

ROARING

Recovery Over Addictive, Recreational
Internet use & Gaming

The TIGAR Newsletter

Issue 1: EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH & HOPE!



Issue 1
Summer, 2020

Toronto Internet & Gaming Addiction Recovery (TIGAR) peer support group meets at 4 pm, every Saturday at Sacred Space, 2nd Floor, Centre for Addiction & Mental Health, 100 Stokes St. Toronto, ON, M6J 1H4
Zoom meetings on Wed. & Sat. during the pandemic. EVERYONE IS WELCOME!
www.tigargroup.weebly.com | Email us: TIGARpeers@gmail.com

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“Gaming always felt more important than my own life.”

Experience, Strength & Hope

by Daniel S.

It’s obvious to me now how unhealthy my relationship with video games has been since my childhood. In grade 3, I would forego sleeping and sneak down to my basement in the early morning hours during a school night just to get some playing in before I’d start the day. So many moments of making gaming a priority over anything else has pervaded my entire life. Why? Because—in my own twisted logic—gaming has always been more important than my own life.

Gaming gave me an out; a temporary escape from the problems life had presented me on a daily basis. From bullying and parental abuse as a child, to depression and social isolation as an adult, gaming was there to take me out of myself. However, running from my problems could never last.

Over time, the “temporary escape” started to lose its sheen and began to exacerbate my problems. My life started to deteriorate: I dropped out of school, stopped working, and my alcoholism got worse. Gaming started to take up more time, but no longer gave me any relief from my pain—it only served as a numbing agent.

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Experience, Strength & Hope *by Daniel S.*

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In 2018 I finally decided to take control of my life. I stopped drinking and doing drugs. However, gaming was still there and continued to preclude a lot of growth I was making. That's when, with two years of sobriety, I tried my hand at abstinence. After many unsuccessful attempts and limiting my play time on my own, I decided to join the TIGAR gaming anonymous group. I was able to open up about my experience with like-minded people who shared some of the same issues I had. As members shared their stories, I realized that escapism is the lynchpin of gaming addiction.

I have a group of people that have experienced the exact same thing as me. No longer do I have to strive for a daily reprieve from gaming on my own; I have a group of people willing to help me along the way. I'm no longer alone.

**“In TIGAR I've
found
acceptance
and unity.”**

Gaming Over

by Matt L.

I could recount the many ways in which compulsive gaming has had a negative impact on my life, but I won't. Chances are, if you're reading this, you're already very aware of the negative effects of gaming addiction. That a person can be addicted to video games is a concept that is still controversial to some. Whether in support groups for mental illness or recovery groups for addiction to drugs, I rarely felt comfortable expressing my struggles with gaming. How could video games compare to the REAL problems I had heard others talking about? That said, I never questioned the legitimacy of gaming addiction; my life was an indisputable proof. Almost one year ago was when I decided to look for others who had similar struggles.

The first time I walked into a TIGAR meeting, I wasn't sure what to expect. With my experience in rehab and as a member of two different 12-step based fellowships for substance use, I didn't know how the behavioural addiction of gaming would be addressed.

I quickly learned that TIGAR does not require abstinence from gaming. This appealed to me as a new member. Although I was well aware of my problematic relationship with video games, the thought of cutting them completely out of my life seemed extreme. However, as I continued to attend meetings, share my experiences, and listen to other members talk about their own, my attitude started to change. I began to see that gaming wasn't much different from the drugs that had brought me to my lowest point. Video games were more socially acceptable and ubiquitous to be sure, but the relationship I had formed with them was profoundly unhealthy.

As I write this article, I have over 7 months free from video games. Each day, I become more

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Gaming Over *by Matt L.*
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convinced that I am better off without gaming in my life. The members of TIGAR provide support and accountability with maintaining my abstinence, and by sharing my experiences, challenges, and successes with gaming, I am helping other members to see that change is possible. Best of all, without the compulsion to game constantly in the back of my mind, I am starting to be able to focus on what I really want from my life.

In TIGAR I've found acceptance and unity. In hearing members share I am continually reminded that I am far from alone in my struggles. The isolation and hopelessness I once felt regarding my gaming addiction have been replaced with a sense of belonging and purpose. As the group continues to grow and evolve, my conviction that I am a part of something truly worthwhile continues to develop. Learning from others and seeing how they can also learn from me, gives me hope that together we can build a better life for ourselves.

Experience, Strength & Hope from Day One
by Monica K.

Experience

Walking towards the corner of St. George and Bloor on a warm, July evening, I spotted a tall, bespectacled figure. I knew right away he was one of "us." Keeping my usual reserve, I waited for the group to gather naturally. K. arrived after awhile and greeted me with a friendly smile. The tall individual, T, joined us. C. approached us in a few minutes. Gathered together, the four of us marched south, seeking a quiet shelter in downtown Toronto, to find solutions to our common problem of excessive gaming behaviours and internet overuse.

Sitting down on cool, stone benches in front of a historic university building, K. offered us *Made Good* bars—organic, vegan, and tasty. "My kinda group," I mused. K. had thought about everything, from snacks to abstinence, moderation, harm-reduction, format, venue, and most importantly, respect and confidentiality. All of us agreed on being respectful with each other as we shared our experiences of gaming and internet addiction in a confidential setting. Since we were

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A Brief History of TIGAR
by Monica K.

June 29, 2019

Toronto gaming addiction peer support group email invitations launched for an initial meeting.

July 11, 2019

Inaugural Toronto gaming addiction peer support group meeting at an outdoor location, University of Toronto, St. George Campus.

September 28, 2019

Permanent meeting space established at CAMH, 100 Stokes St., Toronto.

October 7, 2019

Toronto Internet & Gaming Addiction Recovery name voted unanimously.

October 27, 2019

TIGAR website live and running.

November 11, 2019

TIGAR logo finalized, additional posters printed and distributed.

December 3, 2019

TIGAR flyer finalized and distributed.

March 14, 2020

Zoom meetings begin due to Covid-19 pandemic.

April 6, 2020

Mid-week meetings added.

August 29, 2020

Inaugural issue of ROARING, the TIGAR newsletter, completed to celebrate our first-year anniversary.

**"The impossible
became a reality
that I live daily."**

Experience, Strength & Hope from Day One

by Monica K.
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equally divided in our experience of 12-step recovery groups and topic-focused, facilitator-led support groups, we decided to alternate meeting formats between the two—12-steps one week, topic-led, another.

Strength

It was truly inspiring to learn how K. and T. had already logged many months of abstinence from gaming. I was still struggling to keep to the limit of less than 20 minutes of gaming a day. My internet use was rampant, from watching shows all day to mindless web browsing into the wee hours. Earlier in the year, I was introduced to Computer Gaming Addicts Anonymous by a member in another fellowship. The goals of CGAA, as an abstinence-based program, seemed like an impossibility. I felt reassured by the option of moderation and harm-reduction in this support group, as my addicted mind couldn't fathom how I could play less than 20 minutes of my favourite farm game daily. This incarnation of obsessive gaming began seven years ago, shortly after my cancer diagnosis. At my worst, I spent all day playing the game for days, weeks, and probably months. I managed to pare down to around 20 minutes, by the time this group started. Surely, 20 minutes were perfectly reasonable? Most people spend more time watching TV every single day. I came to the meeting primarily for my internet addiction, which was far more difficult to handle than my gaming behaviour.

Hope

After the first meeting, I gained a renewed sense of possibility. Other addicts like me had experienced abstinence. Even if I couldn't practice complete abstinence, I wanted to reduce the time I spent online and do something more meaningful with my life. Before the first meeting, I felt self-conscious about being an "older" female, thinking the group would be full of teenage males. Fortunately, the members spanned a wider age range, including my own.

The gender ratio was skewed, but in a small group, that didn't seem to matter.

Fast forward a year, I can count on my gaming abstinence, at eight months. The impossible became a reality that I live daily. My internet use is still problematic, but most days of the week, I meet my moderation goals. No more streaming services, but I spend too much time watching videos online, especially when stressed or in pain. Cute animals are my weakness, just like on my farm game. Progress, not perfection! For my gaming abstinence and moderated internet use, I am eternally grateful to TIGAR members for their continued support.

WHO's Definition of Gaming Disorder

Gaming disorder is defined in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) as a pattern of gaming behavior ("digital-gaming" or "video-gaming") characterized by impaired control over gaming, increasing priority given to gaming over other activities to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other interests and daily activities, and continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences.

For gaming disorder to be diagnosed, the behaviour pattern must be of sufficient severity to result in significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning and would normally have been evident for at least 12 months.

Source: <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/gaming-disorder>

Opening Up and Understanding

by T. B.

I hadn't talked about my gaming much before our meetings. I had been to plenty of other support group meetings where I avoided this topic because I didn't expect people to understand how much of a problem gaming can be. Before this group I felt more vulnerable to any disrespect that may have come my way if I mentioned video gaming, and I was much less ready to describe my experiences with confidence. Although I had a strong sense that I had an addiction like any other, I didn't have the certainty or clarity that I do now. I was able to explore those experiences more easily with people who already could relate.

In the past, I talked about my gaming as little as possible with people in my life because of shame and avoidance. I didn't want to even think about why I was playing or how often I was doing that. Most of me was shut down when I was gaming, so I barely remember what I was feeling. I played to withdraw from what was happening in myself and my life off screen. Talking about those gaming experiences has involved finding more readiness to face my life.

When this group started, I was abstinent from video games and I needed to air out my past on screen experiences, which was like a secret life. I felt confused and alone with my countless hours of gaming. After over a year, those feelings mostly are gone and I largely accept that side of my past. I continue to deepen my understanding of what was happening inside of me. When I tried playing again this year, our meetings sparked reflections that had not been part of my previous gaming. Now I am more aware of the effects that gaming would have on me if I were to start again.

I needed the mutual understanding that I've had in this group. I needed to relate to others and see that they related to me. We have our differences as well, and these make the dialogue more interesting. We also have commonalities beyond gaming and seeing these has helped me to gain a better understanding of what was behind my addiction.

Other Resources

Online:

Computer Gaming Addicts Anonymous (CGAA)
<http://cgaa.info>

A directory of face-to-face 12-Step (Anonymous) meetings across the world, as well as online recovery meetings using Mumble.

Game Quitters

www.gamequitters.com

A website and online community with guides to quitting and starting new activities, resources, videos, and podcasts, discussing games, healing, and self-improvement.

Reddit

www.reddit.com/r/stopgaming

An anonymous online forum where people discuss efforts to quit or reduce gaming. Also connected to a Discord community.

In Toronto:

Centre for Addictions and Mental Health,
Problem Gaming and Technology Use Clinic

[CAMH Gambling and Technology Use Clinic Site](#)

CAMH offers professional support for recovering gaming addicts in an out-patient program (a group discussion weekly), as well as one-on-one counseling.

Traveling the Road of Recovery Together

by Kalin

I spent two years trying to quit gaming through my own grit and determination. It didn't take. Before that - before I realized how much gaming was harming me and my relationships -- I spent far longer than that playing, and playing, and playing. Alone. Gaming addiction reinforces isolation, loneliness, and disconnection. It stands to reason, then, that it might not be a good idea to try to overcome it in this same context, alone. That we might be better served working to heal ourselves together, in community.

So many support groups have existed over the years for substance abuse problems, following a 12 Step model pioneered by Alcoholics Anonymous, as well as alternative models. But when I first recognized I had a capital-p Problem, there was no in-person peer support group for ex-gamers by ex-gamers. None existed in my city. Whether or not "gaming disorder" was a Real Thing was still the subject of debate among academics and mental health experts (it was officially recognized by the WHO in 2019). But I realized I did not want to carry out a recovery journey on my own. This, for me, is what prompted interest in bringing TIGAR into being.

We've spent a year together as a small but committed group, sharing with each other our stories, challenges, aspirations, and hard-earned lessons from both successes and setbacks. We've supported each other in setting recovery goals and working towards them. And, along with the rest of society, we've gone online due to the pandemic and still managed to stay connected with each other and with our goals.

TIGAR has given me a space to continue pushing myself to live up to my hopes and dreams, for myself and my life. I hope it will continue to do so for a long time, and I hope it will grow as more people hear about us. I hope it will continue to be a place where for building community focused on living healthy, living wide awake, living fully - no matter what life challenges we may be faced with in the future.



Welcome to ROARING, the newsletter for TIGAR! Glued to your game? Hooked on your smart phone? Addicted to multiple screens? Join us on Wednesdays and/or Saturdays for peer support meetings in a safe, anonymous environment, where we help each other moderate or abstain from our gaming and internet overuse.

ROARING on Experience, Strength & Hope! issue 1
Newsletter for Toronto Internet & Gaming Addiction Recovery

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