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Michael Platt

Troubled addicts are getting clean with court-ordered rehab but the program's cost has some worried about the future

There's supposed to be a happy ending, when the crystal meth addict stops talking about his shattered life, filled with dead friends, lost opportunity and despair.

Any time now, the thin 31-year-old will lift his head up with a smile, wipe away his tears, and say: "But everything is just swell now."

He never does.

What starts as a seat-squirming, emotional tale of a young man losing everything to drugs ends as a seat-squirming emotional tale of a young man with nothing but the threat of jail and a newfound will to live keeping him straight.

"Why did I try crystal meth — to this day I ask myself that," said the addict, Kieran G., whose name is protected by court order.

"I remember my old man saying something to me as a kid, that the beautiful thing about life is choice. One bad choice cost me it all."

This June, Kieran G. will become one of the first two graduates from the Calgary Drug Treatment Court, a program celebrating its second anniversary with a perfect record of no repeat offenders so far.

Some have criticized the court as coddling the crooks, but even those with no sympathy can't deny the math.

Calgary has 200 or so hardcore junkies, each requiring between \$2,800 and \$3,000 a week to feed their habits.

That requires the theft of about \$20,000 worth of property a week — a million dollars a year — which the user sells on the cheap for drug cash.

Yesterday, in front of judges, police officials, politicians and press, a handful of addicts told their stories, and spoke to the remarkable achievement of the court, which aims to keep non-violent junkie criminals out of jail.

The theory is, it's addiction which drives the crime: Take away the drugs and you're left with a responsible member of society.

Kieran, now enrolled in college, returns to court next month to face a judge, where his progress will be measured against his probability of landing in trouble again.

It could mean a suspended sentence, probation or jail.

But with 24 months of court-monitored clean living behind him and a college diploma in his future, it seems likely Kieran will get another chance at the life he abandoned to speed.

It's what that life once was that makes his story anything but a happy Hollywood script of redemption.

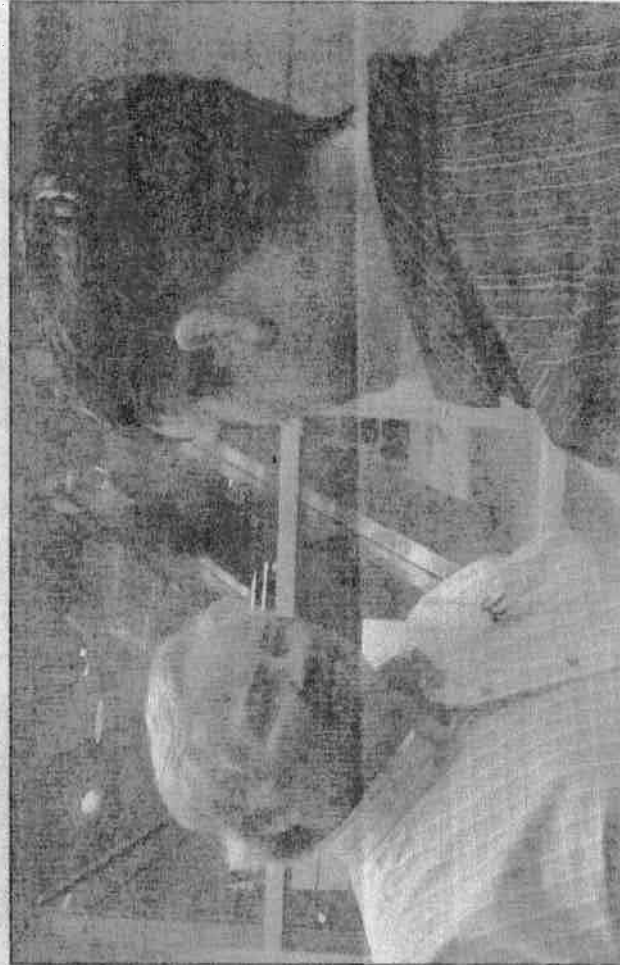
Kieran, when the meth pipe first filled his lungs, was a successful young man who was engaged to be married, and part-owner of a two-section ranch with 500-head of cattle and a nice truck to boot.

"All that was missing was the white picket fence and a big dog," said Kieran.

If speed had only taken away what Kieran had, it might be easier.

What it left behind is the real hell.

With a haunted voice waver-ing on tears, he talks about six years of pain and horror, of



MICHAEL PLATT/SUN MEDIA

A former crystal meth addict name Kieran (his back is turned) speaks to Rob Laird of the Calgary Dream Centre. Kieran may have beaten the drug, but he'll battle the residual pain forever.

close friends and good people dying, of girls as young as 14 selling themselves for another high.

Kieran may have beaten the drug, but he'll never erase the scars of a half-dozen years under its spell.

There's no happy ending — just the hope that some day, he'll look back on it all as a distant, awful memory.

"I working on it, I'm working on that right now," said Kieran.

"This addiction is going to

vital and possible expansion. It means Calgary is no longer the only city in Canada forced to pay for its own drug court with property taxes.

The judge who started it all, Jim Ogile, says the 11 addicts enrolled so far are just the tip of the iceberg — many who could benefit are still going to jail because there was no cash.

"It's absolutely a money issue — it's been a real struggle in that regard," said Ogile.

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