

Research and Practice Note

**THE CES CASE COMPETITION:
A VALUABLE RESOURCE FOR
COMMUNITY-BASED AGENCIES**

Natasha Bergeron
School of Psychology
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario

Paul Welsh
Executive Director
Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services
Ottawa, Ontario

■ The Annual Student Evaluation Case Competition of the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) has gained widespread interest since its inception in 1996, growing from 2 participating teams in 1996 to 15 teams in 2002 representing several regions and academic disciplines in Canada. The primary goals of the Student Evaluation Case Competition were originally to provide students with a challenging learning experience to promote professional development for entrants to the evaluation field and raise the profile of evaluation within academic institutions. However, it soon became apparent that the competition had far-reaching benefits, including assisting underfunded agencies and organizations with evaluation needs. This article will illustrate the contribution that the Student Case Competition can make to agencies with evaluation needs by describing the experience of Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services (Ottawa, Ontario) whose Gambling Treatment Program was used as the case in the qualifying round of the 1998 competition.

THE COMPETITION

Since 1996, the National Capital Chapter of the CES has organized a student evaluation case competition where teams of three to five students from post-secondary institutions compete in the analysis of an evaluation case file in English or in French. Students from all

disciplines and all levels of post-secondary studies in academic institutions across Canada are invited to participate. There is no limit to the number of teams from a given institution. In a preliminary qualifying round, teams receive an evaluation case file at their home institution and have five hours to prepare an analysis and submit it for review by a bilingual panel of judges (composed of individuals with significant experience in evaluation). The three top-rated teams are then invited to participate in a final round (held since 2000 at the Canadian Evaluation Society Conference), during which they must analyze a new case (again in only five hours) and present findings and recommendations before judges and a live audience. The team that makes the best presentation takes possession of the Case Competition Trophy, receives prizes from sponsors, and is given visibility in various publications.

The cases that are used for the competitions cover a wide array of topics and are presented in different formats, including completed evaluation reports, evaluation frameworks, and program descriptions, with a combination of actual and hypothetical documents assembled. In 1998, the case for the preliminary round of the competition was a request for evaluation strategies for a Problem Gambling Treatment Program at a community-based treatment agency in Ottawa.

THE AGENCY

Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services is a nonprofit agency that provides non-residential substance abuse and addiction counselling services for adults, adolescents, and family members. The agency offers (a) an Adult Addiction Program, (b) a Family Member Program for spouses, partners, or other people close to an adult with substance abuse or addiction problems (whether or not that person is in treatment), (c) Youth Substance Abuse Treatment programs for younger adolescents 12 to 18 and young adults aged 19 to 23 (separately) with alcohol- or drug-related problems, (d) Parent Programs for parents of youth who have alcohol- or drug-related problems (regardless of whether their child is in treatment), (e) Children and Sibling Programs for children and siblings of an individual with substance abuse or addiction problems, and (f) Problem Gambling Treatment Programs in co-ed, women-only, and men-only modalities and family member services. All programs are group-based with individual counselling as needed. Public education, training, and consultation with other service providers are some other activities that

are carried out by the agency's staff. The agency is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, and fundraising for services not supported by government. The agency served approximately 1,900 clients in 2000–2001.

THE CHALLENGE

Rideauwood added the Problem Gambling Program to their services in April 1997 after having seen an increasing number of people with serious gambling problems and people inquiring about such services when a high stakes gambling casino opened near the area. The Problem Gambling Program was at the time supported by fundraising and voluntary fees based on an ability to pay. It served 40 clients and operated with \$10,000 a year; not enough to accommodate all the requests for services that were being received. The agency needed to obtain increased funding to expand the program capacity to meet needs, but believed it would be essential to demonstrate its effectiveness in order to strengthen a request for funding where no Request for Proposals had been issued. Not having sufficient funds to develop an evaluation framework and having limited ideas about how best to undertake this evaluation posed a challenge to the agency.

Aware of the Student Evaluation Case Competition, the agency inquired about the possibility of developing a case for the competition around Rideauwood's need for an evaluation of the Problem Gambling Treatment Program. The proposition was accepted by the Case Competition Organizing Committee, and the Committee helped the Executive Director and Administrative Assistant of Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services to assemble the materials necessary for the competition participants to develop strategies and recommendations for conducting an evaluation of Rideauwood's Problem Gambling Treatment Program.

OUTCOME OF THE COMPETITION

Five teams competed in the 1998 Student Evaluation Competition, and each submitted proposals of how an evaluation of the Gambling Treatment Program at Rideauwood might be conducted. The agency was given the five high-quality student submissions and extracted from them ideas to guide their development of an evaluation of the

Problem Gambling Treatment Program. After about a year of implementing this evaluation, the agency obtained outcome data that confirmed their hypothesis that the Gambling Treatment Program was indeed effective as well as output data that supported need. Table 1 presents a sample of these data.

The agency now had valuable data, not only to support a request for funding but also to share with others. The agency was successful in obtaining provincial financial support and presented their findings at four conferences in Ontario and the United States (two on gambling treatment and two on outcome evaluation/performance measurement). The agency was also featured in an article in the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy's publication, *Front & Centre*, which described how the agency conducted an outcome evaluation and how it had helped their fundraising efforts.

The Gambling Treatment Program is now ongoing and is funded on a continuing basis. It now serves 190–200 clients a year and operates on approximately \$92,000 per year. The agency was also able to increase the types of programs available to individuals with gambling problems, to provide them with more choices (i.e., co-ed groups, men-only groups, women-only groups), and to increase its services to include groups for family members who are also affected by the problem gambling. The agency was also able to increase the length of stay in the program. As a result of this success, other self-help and treatment options in the region, such as Gamblers Anonymous, have also grown in some small part due to the increase in the number of people in recovery from problem gambling continuing their recovery through self-help. The suggestions offered by the students of the case competition also helped the agency design an evaluation for their School Substance Abuse Treatment Programs, which serve about 600 students in their high-school milieu.

Table 1
Sample Outcome and Output Data from the Evaluation of the Problem Gambling Treatment Program

-
- *Retention rate:* 88% of individuals assessed during a preliminary interview entered treatment.
 - *Gambling habits:* After 12 weeks of treatment, 47% of the clients achieved abstinence from gambling, and 13% achieved moderate to high reduction in gambling.
 - *Losses:* Prior to entry in the program, clients lost an average of \$2,116 per month. After three months of treatment, clients lost an average of \$88 per month.
 - *Average length of stay:* 26 weeks.
-

CONCLUSION

The experience of Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services with the Student Evaluation Case Competition illustrates how this competition can assist community agencies develop evaluations of their services, which, as seen in the example of Rideauwood, can lead to the empowerment of service providers by demonstrating successful outcomes and making a strong case that a program is worthy of funding. In general, community-based human services are underfunded, and resources for evaluation draw from services, posing a quandary for managers. This Case Competition approach can, in some small but powerful way, provide an avenue for agencies like Rideauwood to develop evaluations of their services. This process is also rewarding to Case Competition participants who know that their work may have “real-world” applications and be used by the agencies to develop evaluation plans. Students are typically informed of this possibility when the case is given to them and have reported a great sense of gratification on these occasions. It might be recommended that for future competitions, the Case Competition Organizing Committee maintain contact with donors of cases following the competition and inform students explicitly if and how their ideas were used by the agency.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the significant contribution made by the members of the 1998 Case Competition Organizing Committee: Blair Haddock, Nancy Porteous, and especially Michael Obrecht, to the development of the case on the Gambling Treatment Program and for organizing the 1998 competition. Rideauwood would also like to thank Mary Egan, Ph.D. School of Health Sciences, University of Ottawa, for providing consultation, organizing and interpreting data, and designing a new outcome evaluation following the Case Competition. Thanks also to Brenda Donnelly, Administrative Assistant, Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services, for her help in the preparation of documents for the case.

REFERENCE

Canadian Centre for Philanthropy. (2000). *Front & Centre*, 7(2), 12–14.