



Parliamentary All Party Betting & Gaming Group



The Future of Gambling Seminar Series 2016 - The Future of Research, Education & Treatment into Problem Gambling. Tuesday 05 July 2016.

Presentation by Lee Willows, Founder & Chief Executive, YGAM



Brief biography

Lee Willows is the Founder & Chief Executive of YGAM (Young Gamblers Education Trust) which is a new UK-Registered Charity with a social purpose to inform, educate and safeguard young people against problematic gambling or social gaming.

Lee founded the charity a year ago with colleagues following his own struggles with gambling. Going through treatment and trying to understand why he became addicted, Lee quickly realised that there was limited information for young people about the potential risks of gambling and gaming, compared with other 'risky behaviours' such as drinking alcohol, having sex or going on the internet. Having spent 25 + years in education, working with young people and leading the work of national education charities, Lee saw an opportunity to work with colleagues from the gambling, education and health sectors to create a charity, with a principle social purpose of harm-minimisation through preventative education.

Lee is an UnLtd social entrepreneur award winner; a Rank Foundation Thought Leader and has worked in Director / Chief Executive roles for the last twelve years. He has a keen interest in the many facets of the gambling industry and how a charity like YGAM can collaborate to build upon the work currently happening in this area.

I am both delighted and very proud to be standing here before you today. I am very proud for two reasons; as some of you will know I am a former gambling addict and so have first-hand experience of the devastation that some people can suffer. Almost three years ago I was within a whisker of taking my own life because of the lengths I went to feed my addiction. Do have a look at our website www.ygam.org where I have uploaded my personal story.

Going through treatment provided by the National Problem Gambling Clinic, funded by operators in this room via the RGT, was instrumental to my recovery. It helped me to start the journey to become abstinent. Going through my treatment and having spent the last 25 years in education and youth work it became very apparent, very quickly that there was a lack of information around the potential risks associated with gambling and unregulated gaming, when compared to other risky activities such as drinking alcohol, having sex or going on the internet. So the first reason why I am proud to be standing here before you today is many of you have welcomed me in to the industry and have offered your support to YGAM. That support is through pro-bono advice, employee volunteering or a financial contribution to our work. I am incredibly proud of everybody whom supports our work and there is cause for you to be proud too. The second reason why I am proud to be standing before you, is we are delivering workshops to young people and training teachers and youth practitioners up and down the country today.

We have moved from an idea and concept of minimising gambling-related harm to delivering thoroughly thought through, externally quality-assured, kite marked and accredited educational products that, most importantly, teachers absolutely love.

So, I am here today to share some of the insights of our work and talk about the future of education and its role in minimising harm among; particularly those aged under 24yrs, who as we all know, are at the highest risk.

Let me start by winding the clock forward over the next five to ten years; what do we see. Well the answer is relatively simple. We see our children and young people being even more connected to an on-line, virtual world. A virtual world where children and young people's minds are captured by the creativity of virtual worlds and we see huge numbers of young people participating in gaming platforms within these virtual worlds. Young people will no longer engage with traditional gaming consuls, but instead will engage with VR on their mobile phone. Within these virtual worlds, actual financial rewards can be won and so the lines between gaming and gambling will become more blurred. This is starting to happen now; last week I was with Adrian Sladdin our Director of Education and Anne Evans our Ambassador in Doncaster working with year nine pupils, who were aged 15 years. They were telling us how you can win actual money from the latest Play Station games and they went to explain how they get around the various restrictions.

So we see there is a critical need for gaming and gambling-related harm education and we'd like to see that education being as common place as sexual health education in schools, colleges, universities and community organisations. In our experience some Local Authorities, are 'waking up' to this now, for example in Doncaster the Local Authority did a health and well-being survey last year among their year nine pupils. One question to the students was do you participate in gaming or gambling and 70% said yes. The Local Authority do not know if they are experiencing harm, but with such high levels of participation; higher than any other 'risky activity', the Local Authority wanted to consider their safeguarding arrangements.

So if we agree education to prevent gambling-related harm is important, where does it sit within the national curriculum. We clearly see it being part of the PSHE (Personal, Health & Social Education) curriculum as naturally this is where education for other 'risky behaviours' currently sits. YGAM is supporting the PSHE Association's campaign for PSHE education to become a mandatory part of the national curriculum.

To summarise, in the future we see significantly higher levels of participation, a blurring of gaming & gambling, and we see schools, colleges and universities embracing harm-prevention education and for it to be as common as what sexual health education is today.

So what does harm-prevention education specifically look like. Firstly, to achieve the scale and reach that is needed, any programme has to be highly professional and by this we mean it must be (i) quality-assured and have achieved a quality standard such as the PSHE Association quality kite mark; and (ii) accredited, so schools, colleges and universities have the option to formally certificate young people's learning and participation. With so many 'pulls' on the school curriculum, without these basic foundations it is unlikely schools will participate in large numbers.

Schools, colleges and universities also need a programme that is flexible, meets the mandatory aspects of the curriculum, such as English and Maths and a programme that builds young people's resilience, character and grit. So it's important to build a programme that is skills based and one that equips young people with skills and knowledge, so they can make informed decisions about gambling and gaming.

The YGAM programme is quality-assured by the PSHE Association and accredited by Ofqual Awarding Body ASDAN. It is mapped to the national curriculum and encompasses the skills of Leadership & Teamwork; Learning & Sharing; Creative Thinking & Exploration; Research & Presentation and Preparation & Discussion. Any programme in this area needs to be as broad and flexible as the YGAM programme currently is, with the quality foundations we have secured.

To also achieve scale and reach it is important to think about a cost effective delivery model. As I did when I first started YGAM, former addicts like myself going to give talks, presentations or assemblies on harm-prevention does have some value. Indeed, the recently published literacy review on young people and gambling by the RGT sighted such approaches as potentially effective. However, if YGAM adopted this model of delivery we would not achieve the reach we seek, nor could we achieve financial sustainability. Creating an organisation around its founder's story of harm (i.e. my story of harm), isn't sustainable and means there would be an over reliance on me. This is something we considered carefully as an organisation and we have come up with what we believe to be the two most effective delivery models.

One model is Train the Trainer. Which in YGAM's case we train and formally accredit teachers, youth workers, community mental health workers etc to deliver our programme to young people in their care, as part of a PSHE curriculum. This has the value of bringing together teachers from several schools and equipping them with the skills, knowledge and resources so need so they can go back to their school and deliver. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) remains critical for those who work in education and so when we are thinking about the future of education, it's also important to think about the people whom deliver harm-minimisation programmes too. Rather excitingly for YGAM we are working to become an approved Edexcel qualification centre. If we achieve qualification centre status, we then want to work with Edexcel to create a specific level 2 / 3 qualification in harm-minimisation. This will be a UK first and what we have learned to date is there is huge appetite for such qualifications for teachers, youth practitioners and community mental-health workers.

The second delivery model is via Peer Education, where we train (in the case of YGAM), year two or three psychology students to deliver our programme to their peer group and community organisations. Peer education has been shown to be a highly effective intervention, particularly among hard to reach, vulnerable communities or young people whom are NEET (not in education, employment or training). Again we are looking to move to a place later this year where YGAM can offer such students a Level 2 Edexcel qualification to deliver such a programme.

So when we think about the future of education to prevent harm, it couldn't be more different than what we have today. Specific teacher qualifications, quality-assurance and accreditation is the future. Research is going to be fundamental to enable us to learn and understand the effectiveness of such programmes and to further strengthen their content and delivery. That research needs to be influenced by actual teachers whom are delivering the programme and take account of both young people's learning, teachers and parents perceptions.

To finish off with I have two requests for everybody assembled today. Firstly, to the operators have a look at the leaflet on your chairs and consider how we might work together on this relatively new area of work. Employee volunteering or fundraising; corporate donations; pro-bono support or working together to better understand youth gambling are all possibilities. Secondly to members of the APG, recognise the commitment of the operators in this room and I'd like to specifically work with members to roll out the YGAM programmes in your constituencies.

Young Gamblers Education Trust, 71 – 75 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London, WC2H 9JQ.

www.ygam.org | 0203 837 4963 | Registered Company no: 09189998 | Registered Charity no. 1162425.