

## Good Morning Reader

# Exeter teen's poster underscores gambling's dangers



BY MICHELLE N. LYNCH  
READING EAGLE

People need to know that gambling can become an addiction as powerful and destructive as a chemical addiction, Kayla Russell said.



Kayla Russell

The 16-year-old daughter of Lamont and Stephanie Russell of Exeter Township, Kayla was the first-place winner in the Berks County Council on Chemical Abuse's, or COCA, gambling addiction awareness poster contest.

"A lot of things that seem to be harmless fun can turn into something dangerous," she said. "People need to understand the risks involved."

Her poster will be digitized and shown on an electronic billboard during Fightin Phils games at First Energy Stadium. It depicts cards spread on a green felt backdrop, contains the slogans "Through the highs and the lows, gambling is risky," and "Gam-

bling is risky ... There's too much to lose." The latter was the theme of a problem gambling forum held last week at the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts.

Marcia Goodman-Hinnershitz, a Reading councilwoman and director of planning and resource development for COCA, congratulated Kayla and other winners after the forum, which began with a reception for the young artists and their families and an exhibit of the more than 80 posters submitted.

The posters were judged for creativity, originality and how well they fit the theme, said Lucy Kalista, 22, of Shrewsbury, York County.

Kalista, a COCA intern and student in Kutztown University's social work master's degree program, coordinated the poster contest, held during Problem Gambling Awareness Month in March.

Kayla, who is homeschooled, said she learned of the contest at the Recreation Center, 320 S. 3rd St., where she goes to socialize with other teens.

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### POSTER CONTEST WINNERS

- **First place:** Kayla Russell, 16, of Exeter Township.
- **Second place:** Jackeline Frutos Espinosa, 9, of Reading.
- **Third place:** Guadalupe Frutos Espinosa, 11, of Reading.
- **Fourth place:** Jayanara Garcia, 10, of Reading.
- **Fifth place:** Adilen Pena, 12, of Spring Township.

Mike Reese of COCA, who works on awareness with youth at the recreation center, Olivet Boys & Girls Clubs locations and in area schools.

"Most of my work is with young people," he said, "because problem gambling often begins young." Gambling is meant to be fun, he tells them, but it carries a risk. Setting limits on the time and money spent is essential, he said.

"You can risk losing everything you built up in life," Kayla said. "You might even risk your life."

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