

Amusements Can Lose Their Fun...

I had my first encounter with gambling in my mid teens. I would go with a friend to an arcade not far from where we lived and watch as he occasionally doubled his money. I never actually partook in any form of gambling at first, I would just tag along, but on one occasion, in his absence, curiosity took the better of me and I dabbled a little.

Back then the highest win was around £5, which was usually paid out in tokens, but it didn't discourage us from spending ten times what we could win on trying for a jackpot!

For most of my teenage years I didn't really bother with gambling in general – I had a career in the forces, which meant I moved around a lot, and girlfriends were a lot higher on my list of priorities than winning a tenner! But a few years later I went away to university and as a full time student I had a lot of free time on my hands every week and that's when I began to try my luck.

For a bit of light entertainment I would head down to the local slot machines and try for the £15 jackpots, but rarely won any big money. My losses were normally drowned with alcohol and overlooked as I didn't really have any responsibilities or financial burdens.

After graduating from university, I moved up north and gambling was put on the backburner again as my job pretty much dictated my lifestyle and there was no arcades in the town. It wasn't till I moved to a seaside town in Suffolk that the arcades came back on the scene and with no one at home and little in the way of responsibilities I became a creature of habit. I would finish work early and spend hours circulating the arcade with my 10p coins. Eventually they introduced new machines which held jackpots of up to £500 and on occasions I could spend £200 without a single win. These machines were my downfall. I often lost £100 in less than 20 minutes, but the rare £500 win seemed to make up for all the money lost.

My 'amusement' was funded initially by earnings and eventually supplemented by various loans and overdrafts once my own money had run out. On one occasion I even 'borrowed' £300 from my wife's account. My total personal debt lies in the range of over 20k and this led to me experiencing symptoms associated with heavy financial losses; sleepless nights, anxiety, depression sometimes even suicidal thoughts.

I couldn't put my family or myself through it anymore and so I took two days off work and phoned Gamcare as their stickers were on the machines that I played. There was a sense of trepidation about being judged, but I was finally making the initial step into self admittance to a big problem.

I spoke to a Gamcare counsellor who immediately put me in contact with NORCAS in Ipswich. NORCAS answered the phone in a very non judgmental manner - very polite, courteous and professional. NORCAS provided the means to deliver professional counselling sessions in a safe and confidential environment. Neatly tucked away just south of the town centre of Ipswich, there was never a concern on my part about being spotted going into a dependency centre and I believe that NORCAS is a very fundamental part of the locality's welfare infrastructure.

I can now say, with my help from NORCAS, that I have cut my gambling by 90%. I have slipped on the odd occasion, but I know this is part of the recovery process. I feel assured as a result of NORCAS's presence in the area that I can still receive ongoing support through counselling sessions to aid my recovery to be there fully for my family. At the end of the day it's about personal choice, the gambling venues didn't force me to walk through their doors and spend my money in their establishments.