

Compulsive Gambling Annual Report

State Fiscal Year 2025



WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF

**HUMAN
SERVICES**

Bureau for Behavioral Health

The West Virginia Department of Human Services (DoHS) submits the enclosed report detailing the administration of the compulsive gambling treatment program funds. DoHS did not retain or utilize any portion of the funding for administrative costs or fees.

1-800-GAMBLER

WV'S PROBLEM GAMBLING HELP NETWORK

ANNUAL REPORT

State Fiscal Year 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In FY 2025, WVPGHN received 1,511 contacts from individuals seeking help with a gambling problem, a 27% increase from last year. This rise likely reflects both the growing accessibility of gambling, especially mobile betting, and expanded awareness of the helpline.

WVPGHN generated 110 news stories statewide and participated in more than 500 events alongside its parent company, First Choice Services (FCS). The partnership between WVPGHN and FCS, the organization that operates 1-800-GAMBLER, continues to create significant opportunities to reach West Virginians in need. FCS is the only West Virginia entity credentialed by the International Council on Helplines. With a team of more than 200 staff, FCS operates 15 helplines and programs and manages over 200,000 calls, texts, and chats each year. These programs assist West Virginians with mental health counseling, substance use disorder treatment, crisis and suicide-related support, social service navigation, Affordable Care Act enrollment, employment challenges, and additional needs. WVPGHN staff work closely with their colleagues across FCS programs, ensuring that callers experiencing gambling-related harm can quickly access the support, treatment, and resources they need. This collaboration creates a seamless, comprehensive system of care, no matter which helpline someone contacts.

WVPGHN continues to use technology to make help easy to reach. WVPGHN offers telehealth therapy, bet-blocking tools, financial counseling through GamFin, and the Recovery Connection app, which connects people to resources and support. Yet the most important part of the program remains the human connection. Every call, chat, and referral is answered by a real person who listens, understands, and helps guide the next step toward recovery.

Throughout this report, you will see quotes from individuals who reached out for help and found not just information, but compassion and hope from the real people who answer the 1-800-GAMBLER helpline.

MARICEL BERNARDO
PROGRAM DIRECTOR

“

Doug was a great person and understood he has called me several times to check in me and I have an appointment today with Virginia to get me help. Doug is a kind soul.

”

** Quotes taken from FY 2025 Helpline Satisfaction Survey*

RESOURCES GIVEN TO *HELPLINE VISITORS*

During FY 2025, the helpline received 4,206 total contacts, including 1,511 from individuals seeking help for a gambling addiction. This includes those seeking guidance for a loved one. This represents a significant increase from last year, when 1,191 people sought help for a gambling problem.

All help seekers experiencing a gambling problem or who are concerned about the gambling of a loved one are offered a free consultation with a WVPGHN network clinician. Network clinicians are professionally licensed and have a minimum of 35 hours of training in treating gambling addiction.

Network counselors completed 158 initial assessments; 110 clients continued into ongoing counseling, while 48 completed only the initial assessment. WVPGHN reimbursed a total of 663 counseling sessions during the year, including some sessions for individuals who began services in FY 2024.

WVPGHN operated three counselor-led support groups during FY 2025, serving 35 participants in Charleston, 17 in Morgantown, and 10 in Clarksburg. West Virginia also has three in-person Gamblers Anonymous groups not affiliated with WVPGHN. All callers are provided information on these meetings, as well as online and telephone Gamblers Anonymous options and inclusive addiction support groups such as Celebrate Recovery and SMART Recovery.

WVPGHN partners with the Virginia Council on Problem Gambling and the Virginia Partnership for Gaming & Health to host a bimonthly online Wellness Call for people who want to stop gambling or are in recovery. Led by Dr. Heather Chapman and WVPGHN staff, the call blends support and therapy group elements. This year, 27 participants took part in discussions on financial recovery, personal reflections, cross-addiction, relapse, and accountability.

“

Melissa was so great. She was respectful, informative, and kind. I truly appreciated the conversation and resources! Thank you!

”

RESOURCES GIVEN TO *HELPLINE VISITORS*

West Virginia does not have an inpatient facility for problem gambling. Several out-of-state treatment facilities exist, though cost can be a barrier. In FY 2025, 14 people requested referrals to these facilities.

GamFin

WVPGHN works with GamFin to give help seekers free financial support. Services include debt guidance, credit rebuilding, and creating a financial recovery plan.



Gamban

WVPGHN partners with Gamban to provide help seekers free access to software that blocks gambling sites from their computers or mobile devices. The platform also provides resources for those in recovery from gambling disorder. There were 21 activations in FY 2025.

Help seekers are offered many other free resources, including:

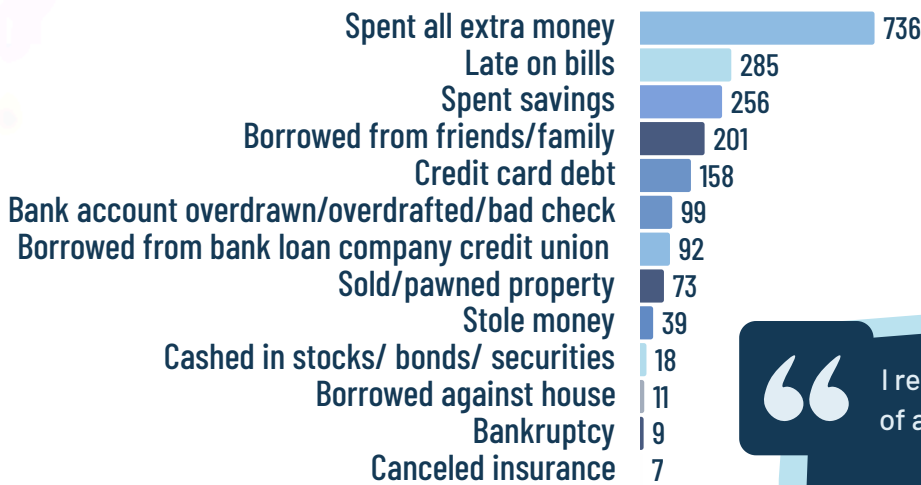
- Self-help workbooks
- Book/podcast recommendations
- Information on self-exclusion
- Credit counseling and debt relief referrals
- Retreatment Weekends
- Online forums and other helpful websites
- Referrals for psychiatric treatment or social service resources

“

Great work y'all!

”

Financial Problems Caused by Gambling

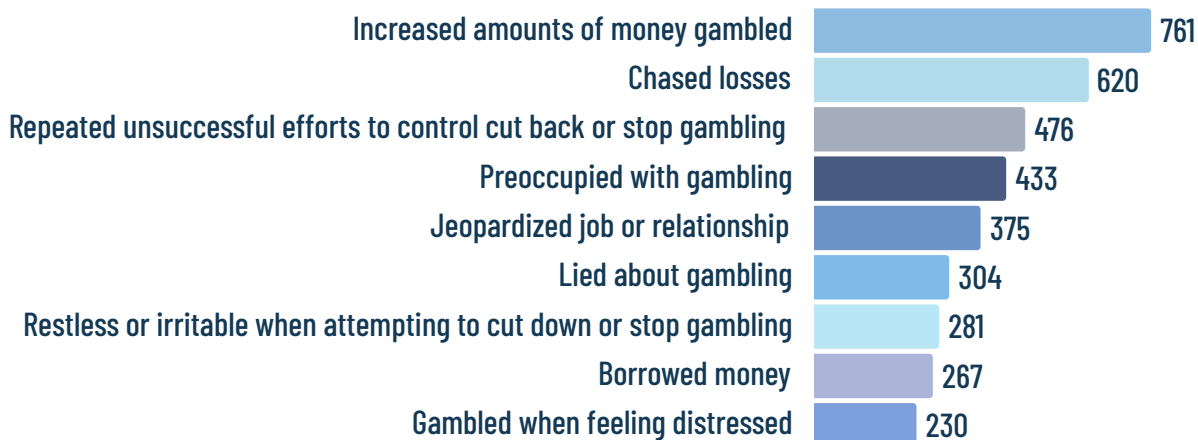


“

I reached out via the chat link on behalf of a family I work with. Kriston was very kind and helpful. She provided resources that I can share with the family and encourage them to reach out to be linked with services.

”

Symptoms of Gambling Disorder



Motivation for Call

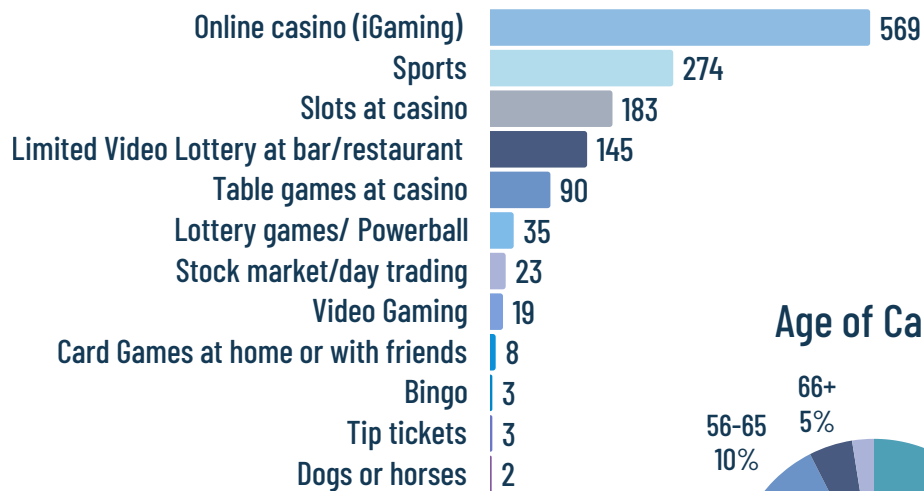


“

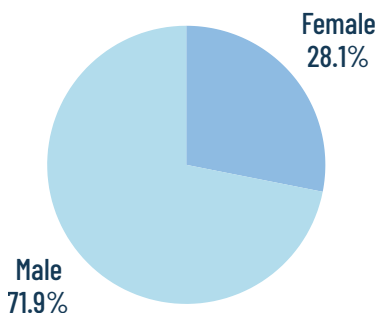
He was amazing. I'm so thankful I got a wonderful person to speak with. Did not judge me. I appreciate him so much! Thank you Cameron for this first step! God bless you!

”

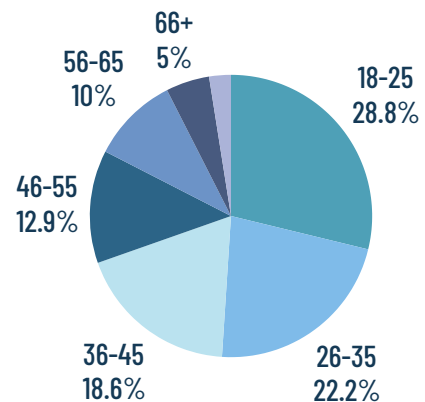
Primary Type of Gambling



Gender of Caller



Age of Caller



RETREATMENT WEEKEND

In FY 2025, WVPGHN held a Retreatment Weekend at Oglebay Park in Wheeling. There were 49 attendees. Staff members and counselors are pictured below.



The retreat opened with introductions and a keynote session, “Why Change,” led by Dr. Heather Chapman, setting the tone for reflection and personal growth in recovery. Throughout the weekend, participants engaged in a mix of educational and therapeutic sessions that supported insight, healing, and continued recovery:

- 12 Steps on the Path to Recovery – A guided exploration of the foundational principles of recovery, facilitated by Tim Underwood.
- The Wounded Gambler – A powerful session by Derrick Gibson examining the emotional and psychological wounds caused by gambling and the process of healing.
- Self-Care 101: Embracing Change Using Self-Care Techniques – Presented by Marsha Woods, this session offered strategies for managing change and maintaining balance through self-care.
- My Story... Path to Recovery – Personal testimonies from Sean Fournia and Merritt Moore, highlighting real-life recovery experiences and hope.
- The Process of Change – Dr. Heather Chapman returned to lead a session on understanding how behavioral change occurs and how to sustain it over time.
- ME! ME! ME! A Focus Shift for Healing and Recovery – Virginia Loew-Shelhammer facilitated this session, emphasizing self-awareness, personal responsibility, and empowerment in the recovery journey.
- Baby Steps are Big Steps – The closing presentation by Dr. Heather Chapman underscored the importance of small, consistent actions in achieving lasting recovery.

Each evening also included support group meetings for both Gamblers Anonymous (GA) participants and Loved Ones, offering peer connection and shared healing in a supportive environment.

OUTCOMES

Follow-up data for FY 2025 included all helpline intakes from July 2023 through June 2025. WVPGHN attempted more than 700 follow-ups, and 313 callers answered at least one. Of those, 178 had complete data for analysis; 135 had incomplete records but still received support. Of the 178 with data, 81 were reached once, 60 twice, and 37 three times.

Demographics

| | |
|------|--------|
| Male | Female |
| 59% | 41% |

Ages 36-45 were the largest group; callers 56+ were most likely to complete all follow-ups; callers 18-25 had the lowest retention.

Reduced or No Gambling by Follow-Up Period



Percent Improved

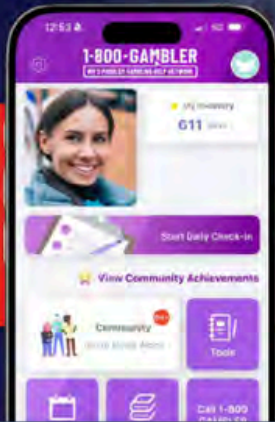
Most follow-up respondents were men between ages 36 and 65, who also showed the strongest engagement and improvement. While many callers could not be fully tracked, the available data shows meaningful, sustained progress in gambling behavior, financial stability, emotional health, and relationships among those who participated in the follow-up process.

37 callers completed all three follow-ups; 29 of them (78.4%) improved in four or more of six outcome areas. Across all callers with usable data (n=178), 90 (51%) improved in four or more areas, including gambling behavior, finances, emotional well-being, problem-solving, social activity, and family relationships.

Overall, 77-85% of respondents showed progress in at least one area.

“ Beth is an amazing woman who is beyond amazing at her job. She went above and beyond. I can't say enough to describe how wonderful she was when I needed advice. Thank you for doing everything you do. ”

MARKETING



Connect with others on the path to gambling recovery.

1-800-GAMBLER
WV'S PROBLEM GAMBLING HELP NETWORK



WVPGHN launched a digital ad campaign strategically targeting individuals interested in gambling. The campaign spanned streaming services, YouTube, and Facebook, tailoring content for those frequenting gambling websites, engaging with gambling-related content on Facebook, and visiting limited video lottery establishments.

WVPGHN used outdoor signage and screens in bars, restaurants, airports, entertainment venues, and more to promote the new Connections app.

In FY 2025, a statewide campaign featured billboards with this message that emphasized WVPGHN's partnership with GamBan.

Talk to someone who understands

1-800-GAMBLER

WV'S PROBLEM GAMBLING HELP NETWORK

Ask about our free bet-blocking app

Talk to someone who understands

1-800-GAMBLER
WV'S PROBLEM GAMBLING HELP NETWORK

WVPGHN aired commercials on network television, cable, and streaming services.

OUTREACH

Outreach activities included participation in more than 500 events statewide, including health fairs, community festivals, job and resource fairs, professional conferences, and educational presentations. Most efforts were coordinated by First Choice Services, with staff traveling across multiple counties to distribute materials, engage with community members, and build partnerships that support problem gambling awareness and prevention. Program-specific outreach also included targeted presentations, on-site engagement, and mass mailings to schools, professional counselors, recovery homes, and casinos.



“

She was amazing to talk to, she sent me resources, made sure I was doing ok mentally and made sure I knew that I am not alone and there are many resources to help with gambling addiction.

”

NATIONAL PROBLEM GAMBLING AWARENESS MONTH

As part of National Problem Gambling Awareness Month (NPGAM), 154 people took part in WVPGHN's public gambling screenings. Nearly one in three participants (29%) responded "yes" to at least one of the three screening questions, suggesting they may be experiencing gambling-related concerns.



Staff members Kriston Vanhorn, Beth Roach, Maricel Bernardo, and Nick Andrick stand with Charleston Mayor Amy Goodwin (center) to receive a proclamation for NPGAM.



Staff members Heather Downey-Payne, Maricel Bernardo, Kriston Van Horn, and Keith McHorney set up a table during NPGAM to share information with First Choice Services employees.

“

Whoever she was, she was very understanding, professional, and ensured that I fully understood everything before ending the call. I was hesitant to reach out for help but was glad I did after talking with her.

”

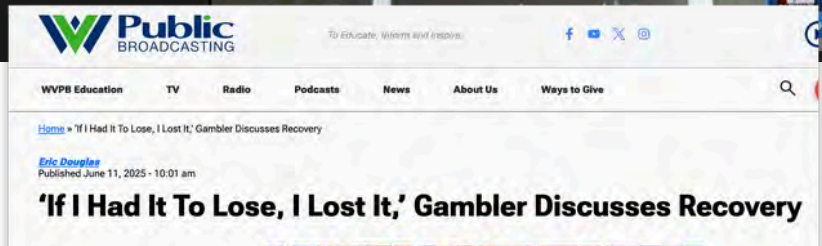
IN THE NEWS

In FY 2025, the program generated 110 news stories on problem gambling in West Virginia. There were an estimated 178,000 views of these articles, with an ad value equivalent of 2.87 million dollars.

SPORTS

How to stay safe while gambling during March Madness

by: Barbara Ron
 Posted: Mar 20, 2025 / 06:24 PM EDT
 Updated: Mar 20, 2025 / 06:24 PM EDT



A gambler plays a slot machine at the Hard Rock casino in Atlantic City, N.J., in 2021. AP Photo



Calls to the problem gambler hotline have increased with the rise of video poker and online gaming.

LATEST NEWS

Help on gambling is just a call away

June 18, 2025 4:48 pm by Cassidy Roark, The Dominion Post

KANAWHA COUNTY, WV

Summit in Charleston creates awareness for gambling addiction help

by: Jessica Patterson
 Posted: Apr 1, 2025 / 12:50 PM EDT
 Updated: Apr 1, 2025 / 12:50 PM EDT



“

Thank you so much.....for just listening and sending resources. As a parent, you will do whatever it takes.... Today was Day 1.... one day at a time.

”

WEBSITE

The website 1800GAMBLER.net serves as a central gateway for individuals seeking problem gambling treatment resources. This year, the site recorded 191,000 unique visitors, a 73% increase from the 110,000 visitors the previous year.

Visitors had 24/7 access to online chat support and explored a wide range of resources, including:

- Local treatment options in their area
- Opportunities to enroll in training programs
- Information on the symptoms of problem gambling
- Guidance on safer gambling practices
- Tools to dispel common gambling myths

Through these services, 1800GAMBLER.net continued to expand its reach and provide accessible, confidential help to individuals, families, and communities impacted by problem gambling. Visitors to the website were offered a free interactive quiz to assess their risk of problem gambling.

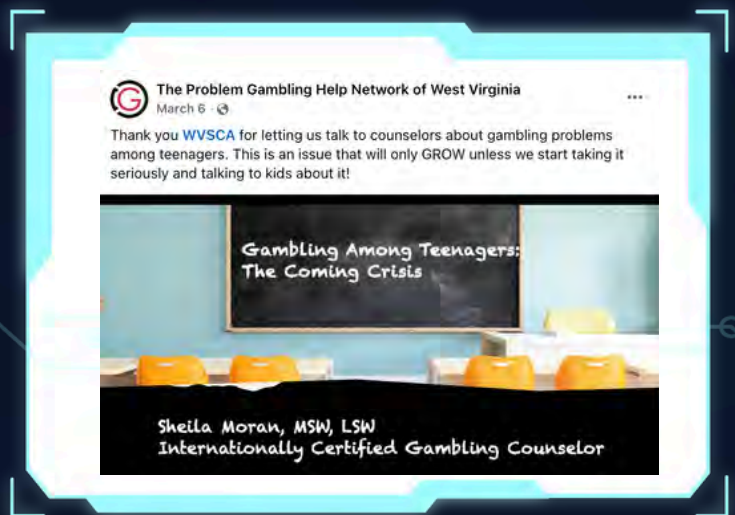
This chart shows last year's results:



“ Beth was wonderful. She was kind, sympathetic to my situations and understood what I was going through. She explained what was offered to help me. She talked me down from my moments of falling apart on the phone and allowed me to take my time. She helped me with being able to talk about and was very sincere. ”

SOCIAL MEDIA

WVPGHN social media outreach reached more than 130,000 people across Facebook, X, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram this year. Through posts, stories, and live updates, the program sparked conversations, shared vital resources, and increased awareness. By tailoring content with short videos, infographics, and personal stories, WVPGHN expanded its audience while fostering deeper engagement and stronger community connections.



“ The lady I spoke with was absolutely awesome. She was pleasant and very understanding. Knowledge of what resources were available and also sent the info. ”

PREVENTION

In FY 2025, WVPGHN contracted with 11 groups to provide outreach and education on youth gambling. These groups are: Mason County Family Resource Network (FRN), Jefferson Day Report, Brooke-Hancock FRN, Wetzel County FRN, Putman Wellness/Regional FRN, Community Connections Inc., Reset Inc., Clay County HD, Clay FRN/SADD, Taylor County FRN, and Pleasants County Committee on Family Issues.



Program Coordinator Nick Andrick is at a community event with Debbie Thompson, Pleasants County FRN Director.

“

Kriston eased my anxiety, and made me feel less helpless to start this journey. She was so amazing, and I wish nothing but amazing things for her.

”



Program Coordinator Nick Andrick and Program Director Maricel Bernardo visited the WV Capitol for Prevention Day.

“

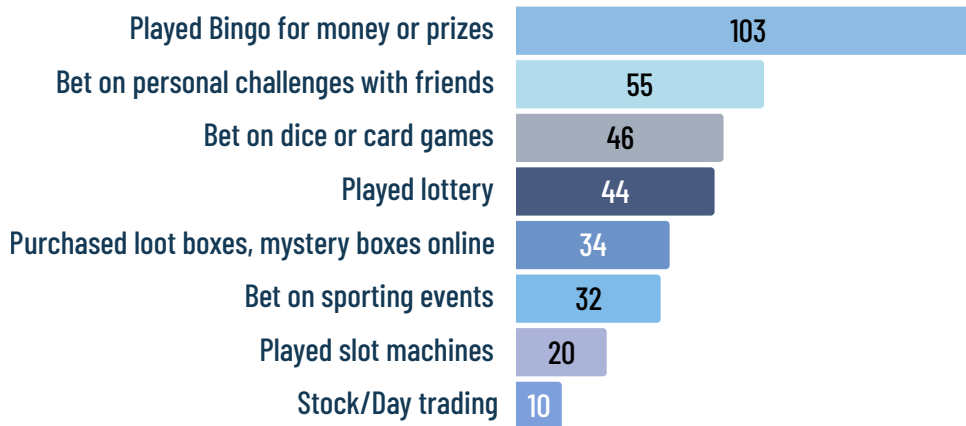
Jade went above and beyond making me feel validated and gave me more information about what this addiction is. She gave me tons of helpful resources also. Thanks, Jade!

”

PREVENTION

Our grantees surveyed teens from around the state on their gambling behaviors.

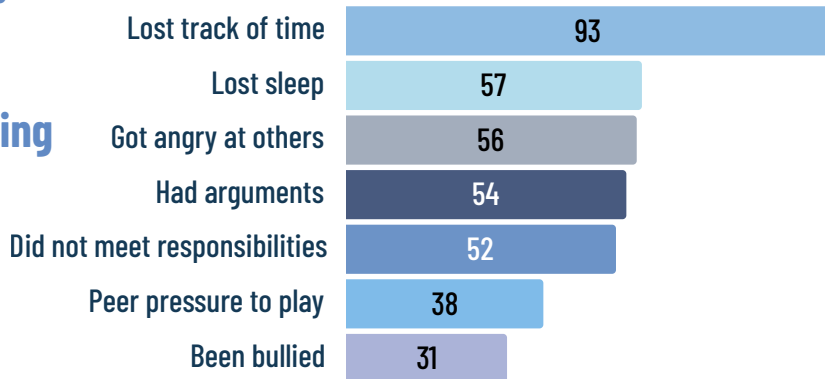
Primary Types of Gambling



Among youth who reported gambling, the top reason was “entertainment,” followed closely by “to make money,” which is a concern because responsible gambling guidance emphasizes that it should never be viewed as a way to earn income.

Since there is overlap between gaming and gambling, teens were asked about how gaming affected their lives.

Consequences Experienced



How Often They Bet



10 reported hiding their gambling from others.
 20 said they would like to stop gambling, but do not know how.
 36 were concerned that a friend or family member may have a gambling problem.
 13 were concerned they may have a gambling problem.
 79 participants said they spend too much time online.
 30 said they want to cut back on their online time.
 71 reported using microtransactions to purchase virtual goods.
 21 said they've spent too much money on these purchases.

TRAINING

Marsha Woods (center) was “WVPGHN 2025 Problem Gambling Network Counselor of the Year.” She is surrounded by Program Coordinator Kriston Van Horn, Program Director Maricel Bernardo, Program Coordinator Nick Andrick and Network Counselor Virginia Shelhammer.



National Council on Problem Gambling Director Keith Whyte (front) poses with First Choice Services Marketing Director Sheila Moran, Network Counselor Marsha Woods, WV Lottery Public Relations Manager Catie Smith, Clinical Coordinator Heather Downey-Payne, Program Director Maricel Bernardo, and Program Coordinator Nick Andrick at the annual NCPG Conference.

TRAINING



There were 18 network counselors in attendance at the annual Advanced Counselor Training. The Mountain State Summit on Gambling Addiction welcomed 54 participants, including clinicians, prevention professionals, First Choice Services staff, and members of the public.

“

Kriston was a great resource and easy to talk too. Helped me feel comfortable discussing a very uncomfortable topic. I highly recommend you recognize and reward such a great employee. She was a true professional. Time for raise!

”

FINANCIAL REPORT

INCOME

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| PGHNWV Contract | 1,473,650.16 |
| Other Income | 26,000.00 |
| Total Income: | 1,499,650.16 |

EXPENSE

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| Payroll | 590,470.66 |
| Marketing/Media/Outreach | 164,990.12 |
| Direct Program Expense | 67,186.01 |
| Treatment Services - Direct | 197,093.56 |
| Treatment Services - Admin | 863.15 |
| Communication | 10,491.26 |
| Equipment | 7,440.45 |
| Contracting Expense | 10,429.62 |
| Supplies | 7,475.59 |
| Travel | 3,824.20 |
| Rent | 12,141.66 |
| Training | 42,860.04 |
| Administrative Costs | 196,161.78 |

TOTAL EXPENSE 1,311,428.10

NET INCOME 188,222.06

STAFF

Lata Menon, CEO

David Sheppard, CFO

Maricel Bernardo, Program Director

Sheila Moran, Dir. of Marketing and Communication

Adam Sypolt, Media Coordinator

Kriston Vanhorn, Program Coordinator

Nick Andrick, Program Coordinator

Heather Downey-Payne, Helpline Lead

Gina Lancianese, Helpline Coordinator

Doug Squire, Helpline Coordinator

Aaron Floyd, Helpline Coordinator

Jade Wise, Helpline Coordinator

Kristina Radich, Helpline Coordinator

Cameron Asbury, Helpline Coordinator

Melissa Jarrett, Helpline Coordinator

Maribeth Roach, Helpline Coordinator

Matt Meadows, Helpline Coordinator

Keith McHorney, Helpline Coordinator

Leslie White, Helpline Coordinator

“

She made me very comfortable to be honest and talk about my problem. She was very understanding. I was in tears when I googled this website but after chatting with her I felt so much better. I felt like there really is hope for a better lifestyle.

”

1-800-GAMBLER

WV'S PROBLEM GAMBLING HELP NETWORK

PROUDLY OPERATED BY

FIRST CHOICE
SERVICES

SUPPORTED BY



1-800-GAMBLER

pghnwv@firstchoiceservices.org

www.1800GAMBLER.net

[@1800GamblerWV](https://www.instagram.com/1800GamblerWV)



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