

## CROWN ROYAL COMMISSION SUBMISSION

From Confidential

My gambling started at a very young age, playing cards and mahjong with cousins and family friends and gradually escalated, from cents to dollars, to hundreds and then thousands of dollars of any form of gambling that was available.

I was gambling all my pay cheque every week and then borrowing and stealing off family and friends to feed my habit. My gambling got so bad I was taking out credit cards and gambling them within a day, stealing money from my parent's credit cards and dealing drugs. This led to long-term housing instability, moving from place to place and even sleeping on the streets. My mental health was seriously impacted which caused suicidal thoughts and an attempted suicide.

Over the last 10 years I have been in recovery for gambling and as a part of this I currently work on many projects within the gambling harm space which include;

- Three sides of the coin – Sharing my story using theatre and video

<https://vimeo.com/465692235/2bf8c3254d>

<https://www.linkhc.org.au/three-sides-of-the-coin/>

- Chinese Peer connection – Volunteer telephone support worker and advisor

<https://www.each.com.au/service/chinese-peer-connection/>

- Young Leaders of the west – Volunteer campaign leader

<https://www.ipchealth.com.au/ylotw/>

- Lived experience advisory committee – Lived experience committee member

<https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/lived-experience-advisory-committee/>

- Respin – Lived experience Speaker

<https://bchs.org.au/services/gambling-support/respin/>

- Brimbank Reducing gambling harm steering committee – Lived experience advisor
- Alliance for Gambling reform – Volunteer lived experience advocate

Gambling harm has impacted my life severely from an early age and I have watched the transformation of not just myself but my whole family. Gambling is a popular activity amongst the Chinese culture and is displayed as part of social interaction, in my early years of life I noticed this as many of the Chinese community in Melbourne would come together and play cards and mahjong, have dinner and enjoy each other's company, though some would gamble more than they could afford and spend more time than they should. This occurred in my own family, my parents were working hard and then spending more time than usual gambling, the harm of this was not spending enough time attending to myself and brother. My recollections of this were: having no one attend my sporting events, parent teacher interview nights and spending many nights alone at home unsupervised. These were the harms of gambling that are often overlooked, not the financial aspect, it was the time lost with loved ones.

In June 1994 the temporary Crown casino was opened and remembering it was the talk of the town, I was a teenager by this stage, I noticed that the constant weekly get together with the Chinese community had become scarcer and they were now going to the casino to meet and gamble. I personally recall the car park which was situated behind Spencer Street Station, there were a few times I was left there to wait whilst my parents were inside the casino. Most of those times it was brief, though a some of the times they were quite a substantial amount of time. I used to watch my parents walk through the over pass bridge that connected the car park to the casino, I do remember one time being curious and taking that path myself, only to find myself stopped at the entrance by security. Though the curiosity of this fabulous world behind the curtains intrigued me.

A few years went past and in May 1997 the new Crown casino complex had opened and by this time a high majority of the Chinese community that used to get together for lunch/dinner and the odd card/mahjong game in Chinatown was all but extinct. Crown casino was the place where you could find almost everyone within that community. The major affect this had on people within the Chinese community were:

- Loss of money and businesses, my father had gone on a bender and lost all the money of the business that he had just established
- Broken family and relationships, the relationships within our family was on tender hooks
- In the space of a few years a tight knit community had become broken by the opening of Crown casino

My first visit to the casino started by obtaining a fake keypass, this granted me entry into the casino, I do remember the first time I stepped foot into the casino, the bright lights, sounds of cards flickering, balls of the roulette wheel spinning and people cheering as a big wheel turned. It was carnival like atmosphere. I noticed the amounts of chips people had in front of them and thought WOW, that's what I want, all those chips and to be as happy as that person, this was my first taste of the casino.

By the time I was a legal age to enter the casino, my parents took me there for a visit and show me what it was like, not knowing that a year or so ago I had entered and seen it for myself. It was like a tradition, a ritual, when you are the legal age to gamble let's do gamble to celebrate. My mother talked me through what happens, how the games worked how you make a bet, it was like an initiation period for you to be an adult. She showed me how to become a Crown member, it was a very easy sign-up process, and it started with rewards straight away, free parking on your next visit and a pokie and table game voucher for you to gamble. That's nice I thought, already rewarded without even doing anything.

My mother had a card that we could have access to a VIP room, called the TEAK room. There was free food and drinks, it was a room for the elite or high stakes gamblers, as I remembered the minimum bet per hand was \$50, which equated to a day's work for me at the time. She then worked her way through the members grades and gaining access to the mahogany card, which is one of the higher statuses in the casino and there was a whole list of things that she received; Hotel rooms every 6 months, invitation to Football games (VIP box at Etihad Stadium), concert tickets, valet parking, movie tickets, sporting tickets, invitation to dinners – Chinese New Year – red envelopes, Coles Myer vouchers. My mother was also assigned a host that could speak Chinese so that there was regular communication and made her feel comfortable and cared for. She also had friends that were also part of the loyalty program that would introduce her to community bus programs, where she could get \$5 buffet, play bingo in the palladium, so that she would feel like she was part of the Crown community. I did have a loyalty card, though refrained from using it too much as I was avoiding from people knowing my whereabouts

I would say for the first 6 months of my adulthood, I frequented the casino on a weekly basis and then it became a more regular occurrence, 4-5 times a week through my late teens and early 20's. I was there at all different times of day, sometimes to avoid my parents and sometimes in between work shifts. There were times I would stay between 2-3 days at Crown without ever being approached by staff, dealers would recognise me, as they were changing shifts from day to day, I would be walking around in a daze, barely being able to open my eyes, though no one ever noticed the length of time I had been there. The only intervention I do remember was when I was asleep in a lounge and the security would tap me on the shoulder and ask me to open my eyes. My grandmother, a lady her in 80's was there quite frequently and would stay there for up to 36 hours without any intervention.

Other bad practices that I noticed at Crown casino were;

- Cages – Where you exchange chips for money, are hidden or not opened, so that people cannot exchange their chips for money
- Opening specific sections during different hours – forcing minimum bets to higher amount during graveyard shift hours so that gamblers gamble more
- Free play chips – must turnover once to receive casino chips in return, an enticement to continue to gamble
- Block off exits so you have to walk through the maze of machine and tables (cleaning, this section is closed) to make you stay longer
- VIP area - Serving of alcohol to high stakes gamblers, there is no limit
- Change \$500 and get free parking – enticing patrons to gamble
- Daily dine – get pokies points and get a free meal – enticing to gamble more, so at least you have a meal
- Points that you can turn into casino cash – the more you gamble, the more rewards points you have

I look forward to speaking to you about my submission in the near future.

Regards

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