

Steve's gambling addiction story

How a North East man's guilt made him pray for jail time for his £200k gambling fraud



Steve Ramsey was born in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1966. He's part of a large close family; he's a lifelong Newcastle United fan, and he's a compulsive gambler.

Steve moved away from his native Geordieland at 18 to work in London. He landed a job in finance and became quite successful. He got his qualifications and was promoted to Business Support Manager looking after a £270million company. Steve then moved to the Midlands and worked for Warwickshire County Council until July 2017 when he had his last bet – and had to face a number of harsh realities.

Read Steve's full story below or watch his video story here:

<https://youtu.be/752gRPakamo>

Steve takes up his story from here:

I spent a lot of my youth with my older and younger brothers; we were joined at the hip. Dad often took us to the local greyhound track and Newcastle races. He enjoyed horse racing and would always have it on the TV. But I do not think I ever worried about gambling. It was always just a social thing. We followed Newcastle United and would go to as many matches as we could. As I turned 18 having a bet on match day was just part and parcel of the day out.

Online and in play betting

About 10 years ago I was introduced to online gambling and a thing called matched deposit - how if I deposited £200 the bookies would match it. Within a few months I won a few thousand pounds.

I was in my local pub one evening and there was a match on the TV - Aston Villa versus West Brom. Villa were on top and one of the lads said they would score any minute. I checked online and it was 14/1 for Villa to score before half time via in play betting. I placed £10 on this, my first ever in play bet. Villa scored and in that instant my life changed. £140 was won in a blink of any eye. It was exciting, exhilarating and easy! I had never felt that feeling before whilst gambling. I had discovered in play betting and it was instant, easy accessible and literally available 24 hours per day.

Within a short period of time my stakes were increasing and the amount of transactions steadily increased. Before long I was starting to spend too much and used my savings to pay bills. When my savings had gone I used credit to deposit funds into my account. I reached my limits – so I got more credit to help out but rather than pay for things owed I tended to just gamble instead. This continued until I was in a big hole with nowhere to turn to and I felt unable to tell anybody about it. I just needed to gamble as everything was ok whilst I was gambling. But it really wasn't.

The addiction preyed on my poorest character traits making it so easy not to deal with anything and instead go off and forget about any problems and just continue to gamble.

I was in a financial mess, but worse than that it was my lack of understanding of what I was doing and the mental strain it put me under that was so hard to deal with and comprehend. It felt like I was the only person in the world with this problem.

Confessing to fraud

In 2012 I substituted my personal bank details in place of my works account and committed my first act of fraud. Around eight months later I did it again. As the addiction took hold the frequency of each act increased. By this time I was spending thousands of pounds gambling and sometimes upwards of 500 transactions per day.

I worked out I'd stolen just over £192,000. At this point I confessed what I'd done to my family, friends, colleagues and the police.

I remember telling my daughters. It was the hardest conversation of my life. I then started to tell other people, those closest to me. Again it was devastating to have to do this and see or hear people's reactions. It is something that will live with me forever.

Recovery and support

I remember once I'd said the words "I have a huge gambling problem" everything in my life got better. An incredible weight had been lifted off my shoulders just by uttering those words and letting people know I needed some help.

I initially got help from Gamblers Anonymous and still attend their meetings. They have been fantastic for me. I also spoke to my sister's partner who, luckily, was a specialist mental health worker in addiction. He cleared my mind pretty quickly by asking me to separate the things I could control in my life versus those I literally had no control over. By doing this, attending GA and just speaking with those close to me I was able to start my recovery.

My lowest point is linked to this, you start to grasp the reality of what you have done and also some of your actions to ensure you can just carry on gambling regardless, that realization is pretty horrendous and could be quite damaging if you let it. The picture in my head of my daughters faces as I told them of my actions, and again the fear on their faces when they visited me for the first time in prison will never ever leave me but I do use those images to drive my recovery.

I remember going to my doctor and explained I was quite depressed, anxious and not sleeping well and made the link to gambling. Unfortunately he said something like: ". . . ah well at least you can just stop gambling and I will prescribe some sleeping tablets." So little is still known about the harm gambling can cause.

How I wanted jail time!

I was sentenced to 27 months in prison. It was not a shock I fully expected a custodial sentence and could have received up to five years.

If it had been 24 months I could have received a suspended sentence. When the Judge was summing up, he kept referring to 'mitigating circumstances' and reducing the sentence. I actually prayed for him to stop to ensure I received a custodial sentence. That's how much guilt I had.

Within ten minutes of being led down from court to the cells I realized how naïve I was. The whole thing is simply terrifying and horrendous – and something you should never wish for!

How far I've come

If I'd been able to use an NHS gambling clinic or been aware of one it would have made a big difference to me. I am so pleased they are up and running and that more will be coming. If they can stop even one person from going through what I have been through then that is a success in my eyes.

The support of my family and friends has been utterly amazing, that comes with a big question of why the hell I didn't go to them sooner. The guilt is hard to live with but I have to live with that and manage it, it all happened for a reason.

I understand addiction a lot more now and realise that it led me in the direction I went. The fact I am happy to support the new clinic shows how far I have come in my recovery.

It's been just over a year since my release from prison I am repairing relationships damaged through my actions, I am in work and now have my own place. The fact that I am in a relationship with a wonderful woman who knows my story, the entire story and still wants to be with me is just amazing. I never thought I would be able to get close to anyone again after doing what I did. But recovery is wonderful and the honesty required to go hand in hand with that is something quite magical.

ENDS

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