




Combining professional help and peer support - developing new ways to change harmful gambling behaviour

Markus Sjöholm, Councelling coordinator, Peluuri Helpline & E-help, Finland

A man with a beard and short brown hair, wearing a black polo shirt with white and red patterns, holds a badminton racket in his right hand. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. Several playing cards are floating in the air around him, including a red ten, a blue ten, a red ace, and a red king. The background is dark and out of focus.

Peluri + luuri
Gambler + phone
= Peluuri

Est. 1.9.2004

Ville Lång,
Finnish champion
2005-2014

FROM COUNSELLOR TO CLIENT SERVICES**Users/Callers/Visitors 2014**

<i>Helpline (2004–)</i>	<i>Support from counsellor, daily 12- 6 pm.</i>	1178 PG-related calls
<i>Chat (2014–)</i>	<i>Real-time discussion in written form with counsellor.</i>	57 real chats (4.9.-31.12.14)
<i>eCounselling (2005–)</i>	<i>Question-answer type of service. (Like an e-mail but with an anonymous system.)</i>	120 questions

VIRTUAL THERAPY PROGRAM

<i>Time to Fold -program (2007-)</i>	<i>Lenght: 8 weeks. Weekly phone calls with therapist, weekly practices in web-enviroment & mandatory participation to a closed discussion forum.</i>	141 who carried out the whole program
--------------------------------------	---	--

SELF-HELP SERVICES

<i>Webpage (2005–, new -14)</i>	<i>Tests, self-help workbooks, information and advices.. Own specific parts for PG's, significant others, professionals & databank for those who are interested..</i>	26 854 visitors (1.9.-31.12.14)
<i>Gambling Power Circle (2009–)</i>	<i>Reminder-SMS set by user (e.g. every morning 9 am: "Today I'm not going to gamble) and series of messages (e.g. how to quit gambling slots)</i>	560 Registered users 31.12.14

..AND PEER SUPPORT..

ONE ON ONE

Users/Callers/Visitors 2014

Gambling Power Circle (2009–)	A chance to write private, one on one messages with another group member (or with a councillor).	560 users (31.12.14) & 673 private messages.
Chat with a peer (Pilot 2015)	Chance to have a chat session with a peer. Pilot 2-3/2015: 6 chat sessions with former PG were available.	0-2 chats per time.
Peer phone (Pilot 2015)	For PG's and SO's. 1-3 phone support calls from former PG's and SO's. 3 former PG's and 4 SO's are giving support in this pilot.	Pilot 23.4. – 19.6. Until 26.5.: 21 calls / 13 people

IN GROUPS

Discussion forum & closed groups (2006–)	Open discussion forum and closed groups for both PG's and SO's.	Forum: 12 654 visits / month Groups: 546 visits / month
Gambling Power Circle (2009–)	SMS- and web-based service with small groups. 4 groups for PG's and 1 group for SO's.	219/560 belongs to group & 2020 send group messages (31.12.14)

**Why (virtual)
peer support?**

Many practical reasons!

- Many people **PREFER** peer support over other services
- Other (professional) services **MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE** (long queues etc..)
- People are often **SCARED TO USE** non-anonymous (f2f) services
- Probably **REDUCES THE THRESHOLD** to other services?

+ Peer support can help an individual in many ways..

1. .. to identify the problem
2. .. to make a decision to solve the problem
3. .. **to plan how to solve the problem**
4. .. **to encourage to be active/persistent to solve the problem**
5. .. **to maintain the strategies to change the behaviour**

Prochaska, Norcross & DiClemente (1994, ref. Gant 2004, 463–464)



Virtual vs. f2f (peer) support

Pros..

1. Easy to **REACH** from anywhere & anytime (not fixed meeting times)
2. **ANONYMITY** and text-based/faceless communication may be easier for people who feel stigmatized
3. Shyness, physical characters, gender, power, status etc. **DON'T PLAY A BIG ROLE** in virtual communication

-> Individuals may be more "tolerant" about who he/she they are communicating with & focus more to **THE TASK AT HAND.**

..and cons

1. Restricted communication
2. Deindividuation may lead to "flaming"
3. May lead to isolation and loneliness?
4. Conversations may be incoherent & repetitive



**One on one
virtual
peer support**

1. Chat (pilot)

- With former PG
- 6 chat times on February & March
 - 12 - 4 pm (4 times on Feb)
 - 18 - 9 pm (2 times on March)
- Information on our website & FB-pages
- Less than 10 "real chats" in 22 duty hours.
- Also some prank/interference contacts.

Not a great success!



Vertaisauttaja päivystää Peluurin chatissa helmikuussa

Makatti keskustella entisen ongelmapelaajan kanssa rahapeliongelmaista ja siitä toipumisesta anonyymisti chatin välityksellä?

Tähän tarjoutuu mahdollisuus helmikuussa, kun chatissamme päivystää yli kaksi vuotta pelaamatta ollut, paljon ongelmapelaajia vertaustukipalvelu [Töttösi](#) ja [Pelivoimapiiritsi](#) kohdanneet kokemusasiantuntija Hanna. Kokemusasiantuntijamme tarinaa voit perehtyä tarkemmin [tästä](#) Tiimilähden jutuista.

Kokemusasiantuntija chat on tarkoitettu kaikille ongelmapelaajille, mutta erityisesti heille, jotka...

- vasta harkitsevat muutosta.
- haluavat saada tukea ja vaihtaa ajatuksia samoja asioita kokeneen vertaisen kanssa.
- eivät ole olleet yhteydessä mihinkään tukit, terapia-, vertaisryhmä- tai muihin auttajajärjestöihin.

Kokemusasiantuntija chat on tarjolla seuraavina päivinä, klo 12-16:

ke 4.2., to 12.2., ke 18.2. & ke 25.2.

Chatissa keskustelua käyvät ainoastaan kokemusasiantuntija ja yhteydenottaja. Chatissa ei tarvitse erityisemmin avata: kun chat on auki, näkyy keskustelukuva näiden nettiisivujen oikeassa alakulmassa.

PELUURIN PALVELUT

- 👤 Anvi oma tilanteeni -testi
- 🗨️ eHänetvasta
- 📞 Pelipöytä -ohjelma
- 📞 Auttaa puhelin
- 🗨️ Valitti - keskustele netissä
- 📞 Tuuletin - ohjattu vertaistukikeskus
- 📞 Pelivoimapiiri - tukea ikätyöväen
- 🗨️ Chat



"Hello, There is Hanna online, a former problem gambler who hasn't been gambling in 2,5 years. If you wanna talk or share thoughts about anything relating to PG with me, please start a chat."

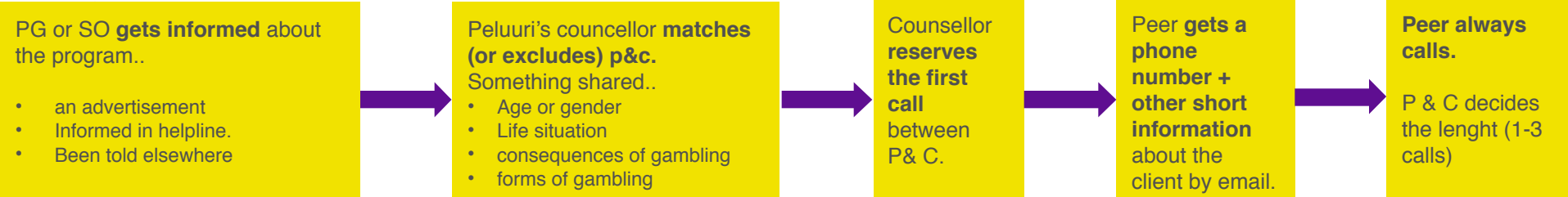


2. Phone (pilot)

- 23.4. – 19.6.
- 3 PG's and 4 SO's
- 1-3 phone calls per client (so far max 2)
- **Excluded** "too heavy cases":
suicidal, serious mental problems etc.

In cooperation with

- **Pelirajat'on** (offers live groups around Finland)
- **Tiltti** (info & support centre in Helsinki)



There is one peer who's about the same age with you, who played the same games than you and whose family was also affected. Let me read a short intro:

Sami is 32 years old, married and has one kid...Ggambled ever since he was 10 y.

He preferred betting on sports online. He also took loans for his wife name and got caught.

After a marital and economic crisis they are still together. Sami haven't been gambled since last 3 years. He has led many f2f peer support groups.

How would this sound to you?



Experiences of matched peer support on phone

- Length of a calls: **30 min – 1 h 5 min**
- **21 calls** so far (26.5.), 13 with PG's & 8 with SO's
- Age of clients: **24 – 67** years.
- Mostly positive experiences by both support persons and clients
- Wide spectrum of discussion themes
 - Gambling & money issues
 - Aims & personal values
 - Hobbies & spare time
 - Health & mental health
 - Family & human relations
 - Searching help elsewhere



"Second call. We talked about thoughts and insights which have arisen in the last 2 weeks. He was still interested to hear my own experiences about gambling addiction and how I got rid of it. He told he recognized a lot of similar things in his own situation than what was in my case. A very good call with lots of hope in it [- -]. We agreed to end up our calls to this one."

"A great conversation! We talked about how the sign.other felt by herself, not only how to change a gambler. By her own words, she was feeling surprisingly well. She felt that she got affirmation about not being alone and lost in this case. She felt happy that she has a chance to talk and share thought with another significant other who has felt the same. [- -]. Not only her, but I also got really good mood of this call"



**Group/public based
virtual
peer support**









1. Peer support in public forum

Hello Isa, don't become too desperate now! If that's all your gambling debts, I think those are comparatively small and still manageable!

And of course your family wants to have you here anyway, money is only money. But certainly it's very important now to get your gambling under some kind of control.

I think you should be honest to your husband and tell him what really happened so that he won't give you money but rather for example would help by paying the debts directly, if he wants to help in that way. Otherwise there's a huge chance you'll find your self gambling again and making your debts and desperation even bigger!

Rick already suggest that you should find a decent professional help and I do the same. As we all know, it's so hard to get rid of gambling so it's very necessary that you find help!

	N. of messages in the thread	N. of times the thread has been read	
 Pelasin takautuvat tuet Kirjoittaja PääPinnanAila » 26.5.2015 08:42:20	0	31	Kirjoittaja PääPinnanAila → 26.5.2015 08:42:20
 Vertaistukea ja apua pelaamisen lopettamiseen!! Kirjoittaja Ansku gamedependent » 16.5.2015 12:43:24	10	450	Kirjoittaja Vieras → 26.5.2015 08:29:46
 Pelaaminen ahdistaa Kirjoittaja Vieras » 5.7.2014 21:46:36	579	36156	Kirjoittaja Vieras → 26.5.2015 08:24:40
 Himo pelata Kirjoittaja pelinainen » 7.7.2013 20:35:13	286	27693	Kirjoittaja Vertaishelppari → 25.5.2015 19:14:38
 Ei enää pelejä!!! Kirjoittaja koolibri » 11.5.2015 12:58:16	14	857	Kirjoittaja koolibri → 25.5.2015 08:50:14
 Taisteluni alkaa Kirjoittaja stop777 » 25.5.2015 02:09:13	1	104	Kirjoittaja III → 25.5.2015 07:43:16
 Miesystävä ja tietokone Kirjoittaja kolmas pyörä » 8.1.2015 18:35:53	6	1500	Kirjoittaja Carina 83 → 24.5.2015 11:36:58
 Epätodellinen olo Kirjoittaja WilliamHill » 18.5.2015 21:54:06	15	724	Kirjoittaja Jokujaskanen → 23.5.2015 20:22:15
 (Tukea)-Piste pelihistorialle! Kirjoittaja amelle-aa » 4.4.2015 07:48:12	109	3543	Kirjoittaja amelle-aa → 23.5.2015 15:48:30

2. Peer support in small groups ("Power Circles")

4 groups for PG's, 1 for SO's

- 2 PG's group lead only by counsellor
- 2 groups lead by counsellor + peer supporter
- Closed groups
- Members are added when they arrive
- A group consists of 30-60 members
- Groups don't have clear starting or ending points
- Few people are usually dominating the discussion

- ✓ Increasing the well-being
- ✓ Learning new lifeskills
- ✓ Monitoring the process of recovery
- ✓ Processing/dealing with the thoughts and emotions
- ✓ Identifying own background & personal resources
- ✓ **Changing the behaviour!**

Peer (+ professional) support in small groups



Etusivu

Viestit

- [Lähetä viesti](#)
- [Laheta tiedotusviesti](#)
- [Luonnokset](#)
- [Saapuneet yksityisviestit](#)
- [Saapuneet ryhmäviestit](#)
- [Lähetetyt yksityisviestit](#)
- [Lähetetyt ryhmäviestit](#)
- [Lähetetyt tiedotusviestit](#)

Oma-apu

Neuvonta

Ota yhteyttä

Käyttöohjeet

Tietoa pelivoimapiiristä

Omat asetukset

Ylläpito

Lähetä viesti

Vastaanottaja Ryhmäviesti: Vertaistukihenkilön ohjaama pelaajien ryhmä 1
 Yksityisviesti:

Viesti 😊 😄 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 ❤️

Hello group, how are everyone doing today?....

Viestin pituus 46 merkkiä, maksimipituus 9999 merkkiä.

Group & personal messages

Self-help reminders and series of SMS to your phone

Ask personally from counsellor

Who uses virtual small groups (=Power Circles)?

- Mostly aged 18-40
- Women are over-represented
- Live-players (62 %) / Internet (38%)
- Mostly slots & other "pure" games of chance gamblers..
- ..also e.g. sport bettors (11%)

Members	2014
Amount (n)	560
PG's	74 %
Sign. others	23 %
Men / Women	50 % / 50 %
age 18 – 40	62 %
age 41 – 60	31 %
age over 60	7 %

Primary target of gambling	2014
Slot machines	31 %
Table games	7 %
Internet (any form)	38 %
Sports betting	11 %
Lotteries, scratch cards, bingo..	11 %
Others	1 %

(data consist of all Power Circle users)

**Towards matched virtual
peer support groups..**

WHY? HOW?

What is a group?

..A bunch of people?..People interacting f2f?..Shared tasks and missions?

Cognitive feelings of being together → **Social identity!**

The more similarities → the more things to share → the more interest
→ the more interaction → the more satisfaction → the more liking → the
less conflicts.. → **The better group cohesion!**

→ **THE MORE USEFUL FOR ALL GROUP MEMBERS**

- Identify with other members...
- feel belongingness...
- feel there is a shared mission...
- feel they enjoy being in the group...
- have shared norms...etc..



Functions of the virtual groups?

Meier (2004)

1. Early stage functions Starting the group

- learn to know each other
- activating each other
- forming the norms (the length, the goals etc.)

• 2. Mid-stage functions

- Maintaining the interaction
- Solving the conflicts
- Understanding of the limits of (virtual) group support
- Deepen the mutual trust

• 3. Late stage functions

- Ending the group: information, handle the emotions, make clear about the future options etc..

PG's are VERY different

Only shared thing may be that they are gambling in a problematic way!

- what type of (problem) gambler am I?
- Age, gender -> preference to certain type of games
- Motives: Escape vs. action seekers?
- Pathways model?
- Stage of change?
- Other addictions?
- Seriousness of the PG
- Protective things: family, work, education etc.
- Cultural backgrounds
- Cognitive capacity.....etc..etc..



Practical problems..

- Endless differences: not possible to organize everything for everyone
- People don't like to be classified!
- Which type of gamblers enjoy group support – who don't? Who don't because they are not being offered "anything"?
- A bunch of people is easy to collect - it takes time to form "a group"
- Principles of virtual peer support are against queueing, waiting, classifying..

Both **timing** (group functions, motivation to write etc)
& **matching** are important...

Enough clients to match them and form many specific groups?
Can we offer group that **would still be instantly accesible?**



When people are active in a virtual group? - Experiences from Power Circle –groups! (my own master thesis, 2011)

- When they join the group
- When others are active as well (seems to be max. 2 months..)
- When they believe that the group can help them
- When they have been without relapses for some days/weeks
- When they get responses -> needs to be "enough" active members
- When their problems are still active -> not that communicative after better lifesituation / when the problem is solved

Group cohesion doesn't seem to be a stable condition but rather a VERY dynamic process.

The foundations of the cohesion are formed at the beginning of the groupwork..



**How to improve
group cohesion?**

Good practices:

(according to my own master thesis, 2011)

- Small groups (max 15 people..?)
- Restricted time of the group (2-3 months..?)
- A proper start for the group:
 - starting it when it's not "empty"
 - Leader's role in maintaining the early "motivation to change"
- Mandatory "hello"-message (less lurkers)
- Matching the people in certain groups (being in the same stage of change..?)



Combined professional & peer support? Matched or non-matched? Restricted time? Size of the groups?



Matched, lasting forever:

"Peer leader of this group is Janne. There is also Peluuri's councillor taking part to the conversation.

Janne, 30, used to have a problem with internet table games, slots and sports betting. He completely stopped gambling 2 years ago. Now he's paying his debts and creating trust to his partner again.

Does this sound familiar at all?
If yes, Welcome to join to Janne' group!

(You can join whenever. This group lasts forever!)

Non-matched, restricted time :

"Next peer group for everyone interested to have their gambling under control starts on 15.6. Sign up now, there are seats for 15 first. Group lasts for 10 weeks.

This group is led by Peluuri's councillor. Peer leader takes also part into group work.

Different discussion topics in every week. No matter of your gambling preferences or anything else. Welcome anyone!"

Peer leader's role:

- head of the socio-emotional process
- Attracts certain type of PG's in a group

Councillor's role:

- Head of the task process
- Background material & wider perspective

Cooperation? Insights? Ideas?

Face to face or....
virtual peer support:

markus.sjoholm
@peluuri.fi

THANKS!