

State's problem gambling program introduces electronic messaging

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

For growing numbers of people, picking up the telephone is so yesterday.

Responding to that fact, the state's Problem Gambling Services program has introduced e-mail, instant messaging and live chat to its popular telephone helpline.

"We see this as a way to reach people who aren't comfortable seeking help by phone, and we expect it to be especially popular with younger, Internet-savvy people who don't often come into treatment for gambling issues," said Bob Nikkel, Oregon Department of Human Services assistant director for addictions and mental health. "This is an excellent addition to a problem gambling program already recognized as among the nation's best."

Oregon is one of a handful of jurisdictions worldwide that can invite people to communicate electronically with treatment counselors, Nikkel said.

Like people who call the toll-free phone line, those who contact the program electronically will communicate with qualified counselors trained in helping people with gambling addictions. People may send e-mail and instant messages or call the helpline at any time or, for live chat with a counselor, may call weekdays from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

As with calling the helpline, using electronic communication is confidential. Encrypted software protects personal information that is shared electronically.

To connect, people may go to the Web site www.1877mylimit.org. From there, they may send an e-mail message or click on an icon to initiate live chat. People also may send an instant message using AOL, ICQ, Google, MSN or Yahoo services.

Services are available in both English and Spanish.

Nikkel said the program expects inquiries such as what level of gambling constitutes a problem, where and when local Gamblers Anonymous meetings are held, what happens in treatment, and how and where to enroll.

The state's problem-gambling program, operated by DHS as part of its addiction prevention and treatment services, is paid for by 1 percent of Oregon Lottery revenues. Problem-gambling treatment is free, confidential and has been shown to be effective.

For traditionalists who still prefer to use the 24-hour telephone helpline, the toll-free phone number is 1-877-695-4648 (MY LIMIT). More than 4,000 people call the helpline annually.

State's problem gambling program introduces electronic messaging by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources