

I had finished a 10-weekend Certified Gambling Counsellor Training Course at Caritas Addicted Gamblers Counseling Centre and that is accredited by the Canadian Council of Professional Certification.

“Small amount of gambling is entertaining” that is a belief commonly accepted by people in Chinese society. Gambling with small amount, e.g. generally perceived as playing Mahjong, Mark Six, or even horse racing with low stakes, etc., are considered an acceptable gambling amongst us. Taking the Mahjong game as an example, it has traditionally been regarded as an amusement activity taking place in family and/or friends gathering activities. Especially for those celebrative events and/or occasions like wedding and birthday parties, and some seasonal holidays such as Chinese New Year, etc. People believe that only excessive gambling harms. So this kind of gambling activity has been deeply penetrating into families, our society and even our daily life and soundlessly harming everyone involved. Apparently, people cannot live without this kind amusement activity! Worst still, I noticed a rapid growth in different types of gambling such as soccer lottery, mahjong, cards, and internet gambling over these years. Also, the numbers of teenagers who are gambling in Hong Kong and some of them only aged below 10 started placing their first bet has been increasing. The findings are really alarming! This realization urged me as a counselor to take this course so as to learn more about addicted gambling and counselling skills to help people who are in need.

It is not easy to say what the most significant thing I learned in this course is. It is because I really liked how the course overall designed, structured, organized and it provided an all-rounded learning and suitable environment for the students. What’s more, a team of very knowledgeable and experienced tutors on board could strongly reinforce our learning in the class. I really found every Saturday class learning so fruitful and enjoyable.

What I learned and what I benefited from this course are;

- *A holistic approach to provide support for addicted gamblers and their families*  
In the course of my learning, I understood that how helpless the gamblers and their family felt and desperate they could be for professional help and support in terms of solving their gambling problems, if possible, or at least improving, providing financial restructuring, family, marriage and individual counselling, as well as liaising with other similar organizations for temporary accommodations and other necessary needs. These seem to be the basic issues but in fact the most important and highly prioritized needs that we shall help them to meet first. This is very

important to learn about what we really can help them in the first place on top of the ultimate goal of solving the gambling problem.

- *Understanding of gambling and its myth as well as the impacts*  
This is the core part of learning. I found them very useful for me in the future as a counsellor to handle clients with addicted gambling problems.
- *Global policy and strategies for addicted gambling*  
It is a very informative class learning that I was able to know more about other countries' policy and strategies for addicted gambling, their education plans and practices, as well as their provision of counselling support services.
- *Group counselling and site visit at casino training centre in Macau*  
One of the highlights of this course was the group counselling and our site visit at casino training centre in Macau. A group, which is called [唔賭好友營], takes place regularly and gather all members, who come to centre for solving their gambling problem, to update and chit-chat with each other. What I found it so amazing in it was the group dynamic that made the ball rolling so effectively. Members with different backgrounds/ experience, number of years in gambling and solving their gambling problems, other problems such as job, family and marriage, are so genuine to share their experiences and feelings, helpful and encouraging to each other. What also impressed me a lot was that how smart and sensitive they could be to detect you, especially for those new comers in the group, who would not have any chance to lie and/or cover up their relapse into gambling in front of this group of people as they have gone through all difficulties and hard lives before they came to centre.
- *20 hours effective internship*  
I gained great experience in my 20 hours internship. In particular, the hot-line service that I supported. It was my first time to talk to the help seeker directly on the phone. Lucky me, I had two calls within two hours. In the beginning, I felt a bit overwhelming or you may call that frightening as I had no clue how to manage the phone enquiry effectively. It seemed hard to achieve my goal that needed to invite the help seeker to the centre for follow up meeting. Fortunately, with professional guidance by my tutor who babysat me during my phone conversation with the help seeker, I started to grab an idea and proceed properly on the phone. What a life experience I had!
- *Great acquaintance and knowledge sharing with classmates*

I had the pleasure of studying this course alongside the great classmates who have ample experience and knowledge about gambling and related counselling. Their active participation in discussion and sharing made great contribution and enrichment to the entire course that I could benefit most.

At last, I am very thankful to the whole team of tutors who were so professional and knowledgeable in their job and lecturing, as well as the team leader – Joe Tang. Over the course I acquired many new skills and a greater knowledge of addicted gambling and that encouraged me to go on in this aspect.

Flora Wong