

THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE IMPACTS OF GAMING MACHINES MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON WEDNESDAY 17 APRIL 2002.

Mr STUART FOSTER, PUBLIC RELATIONS SECRETARY; **Ms RHONDA McINTYRE**, NETWORK COORDINATOR FAMILY SERVICES; **Major JENNY BEGENT**, MANAGER, ELIM HOSPITAL; AND **Mr BILL PARCELL**, GAMBLING OUTREACH OFFICER, SALVATION ARMY, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mrs Silvia Smith) - Welcome all. Thank you, firstly, for your written submission. I did find it extremely interesting and I'm sure other members of the committee have done so as well. I'll give you the opportunity to speak to that in which ever order and whatever way you wish to and, as we go along, perhaps committee members might intercept with questions, if that's okay and appropriate with you. All right then, who's going to lead off?

Mr FOSTER - That's my role. I guess to start with we'd like to thank the Legislative Council for the opportunity to speak to something that we have seen the impacts of in our community and we do commend you for that.

I guess the stance that I could take or the angle that I can come from is from the individual's angle. We do represent the Salvation Army, which is well known for representing the marginalised and I guess the less fortunate of those within our community. So that's the angle that we'd like to come from in presenting to you this morning.

We have a fact sheet which we've done up and it's got three case studies on it as well that we'd like the opportunity to talk to you about because we are seeing this problem with people that we are dealing with every day.

CHAIR - That'd be helpful.

Mr FOSTER - I don't know whether you'd like me to hand that out?

CHAIR - If it's easy enough for us to have a copy in front of us that might be useful because we can refer to it as you're referring to it. If you're going to speak to that it will just make life a little bit easier.

Mr FOSTER - I think we would really like to start, I guess, with the individual impact, and we have with us today our outreach worker who actually sees this, Bill Parcell. Bill, would you just like to speak maybe about the case studies.

CHAIR - I notice, Bill, if I may just intervene before you begin there, you are called the Gambling Outreach Officer, so you are specifically looking at people with those problems?

Mr PARCELL - Alcohol, drugs and gambling.

CHAIR - Okay, right.

Mr PARCELL - But I was working as the gambling worker for the Salvation Army. Before you is a list of three scenarios, and these are just three ad hoc scenarios. There are many other scenarios that prove many other different issues, so if you would like to question me about things I am quite happy to talk at length. The first case study is that of Reg who is a recovering alcoholic who has been sober for four years. Reg's alcoholism was a cover for significant childhood abuse. Like many people in his situation, Reg lacks good social skills and experiences chronic housing issues. As a result of the alcohol abuse, Reg has developed noticeable brain damage. His sole income is the disability pension. Reg was sharing accommodation with a friend. However the friend moved out, leaving Reg with a lot of spare and unwanted time on his hands. With a lot of people I have worked with the time factor is something to consider. It was soon apparent to members of Reg's family, his sister and brother-in-law, that Reg was not coping well and that he in fact exchanged one addiction for another. Reg was filling his time with visits to the poker machines. Reg came to the Salvation Army seeking financial assistance and was eventually referred to the outreach service. Reg had sold his furniture and nearly all his belongings to support his habit. Reg in fact was renting a place at the time and had sold the belongings, the fridge and other things that actually belonged to the owner of the property. This was to feed his addiction. Reg was close to eviction and his long-term Salvation Army worker who had been working with him prior to his gambling issues was brought in and Reg was able to control his gambling, was able to pay back the owner of the property for the fridge and other items, and also was able to secure long-term housing. That is the first scenario.

Mr SQUIBB - Roughly what age group was Reg?

Mr PARCELL - Mid-40s. He started drinking in the early teenage years, and that was in line with the abuse that he had suffered from as a child.

Mr SQUIBB - And his chances of rejoining or entering the work force are pretty slim?

Mr PARCELL - Pretty slim, although he has worked as a night-time security worker for a second-hand car dealer.

Case study number two is of Tom, who was married with two children and was in the process of purchasing his home. In fact he had nearly bought his home. He was never late in paying bills, and appeared to enjoy a normal and happy life. Tom worked for a company that was downsizing its work force and eventually he was made redundant. Tom's wife first came to the Salvation Army to seek counselling to cope with her husband's depression, and not only her husband's depression but her own depression, following the redundancy. Their relationship had become strained and verbal abuse was becoming the norm, which was quite unusual. It really was shaking this particular partner up. Tom began to spend a lot of time away from home at the pub gambling on the pokies. One of Tom's workers who had also taken a redundancy had had a big win on the pokies, and so there was a group of these men who were trying to see if they could copy his result with the pokies.

Tom had tried to hide his gambling problem at first then the bills began to pile up. His gambling increased and his family relationships declined. Tom became convinced that the big win was just around the corner. A big thing about Tom's life was that Tom was used to being the provider of the family and this option for him as a member of the family was taken away with the redundancy issue. He found that his role in the family life was changing and this was also, in my opinion, part of the depression that he was going through at the time.

First on their relationship. Tom's wife lost respect for her husband and began to plan to leave him. This shook her up terribly. She informed him that the effect of his gambling was ruining their family life. Tom appeared not to care. That's the end of that scenario which had an unhappy conclusion.

Case study number three. Mary is a 62 year old grandmother whose husband had recently retired. Mary came to the Salvation Army quite distressed requiring a food voucher for the second time in a month. This is something that she'd never had to do before. She was quite comfortable in her lifestyle and as grandmother and mother to her family and children. She had never in her life required help like this and was beginning to realise that her gambling was out of control.

Mary was lonely: her husband spent a lot of time at the local sports social club. During his time away Mary gambled on the pokies. She began with a limited amount of money after doing the weekly shopping. Then she found that she was raising the limit each time. She decided that going to gamble first before shopping was more of a draw for her than going shopping which was boring and mundane.

She developed an addiction, using a considerable amount of their savings. As a result her relationship became more and more strained and she attempted to keep the problem of her gambling from her partner. Mary was at risk of losing everything.

That had a happy conclusion. I don't know if that's relevant.

CHAIR - No, but it's nice to know that it had a happy conclusion.

Mr PARCELL - There are many, many other varied different scenarios that I could bring to you but they're just the three that we've chosen.

CHAIR - Are you just suggesting that there are a variety of triggers that will trigger people into the gambling?

Mr PARCELL - And socioeconomic groups of people from different environments.

CHAIR - And different groups of people?

Mr PARCELL - Yes.

CHAIR - And their reasons for beginning an addiction, if you like to call it that, are many and varied?

Mr PARCELL - Yes. I'll just share one more with you just to reinforce that if I could and that is about a mother whose son was addicted to marijuana, spent lots of money on marijuana and continually pestered her to give him money. For her to not be tempted to pick up the phone as a parent would in her position she went to the pub to have a go at the pokies and that's why she went. She didn't go to win, she didn't go to lose; she just wanted an out from her own environment. That's just another different slant to what you may have heard before.

CHAIR - No, we've heard of very similar stories. We are hearing that there's no predictable profile -

Mr PARCELL - That's correct.

CHAIR - on the person who becomes an addicted gambler. I guess there's no predictable profile in who becomes an addictive smoker or drinker either.

Major BEGENT - No, there are no common traits.

CHAIR - No. Do you think as a society we should be doing something to find out if there are any common traits?

Major BEGENT - Yes, in fact we would champion some research into the impact of gambling on society, particularly in Tasmania, because it's quite a different scenario to any of the mainland States. It has large rural areas with very little infrastructure. So the only place those people find community often is the pub. So some research into the impact I think will be really important. I think too the way we market some of those things that we would perhaps use marketing tools that are aimed at harm minimisation.

CHAIR - Marketing the machines for gambling.

Major BEGENT - Yes.

CHAIR - Yes. You probably heard the previous people discuss that issue as well. So who is going to take it up from here?

Ms McINTYRE - In a couple of the cases that Bill mentioned, I guess most people have some idea of some of the type of people who come to the Salvation Army to seek help. We are seeing people who would never have been in that situation in the normal course of their life needing to resort to food vouchers to get them through and that is very distressing.

CHAIR - What is that profile like? I mean, we have three or four here. It is very varied, it does not target any particular socioeconomic group?

Ms McINTYRE - No, that is what we are saying, it is across the board. But those people who come from our target group, those that are the most marginalised in the community, they do not have the family supports or the community networks around them to support them and so very often we are being called in to give that support. That is having an enormous stress on the resources, both financial and human resources, that we have to be

able to cope with that because although there have been some positive outcomes, there has been a lot of resources gone into those situations to bring that about.

CHAIR - Have you seen a trend of increase in requirement of your services?

Ms McINTYRE - Absolutely.

CHAIR - Have you done an analysis, I guess, to see why that is happening?

Ms McINTYRE - Through our emergency relief services we turn more away a day than we see. We just do not have the resources to cope with that. Our data is not perhaps as good as it should be and that is something that we are dealing with at the moment. But, yes, certainly we have had an enormous increase.

Mr PARCELL - That is why we would welcome any further study into localising studies of gambling because we just do not have the manpower or resources to be able to do that. But we are so passionate about this issue that it is one way of answering an issue that we just are not able to do at the moment.

CHAIR - Have you been able to put a finger on the causal effect of the requirement of more services from the Salvation Army? What is happening out there?

Ms McINTYRE - I guess it is the level of poverty and the gap between those who are able to support themselves and those that are not. The issues around unemployment. All of those social issues. Family breakdown.

Major BEGENT - Socialisation.

Ms McINTYRE - Yes, socialisation. All of those things that are really impacting on Tasmania at the moment have an enormous effect.

CHAIR - That is what I am trying to get at because of the nature of this inquiry. We are talking about the impact of gaming machines. Is that becoming a causal effect of people requiring services?

Ms McINTYRE - Yes, you cannot isolate.

CHAIR - No, it is only part of it. I understand that there are causal effects of what has happened for them to go out gambling as well.

Ms McINTYRE - To go out gambling, yes.

Major BEGENT - Of the people Bill sees, if I remember rightly when I was putting this together, 88 per cent of Bill's clients with gambling addiction are using poker machines blackjack or poker or any of that.

Mr PARCELL - A majority of those would never have gambled previous to pokies. I put that down to the fact that it is popular culture. It is very trendy.

Ms McINTYRE - Easy accessibility.

Mr PARCELL - The machine, the way it talks to you, the way it presents itself is always positive. All the noises and lights. What that gives off to the gambler is win, win, win. There is no evening up of that with negative noises, negative lighting.

Major BEGENT - When he leaves it does not blow up or anything.

Laughter.

Mr PARCELL - You do not get a negative sound like a dropping bomb or whatever which may be something to consider. I also think the sound of the trays, the money hitting the trays, if that was a plastic tray or something with a deadening sound then that also would not be an encouragement.

Mr SQUIBB - Or a loss is made to look like a win too, isn't it, if I lost 5 credits and invest in 20.

Mr PARCELL - Yes, exactly. And it is easy to hide losses by putting more money in. I also think that with popular culture it takes a while for the community to accept a particular trend that is going on in the community, and that is to me what is happening with the poker machines. People are in denial of losing money through the pokies because it is not yet seen - it is a bit like the early drug situation: it is not seen as being something which people can talk about. It is kind of a perceived social outcast, a form of bigotry towards those people, not that that is what people are saying to them, but that is how they are wearing it because there are no places that they can go out and express their loss and feel good about themselves. Many people that I saw I only saw once, which is very unusual with people with addictions. Also the ones that I saw that were so distressed that I offered to see them in their private home because they just did not want to talk in the environment of an office. They did not want to go to GABA. I cannot remember one pokie gambling person who thought that GABA was a good resource for them.

CHAIR - Is that because they thought that it may be a threatening environment and they wanted to be safer?

Mr PARCELL - And again it is the pop culture thing, I think, because they are the new breed. It is a personal issue more so than that particular program's issue. Again it is looking down upon yourself and not being able to accept services that are already in place for those things.

CHAIR - So they are more attuned to the knowledge of the caring attitude of the Salvation Army, and the GABA and others are an unknown. Is that what you are trying to say?

Mr PARCELL - Yes, that could be true. And a form of admitting to this new kind of - I do not know how you term it, maybe social disease or whatever. Also I wanted to make another point, if I could, about the craving feeling that gamblers get.

CHAIR - This is from your clients' point of view?

Mr PARCELL - Yes, who have tried to give up. One particular person would leave the children at home, wait till they were asleep then just walk down to the hotel, because that was her need, and no matter what she tried to do - she tried to ban herself; she took her picture to that particular hotel and said 'I don't want to come here again', and all that type of stuff - it never worked.

CHAIR - It was not enforced?

Mr PARCELL - No, it was not enforced, and it is something to maybe look at later. I do not know where you want to go with that.

I do not know if people have said this before, likening the addiction to poker machine gambling to the addiction to drugs and alcohol in the sense that you have those emotions, the physical and mental emotions, that a person who is addicted to a drug would go through.

Ms McINTYRE - It is part of that addictive behaviour of the people that we see, so we see people who we may be working with, with drug and alcohol addiction, that will cease their drug and alcohol addiction and take up a gambling addiction, because it is easier to mask, but it is still fulfilling that addictive behaviour that they have.

Major BEGENT - Which is cyclical.

CHAIR - That is interesting. And if you have somebody who has a drinking problem and you cure them of that, it is not unusual then for them to take up some other form of addiction?

Major BEGENT - Not at all. In fact it is highly likely.

Ms McINTYRE - So the gambling is there and -

CHAIR - And then you work with that?

Ms McINTYRE - Yes. It's working with addictive behaviour patterns.

CHAIR - Is there ever an end?

Major BEGENT - Some people are able to manage their addictive behaviour fairly successfully and others aren't. There's not a lot of research done why some people manage behaviour better than others.

Mr PARCELL - It's working with triggers. Looking at a person who may want to try to give up gambling so you take them through the stages. What are you feeling like at a certain stage? Okay, if that's how you feel can you transfer that feeling somewhere else? Try to short-circuit it before it becomes too much of a worry.

Could I possibly go back to what I was talking about before?

CHAIR - Yes, please.

Mr PARCELL - The other side of similarity between gambling addiction and drug addiction is I have this feeling of a very strong knowledge that gamblers have at their machines. They know their machines, they know which ones they want to use, they have a favourite machine and they know when it's going to pay out big, they know when it's not going to pay out big -

CHAIR - I need to talk to them.

Laughter.

Mr PARCELL - And I've written here a strong knowledge, one might say a macabre relationship, between them and their chosen machines. This form of knowledge is very similar to that of the addicts or drug addicts acquired knowledge of social drugs and their drug of choice. They'll probably know just as much about their social drug or drug of choice as a chemist knows, its effects and everything, but they still can't give it up. Like a smoker, and it's similar; it's that addictive behaviour that's been triggered and this is the way that they want to express that addictive behaviour.

CHAIR - Are you saying that the machine continues to feed that -

Mr PARCELL - Yes.

CHAIR - by the way the very nature of its set-up perhaps.

Mr PARCELL - Yes. I presume you've used a lot of information from the *Sun* report that was in last year's newspaper in Melbourne and the fact that the leading pokie machine makers actually used psychologists to develop their machines and there's that link. They are designed to be tasty. You use the analogy of a fisherman; they're the bait that can catch the fish.

CHAIR - Yes, right, okay. We haven't talked to the machine owners themselves or the makers. It would be interesting to have a discussion if they wish to discuss it with us.

Mr PARCELL - I don't know if you've included that research that was done through that paper but that is something worth -

CHAIR - We have lots of papers and research projects from the mainland.

Mr PARCELL - It was very in-depth and very thorough, I thought.

CHAIR - Are you concerned about the lack of research that's been done here in Tasmania?

Mr PARCELL - Yes, there is always that but there's also the lack of response to the research that has been done in other places which is an issue as well. It's easy to say that we're unique here and that is true we are a unique community but we also have similar problems with these machines that are across the board. I just believe that we do ignore other information that's given to us that's already out there.

CHAIR - It would be worthwhile analysing why we ignore it?

Mr PARCELL - That may be because it's done at a State government level where you argue at each State level rather than at a Commonwealth Government level where it could be -

CHAIR - The Productivity Commission report was a very all-encompassing report that covered a lot of areas but no follow-up to it of course at this point in time. It was a large undertaking by the Commonwealth; they gave a fair snapshot picture of the whole of Australia.

Mrs SUE SMITH - I believe the ministers of each State have agreed to a national data collection service. Do you see that as an advantage to Tasmania?

Major BEGENT - Most definitely, particularly in terms of the client profile that helps you to match the services to a particular profile. The national data will give us that and will also assist us as an organisation, I guess in terms of how we gear that service delivery and where we deliver it as well.

Mr FOSTER - I guess with the research is finding where that point is between someone becoming a social gambler and becoming a problem gambler.

Major BEGENT - The cost that is to society as a whole.

Mrs SUE SMITH - If you can identify when you are about to step over the mark you will not step over the mark. Like here comes the train; I am not going to step out in front of it. You know that it is coming.

Major BEGENT - That is why I think responsible marketing - if you have done the research to give you that kind of information then you can develop a marketing that will target those issues that highlight the things that will say to you let us stop and let us not do that. It is like we will not drive 120 miles without our seatbelt on; those kinds of things that help. That means too that there is some responsibility taken by the industry and there needs to be a significant responsibility taken by the industry.

CHAIR - In the paper that you presented to us you talk in the service profile area about a budget coach program which works alongside clients who identify gambling as their addictive behaviour. I just wonder if you could broaden that out a little.

Ms McINTYRE - That was the work that Bill was doing. That is no longer operating. That came out of some funding received out of the support levy.

CHAIR - It was a one-off program then?

Ms McINTYRE - Yes, and it is certainly something that we would like to be able to duplicate and to run again through out outreach program but we are not in a position to do that at the moment, although we still are seeing those families in other ways.

CHAIR - In other ways. I was just wondering how well it was done, what the results were.

Ms McINTYRE - That is why we got the successful outcomes with those families that we were working with.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Was it the lack of successive funding that has stopped the program at the moment?

Ms McINTYRE - Yes, and the clients that we see, historically do not go to other services that are out there in the community. They see the Salvation Army as being the one-stop shop and although part of our aim for our programs is to link them in to other services, sometimes it can take us up to two years to be working with somebody who is - you are right at the bottom, to understand what their issues are. They will do anything to hide that in any way that they can. So through our emergency relief program that is perhaps a front door to some of these issues being exposed. We have another program where we work intensively with people that continually come so that we can identify or help them identify and address their issues and link them into those services. But we could be working with a client - and it is not unusual - for two years for that to happen.

CHAIR - I noticed in the data that you collected from that program that you revealed that 16 out of 42 clients are accessing your services as a direct impact of financial difficulties caused by gambling. Would you consider that figure, which I consider rather high, is fairly the norm out there, that there is a high number of people accessing services or need for services, not only in your own services but in other services because of gambling problems?

Ms McINTYRE - All of the emergency relief services in Tasmania are stretched to capacity and not coping at all.

CHAIR - Then you went on the say gambling machine addiction accounts for 80 per cent of those people with gambling addictions?

Major BEGENT - It is accessible and it is easy to get to. It is also the hub of most communities.

CHAIR - So what can we do about it? It is a big question.

Mr PARCELL - I think that a physical thing that we can do is to even up the sounds on the gambling machine to make it less attractive, to develop a fair playing field for the player. I mean, sure the odds are something which you cannot control or you can control but I do not think that -

Major BEGENT - We cannot.

Mr PARCELL - Yes, I do not think that is such an issue. I think what is an issue is to make - it is like a cigarette packet with a warning on it, you know, that takes up one-third of the packet or whatever. Well, deterring in that sense -

CHAIR - Putting some harm minimisation strategies in place, that is what you are suggesting?

Mr PARCELL - Yes.

Major BEGENT - I also think before we have an increase in gaming machines there needs to be some fairly significant studies done around whether there is a need for an increase

in gaming machines or not. I think the limit of the amount of places that actually have gaming machines needs to be considered so that there is limited access, perhaps; maybe that it costs you to get into the gaming room before you even lose your money, I don't know.

Mr PARCELL - Your profit versus loss, where the profit is gained and where the loss is felt, always showing the flip-side.

Ms McINTYRE - Because we work a lot with families, one of the concerns that we have is the play areas now that are being built into a lot of the venues.

CHAIR - Around the various venues?

Ms McINTYRE - Yes. So you can take children and leave them in a play area while you go and gamble.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Can you leave the children in those play areas or are those play areas just part of the social entertainment area? Like, to leave children with no responsible person in place, surely there is a duty of care on the parent and the owner of the venue.

Major BEGENT - Because there is limited research only into gambling, I do not think those things have even started to enter into the actual knowledge around the impact of gambling, and those have just sprung up as a way of putting the families into the environment. And perhaps for hotel owners it has not necessarily been about bringing them into gamble on the pokies, but about bringing families into the venue.

Ms McINTYRE - Maybe it just says something else about that being the hub of community for many people, and they are taking advantage of that.

CHAIR - In your paper that you had sent to us, there was also a comment about how the machines in your opinion are adversely affecting the financial input in the local community. I just wondered if you have any data that gives us an idea of what the impact is on the local community. It is on page 4 of your original submission addressing term of reference number 1. It says:

'The gaming industry continues to grow beyond a reasonable percentage, whilst small business continue to report that gaming machines are adversely affecting the financial input into their local community.'

I just wonder where that information would have come from with your service.

Ms McINTYRE - I guess with our connections to other services, and particularly TasCOSS and those sorts of places, we are getting that feedback from the community.

Mr PARCELL - Again, due to our lack of ability to do proper research in this area, it is very hard for us to follow these things up. We would love to, because they would support us incredibly in going for submissions and things like that, but like many other services in our area we just do not have the ability to do that.

CHAIR - The manpower or the dollar power.

Mr PARCELL - So a lot of this information that we talk about is through newspapers and other services.

Major BEGENT - With TasCOSS and Anglicare and the peak bodies who do have a research facility and capability.

CHAIR - In looking at the notes I have made, you have covered most of them. You have a concern under term of reference 4 that the full amount allocated to the community service levy was not always spent. From the community service levy do you receive funding?

Ms McINTYRE - No. The budget coach program was the only program that we have received funding for. There seems to be a reticence to fund services that are directly related to gambling problems. That is how it seems to us to have been, and I guess that is a concern that we have had.

Mrs SUE SMITH - But surely that was the original intention of the legislation when that money was put in there, that it was for research, for education and for support. Do you believe there is any link in that statement and the fact that the community service levy sits within the Department of Health rather than by some external body who you would make application to?

Major BEGENT - Yes, most definitely.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Have you made application yearly?

Ms McINTYRE - Yes.

Mrs SUE SMITH - I see pain in your face.

Ms McINTYRE - We've found that to be quite frustrating, I think.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Do you study where the money goes each fortnight to other organisations? Do you see no consistency in that except for Break Even services who are funded each year who presumably are recognised as the provider of the service on the ground?

Ms McINTYRE - Yes.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Other organisations you believe would have the same comment -

Ms McINTYRE - Absolutely.

Mrs SUE SMITH - There's no consistency so that -

Ms McINTYRE - For those people that don't access those services such as GABA we worked with GABA. We've had GABA come in to our services and run their program in our services so we have a strong link with them but we still see people that we need to

support to get to that side. I guess that's the nature of the people that the Salvation Army work with. Yes, we've found that really frustrating.

CHAIR - You've obviously got a few more points that you wish to make to us.

Major BEGENT - The other one is that independency. We would recommend, I guess, that there be an independent body rather than where it currently sits with Treasury.

CHAIR - You're talking about the commission?

Major BEGENT - Yes, purely for public accountability but also because Treasury are interested in amassing revenue and for whatever reason. I think in terms of public accountability and for the need for the commission to be taken seriously in terms of its response to gambling it needs to be independent of the Government and I would suggest particularly of Treasury.

CHAIR - Anyone else want to add to that? I did note your comments in here.

Mr FOSTER - We probably support it being independent from the welfare industry as well. That's also important.

Mrs SUE SMITH - Could you see it as the role of the commission to actually do some continual research study so that instead of when somebody feels we will have an inquiry or do a study we would have some consistency, say biannually, or some standard of research so that we can acknowledge when our processes are working and we see a decline in gaming problems perhaps and when our processes need to be up-ramped because there is an increase in them? Would you see it as a commission role or some other area?

Major BEGENT - No, I do see it as a commission role. Particularly if it's independent it would facilitate even more, I think, the kinds of issues that keep arising and welfare groups keep coming in and talking about with really nothing to substantiate it. I think that the Government's actually in danger of becoming addicted to the gambling revenue.

CHAIR - Like the addictive gambler?

Major BEGENT - Yes. It's there and we can use and we can spend it and if it sits in Treasury there is a chance - I'm not saying that Treasury would in any way be biased -

CHAIR - Compromised.

Major BEGENT - or compromised but I think that certainly in terms of public accountability and a transparent approach to those issues that independence is really important.

CHAIR - You allude to the membership of the commission being independent here but how would an independent group of people make up this commission if you're also saying no vested interest basically? You'd really need to have people with some sort of knowledge to head up and run the commission so what avenues - I guess is the question - it would be all very well to have somebody out of Treasury who knows about this and somebody out

of the Department of Health and Human Services and somebody from the services that are looking after these people, deciding a make-up has got to be a question in that instance.

Major BEGENT - Yes, and we appreciate the difficulty in doing that. I have to say I haven't put a lot of thought into the make-up of the commission. I don't know whether Stuart did. One could say ideally if it was drawn from each of the sections of the community that were affected you may get some degree of independence.

Mrs SUE SMITH - But surely then you could be accused of pecuniary interest in the same way.

Major BEGENT - Certainly and we would certainly be there, if the welfare sector was part of the commission then our brief would definitely be around the minimisation of the effect.

Mrs SUE SMITH - We had one organisation who gave us some information and they listed particular skills as in economists, psychiatrists, et cetera and so forth as a make-up to cover the raft from the economist aspect right through the social aspect but external to organisations. Would you see that as perhaps an option that could be considered?

Major BEGENT - Yes, I honestly have not really considered the make-up.

CHAIR - You comment quite a lot through the original paper about the collaborative approach between State and Commonwealth governments and of course at this stage we are only looking at the State issue. Why do you want that type of approach?

Major BEGENT - That is because we are a national organisation.

CHAIR - Okay, and you talk about a national data set and we have had evidence that this is going to happen but of course it needs to happen obviously at a State level as well.

Major BEGENT - Yes, it does, but our focus tends to be on the national and we do tend to work with the Federal and State governments. I think it is important anyway in terms of that national caption that there is collaboration, particularly in the areas of health and wellbeing, with their Federal responsibilities in some respects as well as State responsibilities. There needs to be some kind of streamlined approach to the way it is dealt with and the way it is performed.

Mrs SUE SMITH - As a national organisation, which you acknowledge you are, you would have access to what is happening through the Salvation Army in other areas of Australia. Are we better or worse off in the situation of problem gambling, in your opinion, than other States?

Mr FOSTER - I guess the highest contact that we would have would be Victoria and, as I understand it, their problems would be no better or no worse than ours. But it is still of significant importance and a problems, I guess, as far as they are concerned.

Major BEGENT - In Victoria they have a designated service specifically for problem gambling.

CHAIR - The Salvation Army does?

Major BEGENT - Yes, and that is funded through the State Government out of the Gaming Commission money in that State but that does not occur in this State and does not occur in any other State.

CHAIR - How long has that dedicated service been in place?

Major BEGENT - About five years, I think. It came as a result of pretty much the same thing that is going on here in Tasmania now. There was some research done on the impact of gaming machines because they commenced them much earlier than we did and they were seeing exactly what we are seeing now, an increase in people accessing services with underlying gambling problems and coming from a wide range of social strata and that is where the money came from in the end to fund that particular service. It is not a service that stands alone; it is part of a wider service.

CHAIR - Yes, it might be interesting to be able to procure some data from that specific part of your services in Victoria to see if there has been a trend. I mean, we can be proactive by getting on it earlier and perhaps would be of significant assistance to us.

Major BEGENT - We could certainly do that for you.

CHAIR - Thank you, I appreciate that. The other thing - you just mentioned it again - in my note I have three pages here where it is a continued mention. I know we briefly touched on the issue but I just wonder if you would like to give us a better outline about the need for research. In every paragraph almost here, is the results of research, we recommend research, we need to know the outcomes. What sort of research? Just give me a broad picture from your point of view, the type of research you believe we need to initiate here if we can encourage people to initiate it.

Mr FOSTER - Certainly I think the research that we would be keen to see is I guess the behavioural aspects of the problem gambler and how they actually come to be a problem gambler. A second thing that we would really recommend is the actual impact upon our Tasmanian communities, both the economic and the social impacts for families, business and individuals as well. Those are the two areas that I can think of.

Ms McINTYRE - And the impact on services, definitely, because that -

CHAIR - Services such as your own?

Ms McINTYRE - Yes.

Major BEGENT - I think it would be interesting to know whether the onset and increase has actually contributed to it. We are saying it has -

CHAIR - The onset and increase of the electronic gaming machines?

Major BEGENT - Yes. We are saying it has, but in terms of quantitative and qualitative data we really cannot put handles on it, and so that would be really valuable. How we would go about doing that I am not certain.

CHAIR - There have been a couple of earlier studies. I think there was one in 1994 and then the recent one that would give us some of that baseline information.

Major BEGENT - And I think one of the other things is when it becomes problem gambling. Some of the things that may come out of research are those indicators that will assist services to recognise it before it becomes problem gambling, particularly for those with whom we work who are the most marginal, as they access our services sometimes prior to gambling becoming a problem, and if we are able to track those indicators then we may be able to intervene.

Mr FOSTER - And I guess it is the point at which you can identify those behavioural changes, and who actually identifies it. I guess within the pokie centres themselves, are the staff well educated enough to know when someone crosses that line from the social gambler to a problem gambler. Educating the families so that they are able to actually identify it, because it is not something that you can put your finger on very easily.

CHAIR - You cannot visually see it. Putting the finger on it is probably not a good analogy there in this instance.

Major BEGENT - One of the things that Bill raised is that it is so hidden. Those who do the research are going to have to be very slick, because it is such a -

CHAIR - People hide it.

Major BEGENT - Yes, they do. They really hide it and, as Bill said, it is much more socially acceptable today to say you are a heroin addict than to say you are a gambler, which is horrid.

Mr PARCELL - That is true.

Major BEGENT - It is a dreadful analogy. But it is getting into those families and, whilst we work with the most marginalised, I think it is the middle-class families, if I can use that term, that are most at risk of losing everything, because they are able to present a veneer of coping, of being all right and things are going fine, and it is not until it is almost too late, or in some instances it is too late, that that arises. And so the research in order to pick that up, I do not know how we do that, because it is -

CHAIR - That would be up to the terms of reference.

Mr PARCELL - It is a lot easier to get research from those who are profiting or at the positive end of the research than it is from those who are losing or at the negative end of research. I truly believe, but I have no figures to prove this, that the problem is a lot greater than I have seen. I back it up again with the fact that this is new, it is pop culture and it is only trendy to be a winner, it is not trendy to be a loser, and there is the shame and the denial and all that which goes with it, so there are a lot of figures there that you just will not get through research, but it has to be somehow shown somewhere.

CHAIR - It took a long time for that changeover from the pop culture idea of being a smoker to finding out that -

Mr PARCELL - And it is only now that the drug situation is more open and people can talk about it.

Major BEGENT - And even now young girls smoking is still considered to be trendy.

Mrs SUE SMITH - It is an interesting scenario you make about your feeling that there is a middle-class culture which is hidden, because my experience, without getting into detail on this committee, is it is the middle-class culture who are coming out and expressing their experiences with the gaming machines themselves privately and individually, maybe because they have had physical assets that they have lost against those who you are seeing who are either, say, looking to yourselves an organisation such as yours, to represent their needs to this committee.

Ms McINTYRE - Yes, we're able to articulate their situation where the people that we work with are not able to do that.

Mr PARCELL - It's usually when people actually lose, correct me if I'm wrong I don't know the information that has been brought before you, but in my experience it's usually when people have lost everything that they start talking to you. A middle class family may go a certain distance before they do lose everything, whereas a class at the other end of the economic scale doesn't have a lot to lose. So therefore there could be a lot of people who aren't presenting themselves in that area still with a great loss but not having to come to a service such as ours.

CHAIR - Perhaps just one last question before you round up here.

Mr SQUIBB - I've got one too.

CHAIR - Sorry, would you like to - it might be similar.

Mr SQUIBB - Mine is just in relation to term of reference 4 and your comments in the submission where you refer to the charitable organisations receiving less than 25 per cent of the levy and overspending in sport and recreation. I don't have my notes with me but my recollection is that only occurred in one financial year or have you got information that indicates it's more prevalent than that?

Ms McINTYRE - We're on the board of TasCOSS and places like that that have that information.

CHAIR - We can extrapolate that. That is in their information.

Major BEGENT - We've actually said figures published in the annual report but not the year of that annual report.

Mr SQUIBB - I think there is a particular year, from my recollection, when that happened. I just wanted to see if it was an isolated one or whether you feel that it is a regular occurrence.

Major BEGENT - I would suggest that it's a regular occurrence but I certainly couldn't tell you that definitely.

Mr SQUIBB - And you also make comment about the disbandment of the Community Development Board. Would you like to elaborate further on that?

Major BEGENT - It's what we've said there, that it would assist in the transparency to the system I think. The disbandment of the board meant that there wasn't a lot of - I keep using the word transparency - it was difficult to see why the decisions were made in that regard. There was no real accountability about where the money went or what it went for and why they were much more deserving than someone else was.

Mr SQUIBB - So the move to disband the Community Development Board, did that come from within Treasury?

Major BEGENT - Yes, I think that was the Treasurer's decision. Yes. We're fairly certain that's the case.

CHAIR - I haven't got that page open. Are you looking to the possibility of a reinstatement of that?

Major BEGENT - We've actually said that, I think.

CHAIR - All right, okay. I hope to just flip back again because I lost my place when I did it before.

Laughter.

Major BEGENT - I keep saying 'transparency' but I don't think you can too transparent when you're delivering moneys that have come about from community revenue.

CHAIR - Yes, fair enough.

Just briefly, we've talked about the community education public awareness programs that need to be put in place and we all agree that something has to be done in this area but one particular comment you made here caught my attention. You indicated that strategies needed to be specifically targeted to culturally and linguistically diverse groups. I wonder why that particular comment was made. We don't have huge culturally and linguistically diverse groups. I know we do nationally, I can understand it nationally, but I presumed this comment was meant for Tasmania.

Major BEGENT - It was because it was written to the Tasmanian committee. At the risk of saying that's a politically correct comment, it basically is, and I think that whatever we present to the committee, even if we don't have huge populations who are culturally and linguistically diverse we still need to keep in mind that that's something we will deal with in the future. There has been quite an increase in people from the Horn of Africa who

find themselves using those machines. We have had some incidents in our services but not great, but it is there and I think we need to be aware, and the commission certainly does need to be aware.

CHAIR - And we need to be mindful of it.

Major BEGENT - And mindful of it.

CHAIR - And not act later, but act now.

Major BEGENT - And act now, so that it is part of what we begin to do rather than something we might pick up on the way.

CHAIR - I just wanted to clarify that, because I thought that was where you were coming from and I just wanted to check on that. I do not have any more questions. Is there anything you would like to say in round-up or in conclusion?

Mr FOSTER - I think you have picked up on our main point in speaking about research, that again we are looking at the individuals and we are seeing, I guess, the symptoms without really understanding too much about how those symptoms have come about, and I guess that is why you have noticed through our submission we really have focused on research and getting an understanding of it in the Tasmanian context.

The other important thing that we need to say is that again it is not any particular demographic. I noticed in the discussion with your last group that came out as well, but there is no particular - we are not seeing single mums or retired ladies. It is across the spectrum.

The other main point we would like to get across is the independence of the commission, which we have discussed. So those are our three main concerns.

CHAIR - We managed to pick up on all those quite well, didn't we. Thank you very much for coming before us and giving us that information, and the extra information about that service in Victoria. If you can gather any information it would be beneficial to us. Thanks very much.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW: