

The Machine Zone Et Cetera!

These notes are supplementary materials for our workshop at the Glasgow Gambling Summit, September 2021

- The Machine Zone
- Chatter
- Links
- One Last Spin, the film

THE MACHINE ZONE Community Interest Company

ORIGINS to PRESENT

This is written by Adrian Bailey, (Machine Zone director) and is a personal take on how The Machine Zone started and where it's at now.

Once upon a time, well some time in early 2017, I met Martin. We'd arranged to meet in Glasgow's Mitchell Library. While in the queue for coffee Martin mentioned that he didn't do libraries. I mentioned the one-time gangster Jimmy Boyle who 'reformed' while in an experimental unit at Barlinnie Prison. How he'd later looked both ways before going into a library, didn't want to be caught breaking hard men's codes of behaviour.

'That's a name you don't hear much these days,' said Martin.

Funnily enough, a few years later, Martin met and befriended the actor David Hayman who played Boyle in the 1981 film *A Sense of Freedom*, and David's one of many who have helped us out. But that's jumping ahead.

We sat with our coffee. Martin was in bits after the recent unexpected death of his son. His grieving was bound with his feelings of guilt for having not been there for his family while in the grip of gambling addiction. This, and fury about something called fixed odds betting terminals.

I knew nothing about gambling. Martin was convinced that gambling itself was a destroyer, but these machines were something else. The crack cocaine of gambling, he said. Four in each bookies, six bookies within walking distance of each other. He'd played roulette on them, got hooked. You could bet £100 a spin, and have three spins in a minute.

I'd come to meet Martin after someone suggested to someone that I may be able to offer help to a guy who wanted to write a book. (At the time I was working with reading and writing groups in health settings). I asked him what sort of book.

'Don't know. I've never read a book.'

Before I could consider this, he added that he also wanted to make a film and stage a theatre play.

I suggested we meet again soon. Before parting, he took me into a bookies on Sauchiehall Street to show me a machine. He slid in a £20 note to show how to lose in fifteen seconds. That was my introduction to modern gambling.

Maybe take a break here and watch Martin tell his story which was recorded in 2021, [Martin talks about Gambling Harm \(gamblingwatchscotland.org.uk\)](https://gamblingwatchscotland.org.uk)

✱

Before meeting Martin again, I did some research and was both horrified and angered at what was going on in modern Britain. The nature and prevalence of gambling damages seemed to be going on invisibly to most of us. Since that time, everybody we've spoken to who's become aware of the issue has been similarly appalled and angry.

My own background included lived experience of substance addiction then later on working in the recovery field, but while harms from alcohol and other hard drugs were high on the agenda of concern, I'd never heard mention of gambling. It struck me from the start, that victim of it or not, gambling harm represents a major health issue that all of us should be addressing.

Having had experience setting up a community interest company I suggested to Martin we do the same. I said we would need a company if we ever applied for funding.

'They'll never give us a penny,' Martin replied glumly.

This expressed one aspect of lived experience. 'They' will never do anything about it. Still, Martin allowed me to fill in the forms and The Machine Zone was born.

The phrase *machine zone* comes from a book, '[Addiction by Design](#)' by anthropologist Natasha Dow Schull who spent fifteen years among machines, punters and industry people in Las Vegas. The zone is, among other things, a place where the world goes away, winning or losing are not important. The machines are designed to lure people to the zone.

We were finding on social media, mainly twitter, many other individuals coming from the same place as us. Some were starting their own groups. We set up a website

<https://themachinezone.com> and a sister site <https://beatthefix.com> which concentrated on fixed odds betting terminals.

We put a lot of time along with many others into campaigning to reduce the maximum stake on FOBTs from £100 to £2. Against the protests of the gambling industry and its supporters, the campaign was successful, and new legislation introduced. As today, the campaign featured voices like our own, public health, medical professions, psychiatrists, churches, mosques, temples, politicians, newspapers, and many others. The house of ‘them’ has many rooms.

Martin was being sought increasingly for media interviews – local, regional and national; newspapers, radio and television. Even the *New York Times* came looking for him! We also published a couple of fiction books wot I wrote under our own imprint, MacZon Press, and a drama piece scheduled for performance at Barlinnie Prison pre-Covid. Martin was also going to Westminster for meetings curated by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Gambling Harms. Martin was involved with ‘them’! One of them is Ronnie Cowan, Inverclyde MP and Vice Chair of the group who appears in our film currently being produced, [One Last Spin](#).

We continued to link with grassroots individuals and groups, some of these becoming nationally prominent. In particular, [The Big Step](#) is a campaign which organises walks between and around football grounds to campaign against gambling advertising in football. This group is linked with [Gambling with Lives](#), an organisation set up by Liz and Charles Ritchie and families who have lost their children to gambling suicide. In 2020 Martin and others did a walk between Rangers and Celtic grounds which Chris Lee attended just before becoming a Director at The Machine Zone. (In 2021 Martin walked the first leg of the Big Step Walk between Scotland and Wembley Stadium to coincide with the European Internationals, Martin covering Gretna to Kendal).

So. We were growing without any ‘business plans’, strategies, etc. It has all been chance and meeting people. All we had was our time to give (and our own money, a couple of thousand over the first three years for costs that add up – website hosting, software leaflets, travel etc.)

Then, one day just idly surveying local community organisations with a vague view of seeing if we could get involved with something going on around gambling, I dropped an email to COPEScotland based in Drumchapel, very near where I live. Twenty minutes later I got a reply from Hilda Campbell, founder of COPE more than 30 years ago. Warm, encouraging and human, she said she’d flagged gambling as a major issue back in 2007 but there had seemed nowhere to go with it. But she was now partnered with the Alliance for Health and Social Care Scotland’s three year strategy for reducing gambling harms nationally. Wow! Shortly afterwards we were welcomed to the Alliance lived experience forum and opened to an amazing number of places in Glasgow alone from the ‘them’ sector (council, public health, voluntary services etc.) all working on gambling harms. The manager of the Alliance’s Scotland Reducing Gambling Harms programme was Will Griffiths who has since moved to another role. He gave us incredible support, even arranging some financial support for our film.

Hilda encouraged us to bid for an award from Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Healthy Minds Anti-Stigma and we were successful. Hilda and COPEScotland continue to offer and actualise support. That funding went on our website <https://gamblingwatchscotland.org> and

towards our film, both these seen as integral elements of one project. I was the contact point for this award and was lucky to receive, with other people who got funded, ongoing support from NHS Healthy Minds and [See Me](#) via online meetings.

At every step of our journey it has been individuals who have been key. Our fellow activists, of course, but our eyes have been well and truly opened to the fact that the ‘them’ contains many wonderful individuals, often limited, frustrated and constrained by the many ‘thems’ above and around them. We couldn’t dream a few years ago that a CEO, far from being a them is one of us!

Our current time is mostly spent on getting the film finished, and looking ahead to have it screened at the best possible quality community events throughout Scotland. We hope to make new friends at our workshop at the Glasgow Gambling Summit.

We’re on twitter every day and always love getting emailed. Links are on a separate page.

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Chatter Scotland

What happened, what’s happening and what does tomorrow look like?

Written by Chris Lee

It all happened innocently enough. My friend asked me if I wanted to place a bet when I was just shy of 15 years old. I knew him and his family all liked to bet on the horses. Mine didn’t. Maybe a flutter on the Grand National but nothing more. My 50p turned into £4.50 and off I went into 37 years of gambling addiction. It might have been longer than that if I count the times that I was taken into amusement arcades to play one arm bandits and the Donkey Derby by my mum – all seemed like good fun. Lost a few 2ps but no harm done. That first winner was ridden by Lester Piggott – I really wish he had an off day. What if that horse had lost? Would I be so keen to bet again? Fast forward to 3rd February 2020. The day of my last bet and the night I walked into Gamblers Anonymous (GA) to admit step 1 of the program. I finally admitted to myself that I had a problem.

Throughout my time as a disordered gambler and even now, I hadn’t considered myself a big stakes player but I would bet ALL the time. Not entirely sure how I’ve remained employed or employable over the years but somehow had enough of a work ethic to not allow gambling to interfere with my attendance or productivity. But every other waking hour, I would be consumed by gambling. Watching TV, playing sport, out with friends, sat with family, I would be either gambling or at the very least thinking about it. Very quickly, it became clear that I was spending my money to play and not to win. Often, I would look forward to losing so I could go home and think about the struggle to get money for tomorrow’s assault on the

bookies. And that's way before online betting became so prevalent. A real game changer, a betting shop in your pocket and a casino in your hand. Why hang about in a smoke-filled toilet of a betting shop, when I could sit in the comfort of my home and throw away whatever money I had.

I must have been looking for something. It's easy to look back and pinpoint how it happened, whose fault it was and so on but I was a bit lost at 15. My parents were 40 years older than me and while that in itself should not be an issue, I have 3 older brothers – the youngest of which is 9 years older than me so they had all flown the nest by the time I was about to get in trouble with drinking, girls, drugs....and gambling. Guess my mum and dad were tired of raising another unruly teenager so I was left to dig my own holes

I'm not entirely sure how I stopped but I did. Yes, I attended GA but never followed the 12 steps, although I have come to understand them and still attend to this day. I never sought any support from friends or other former gamblers but having blown a huge chunk of my redundancy package, I knew I had to quit. I often wonder if I finally just got bored with it. It was never about winning or landing that big bet. Gambling got hold of me and never let me go.

Two things happened early in 2020 which powered my idea of Chatter. I had used Twitter mainly for fun until I started to look at and engage with accounts from former gamblers and was invited to a charity walk in Glasgow to raise awareness of the gambling advertising saturation in football. On the walk, I met Martin Paterson who has since become a partner and friend. Martin spoke of his journey and I shared mine and we stumbled on the word discovery. We both felt that after years in the fog, we were starting to discover rather than recover. It sounded better. I still cringe a little when introducing myself at GA as Chris Lee, compulsive gambler, no gambling to report. It's not that I wasn't. It's just that I am no longer that. I find recovery odd as a term when coming out of addiction. It is only a personal view but telling myself I am recovering would suggest that something was broken. Nothing was broken. I just couldn't see through the fog.

The second thing that happened was purely by chance. I went to see my doctor for a minor issue and happened to ask him what he would do if I told him I was disordered gambler. He didn't know. He didn't even pretend to know in that way that only GPs can do. I left thinking well if my doctor doesn't know, who does? After a couple of months of scouring the internet, engaging with individuals both in the health and social care field and third sector volunteers – it became very clear that was literally nothing in terms of peer support in Scotland for disordered gamblers. Yes, GA is an option. There is also a National Helpline number for the UK but nothing in terms of 121 support. More than that, gambling addiction has been largely overlooked by both Public Health and the recovery network in Scotland. What could I do to at least highlight this gap and, in some way, fill it?

I founded Chatter in July 2020. The idea was to reach out to disordered gamblers in Scotland who were willing to help out and set up our own support network. Small in scale but big in noise, we found ourselves on the forum for Lived Experience with Alliance Scotland where for the past year we have been helping the Alliance to shape their strategy for reducing gambling harm in Scotland as well as helping a number of people quit gambling by simply lending an ear, our experience and our time. Time remains the enemy as we look to spread our wings and if possible, scale up to ensure that there is peer support available in Scotland

but we simply cannot do this on our own so it is vital for us that those of us with lived experience are not just wheeled out when it suits and that our skills and compassion, as well as our experience is front and centre of any initiative to help disordered gambling. We can only continue to work from the bottom up if policy makers and the wider recovery community acknowledges that there is a growing issue of gambling not just in Scotland but across the UK and beyond.

Re-imagining tomorrow's gambling landscape in Scotland would see the path for the disordered gambler clear to the right level of support at the point of entry and he/she will not simply be seen as someone with a bad habit and a weak character.

It is a public health issue and it should be seen as such. It's not going away or neither are we.

USEFUL LINKS

Scotland, UK and World Links at [Links - Gambling Watch Scotland](#) We'd particularly emphasise Gambling with Lives as they are now outreaching in Glasgow. **We'd be most grateful if you helped us update these links. You own or other suggestions.** Please contact us via info@gamblingwatchscotland.org.uk

The Machine Zone has four websites currently. [The Machine Zone](#) is resting but will soon spring back into action. Most of our current work is devoted to [Gambling Watch Scotland](#). [Beat the Fix](#) contains archived material from our campaigning to reduce the maximum stakes of fixed odds betting terminals. [One Last Spin](#) is very much alive and kicking: here you can see some pictures and news from ongoing production.

A great deal of grassroots activity can be found on Twitter. It ranges from the informal to the formal. Our own 'handles' are:

@GambleWatchScot for Gambling Watch Scotland

@themachinezone for The Machine Zone

@MachineZona for Beat the Fix

@CHATTERSCO Chatter,org

@MartinPaterson13 Martin's account

If you want to get a feel for the live voices of lived experience the above links will get you started. Soon you'll meet so many people, share, learn, support, get news etc. A great way to join the conversation. Also a great method for hours of distraction and procrastination!

Again, if you can add to our links we would be very grateful.

One Last Spin – the film

September 2021

One Last Spin is a film about gambling harms. It features four interviews with people badly hurt by gambling, and each of their stories is complemented with drama sequences,

The film also includes interviews with an MP, a Glasgow University professor with a worldwide reputation for gambling research, and the manager of a gambling harms reduction programme across Scotland.

The film will be premiered in Glasgow during December 2021. After this it will be screened in community venues, firstly in Greater Glasgow and Clyde, then in other parts of Scotland.

After a run in film festivals throughout 2022 the film will be made available later in the year on a website.

One Last Spin is a significant part of our ongoing work to raise awareness, challenge stigma and campaign for regulatory changes around gambling. [The Machine Zone](#) is a very small community interest company of volunteers with lived experience set up in 2017. It networks with voices of lived experience across the UK and beyond. We work with stakeholders, including the media, statutory health and social care sectors, politicians, academic researchers third sector lived experience organisations, and mental health organisations. Our main focus is upon working with grassroots lived experience individuals and groups.

Screening the film will take us out into communities. We are seeking lived experience partners to tailor each event to their local contexts. Each event will include a small panel to facilitative audience involvement. The film and supplementary materials will enable ideas for further community involvement.

A temporary website provides more information and updates about the film, <https://onelastspin.vision>

The film is produced by <https://reveriefilms.co.uk>. The founder of Reverie Films and director of the film, Ross Donald, is working on a voluntary basis. The film has received funding from private donations, charities, businesses and Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Healthy Minds Anti-Stigma project. The financial award from the latter has also enabled our parallel website <https://gamblingwatchscotland.org.uk> Further funding is being sought to finance ongoing community screenings.

One Last Spin

a documentary about gambling

COMMUNITY SCREENINGS and COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

One Last Spin is a film featuring interviews with four people severely harmed by gambling. Each of their stories is complemented with drama sequences.

The film also includes contributions from William Griffiths, project lead for Scotland Reducing Gambling Harms at the Alliance for Health and Social Care Scotland; Professor Gerda Reith of Glasgow University, a world-renowned researcher into gambling for many decades; Ronnie Cowan, MP for Inverclyde and Vice-Chair of the Westminster All Party Parliamentary Group on Gambling Harms.

The film is scheduled for premiere in Glasgow during December 2021. Thereafter it will be screened at community venues, each event delivered jointly with community activists in each area.

Initial events will be in Greater Glasgow and Clyde. It will move across the Central Belt, then population centres on the east coast of Scotland. At the same time we shall be seeking partners and venues throughout Scotland, particularly looking for those in often excluded rural areas such as the Highlands and Islands.

We would also encourage colleagues from south of the border who wish to host a screening. In all cases, we anticipate that our partners may be in generic community mental health, and addiction services., but we greatly welcome interest from any sector. We shall, in particular, be seeking events in the social justice sector, to include prisons.

Through 2022 the film will be entered for film festivals. After this run it shall be available for general release and we shall publish it to a dedicated website.

We, [The Machine Zone Community Interest Company](#), operate with very low capacity. We are a voluntary group with limited powers, time and skills. We are grateful to individuals, businesses and third sector organisations who have

provided us with film funding so far. We are extremely grateful to the professionals who have engaged in production without remuneration.

We continue to seek a small amount of funding to complete the film, and a larger amount for distribution throughout 2022. If you feel able to make a contribution no matter how small, or if you represent an organisation able to sponsor the film or perhaps a single community event, please get in touch.

Get in touch too if you'd like to discuss a possible community event in your own area or if you have any questions. We will do our very best to cover costs if you're unable to.

info@gamblingwatchscotland.org.uk

We have a temporary website for the film where you can see updates of shooting.

<https://onelastspin.vision>

Martin Paterson, Chris Lee, Adrian Bailey

Directors

The Machine Zone Community Interest Company

September 2021

