

NETWORKING IN A GAMBLING GROWING CONTEST: THE EXPERIENCE OF A PUBLIC SERVICE ON A LOW COST SCALE.

The experience of the Social Service Agency for Drug Addiction (SerT via Albenga- ASL Milan – Italy)

The interest of Milan SerTs in new addictions starts in 1999, thanks to a research group of ASL specialists that used to work on the rating incidence of gambling, internet, shopping and mobile phone addiction in the general case survey. Gambling surfaces as a problem more and more common in the Medical Services, going with substance addiction and as an issue itself, too.

Actually, until 2003 there hasn't been a real solution to these problems, but only a researching work with the structures on the territory (public and private systems, voluntary) in order to draw a map of the existent resources (absolutely low and weak) and researching project that want to better understand the phenomena (about slot machine for example, becoming more and more important at that period).

This work, getting along with a strengthened experience in the addiction field, established the magic and winning formula to gamble...with no budget: the highest employment of the resources already existent in other fields and a close net working.

It's only when the Laducer's convention (Varese 2003, organised by ASL- Local Sanitary Agency) takes place that our Service obtains a legitimation to give clinic answers to gamblers. More professional subjects have a role in the "game" beyond the psychologist: this leads to the birth of a small staff that wants to face the problem.

To provide an appropriate solution to the changing of the patients' typology that used to come to the Service, it was necessary, as in any changing process, to match three elements: a strong motivation, some inner resources (operators with interest and pretty good professional competence), and everything was ok at this step! and some specific outer resources (experimental projects for training and supervising the particular cases; some more staff, considering the uncertain situation of the Service). This was the point!

We had to create some extra resources that, as often happens amongst people involved in a helping and caring relationship, come from the abilities of making friendly and pleasant bonds, in which the operators had the chance to compare and share ideas.

The experience in the small group of psychotherapists led by Laduceur has been my opportunity to set closer links with the Varese staff and the Swiss one. As a consequence of this link, the clinic interview became the "no budget" instrument to face together new cases, first in Varese, the year after in

Mendrisio. It was the international moment of exchanging experiences of training and information, beyond clinic, plus the creation of new projects.

Beside this, our Service promoted net meeting with all voluntary and social private association in Milan that dealt with gambling and might work with our SerT.

Even more relevant was the involvement in the Lombard Regional Group, that made us aware more of our limits than the resources, but, at least, it reminded us our need of having an institutional representative!!!

AND association and the Swiss information net led by doctor Carlevaro has become essential references in comparing the work.

Last year our Service took care of 25 patients, providing sustaining treatments or psychotherapies, social and legal assistance, medical and pharmacological engagements (50 cases since 2005), thanks to the part-time activity of 2 psychologists, 2 social assistants and a doctor , beyond a psychiatric consultation coming from another centre.

Mainly, our work proceeds out of SerT, linked to ASL Services (Family Planning Clinics, Family Therapy Centres, Centres for Alcoholists), hospitals, Social Psychiatry, Social Private and Voluntary Services, both at a community residential level and at an educative one on the territory; for the sustaining in a residential home and the controlled financial administration, therapeutic groups for gamblers and their families, self help groups, etc...

We provide many telephonic consultation, we inform and address towards other resources, we listen individuals and families in order to give suggestions even when they are not ready to be engaged.

Getting in touch with the gambler's uneasiness drew new representations of a disease that is closer to our reality than what we imagine and it forced us in finding new solutions, both in the prevention field and in the therapeutic one, about all the addiction, also to the substances. It made us thinking about addiction as a emerging and cross-aging phenomena ,transversal to all social classes.

The number of cases met till here is quite small ,this depending on little advertising of what our Service could offer ; on the contrary the problem rises up more and more dramatically and makes us suspect about a hidden side still to notice. Our strength until here have been small, but the net multiplied our resources and let us provide the patients shared interventions. Beyond, this changing and touching experience made us grow on the professional side.

Unexpectedly, we received a "signal" of changing from the political authority of the services. Did the management understand and get the signals that the services in Milan sent?

Today we can finally bring real news from the institutional point of view, regarding investments in projects that deal with gambling connections engagements.

On June 15th the ASL of Milan general director reset the structure of the SertTs thanks to a law decree (154/2008).

The centre in via Albenga became the specific institute that works with abuse and addiction to cocaine, new drugs, tobacco and takes care of non substances dependence (compulsive shopping, internet, videogames, etc...); amongst all these addiction, gambling has a privileged attention.

A specialistic teamwork, finally composed of all the different professional operators, with adequate schedule and time, will provide sustain and psycho-education, individual sessions, family or group courses to gamblers and their family, following both the “motivational” approach and the psychotherapy, systemic or psychodynamic.

We are going to offer an educational tutoring on the economic administration to high compulsive gamblers with no family and a social and legal assistance to plan a liquidation of the debits, in collaboration with the net (anti-usury service-Caritas).

Beyond, we will provide interventions in association with residential or semi-residential structures, medical interventions on anxiety, stress, insomnia linked to craving and gambling abstinence: using both pharmacological traditional therapies and alternative medicine, such as autogenetic training and acupuncture for relax. We can also ask for psychiatric consultation on the base of the specific need.

Above all our aim is to further develop the NET that has sustained us so far, involving the associations existent on the territory to promote the population guardianship towards the massive sponsor action by the mass media that wants to incentive gambling. It pushes the button of economic doubtfulness, employment and retiring crisis, that are making new poorness and space for illusions (for example, we're going to start from new AAMS publishing “new net and the safe gamble”, where “safe” stands for “surely the incomings will go to the State”. In this way, thousands of people will end to get strangled by the net).

Our intention, with other agencies, is to sustain the hypothesis that the State monopolies give (as it happens in Switzerland with Casino and Lottery or abroad with alcohol and tobacco multinational industries) a percentage of their incomings to intervention to gamblers and their families' benefits, fixing a preventive strategy where playing is not going to become a tragedy.

We are thinking about daily open discussions and movie debates like AND association did successfully in Varese; we would like to create a web site where collecting our activities, the specialistic services net map in Lombardia and specifically in Milan. We would like to list our patients' stories that lead us to produce papers and videotapes, following their requests trough these years, to

be able to get them public and sharing as our contribution to prevention, care and therapy.

And finally we could play this match with some more winning card!!!