

## Office of Problem Gambling Director Leslie Welch

Veteran Arizona Department of Gaming (ADG) employee, Leslie Welch, settles into her new role as Director of the Office of Problem Gambling (OPG) who, along with her team, is in charge of awareness, education, support, and provision of resources on problem gambling. We were fortunate to have an exclusive opportunity to work together with Shana Berschler, an ADG legislative and communications intern, in order to obtain this interview and introduce Leslie and the OPG.



Director Leslie Welch (bottom center) together with her Office of Problem Gambling Team. Top L-R: Ryan Ruelas, Elise Mikkelsen. Bottom L-R: Kathy Donner, Leslie Welch, Larissa Pixler. Photos: Jelena Momich.

By Shana Berschler

**Can you tell us a little bit about your education and job experience before OPG? What was the most exciting part about finding out you were going to run OPG?**

*I earned my bachelor's degree from Arizona State University in Sociology and my master's degree from NAU in Administration-Public Management. I was excited to be promoted to The Office of Problem Gambling. I began my career in state government with the goal of working in social services. This is an opportunity for me to focus my energy and attention on helping people and serving the public.*

**Why do you believe OPG is important to the public? What are a few important resources OPG provides?**

*OPG is important to the public because there are social costs associated with gambling and our agency must address those issues. Our resources are critical for the people of Arizona, especially the problem gamblers and their family and friends. OPG provides effective treatment services, a 24 hour hotline, education and prevention services, statewide self-exclusion program and helpful information on our website.*

**What are the main warning signs of a problem gambler?**

*If you think someone close to you is a problem gambler, the questions to ask yourself are available on the GAM-ANON website at [gam-anon.org/living.htm](http://gam-anon.org/living.htm)*

*Some examples of the questions are listed here:*

- *Does this person ever gamble to get money to solve financial difficulties or have unrealistic expectations that gambling will bring the family material comfort and wealth?*

- *Is the person in question often away from home for long, unexplained periods of time?*

- *Does the person in question hide his or her money?*

*There is a self assessment tool link available on our website, [problemgambling.az.gov](http://problemgambling.az.gov).*

*Some examples of the self assessment questions are:*

- *Have you ever lied to people important to you about how much you gambled?*
- *Has gambling ever made your home life unhappy?*
- *Do you gamble to try to get your money back?*

**I think one of my close friends may be a problem gambler. How do I go about confronting them and suggesting that they seek help through OPG?**

*In my opinion, confrontation doesn't work. Confronting, questioning, or interrogating a problem gambler serves no purpose and will only cause your friend to either avoid you or lie about their gambling. This is why we strongly recommend that anyone who is close to someone they believe is a problem gambler, to contact 1.800.NEXT.STEP. The helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Your call is answered by specialists in the field of problem gambling.*

*It is important not to enable a close friend or family member who is a problem gambler. To help you understand the issue and learn how you can best help your family member or friend, I encourage you to reach out to one of our treatment professionals or get support from GAM-ANON. Our helpline, 1.800.NEXT.STEP, or [problemgambling.az.gov](http://problemgambling.az.gov), can direct you to these resources.*



**What is one of your main objectives while running OPG? How do you plan on accomplishing this?**

*My first objective is to continue to provide the critical services OPG provides in the areas of treatment, education, and self-exclusion. My objective for the future is to research more in the area of prevention and increase awareness of problem gambling statewide.*

**Statistics say that teens that start to gamble have a better chance of getting involved in drugs and crime. How would you feel if one of your children started to gamble?**

*As a parent I would be very concerned. Gambling is considered a risky behavior, and if any child is partaking in it then their parents should be aware of the possible outcomes.*

**Do you become emotional when hearing stories throughout your day about obsessive gamblers who may have ruined their lives or burned bridges with family members and friends because of their addiction? How do you deal with this difficulty?**

*It is definitely heartbreaking to hear these stories, but I am a very hopeful person. It is always encouraging to know that people are contacting us to make positive changes. By calling OPG, people are expressing a desire to regain control of their lives. I try to focus and build on that.*

**Do problem gamblers recover or is it a life-long battle?**

*Each problem gambler has his or her own story and situation. I believe that problem gamblers can definitely recover if they commit to their programs.*

**What are your thoughts about online gambling? Do you believe giving people the right to gamble in the comfort of their own homes will increase problem gambling?**

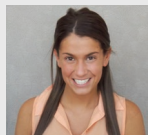
*Today, there are three states with legalized gambling. There is so much we don't know yet on the subject. We are definitely concerned about the effects internet gambling will have on problem gamblers and their families.*

**Did you ever expect that you would be running OPG?**

*I am happy to be part of an organization that has a lot to offer our state. The success of OPG has always been due to the talent and expertise of its staff. Being a part of this team is something I hoped for. I believe the work I have done for OPG in the past several years has prepared me for this position. I know that problem gambling is a big issue in our state and nation, and I truly hope to be a part of the solution. 💰*

For more information on the OPG, call 1.800.NEXT.STEP or visit their website at [problemgambling.az.gov](http://problemgambling.az.gov).

Shana Berschler is the legislative and communications intern for the Arizona Department of Gaming. Originally from New Jersey, she is currently a junior at Arizona State University and the Vice President of Recruitment for the Delta Gamma sorority.



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WE'LL THROW YOU A LIFELINE.**



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**PROBLEM  
GAMBLING**

Resources include:

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- Self-exclusion from casinos
- Gamblers Anonymous

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or visit [www.problemgambling.az.gov](http://www.problemgambling.az.gov)

