research findings so far and expects that phase two of the project will produce more encouraging results.

"It shows what's being done [in gambling intervention] is working," she says.

Campbell says the centre is taking a "holistic approach" to researching problem gambling but its main focus is evaluating the effectiveness of counselling methods already in use.

"We've taken a really pragmatic approach. There's a whole lot of things that go into it," she says.

"People need to feel really comfortable [with their counsellors]."

Phase one of the study evaluated the effectiveness of telephone and face-to-face counselling in treating problem gambling.

About 70 participants who volunteered to take part in the study were randomly placed in telephone and face-to-face counselling programmes during a six-week period.

At the end of the six weeks, those involved were asked to evaluate how helpful and supportive they found the counselling.

John Stansfield, chief executive of the Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand, says the study is a step towards treating a problem that affects many New Zealanders.

He says gambling was a "hidden problem" in the past, but new research into intervention programmes and public education helps get it out in the open.

"It's very important that people do participate in research studies to ensure that harm can be prevented and that people can get help sooner," he says.

According to recent Ministry of Health statistics, around 33,000 New Zealanders are affected by problem gambling but only 12 per cent seek professional help for their addiction.

Campbell says many problem gamblers seek help only when they find themselves at "rock bottom", where they may be resorting to crime to pay for their gambling debts.

"There's a lot of shame and denial involved," she says.

"We'd like to see people getting in there sooner."

Campbell says access to gambling has been identified as a key issue.

She says more than half of non-casino pokie machines are in poorer areas, such as South



PHOTO: GRAEME TWOSE

LUCKY ONES: Research shows support services are effective in helping problem gamblers.

Auckland. "It's in areas where people have lost hope. People see gambling as a way of having some hope in their lives.

"It's a huge industry with a lot

of money they're earning from it. You're fighting against it all the time."

Although the study is producing important results in the gambling prevention field, Campbell

says follow-up research is needed as a single study will not produce "definitive results".

"There's a lot more harm done out there than the gambling sector would like people to know."

## Going solar saves power

By Anika Forsman

As power prices soar and New Zealand's greenhouse gas emissions increase, many families are realising the value of going solar.

Solar radiation is an abundant energy source, one that is free, non-polluting and renewable.

Mt Roskill resident Russ Cornwall installed solar panels three years ago on the roof of his new home he was building to supply hot water in the summer.

"Basically as power kept going up I did my homework and found that solar water heating was the way to go," he says.

"I turn the electricity off at Labour weekend and don't have to turn it on again until Easter."

Cornwall says all new homes being built should have solar panels installed which will save on people's power bills and assist on a national scale if more homes have them.

"Solar panels give you free hot water once the initial outlay is paid back and could also save valuable resources by not having to build another power station," he says.

Solar panels work by trapping the sun's energy in a collector panel and then this heat is transferred to the water flowing through the panel into a storage cylinder.

According to the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority, many homes are

exposed annually to more than 20 times more energy from the sun than they use in electricity or gas.

Ministerial advisor for the Green Party Phillip Mladenov says the average family can save \$400 a year on their power bills by installing solar water heating.

"It's generally saving people 50 to 75 per cent because your hot water accounts for about one third of your power bill," he says.

"It is also reducing the emission of carbon dioxide greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

"Every time two houses have solar water heating installed it is like removing the same amount of emissions a car causes a year."

Mladenov says on a national level if one in every three homes had solar panels installed there would be an overall saving of more than \$190 million in people's power bills.

One of the main barriers for many people is price and a lack of qualified plumbers to install the systems, he says.

The Government does offer some financial assistance through the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority but this will cover only a fraction of the cost.

The financial assistance will cover up to \$300 of any loan applied for, which will help with some or all of the interest incurred over the loan period.

The costs of solar water heaters can vary because of a

### How it works

**Solar panels work by trapping the sun's energy in a collector panel and then this heat is transferred to the water flowing through the panel into a storage cylinder.**

number of factors but pricing starts from about \$3000.

Regulation of the industry is undertaken by Solar Industries in conjunction with the EEC, which has implemented an accreditation system to protect the consumer.

Executive officer for Solar Industries Brian Cox says it is important to break down some of the barriers facing users of solar water heating.

EEC and Solar Industries is hoping a discussion document being put forward in September will lead to the development of some stronger policy initiatives.

"We hope to build a quality assurance system that will meet world class standards and create more information programmes," says Cox.

"The Government may start to encourage the use by putting systems on its own buildings. There are more than 60,000 state houses that could have these systems installed."

## Running late on your date? Text your mum

By Rebecca Lewis

Internet dating could become a lot safer thanks to a 26-year-old Aucklander's initiative.

Chris Parker set up Dating SOS two years ago to help family and friends keep track of people while they are on a date with someone they met online.

Dating SOS, part of the internet dating website Sparkle Road, gets you to input the time and meeting place of your date along with contact details of your friends and family. If you are not home when expected, they will be notified.

"When you get home from a date you just log on and say you are home, otherwise a non-threatening reminder is sent by text and email to your friends and family telling them to call you," says Parker.

"But if the date is going well and you think you might be late you can simply text the website."

Parker, who lives in Devonport, decided to set up Dating SOS because he believes you can never be sure who you are meeting when you set a date online.

"It's a safety thing. I started it up because there was a lot of press coverage about the dangers of dating online at the time, so I wanted to make it safe and do something different; our members like that we are serious about their safety," he says.

And it seems to be working.

His company, Sparkle Road, has about 85,000 members worldwide and Parker says the systems worked when needed to.

"But it's usually just people coming home late. We haven't had any serious problems."

Sarah Frank, 24, who has been a member of Sparkle Road for more than two years and has started using the Dating SOS service recently, says the system is great.

"I don't understand why someone didn't think of it sooner.

"I have only used it twice but I will definitely keep using it. It makes me feel safer to know that people know where I have gone," she says.

The website, which Parker started after a failed attempt to launch another internet dating site, has about 13,000 members in New Zealand, 50,000 in South Africa, as well as members in Australia, the United States and Canada.

"For some reason it's really taken off in South Africa. I think it's because there's not as many choices over there. The timing was good and it just works for them," he says.

The website is free to sign up to, but you have to pay a small fee to contact someone.

"I just wanted to make internet dating something that was safe offline, and fun, but that people took seriously," Parker says.