Make a Mark: using art to educate youth about problem gambling

Stephanie Jelbart

Abstract
This paper will outline the process taken to develop, implement and evaluate a project for young people using art as a medium to address the social determinants of problem gambling. Data will be presented to demonstrate emerging statistics that warranted this project; the successful outcomes; the evidence that highlights how resilience against problem gambling by young people can be built into school curricula; and how the arts can effectively be used as a tool for engaging, mentoring and educating young people about decisions that affect their health.

The project: Bendigo Loddon Primary Care Partnership implemented an upstream integrated health promotion project in 2012 which addressed the social determinants of problem gambling, specifically the development of protective factors such as financial education, social connectedness and community engagement. The Bendigo Loddon Primary Care Partnership is a system of autonomous health and community service organisations and local governments in Greater Bendigo and Loddon, Victoria. This partnership of organisations came together in 2000 to improve the health and wellbeing of people in the area by working with one another, supported with funding and a policy framework of the Victorian Government. Our Partnership covers a broad landscape of 9,700 square kilometres of rural and regional Victoria. Our service system provides services to over 108,000 people within our catchment.

The project, funded by the Department of Justice, was in response to emerging evidence that young people, particularly young males, are engaging in internet gambling, with evidence stating that this can lead to problem gambling. Problem gambling affects individuals, families and the community. From relationship breakdown and financial crisis, to individual anger, anxiety and depression; the effects of problem gambling are vast and varied.

The project was a cross-curriculum approach, to educate students about the effects of problem gambling. It also aimed to enhance their social connectedness using the arts as a medium to provide an alternative to unhealthy financial activities and opportunities to think creatively. Participants were mentored, not only by a professional artist experienced working with young people, but also by a Gambler’s Help Community Educator, the class teacher, and mentors from a local youth group. The culminating outcome was an exhibition of the participant’s artwork—a reflection of their journey—displayed in a prominent position within the Bendigo Bank Central foyer, coinciding with Responsible Gambling Awareness Week in Victoria from May 14-21st 2012.

Results from participant surveys highlighted an increase in participants’ confidence in their ability to think creatively and to manage their money. Young people indicated they knew what to do if they or someone else was affected by problem gambling and felt more assured about making a positive mark on life. Further to the surveys, qualitative data collected from the participants indicated that this project had made a significant difference to their life.

To highlight success of this project and commitment to this approach, the Bendigo Loddon PCP is creating a Resource Kit during 2012-2013, which packages the project to enable transferability to other communities. Professional education will also be offered with this Kit.

Make A Mark project

Priority goal
To improve young people’s understanding of the effects of problem gambling; their confidence to think creatively when making decisions; and their social connectedness, using arts as a medium to provide an alternative to unhealthy financial activities
Priority issue(s)
The priority issues addressed by this project are:

- social connectedness for young males
- engagement in healthy social activity, especially for young males
- social isolation of young people for the broader community
- education about risks associated with finances
- concern about ease for young males to gamble—online.

Target group
The target population for this project is 14-16 year old males and females within a Bendigo secondary school.

Background
Planning
After conducting a brief literature review on problem gambling, it was evident that the emerging concern was for young males being particularly at risk of internet problem gambling. Separately, literature also supported the methodology and approach taken—to combine the Arts with other learning. Considering the social determinants associated with problem gambling, the Bendigo Loddon PCP began discussions with potential partners to gauge interest in conducting an upstream health promotion collaborative project aimed at raising the awareness of the risk and protective factors required to minimise the harm of problem gambling. Subsequently, the Bendigo Loddon PCP drafted a work plan to enable partnership in delivering such a project.

The Bendigo Loddon PCP Program Leader liaised with partners and potential partners over a period of six months before the project began implementation. These meetings involved:

- liaising with the City of Greater Bendigo Community Arts Officer
- sourcing and engaging artists who would be responsible for delivering the creative component
- sourcing and purchasing materials
- planning session content with the artists
- liaising with the Principal and Domain Leader at the College
- planning with the teacher from the College, who would be responsible for delivering the education component of the project
- liaising with St Luke’s Gambler’s Help and the Community Educator for resource support and to arrange the collaborative delivery of the education component of the project
- sourcing and engaging suitable mentors
- facilitating communication between the teacher, Community Educator, artists and mentors
- liaising the Bendigo and Adelaide Bank for possible exhibition space.
Evidence—for the project
A number of sources were used to establish and inform the decision for this project. Evidence was
gathered from across the world and locally, to demonstrate the need for such a project.

Despite age, internet gambling amongst youth is on the increase. Technological trends such as the
following support growing concern:

- Youth are more familiar with digital technologies (‘digital natives’)
- Mobile gaming is growing
- Technological advertising and marketing is increasing
- Social networks—gambling access increased
- Non-financial problem gambling are emerging
- Greater accessibility to gambling opportunities—24 hours
- Visible, attractive, ‘normalising’ the images—making it ‘real’ and appealing to young people
- Fewer restrictions for first time gambling experiences
- Exposure to non-supervised gambling
- Exposure to incorrect/misleading info—‘but it’s on the net it must be true’
- Young people are developing early beliefs/strategies/misconceptions about gambling

The ‘convergence of gambling and digital technologies may pose unique psychological risks for young
people.’1

The most recent data on young people and internet gambling is currently coming out of Canada, where
it was found that internet gamblers are; mostly male, tend to be younger, are likely to be single, have a
slightly higher education and income, are associated with higher rates of substance abuse, and have
lower rates of mental and physical disability.2

The highest prevalence of gambling of any age group is currently 18-25 year olds, with a 16% growth in
internet gambling. Females mostly use demo or practise sites, whereas males tend to gamble with
money. Deverensky found that 1/3 of the youth gambling for money are problem gamblers.3 This
project aimed to target young people before they reached the most at risk age group.

Recent research suggests the new face of internet gambling is social media (such as Facebook) and
mobile applications. Games like Texas Hold’em Poker advertised through Facebook had the number of
users almost doubled in one month in 2007, to a figure of over 24 million active users. The marketing
is attractive; the site is easy to use, real and provocative (for example they promote College ‘drop-outs’ as
now being multi-million dollar gambling winners), therefore it is attractive to young people. There are
different types accessible to all users: poker/card games, casino games, sports betting, betting on reality
shows, contests and betting on celebrities.4 For young people, internet gambling becomes a common
interest and therefore a catalyst for continued use: sharing of knowledge (what they have learnt);
something in common (becomes a ‘talking point’); and it becomes a competition.

1 King, Delfabbro, Mark Griffiths (2011)
2 ibid
3 Derevensky, J. (2011)
4 ibid
Internet gambling is more of a risk because: it’s always accessible; it’s more isolated; it’s anonymous; it’s cashless; it’s fast and therefore can become more continuous. Studies show problem gambling rates tend to be higher in internet gambling statistics—‘Delfabbro et al (2007) found that 10% of young (<18 years) pathological gamblers had tried internet gambling’.5 Although seemingly low, these rates are on the increase. The isolation factor is something that helped to inform the creative component of this project, with the belief that providing healthy social time alternatives may encourage youth to choose these rather than be isolated on their computer.

The implications for young people engaged in internet gambling are vast and varied:

- It can be seen as an escape or ‘safe’ behaviour
- It is unidentifiable and promotes isolation
- It has few restrictions
- It can be encouraged by unrecognised peer influences—competition, approval, sharing knowledge
- It can promote interaction with older/experienced gamblers
- It has a lack of parental awareness/education/protective factors/consumer advice associated with gambling.6

Deverensky believes education is the key: “In retail, there are three important principles: location, location, location ... in responsible gambling for youth, the three important principles are: education, education, education”.7 Hence, this project was developed.

Evidence—for the approach

In the past ten years, studies have been conducted to verify or dismiss claims that the Arts can support or enhance student learning outcomes. One particular study, conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), concluded that when comparing two groups of students—those who studied a non-arts-rich program and those who studied an arts-rich program—a significant difference in student learning outcomes resulted. Arts-rich program students demonstrated clear improvements in Literacy, Numeracy, Writing, Problem Solving, Planning and Organising, Communication and Working with others: ‘Involvement in arts programmes has a positive impact on students’ engagement with learning.’8 Furthermore, researchers found ‘students felt confident about taking risks’ and encouraged the involvement of students who did not normally ‘fit the conventional mould’ because they have qualities that they felt was not necessarily valued in other school life.9

Likewise in a separate study, University of Melbourne researchers working in partnership with the Department of Justice, Human Services, Vic Health and Arts Victoria, investigated ‘the effectiveness of the involvement in the creative arts as a diversionary intervention for at-risk youth in urban and rural Victoria’. They concluded that young people involved in these particular arts programs reported an increase in self-esteem, an improvement in communication, and an increased sense of achievement and personal wellbeing. They felt more connected to their community and experienced other social benefits from being involved.10 In light of this evidence, the Make A Mark project aimed to provide a supportive, engaging and inclusive environment for students to feel accepted, involved regardless of ability, and explore safe risk taking with decision making. The approach reflected the evidence that pairing the Arts

6 King, Delfabbro, Mark Griffiths (2011)
7 Derevensky, J. (2011)
8 Bryce et al., 2004, p.14
9 Ewing, R. 2010, p. 24-25
10 ibid
with other learning increases engagement and involvement, therefore the uptake of information and greater learning outcomes.

**Scope of the project**

The Bendigo Loddon PCP designed and delivered an upstream level integrated health promotion project within a local secondary college, which addressed the social determinants of problem gambling, specifically the development of protective factors such as financial education, social connectedness and community engagement. The project responded to emerging evidence of young people, particularly young males, engaging in internet gambling, in some cases leading to problem gambling. With a cross-curriculum approach, the project aimed to educate participants about the effects of problem gambling as well as promote creative and positive thinking applicable to life situations, using art as a catalyst for developing such skills and confidence. This project was not an ‘extra’ requirement to curriculum; rather, it was built into the curriculum and within the student’s timetable and this added to its success in the school. No additional work was expected of the students as it was incorporated into their current assessment.

**Objectives**

The key objectives for the Make A Mark project were:

- to educate youth, particularly males, within Bendigo on the issues associated with managing finances, particularly the temptation to engage in unhealthy financial activities such as online gambling
- to provide social inclusion opportunities for youth, particularly males, in Bendigo
- to engage youth, particularly males, within the Bendigo in healthy social activities
- to provide opportunity for mentoring between adults and young males
- to demonstrate a way that resilience against problem gambling by young people can be built into school curricula.

**Project participants**

There were 25 participants in this project, all from a financial management elective at a local secondary college. The age of the students varied from 14 to 16 years old, and included both males and females.

**Methodology and approach**

The College welcomed the opportunity to participate in this project as it aligned well with the school’s vision. This project was a cross-curriculum approach, merging the Domains of Humanities, Arts, Thinking Processes and Creativity from the Victorian Essential Learning Standards framework to create a 10-week unit of work and corresponding learning assessment. The participants were chosen based on the most appropriate entry point in the curriculum. Consequently, the Year 9 financial management elective was identified as the subject where this project would be best suited. Participants comprised of the whole class, inclusive of both males and females (14-16 year olds), as it provided a rich opportunity to educate more than just the target audience of young males. Despite the highest prevalence of gambling of any age group currently being 18-25 year olds\(^\text{11}\), this project aimed to be of a higher-order health promotion model, aiming to proactively and intentionally prevent young people engaging in risky financial activity rather than necessarily be an intervention.

The project had two components: (1) an *education component* and (2) a *creative arts component*. The project aimed to educate the students involved about the effects of problem gambling. It also aimed to

---

\(^\text{11}\) Derevensky, J. (2011)
enhance their social connectedness and ability to think creatively using the Arts as a medium. It was anticipated that from this they would apply their new creative thinking confidence to other life decisions, including those to do with money or risk taking.

Students participated in four education lessons, each one and a half hours in duration; the Gambler’s Help Community Educator directly delivered one of these. The classroom teacher designed education sessions around the Office for Gaming and Racing and Consumer Affairs resource ‘Consumer Stuff—Responsible Gambling, Building Resilience for Young Learners’. All sessions included discussions and activities around understanding the marketing of gambling; understanding why people gamble; the concerns to consider when gambling; the risk factors that can lead to problem gambling; and the affect gambling has on their life and others. These discussions continued throughout the nine art sessions once they commenced, with the mentors, and during reflection sessions led by the artist and teacher.

Students completed a pre and post-test to assess their knowledge, confidence and impact of participating in the project. This survey also included questions that helped to identify ‘assets’ in each participant’s life, as outlined by the Developmental Assets Framework. The results demonstrated that the project was successful.

The culminating outcome of the project was an exhibition of the student artwork—a reflection of their journey—displayed in the Bendigo and Adelaide Bank Central Foyer coinciding with Responsible Gambling Awareness Week May 14-21st 2012. The Minister for Gaming, Michael O’Brien, sent a letter of support to read to the audience in his absence from the exhibition.

Results

Impacts and outcomes
Participants reported the following as a result of their involvement in this project:

- 92% feel confident in knowing what to do if they or someone they know was affected by problem gambling
- 96% feel confident about managing their money
- 76% feel they are now more confident in their ability to think creatively
- 76% feel they are now more confident about how to ‘make a mark’ on their life (e.g. future decision making)

The attitudes of the students at the beginning of the project were a little reserved as they took some time to understand the purpose of the inclusion of the creative component, despite the explanations given. It wasn’t until they were partway through the creative component that they were able to reflect—encouraged through guided reflection times by the artist and teacher—on why they were completing a creative arts task in their humanities elective.

Comments such as the following helped to identify that the inclusion of the creative component was a successful tool to promote creative thinking, build confidence in decision making, and highlight one example of how participants can use our social time in a positive way: (note: ‘Terry’ was the artist mentor):

‘My overall opinion on this learning assessment and experience with Terry, I found it all very interesting, life changing and enjoyable. This is the advice I have been missing all my life. Throughout I have been discovering what I want to be and what marks I want to make on the world. During these sessions, with the inspirational artist Terry, I was able to develop my true

12 www.search-institute.org
dream and aspire to make my marks that I want in my life and hopefully achieve all my goals I choose to attempt.'

'I was quite proud of the work I did and found it really enjoyable especially the graffiti, it was also really great to see how my work looked in the end compared to the image I planned in my head.'

'When I first realised what we were doing in manage your money with Terry I didn’t see the point of how our painting skills would help us manage our money. After a few sessions I realised this subject wasn’t just about learning how to budget and manage our money, it was also about making our mark on the world and becoming everything we want in life, inspire and influence the world we live and grow up in.'

'When I think about making my mark in life I dream that I will become what I desire and I can influence the world we live in today. I hope the marking I make in my future life will inspire others like I am being inspired through this subject to make a mark in my life and do something successful and fulfilling.'

'After the sessions I had with Terry I was able to create original art pieces that I could be proud of.'

These comments help to reinforce the need for developing assets in young people, e.g. self-confidence and creative thinking—the more assets (protective factors), the less ‘at risk’ they become.

The results of the asset building post-survey revealed the following of the participants:

- 96% believed they were optimistic about their future, about what lies ahead for them, where they want to go and what they want to achieve
- 86% felt as though their life had purpose and meaning
- 96% like who they are and feel positive about themselves, a 9.7% increase post-project
- 92% feel confident in planning ahead and making choices for themselves, with a 2.5% increase for students that 'always' feel confident to plan ahead and making decisions.

The outcome of the project concludes that 25 young people from Bendigo:

- are informed about the issues associated with managing finances, particularly the temptation to engage in unhealthy financial activities such as online gambling
- are informed about the risk and protective factors for problem gambling
- are informed about the affect problem gambling has on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, and have reported a confidence in knowing what to do about responding to such affects
- have been provided an opportunity to be socially engaged in a healthy activity, in a safe and respectful environment, that promotes engagement and creativity
- have been mentored by adults experienced in relationships building, creative thinking, and resourcefulness.

The project clearly demonstrates a way that resilience against problem gambling by young people can be built into school curriculum.
Conclusion and recommendations

This Integrated Health Promotion for Problem Gambling project was successful.

Key success factors:

- A selection of young people in Bendigo being informed about the risk and protective factors for problem gambling, in order to better inform their own choices about gambling and know how to respond (including services available) to someone who is affected by problem gambling.

- A selection of young people in Bendigo being mentored by positive influences and role models experienced in working with young people to nurture relationship building and open communication.

- Awareness has been raised about the social determinants of health and those that contribute to social connectedness and problem gambling, not only for those involved in the project, but also the opportunity provided to the public during the week-long exhibition.

Key challenges:

- coordinating timetables for the participants and artists
- relying on the artists to be at sessions on time with adequate materials
- communication with artists
- finding mentors initially
- securing a prominent person to officially launch the exhibition
- ensuring the same number of students completed the pre and post survey and that more guidance is provided to assist with participants understanding any questions.

Status and sustainability

Bendigo Loddon PCP will create a toolkit that builds on the outcomes and success of this project, is transferable to any community and school, and promotes partnership between Loddon Mallee PCPs and their community, in order to further impact the young people of the Loddon Mallee region.

Recommendations

This project has proven to be a very effective Integrated Health Promotion strategy which we believe is transferable to other communities and settings. Based on such success, we recommend:

- The Department of Health and Ageing and the Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport (Office for Arts) work collaboratively, using The Arts, to achieve better health outcomes for all Australians.

- The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations consider the inclusion of risk factors for problem gambling, such as social isolation, throughout the school curriculum for ages 12-18, as a preventative approach to problem gambling.

References


Thriving Youth Australia—www.thrivingyouth.org.au

Bridge Builders Ltd—www.bridgebuilders.com.au
King, Delfabbro, Mark Griffiths (2011) Digital technologies, computer games and gambling among youth; University of Adelaide and Nottingham Trent University; Responsible Gambling Forum, Melbourne, May 2011 http://www.slideshare.net/problemgambling/3-rgaw-daniel-king
