

One more roll

Rev Diane Coleman tells the story of one man's descent into financial chaos and examines why problem gamblers can't "just stop".

// Jason sat staring at the flickering screen, completely absorbed by the tumbling symbols in front of him. Unknown to those around him he was fantasising about how he would take Helen and the children up to Dreamworld. He now had \$800 worth of credits, enough to go to the Gold Coast, but not enough to pay for all the extras the kids would want. He was on a roll. 'About time' he said to himself.

He wasn't sure how Helen would react if she knew just how much in debt they really were. But now he was going to make it right. Today was *his* day and he was going to make these machines pay for the best holiday they had ever had as a family. Not satisfied with just \$800, he wanted to make these damn machines pay for all the money he had played and lost in the past. Jason upped each spin to \$10, his winnings increased and mesmerised he kept putting the money through. 'Risk big to make big', he kept repeating, until, about an hour later, when he walked quietly out of the club."

Two weeks later Jason was referred by G-line to HopeStreet to get help. He now owed a staggering \$15,000 on 3 credit cards, plus a personal loan for \$10,000. He was behind in the mortgage by a few months and Helen knew nothing of his gambling.

How had he reached this terrible point? He had an uneventful childhood and did well at school. His family were surprised when he failed



his first year at Uni, they were not aware that he had spent most of that year playing the pokies. After Uni he took a job as a courier, but ended up in hospital with a broken leg when his bike and a car collided. Unsure of his future, he started playing the pokies again. At one point he won a jackpot of \$5,000, which allowed him to pay off his car and some of his debts. He did take a break from playing for a few months, but he was soon back, trying to pull off the big win.

Jason's story is unique to himself, but not to those who experience problem gambling. People gamble for many reasons, for fun and excitement, hoping to win, and sometimes to forget the hassles and problems of everyday life. They also play because they learnt as a child that gambling was fun and a 'harmless' activity.

However, by the time people come in for counselling they have often been addicted to gambling for years and are heavily in debt. Mostly no one knows of their problem and they often feel too ashamed, guilty and afraid to seek help. Usually

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friends and family simply tell the gambler to "just stop, don't do it", but rarely is it that easy.

For those addicted to gambling life becomes a nightmare with pubs, clubs and hotels everywhere, all with pokies or the TAB readily accessible. To stop gambling takes the kind of self-honesty and accountability that many, even those without a gambling problem, would balk at.

HopeStreet provides a full-time counsellor in Darlinghurst and one day a week gambling counselling in Glebe. To cease gambling is not easy but it is possible. For those who are committed to the process and willing to put in the hard work, the peace, relief and freedom from fear and shame are worth the effort.

The Rev Diane Coleman is the minister at HOPESTREET Glebe Estate Community Church.