

Community Patterns of Gambling in Eeyou Istchee:
Preliminary fact-finding

Report prepared by

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for the Public Health Department

Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay

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Acknowledgements

On behalf of myself, and the Public Health Department, I would like to thank everyone who participated in this consultation. I enjoyed having the opportunity to visit and meet the people I interviewed. I was impressed by the warm welcome I received from each person. For confidentiality in this report, no names are mentioned

Frances Couchees
Secretary, Public Health Department
May 2004

REPORT ON COMMUNITY FACT-FINDING ON GAMBLING

Forward

At long last, I am pleased to share with you the results of the fact-finding consultation on gambling carried out by Frances Couchees in a number of communities. Frances had completed the first draft of her report in March of 2004 and the final version a few months later in May. The first draft was used to develop a proposal to obtain funding to carry out a research project on gambling.

I decided to hold up the release of this report until the research project was ready to begin so it could be used as a background document to inform the beginning of the fieldwork. Unfortunately, this was delayed until now.

When I asked Frances, who is the secretary in the Montreal office, to do a little fact-finding about gambling, and worked with her on a few simple questions to ask key people in some communities, I thought she would talk to three or four people in each place. Instead, her simple fact-finding turned out to be a consultation with all the key people who have some involvement with gambling activities for various reasons in each of the communities she visited.

This was the first project of this type Frances had ever attempted, and I believe this is the first long report she had ever had to write. I would like to congratulate her for her work and also for having the courage and tenacity to take on the project by herself and to see it through to completion.

This preliminary report is important because it is the first effort to begin to look at the complex activity of gambling in Eeyou Istchee. As Frances pointed out, gambling is not only enjoyed by most people in the communities, but it is the means used to finance a lot of activities involving sports, youth recreation, culture, and social assistance to people in need. The downside is that for a small percentage of people gambling has become a compulsive behaviour with serious consequences for themselves and their families. The challenge for the community leadership and health workers in the region is to keep the positive benefits from the community activities of gambling, to balance gambling and fund-raising with other community activities and to find ways to identify and help those people who are at risk of becoming pathological gamblers. This will only happen through informed discussion within the communities. Frances has done the region a great service by opening the debate. Thank you Frances.

For more information about gambling in general, or the research project on gambling, please contact either Ron Shisheesh at the Public Health Office of the Cree Health Board in Chisasibi ((819) 855-2844 ext. 5362), or me at our office in Montreal.

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Community Patterns of Gambling in Eeyou Istchee: preliminary fact-finding

1.General Introduction.

This report summarizes the results of a consultation, which was done to determine the patterns of gambling in the Cree communities in Eeyou Istchee. In 2003, the Board of Directors of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay asked the Public Health Department to carry out research on gambling problems. However, before a research proposal could be prepared, the Public Health Department needed more information from the communities about the current activities associated with gambling and the views of community leaders and officials about the impact of these activities on the community.

I was asked to visit five communities, to meet with a cross-section of people working in the community who would have opinions on gambling because of their work in health and social services, recreation, community administration (especially the financial counselors), the Band Council, and radio. My mandate was quite simple: to ask these people about the kinds of gambling practiced in their community; changes in the patterns of gambling; benefits of gambling; and any problems they were aware of because of gambling.

I visited the communities in January and February this year. My notes and the first version of this report were used as background information for a research proposal. Dr. Kathryn Gill of McGill submitted this proposal to a funding competition in mid April in collaboration with the Public Health Department.

What I noticed during the consultation was that activities like gambling are always changing. Elders in some communities told me that in the 1940s and 1950s, competitive races were popular. Then they stopped. Now I see they are happening again with the individual sports challenges in the summer. I was told that in the early 1950's bingo was introduced into one of the communities. Someone also told me that she remembered playing bingo in residential school with cake as the prize. Today, bingo is in each community except Oujé-Bougoumou and on the regional radio and Aboriginal Peoples' Television Network (APTN).

What I found about gambling today is that it is linked to a lot of problems within the Cree communities. But at the same time, gambling is the way that a lot of sports and recreation as well as community and regional radio are funded. That is why the radio and recreation people I met talked about the good things that come from gambling, but the people in social services talked about the problems.

2. How this consultation was done

This consultation was done through interviews with 44 people who work in health and social services (PHOs/CHRs/NADAP). The interviews were also done with the following band officials: one chief, 2 councilors, 4 persons working in the financial department and 6 department heads, and personnel from 2 local and 1 regional radio stations. In the recreation departments I interviewed 5 people; at the stores I spoke to 2 store managers; and 4 elders also participated in the interviews.

I wrote letters to each targeted community explaining why I would be visiting. Once I arrived in the community I went to see the Public Health Officer who told me which people I should speak with. Then I made appointments to meet each person. The interviews were done one-to-one in private.

3. Kinds of gambling in Eeyou Istchee

This section talks about the kinds of gambling that people talked about in the interviews. It starts out by talking about the kinds of gambling remembered by the elders when they were young – probably in the late 1940s and 1950s. It then describes how bingo was introduced into Eeyou Istchee. Then it describes the kinds of gambling today.

It is important to consider whether the gambling happens as a special event for a special purpose or whether it is a regular, everyday event. In the early days, all gambling happened as a special event. Now, some gambling happens as a special event; but most gambling happens as regular daily, weekly, or monthly activities.

The issue of who controls the gambling has also changed. Some kinds of gambling are entirely controlled and run within the communities: penny socials, remole and raffles. Other kinds of gambling are run within the communities but use supplies that can only be purchased from outside: bingos, Nevada tickets. Then another kind takes place in the communities but uses supplies bought from outside, is controlled from outside, and sends a large part of the profits back to someone or a group outside: lottery tickets and VLT machines. Lastly, when gambling happens outside of the communities, all the profit and control is also outside the communities: VLTs, lottery tickets and gambling in casinos. As one elder pointed out, there is a difference when the money stays in the community.

4. Patterns of gambling specific to each of the 5 communities

Each community has different patterns with their special events and their regular games. This section describes these general patterns that were described to me.

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4.1. Community A

In community A in the 1950s, traditional games such as the 50-yard dash, canoe racing, and card games in groups were played. The prizes won were flour, sugar, tea and coffee. Inuit gambled for pennies in card games and someone said they thought the Inuit might have learned this from the people who came in cargo ships.

Today, most of the gambling we are talking about happens as regular events. In Community A, the Band set up the Community A Sports Recreation Association 2 years ago to manage and control gambling. This was because there had been abuses in raising money within the community. This Association controls all gambling including bingo and fundraising except for Nevada tickets. To hold an event, a person has to submit a letter to the Association, who evaluate it and either agree to or refuse the request.

Some gambling in the community does not rely on supplies from outside and is controlled by the community. In this community the Cree Trappers Association sponsors many raffles in order to fundraise. This money is used to pay off gas bills, and to subsidize helicopters, skidoos, and motors. People who are living on the Income Security Program for Cree Hunters and Trappers are only paid four times a year. They do not receive much money. The Band covers some of the costs to help out the CTA but raffles are needed as well. Raffles are also used to raise money for the Community A food bank.

In Community A, penny social fundraising is common and is used to buy necessities - such as groceries, hardware or clothing - for people who need assistance. This takes place within the community and is managed by the Community A Sports Recreation Association. From the total raised, the Association keeps a percentage and gives out the rest to whoever requested assistance, whether it is for a sports event or for assistance to buy necessities.

Bingo is the most popular kind of gambling that uses supplies purchased from outside, but is still controlled by the community. Local radio bingo was a special event in the past and now has become a regular event. Today it has been cut back from four times a week to three. The radio station runs the bingo. The money is used to support sporting events and registration fees for tournaments. Every time money is raised, 10% goes for sports inside the community and the rest goes to whoever requested the funding, for example tournaments outside of the community. The profit is an income source for the radio station. The regional bingo is played once a month. The jackpots of \$30,000 to \$40,000 are very popular with people on the ISP and the elderly.

Nevada tickets sell the fastest and are the quickest way to make money. The Nevada tickets are used to fundraise for people who want to go on trips or to sports tournaments, and this is very common. Different groups sell Nevada tickets for various purposes. The Band-organised Association does not control their sale, although the Recreation Officer felt that Nevadas should also come within the Association's mandate.

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In this community, there is a Quebec Lotto-terminal in the community store. With this type of gambling the control over all aspects of the gambling, the supplies for the gambling and most of the profits are held outside the region. Finally, people gamble outside the community by playing VLTs in Radisson, Val d`Or, and Matagami, and going to the casino in Montreal. This is when the money does not come back to the Community.

4.2. Community B

In Community B, in the 1960s, paddling races, the fifty-yard dash, and running with canoes on the head happened in the summer. Prizes were flour, sugar, and tea. There is also a Band controlled Fundraising Committee here that controls gambling. No one has the right to fundraise alone; they have to apply to the Fundraising Committee. The Fundraising Committee gives to families who need groceries and other necessities. During the year they raise about \$40,000 that is spent to pay for funerals, caskets, flowers and to fly back home the bodies of people who have died in the south.

Radio Bingo is a kind of gambling that happens in the community with supplies purchased from outside, but which is still controlled by the community. It started 20 years ago, mainly to cover the operating costs of running the radio. 85% what they make on bingo revenues are given to winnings and 15% is for operating costs. They also donate to sports events and fundraisers. Bingo is very popular in this community. Bingo is played to fundraise for sports events or for people who have requested some assistance. Local radio bingo started as a special event in the past but it now has become a regular event. The Radio Station donates up to \$8,000-\$9,000 a year to local teams, even though they try to limit this amount to \$6,000. A 12-hour radio-thon was requested to raise money for the day-care center. Their goal was to raise \$2,400 but they made \$5,000. This was used to install new equipment in the centre. The Radio Station gave 25% of the money that was raised. At the end of the year, any surplus made by the radio bingos is donated to groups who request assistance.

Raffle tickets and penny social were not mentioned in this community. If anyone wants to fundraise using Nevada tickets, they have to make a request to and get permission from the Fundraising Committee. One Nevada ticket costs \$1.00 but when the tickets are bought in bulk they cost less.

The Lotto – terminal is the example of gambling that takes place in the community but where the control of the gambling, the supplies and most of the profits are held outside the region. It has been at the store for four years now. The first year, people spent \$11,000 on average per week. The next year this was \$7,500 per week. This year it is averaging \$6,500 per week. Because of these sales, the store manager from this community had a unique experience with Lotto Quebec: the manager was invited to a hockey game in Montreal and was given the VIP treatment. Lotto Quebec asked him what the trick was to have the sales of tickets go up Apparently the store in this community had the top sales in the entire province of Quebec. There are also 20 VLT

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machines in this community. 45% of the profits go back to the company, which owns the machines, and the Fundraising Committee keeps the remaining 55%.

The Fundraising Committee runs the machines. They make \$4,000 to \$5,000 a week: sometimes it is lower, but on paydays more money comes in. The daily average is less than \$1,000. The store also sells a lot of lottery tickets of Lotto Québec. I was told there are 4 or 5 regular players that come to buy lottery tickets. The store has sold up to 1,400 tickets in one day. The average per day is 930 tickets; however, when the Super 7 pot is high, more tickets are sold.

As in the other communities, some people from Community B go to Radisson to play in the slot machines and some like to go to the Montreal Casino. I was told that some people who hold positions of responsibility and should be role models for others are known to gamble a lot outside the community. .

4.3. Community C

In community C, A long time ago, softball, and soccer were sports played for entertainment. I was told by several people that in this community, in 1960's Mr. and Mrs. Watt introduced bingo: one bingo card cost 25 cents. Prizes were necessities. As in Community B, raffle tickets and penny socials were not mentioned in this community.

Gambling that happens under the control of the community, but with supplies purchased from outside, is also popular in this community. As in Community B, local bingo started to support special events. Later, the bingo games became a regular event themselves. The radio station sells the bingo cards. Bingo is played almost every weeknight. Radio bingo is on Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays; T.V. bingo is played Thursdays. T.V. bingo is played to attract more people. The money raised goes back to the community towards sports, school trips and for educational purposes. Regional bingo was not mentioned in this community, even though this is one of the communities involved in the regional bingo.

The primary fundraisers are the Recreation Department and the radio station. . The Recreation Department has fundraising once a week through radio or T.V. bingo.

The Band Office controls the sale of Nevada tickets. No personal fundraising is allowed in the community at the present time, the band is looking into forming a fundraising committee.

Gambling in Nevada tickets and bingos is very popular; Nevada tickets are sold when there is a hockey tournament and the money goes to sports events. Some teams fundraise for their team to go on trips. The hockey coach hires someone to sell the Nevada tickets for him.

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This community also participates in gambling that takes place in the community but where the control of the gambling, the supplies and most of the profits is held outside the region. There is a Lotto Québec terminal at the store; a lot of people go there to buy lottery tickets. The store operates the machine. There are no VLTs in this community.

For gambling that takes place outside of the community, I was told residents here go to Matagami, Val d'Or and Montreal to play the VLTs and the Montreal Casino is very popular, when they go down south.

4.4. Community D

In community D, I was not able to interview an elder so I have no information about earlier patterns. I was told that raffle tickets are sold and this money is used for women's hockey. Players sell the raffle tickets and the cost of one ticket can range from \$2.00 to \$5.00. In fact, most fundraising is done to support sports events. Penny socials are another way to fundraise for people who want to raise money for trips or tournaments, but this is rare. This fundraising is mostly done by the Recreation Department for sports or events for the community. The amounts of money raised were not mentioned. As well, there is a new card game, similar to poker, called Remole that people play; The more players the more money there for the winner. This game is played almost every night. Not much was said about the costs of playing and the size of the winnings from this game, although one Youth Protection worker said this was becoming a big problem.

As in the other communities, bingo is a type of gambling for which supplies are purchased from outside, while the activity is controlled by the community. The local bingo jackpot is \$1,500 and one package of cards costs \$50.00. Bingo is played 3 or 4 times a week at the Pool Hall. Bingo is played by a lot of people and is very popular in this community. The radio station runs the bingos.

These bingos are the best way to fundraise in this community. Fundraising money is spent on sports tournaments, equipment for youth to permit them to participate in tournaments at major events outside of the community or in local events.

Similar to Community C above, regional bingo was not mentioned in this community although this is one of the communities involved in it. The main gambling here is bingo and the selling of Nevada tickets. However, I was told that local people running these events feel that they do not get as many participants as they would like. The only exception to this is when a tournament is being held in the community.

There are some forms of gambling here where the control of the gambling, the supplies and most of the profits is held outside the region. In this community there is no Lotto-terminal, but the store does sell (Lotto Québec) scratch tickets. The community has VLTs that are controlled by one band-owned entity. They are in a 50-50 partnership with a company from outside. The machines have been there for 10 years now. When the machines were first installed, I was told people fought to use them.

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As in the other communities, people from here also gamble when they are out of the community, buying lottery tickets, playing VLTs (Val d'Or) or going to the Montreal Casino.

4.5. Community E

In community E, a long time ago people played cards but not to win anything. Events like canoe racing and 50 yard dash races were once a popular way to win flour, sugar, and tea.

Today bingo is very popular. Before, this game was a special event but now, as in the other communities, it is played quite a lot. Bingo fundraising for sports tournaments is extremely popular.

Gambling that is controlled from within the community, and does not rely on supplies from outside, happens through raffle tickets, which are also sold through the radio, yard sales, 50-50 draws, and food plates. The money for this is used to help fundraise for weddings, travel, and trips. Then there is New Years Celebration that gives out huge appliances for prizes. Penny socials are common in this community and put on to fundraise by the Recreation Department. It is very common for people to sell bakery or food plates to fundraise. Also, if a family needs to travel they may request a penny social fundraising and the profits then go to the person who has requested the event. Remole is not known in this community.

In this community, the local radio bingo pays out 75% in prizes and 25% to an Association that is a subsidiary of the Band Council. The 25% profit goes to pay for advertising, radio announcements, public service announcements. (The radio station also receives \$6,000 from the CSB for their public announcements.) At the local level, bingo is not as popular as in the past, but December is still a big month. In the past, the station once made \$256,000 per year; now they only make \$30,000. People told me that this is a result of the impact of VLTs.

From the local bingos last year: \$104,093 of this went to the Band-controlled Association and the local radio got 25%, which was \$30,000. They also will do fundraising for people over the radio station depending upon the reason. They are setting up a foundation. They help out minor hockey, tournaments, arenas etc.

As well, the local radio keeps 20% of the profits from the regional bingo that is held once a month. I was told that the reports on the profits are not publicized. (Previously, the CRA used to give money to the James Bay Cree Communications Society but now they do not. As a result, the JBCCS has to raise their own money for training and administration.)

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For the local radio bingos, on average they sell 2,000 to 3,000 sets of cards. One set is \$40. Prizes could be \$70,000 to \$80,000.

Nevada tickets are sold in the community to raise money to start projects, pay costs of tournaments, such as the registration, canteen and ice rental, and pay for the winnings (trophies etc), referees, and scorekeepers at tournaments. Nevadas are ordered from Reserve Bingo Supplies in Winnipeg and purchasers with legitimate reason to get the tickets can benefit from special rates. Although I was not told how much money changed hands with Nevada tickets, I was told they are very big sellers.

In this community, the Lotto-terminal has existed 3 years. This is an example of an activity that happens locally but is controlled from outside, where most of the profits are also sent. People also like to buy lottery and scratch tickets. There are no VLTs in this community.

People who work with social issues told me that gambling outside of the community is now popular, especially on payday when the Cree line up in Chibougamau at the mall to play the VLTs. Apparently, these are people who have good paying jobs, and so can afford this kind of leisure activity.

5. Summary of benefits from gambling

Each community has slightly different patterns of how the gambling activities work in their community. But they all use gambling to support the radio station, sports and recreational activities, special fundraising needs for groups like the day care centres, school trips, and special assistance to families in need.

In community A, the money raised from penny socials is used mostly to buy necessities (groceries, hardware, clothing) for people who need help. Fundraising is common to support sporting events, such as to pay the entry fees to tournaments etc. The community has established a Community A Sports and Recreation Association to manage local fundraising. When a request is made for a bingo, the money must be going back to the community, not to individuals and 10% of the money raised goes to support sports. The Association controls the radio bingo, which now happens 3 times per week and is a source of income for the radio station. The benefits to the station is important:

Local big radio bingo: \$5,000 to \$10,000

Regional radio bingo: \$30,000.

In community B, 90% of money raised locally goes back to the community events. The Fundraising Committee produces financial statements to let the people know how much was raised and where it went from the fundraising. Then if there is enough money left, the fundraising committee allocates the money to whoever is requesting support for sports events.

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The radio station keeps 15% of profits for operational costs, and gives out the remaining 85% of bingo revenues. They also donate to sports events, and they also donate to the fundraisers. Radio bingos are also used to raise money for special needs, such as the 12-hour radio-thon, which hoped to raise \$2,400 for day-care equipment and instead raised \$5000. The radio station gave 25% of what was raised.

To have a tournament it costs \$30,000; if it is successful they can profit \$10,000. The profit is put back to recreation events, or teams that go out to other communities. The recreation department sponsors children from gambling profits. Usually a parent will submit a letter asking for a request to sponsor their child. They will pay equipment for parents who cannot afford to equip their child to play softball, broomball, etc. Before the bingo was out of hand, now it is played 2 times a week

The slot machines are from outside the community. There are 20 machines. 45% goes back to the company and the Fundraising Committee keeps 55%. The Fundraising Committee runs the machines. They make \$4,000-\$5,000 a week, sometimes it is lower, and payday more money comes in. Per day, they make less than \$1,000. Home bingo is played twice a year, this is not radio bingo, you buy a bingo card that comes with a caller card, and one ticket is sold at \$1.00. The money is used for sports events, donations to people to buy groceries. Money is also given to children who live down south who are involved in sports.

In community C, Fundraising is done more by the radio station, and teams who are involved in sports. Money raised goes back to the community, towards sports, school trips and educational purposes. The recreation department has fundraising once a week; this is done in bingo or T.V. bingo. T.V. bingo is played to attract more people. Primary fundraisers are the recreation department and the radio station. The radio station sells the bingo cards, and the Nevada tickets, which are an easy way to get fast money.

Few organizations have given back to the community. The school has a flea market once in a while; the school gets a percentage of what is made. It is hard to determine how much money is made. Nevada tickets are sold when there is a hockey tournament and the money goes to sports events. Some teams fundraise for their team to go on trips by hiring someone to sell the Nevada tickets.

In community D, one PHO says she believes bingo helps the community with their development; it also helps to fundraise for travel money for families who have a family member in the hospital down south. Penny social fundraising helps buy necessities such as groceries, hardware or clothing for people who are hard up.

Fundraising also supports sporting events and covers registration fees. Usually 10% goes to sports and the rest goes to whoever requested the funding. Fundraising money is spent on tournaments, equipment for youth in tournaments, major events, and local events. The local Band corporation runs the pool hall. In the past they made a lot more money than they do at present. As a result, they fundraise and the suppliers receive 40%, and the

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corporation receives 60% of the profit. This helps the corporation to run the operation of the Pool Hall.

In community E, penny social fundraising involves selling baking and food plates. If a family needs to travel they request a penny social for fundraising. For the local radio bingo, 75% goes to prizes and 25% to a Band Association. The 25% profit goes to pay for advertising, radio announcements, public service announcements. (The radio station also receives \$6,000 from the CSB for their public announcements.) Although the radio station once made \$256,000 per year; now they make \$30,000. As well, the local radio keeps 20% of the profits from the regional bingo that is held once a month.

6. Problems that the people I interviewed talked about

6.1. Overview of problems

The people I spoke with ranged from a Chief, a Deputy Chief, Public Health Officers, Community Health Representatives, Financial Officers, Elders, Community Workers, Social Workers, Youth Protection Workers and NNADAP workers. Each one of them said that bingo was a major problem and gambling is becoming a big problem. Having VLTs within the communities has caused an additional problem. However, none of the recreation workers or radio station workers identified any problems with gambling.

I was told that gambling has escalated in each community. The majority of the people I interviewed all agreed, that many people who gamble are the people with low-incomes and many welfare recipients have big gambling problems. Of course, the people with good jobs and good pay are also known to gamble a lot. Here is what one Chief said,

“We have to address this problem before it gets out of hand. It is already a problem; a few of the people go to Radisson in the evening to gamble. On weekends, a lot of children are being neglected because of parents who have a problem with gambling. Children who are under-age are babysitting a lot of smaller children. Some entities raise money for a good cause, for example to sponsor sports events and tournaments. The cause is good but the effect on the individuals gets worse.”

He is quite concerned. He went on to say that, “the big case of addiction is alcoholism then they turn to gambling”.

One Deputy Chief told me,

“The people are in the denial stage. People spend all their pay cheques. At the beginning it was for fun, now it is no longer for fun because the people are addicted. A nurse or a doctor talked on the radio regarding gambling. That sparked the attention of people. I know many of our employees gamble. These people live from pay cheque to pay cheque. Comments we receive, father and mother used to drink, they were away from home. It is the same when they go away to gamble; they stay until the bars are closed. Children are being neglected. The only difference with gambling is they do not pass out, because they prefer to

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gamble rather than drink. In Radisson, they line up to play with the machines. The owner there is very rich. Tax-free: people are losing sight, of the privilege of exemption in paying tax. People do not realize this. It also devalues their work, after a while their work becomes secondary. In Val d'Or children have been seen waiting in lobbies for parents who are inside playing the VLTs.

One approach we cannot take, we cannot judge, that it's a trap. Many good people are gamblers. A lot of gamblers envy others who do not gamble, because the non-gamblers are able to do better in things in life. Last year we had a talk show about putting machines in our community. There was a lot of opposition to this. The Council was against this. In Radisson, children are left in vehicles while parents are inside the bar playing in the VTL machines. The owner of the Radisson bar said, that the busiest time is when family allowances come out. This is very damaging.”

Four of the five Public Health Officers I interviewed confirmed that bingo was a major problem. Although one said, “the negative thing I can say about bingo is the people spend too much money to play bingo“.

Another said that there is a lot of denial. When a gambler loses a lot of money in the machines, he or she takes anger out on the family. This person also mentioned that all of these gambling activities just happened. There was never a mandate set up for organizing these activities. People started to gamble through fundraising for good causes. Then, at the community level, people were told if they wanted to fundraise they would have to write a letter to the Band for permission. She then pointed out that everyone in the community knows who the heavy gamblers are. Some of these people even lose their vehicles because they gamble their payments. However, they have not yet organized these activities from the band.

The Community Health Representatives all said about the same as the Public Health Officers. Although, none of the individuals who have a problem in gambling have approached the CHRs to discuss their problem, the CHRs are very aware of this. One CHR said that some people from her community go to Radisson to play in the slot machines. Some will come to ask for help for something else. Being a trained worker, she can tell some problems are from gambling because the people who come to see her have financial problems. Employees from the Social Services are seeing many people playing the slot machines in Radisson. Another CHR mentioned that individuals with a gambling problem will not approach their employers because they also see the employers s at the slot machines. One CHR said, ”we need to get a handle on this matter”.

The Financial Officers I interviewed mentioned how gambling is a serious problem. They felt that most of the gamblers with problems had transferred from a dependency on alcohol to gambling. One Financial Officer told me that gambling is causing problems. Vehicles have been taken away from one or two individuals who, because of gambling, were not able to pay for the vehicle. He has seen 3 or 4 people who have a problem with gambling. These people came in and asked for assistance to buy food when they have a cash flow problem and need \$40 to \$50 to buy groceries. Sometimes they ask for \$500 as

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a salary advance to pay off car loans or other stuff. People spend a lot of money on VTLs in Radisson. The Cree Trappers Association fund raises money that is used to pay off gas bills, for subsidies, to cover the costs of helicopters, skidoos, and motors. One Financial Officer said that people have come to see her to get bailed out, to pay hydro, rent etc.

The Elders said that there was too much gambling within the communities, although two admitted that they have a slight problem with gambling. Here is what one elder told me,

“When there is an Elder’s meeting, some Elders do not show up at the meeting because they are busy playing radio bingo. It would be nice to have workshops here in the community; I feel the community should be educated about gambling. There is denial in gambling addiction within this community. I also feel we Elders should be role models for our community”.

Another Elder told me:

“The money made from the bingo games stay in the community, but it goes back and forth to the winners and then back to the community. Sometimes a winner does not receive his winnings. The person is told that there was not enough money made at the event to pay out to the winner. This is a big racket. Of course, we have a lot of gamblers here in our community. There is a Lotto terminal at the store and that is another place where people throw away their money.

Lies come about from gambling amongst families. This creates another problem. Children are neglected during bingo nights. Their family allowances are gambled away. Parents cannot buy the necessities for their children. Children suffer because their parents prefer to gamble rather than give them the attention they need from their parents. I see children who long for parental love. Gambling did not exist before; now it is very crazy. Wild game used to be distributed to the community for free; now people sell their kill, just to use the money to gamble. Another thing they do is sell food plates. This you see when it is bingo night. People also borrow money from each other to play bingo. Before when bingo was played every night, the community asked the Band to cut back on bingo nights. Bingo has created a big problem. People do not attend public meetings because they decide to play bingo. Agreements cannot go through because not enough people have attended the public meeting. We need at least 180 people to attend a meeting so if there is an agreement that has to go through their attendance is important.”

I also spoke with three Social Workers, five Community Workers, four NNADAP workers and three Youth Protection Workers. They all agreed on the following. They are aware of the problem of gambling within their communities. There are a lot of addictions within the community; people get out of one addiction and move onto the next addiction. As a Social Worker said, “People who are unemployed are the gamblers, they try to win money, and this has made it an addiction for these people.”

They all agreed there are too many bingo nights, too many Nevada tickets are sold and there is too much fundraising going on. This brings poverty to some people. The Bands

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should be controlling this but they have not yet done so. People borrow money from each other so they can play bingo, and this brings conflict between families. Some people do not have money to buy groceries. One person mentioned having been approached by people looking for assistance to buy groceries

They also agreed that children are being neglected during bingo nights. Small children aged between the ages of two and four can be seen outside their houses late at night; these children are being supervised by 8 or 9 year-olds. One Youth Protection Worker had some children call to the office saying that there was no food in the house and that their parents were not home because they had gone to Radisson to gamble. They also all agreed the Bands do not realize the extent to which some people in the communities have a problem with gambling. They felt that the Band has to reduce the extent of bingo nights.

A majority of the employees I interviewed mentioned that it would be a good if they had a place where the people who have a problem in gambling could go to receive help.

One Anglican priest told me:

“In the past gambling was not a problem. They did not have the VLT machines. Today families neglect children due to gambling; they cannot buy food. The people are slacking off on coming to the service and as all the money from the collection is used to help the church, there is less available to meet the costs. There is a lot of drinking also, and then the people do not have money to buy their groceries. I have heard that the Elders play bingo and scratch tickets; Nevada tickets are the choice of tickets. I feel that the community needs help with the problem of gambling. I also sense that separations between couples are due to the gambling, especially with young marriages. My concern is young people have not experienced the full adult life; they turn to anything to hide their hurt. And I as well have heard that some people steal so they can gamble. Often when people have rummage sales this is to get more money so they can pay to gamble.”

6.2. Differences between the communities visited

From what I was told by the people I interviewed, there is not much difference between the kinds of problems in each of the communities.

While there seemed to be less gambling in Community D, it is also the only place where the game Remole is popular. People told me this is becoming a big problem within this community.

There are three communities B, C, D that have slot machines, which the residents use a lot. And only four communities, A, B, C, E, have Lotto-terminals. In other words, communities A and E do not have slot machines and Community D does not have a Lotto-terminal.

6.3. Specific issues identified

The foremost problem with gambling is when money goes out of the communities. Money spend outside the communities does not come back. The PHOs, CHRs, Financial officer and CLSC workers all said, "the residents from the Coastal area are known to go to Radisson, Val d`Or, Matagami and Montreal to play the VLTs." The PHO, CHR, and Financial counselor all said, "The residents of the Inland communities are known to go to Chibougamau, Val d`Or, and Montreal to play the VLTs also. The Montreal Casino is very popular with the Crees when they go down south."

A Public Health worker said, "Bingo is most prevalent but VLTs are most damaging. People only ever talk about their winnings, never their losing."

A PHO commented,

"Some, but not all, people have a problem with gambling. Bingo helps the development of the community; it also helps to fundraise for travel money for families who have a family member in hospital down south. We have fundraising for kids to go out and visit other communities. Bingo is a way for people to socialize. If the community healed together, we would not have problems of alcohol, drugs and gambling. The negative thing I can say about bingo is the people spend too much money to play bingo. At one time I had requested donation from the L' Escale Hotel in Val d'Or, for students that were scheduled to go to Italy to play sports. I never got a response.

Gambling addiction is a problem of some but not all. [With gambling problems] there is a problem of self-esteem. We should go to the roots of the problems. Alcohol, drugs, gambling are big problems. But we should also realize that school is another problem: the last graduate [in this community] was in 1981. A study should be done in alcoholism and compare this to gambling."

The radio managers and the recreation officers had nothing negative to say about anything that had to do with gambling.

One family counselor said,

"No one has approached me to say they have a problem. But I can see they have financial problems and in the back I know it is from gambling. It is usually the wife who will come in and ask for help but not the husband. I have not encountered any compulsive gamblers. I know that people go to Chibougamau to play in the slot machines and leave their kids alone. I can relate this problem to the residential schools: people turn to alcohol, drugs, and gambling, and lack parenting skills. People are seeking help but they do not know how to ask because they are not admitting [their problems]. And the other thing, people who come back from treatment turn to gambling."

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However a health and social services worker pointed out that while some people have problems, gambling is used to support community services that could provide an alternative to the very gambling:

“Some people go to Radisson to play in the slot machines. This creates a big problem but no one has come to see me to admit that they have a problem in gambling, I am aware of the problem. Some will come to me and ask for help for something else. Being a trained worker I can tell some problems are from gambling because the people who come to see me have financial problems. Employees from the XXX go to Radisson a lot, this of course is a problem why people will not come in and admit that they have a problem in gambling because they see the employees from XXX at the slot machines. There is also a lot of bootlegging going on within the community, and selling drugs.

We have a place, the Gathering Center, which runs activities and this is funded by the Fundraising Committee. The fitness center there is free for people aged from 55 and over, which is another way we want to occupy the people to change their minds from gambling.”