

Know The Score aims to halt gambling addictions

Political Studies professor, Peter McKenna says the government needs to do more

Know The Score, an interactive problem gambling awareness program, visited UPEI in October in an effort to inform the student body of gambling addictions.

Kathleen Baldwin is the bilingual project coordinator for Responsible Gambling Council. She was part of the education located in the Student Centre. "We're just trying to provide the students with some information about the risks associated with gambling so that they are able to make more informed decisions," she said.

Specifically, there is no statistical information available to show how prevalent the problem is within the school, but the numbers for problem gambling in P.E.I. are significant, with 44 per cent of Islanders having an addiction to gambling, some of which started when they were as young as 15, she said.

"They're going to have other situations that they're faced with and gambling is just another one."

There are many factors that play into the problem, like

the appeal of gambling in movies and television.

"Obviously, online poker, the accessibility to it is another factor. And the glamorization of it, again with celebrity poker and things of that nature," she said.

Know The Score informs the public on a topic that

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needs to have some light shed on it, she said.

"I think it's important for everyone to be aware and that's why

we come to universities and college campuses in hopes that we'll reach students and faculty alike."

Baldwin said she would be unable to remark on why the government has not implemented significant means of deterring problem gambling, but it is good to have the government support programs such as this.

"All I know is that they recognize the importance and

they're in support of a program like Know The Score."

Political Studies professor Peter McKenna has long been an opponent of video lottery terminals (VLTs) on Prince Edward Island. The outspoken professor held nothing back when speaking of the issue he says is breaking up families, and killing people.

"They have no expertise," he said on why the government has yet to fight the problem of VLT addiction. "These individuals (Know The Score), while well intentioned and decent, though they are, have no experience in the gambling field, and I've been studying gambling for 15 years."

McKenna said the government has not spent adequate funds on the prevention of VLT addiction.

"The reason governments don't spend much money on it is because they're not concerned about it. And that's a tough statement to make, but when you look at the actual revenues that are earmarked for problem gambling and counseling and research and kinds of steps that have been put into place to try to deter people from gambling, it's one per cent of the overall gambling revenues."

McKenna described the government as being "addicted to gambling revenues," and are attempting to minimize the issue and "look the other way" because of the profits they reap from those

addicted to gambling.

"The best customers are those who are VLT addicts. So how can you say on the one hand that you're concerned about responsible gambling when you know that those putting the most money in the machines, the people that you want sitting in those chairs, have a gambling problem, because those are your best customers."

He said the fact the government is in control of this problem, as they are the benefactors, is part of the problem.

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Even if the profits the province earns because of VLTs is significant, McKenna says we should examine the effects of the problem such as family breakups, depression, suicides and personal bankruptcy.

"It's profiting from the people that put them in power. It's breaking the golden rule of doing no harm, of trying to advance the public interest instead of undermining it."

The question McKenna

had is how the government would respond to those who may have lost a loved one to a gambling addiction.

"What would they say to these people? What would they say to the families who lost a loved one who's committed a suicide because of a VLT addiction," he said. "It's basically a tax on the poor

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and a tax on the foolish. You're knowingly picking the people's pockets, inflicting pain and suffering on them, and then looking the other way."

While the province does make

profits off VLTs, the machines also cause the province money because of suicides and medication, McKenna said, noting there is no indication of whether, because of this, VLTs actually earn the province money.

"We don't know because provincial governments don't want to know. And they haven't conducted a systematic and comprehensive study of the social implications of gambling."

To stop the problem, we need to stop the source, McKenna said.

"There's a very simple solution to that: unplug the machines. That's the solution."