



Ai Nguyen

Gambling Counsellor

Confidential

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To whom it may concern,

My name is Ai Nguyen and I am the Gambling Counsellor at the Australian Vietnamese Women Association Inc. which provides counselling to Vietnamese clients who experience gambling harm. I am writing on behalf of our Gambling Counselling Program, to provide insights and experience my colleague and I have heard from our clients.

We work with clients who self-excluded themselves from Crown Casino and wish to revoke their self-exclusion, people who are on parole and are required to attend counselling. We also work with people who are on bail and waiting for court hearings.

Most of our clients developed problem gambling from playing at Crown Casino. When asked why they didn't play at the local pubs, they said Crown was more fun and the environment was more inviting. Also, it is because Crown is open 24/7 and has more machines available so they don't need to wait to play. Moreover, there are restaurants and luxury brand stores at Crown so they can dine and shop there. Furthermore, there is a Rewards system where patrons are rewarded points for spending money, which they can then spend on anything at Crown. The higher the tier, the more benefits patrons receive, which incite them to spend more money. And the quickest way to move up the tier is by playing at the Casino.

From what we have heard from clients, they all started gambling as a recreational activity. But the thrill they get from the win, the anticipation drives them to go back to the Casino. Others may find comfort in going to the Casino, relying on gambling as a way to escape from their sorrows and unresolved emotional conflicts. Most of our clients face language barriers, and gambling doesn't require much English proficiency. There is also a big presence of the Asian community at Crown, so some of the clients find it easy to navigate around and make friends.

Our clients describe Crown as a lively place with colourful lights and decorations. For big Asian celebrations such as Lunar New Years, Crown always has great decorations which attract a lot of Asian community. When they are there, they lose track of time very easily because there are no clocks in sight and very limited exposure to natural lighting.

From what I have heard from friends who work at Crown, Crown staff only approach patrons when they play over 12 hours continuously to check up on them, but if they play for over 16 or 18 hours continuously, the patron will be asked to leave. I think they should change the policy and intervene earlier since 12 hours is a long time to be playing. In fact, a few of my clients told me that sometimes they don't even intervene/ ask you to leave, but just ask if you are doing okay. I was also told one of the reasons why they keep going back to the Casino is because of the customer service. They say they were treated very nicely, and some staff can speak their language as well. Apparently, the vast majority of the VIP rooms staff can speak another language besides English (Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese). If they obtain the Gold card or higher, they can enter VIP gaming rooms and other special perks. One of my clients said one time, the manager offered him the card to let him go to the VIP room so he could get free drinks. After experiencing the VIP room, he started placing bigger bets to achieve the higher tier to get the Gold card.

Another client had told me she is certain that the Crown is aware of the illegal activities happening on the premises but they just turn a blind eye. Loan sharks are a pressing issue and according to many of my clients, they are at the Casino targeting the vulnerable. The loan sharks know who the regular players are and offer to loan them money with a very high-interest rate. The loan sharks either give the money to the borrowers inside the Casino in form of chips, or cash/chips outside. All our clients who are on parole, or released from prison informed us that the reason they committed criminal offences was to pay off their debt. Loan sharks harass the ones who can't pay up and either suggest or push people to commit crimes to get the money. From shoplifting to cannabis cultivation and drug trafficking. Our clients expressed a sense of hopelessness and feeling like they had no other choice. If they didn't do what the loan sharks told them to do, they or their family would get hurt.

One client told me that people are selling and buying illicit substances inside the Casino. There was an incident where someone collapsed on the gambling table but Crown covered it up and said that the patron had a stroke. The client believed that the patron actually experienced an overdose, not a stroke as stated by Crown.

We do believe Crown should fulfil its duty of care to the community and follow the ethical and legal obligations. Crown as the business is putting their revenues first, and putting the community at risk. Gambling harm should be seen as a public health issue and Crown must do its part in preventing gambling harm.