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NEWS RELEASE

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PILOT PREVENTION PROGRAM INCREASES STUDENT AWARENESS, CHANGES ATTITUDES TOWARD YOUTH GAMBLING

Johnstown, PA (August 1, 2012) – Kids don't gamble, right? Wrong. According to the Pennsylvania Youth Survey, the largest increases in young people gambling for money or any item of value in Cambria County occur, not in high school, but between 6th and 8th grades! **The successful completion of year one of Cambria County's Youth Problem Gambling Prevention Program suggests that's a trend that can change.**

Funded by a PA Department of Health Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Programs grant, The Cambria County Drug and Alcohol Program and The Learning Lamp implemented a 14-month comprehensive youth gambling prevention campaign during the 2011-2012 school year. The campaign, which employed a multi-faceted approach of information dissemination and single session and recurring educational programs, resulted in students':

- greater understanding of gambling facts and fallacies;
- increased perception of gambling regularly as harmful; and
- decreased favorable attitudes toward gambling among friends of the same age.

Utilizing the research-based *Kids Don't Gamble... Wanna Bet?*™ program as its core curriculum, The Learning Lamp reached 5,168 children and adults county-wide. Participants included students, primarily in grades 6-8, from 16 of 21 public and private schools; attendees at 18 health fairs; and teachers, youth leaders, parents, children, and members of the community at 21 professional development/group assemblies.

"There is no disputing that legalized gambling activities are part of the accepted culture of Cambria County. Ours is a community that rallies to support a good cause, and many organizations and groups benefit from raffles, bingos, and other games of chance," said Jim Bracken, administrator, Cambria County Drug and Alcohol Program. "Being mindful not to undermine the importance of these activities and the causes they support, we need to consider there is an addictive risk associated with gambling and that young people are particularly susceptible to the fallacies that suggest the more chances you take, the better your odds are of winning."

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The mission of The Learning Lamp is to engage all children with the support they need to succeed in school and in life. The Learning Lamp is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, donations to which are tax deductible to the fullest extent permitted by law. The official registration and financial information of The Learning Lamp may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free with in Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

Youth Problem Gambling Prevention Outcomes - 2

Kids Don't Gamble...Wanna Bet?™ is a hands-on, kid-friendly curriculum that is aligned with PA Academic Standards in health, math, statistics and probability. *Wanna Bet* lessons enabled students to:

- Explore age-appropriate real-world issues associated with games of chance;
- Use a decision-making model to promote health;
- Apply age-appropriate concepts of chance and data analysis to evaluate information and solve problems;
- Utilize mathematical probabilities to explore the likelihood of winning;
- Practice behavioral rehearsals; and
- Role-play real life situations.

“This was a very informative program and all of the students really learned a lot,” said Laryssa Bremer, guidance counselor for grades 7-9 at Ferndale Area School District. “The information was presented in such a way that it made learning fun for the students.”

What’s more, pre- and post-program testing demonstrated positive changes in what started out for many participants as favorable attitudes toward gambling and misperceptions about the risk of harm if someone gambles on a regular basis.

“Overall, students’ knowledge of things like common risk factors for becoming a problem gambler increased by as much as 10 percent after completing the program,” said Rachel Sernell, program coordinator, The Learning Lamp. “Even more encouraging was a nearly 20 percent increase in students’ perceptions that people who gamble on a regular basis put themselves at moderate versus slight risk of harm.”

Many students also experienced a change of attitude about whether it’s okay for kids their age to gamble with friends. The mean score in post-program surveys increased 11 percent, shifting from a response of *A Little Bit Wrong* to *Wrong*. Cambria County is awaiting word on an application for continuation funding from the new PA Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs that would expand the county’s youth gambling prevention initiative across elementary, middle, and high school levels.

For more information about the Cambria County Youth Problem Gambling Prevention Program, contact Fred Oliveros, assistant administrator, Cambria County Drug and Alcohol Program, at 814-536-5388 or Rachel Sernell, gambling program coordinator, The Learning Lamp, at 814-262-0732.

The Learning Lamp is a nonprofit agency dedicated to providing the support children need to succeed in school. Our programs are developed in partnership with teachers and school administrators to ensure they benefit the students we serve, providing them with a strong foundation for success in the classroom. For more information on The Learning Lamp, please visit our website at www.thelearninglamp.org.