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JUSTICE

London one of a handful of Ontario cities with drug treatment court

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By [Randy Richmond](#), The London Free Press
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Richard, just graduated from drug treatment court. MIKE HENSEN / The London Free Press / QMI AGENCY

Each court session begins with the question: Did you use?, followed by a lesson in the variety of what people will consume to escape life.

Monday: hydromorphone, Ritalin; Tuesday, Oxys and marijuana, and so on. Ecstasy, cocaine, crack, crystal meth.

If the people standing in front of Justice Wayne Rabley were caught on the outside with those drugs, they could very well go to jail.

Here they will get a stern lecture, or have to write an essay, but they will remain relatively free.

"This court is about second chances. It's about hope," says Steve Killiam.

Killiam is the first graduate of London's drug treatment court, a 2-1/2-year-old program that tries to divert long-term addicts from a life of jail time.

Instead of serving their most recent sentence behind bars, they have to attend months or years of treatment programs, do volunteer work, and make the medical, housing and social service appointments to get their lives back in order. They also have to provide a progress report in Rabley's court each Tuesday.

If the people mess up too much, by missing appointments or breaking curfew too often, or if they show no progress after too long, they must return to jail and serve out their sentences.

London's is one of a handful of drug courts in Ontario. Like most, it's plodding along with a patchwork of agencies scraping by without any extra money for the court.

Because each of the dozen or so agencies involved in London's court use existing funds to cover costs, it's impossible to determine how much the court costs to operate.

Toronto gets \$750,000 a year from the federal government for its drug court, which has three full-time case managers/therapists.

London has one counsellor at Addiction Services of Thames Valley dedicated to drug court, funded without any new dollars from the government.

London's drug court recently learned one of its agency's could no longer provide twice weekly drug screening, a key element of the program.

Dedicated funding from the province would pay for a drug screening program,

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another counsellor — doubling the number of participants — more contact with participants, recreation therapy, help for participants' families and programs on weekends when participants may be most tempted to use, supporters say.

"The list goes on and on," says Linda Sibley, executive director of Thames Valley, the lead treatment agency for drug court.

"Drug treatment courts are a hard sell," she says. "Elected officials have a hard time selling the public on diversion for addiction. The clients are complicated and they have high relapse rates, and return to jail sometimes."

About a month ago, London's drug court celebrated its second graduate. A third is close to graduating. That would make three graduates in 33 months, leaving open the question: Is it working?

Three people out of the 33 people admitted would give London's court a 10 % graduate rate. That's not too far off from the 15.6 % graduation rate of the first nine years of Toronto's fully funded court. That court has about 60 people at any one time, compared to seven or eight in London.

Success can be measured in other ways, says Joanne Humphrey, a Thames Valley addiction counsellor and the sole one for drug court.

Humphrey tells clients going back to jail is not a failure.

She asked her clients, most who didn't make it through, to list how they succeeded while in drug court. Many responses are about feeling better, getting closer to being clean.

Many others show just how far addicts must climb to reach level ground:

"I have food in my fridge."

"Saw a dentist."

"No shoplifting."

"I don't think like a criminal anymore."

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D.J. EDWARDS

You can judge the value of drug treatment court by looking at the person, by seeing who D.J. Edwards was, and who he is now.

Or you can judge it by looking at the money, by counting how much D.J. Edwards cost you before, and costs you now.

Edwards, 31, is the kind of man officers like to say in news releases "is known to police."

Judges have told him, "You are a career criminal."

He barely got into drug treatment court, with one Crown attorney reluctant to give approval. Who could blame anyone for that?

In the past 13 years, Edwards has been on probation a total of six years and nine months. He has spent about 1,325 nights at Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre.

His jail time alone — based on calculations by probation services — cost about \$250,425.

You've cost taxpayers a lot of money, a reporter tells him.

At the time, "I never really thought about the taxes," he says.

Born and raised in London, Edwards began drinking and smoking pot at 12, copying some of the adults in his world. At about 16, he moved onto cocaine and dabbled in other drugs, finishing his addiction the past four or five years on OxyContin.

"I've been charged with all kinds of things — break and enters, assaults, drug possessions," he says. "I used to be a mean person. I used to get angry."

When judges told him he was a career criminal, his response was: Fine, then I'll keep doing crime.

"There were times in 2001, 2002, I was on the streets for maybe 10 days and then back in. Then out for 20 days and back in for six months."

After a job in a restaurant fell through and his second daughter was born, "I started to go downhill."

He took OxyContin and found it gave him a boost to get through the day, until he needed it each day to avoid being sick. He tried a residential treatment program, but went back to drugs soon after.

He was arrested Jan. 31, 2012, on 13 charges, a mix of frauds and breaches. His old friends, the police, recommended Edwards get into drug court.

"Every time they arrested me I was high. They knew it was the drugs."

He entered drug court April 17, 2012. With the full 11 months clean, he's set to graduate soon.

Of all the help he received, the most important might have been the chance to talk.

"Half of us who get out of jail, we don't have anyone to talk to," he says. "I got to talk to people a lot and it's got a lot out of me. So many burdens have been lifted."

Now he can focus on who he wants to be next.

"I grew up with no dad, so I don't want my kids to grow up with no dad. I want to stay clean and show them I can be there when they need me."

He has things he never had before. A roof over his head. Food. Enough pocket money to have a coffee every morning. He never spoke to his mother. Now he does every day. He doesn't wake up sick every day. He's signed up to get his high school equivalency and after that, a framing course.

A few months ago, he took his baby son Cohen to drug court to show off.

Edwards smiles at the memory of making the judge, court officials, counsellors, and other clients laugh.

His infant was wearing a t-shirt with the words, "I just spent nine months on the inside."

RICHARD

Boredom came easily to Richard.

So did his cure: cocaine.

And paying for that cure: shoplifting.

"I had it down to a science. I played the role, the part, clean cut, shirt and tie," he says.

"I used a tinfoil bag. It's called the magic bag. You can put anything in there and the alarms will not go off."

The shoplifting paid for the cocaine and fended off the boredom.

“All these stores and shops accommodated me and my boredom for a while. It was very, very easy.”

About a month after becoming the second person to graduate from London’s drug treatment court, Richard easily recognizes the foe he has finally cornered.

“If anything was going to kill me, it was the boredom.”

Every drug court client shares similar battles — the addiction itself, the stresses that lead to addiction, poor health, decades of engaging in crime, homelessness.

Richard, 47, has battled them all, but his story reveals one battle that everyday, work-a-day Londoners rarely face: filling time.

He doesn’t want his last name used, partly because, he says with a wry laugh, he’d like to go shopping legitimately without store managers following him.

Richard doesn’t want to talk much either about what led him to become addicted to cocaine. He didn’t suffer sexual or physical abuse as a child, “maybe emotional abuse,” he says.

But he remembers being bored a lot. At 19, he started philosophy courses at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. Someone offered him cocaine.

“It just flicked the switch.” For the next 25 years, he would try to turn that switch off, with mixed success.

At 22, he moved to London, hoping for a “geographical cure.”

He worked several good jobs and once ran his own business renting inline skates and skating apparel. An apprenticeship in the high-pressure, long-hour catering business turned the cocaine habit into an obsession. His paycheque stopped covering the cost of cocaine. He left the job and went full-time into stealing.

Nothing stopped the cocaine. Not the guilt at stealing — that made him want cocaine more. Not the seven times in jail the past 11 years, not the occasional cardiac arrest or near overdose. Not family, whom he refused to see.

After his last arrest, Feb. 3, 2011, Richard was sick for a week because of the high levels of cocaine he’d been using for years.

His first job in London was at a lightbulb factory and he jokes now, “Imagine that, the lightbulb really went on.”

He got into drug treatment court, providing the chance to avoid an 18-month sentence. Jail was easy compared to what he had to do now.

The daunting question that faces many in recovery. “What am I going to do?”

The answers came in part from counsellors and support workers: Group sessions, one-on-one counselling, community service, Ontario Works appointments, the regular appointments — from doctors to dentists — that fill everyday life but not addicted life.

The new habits and new way of thinking took hold, altering the brain the way drugs used to do.

He’s gone 10 months clean and says he never had a craving. But if there was no drug court?

“I would have got out and probably got bored very quickly. It would have happened, definitely gone back to using.”

In the past 10 months he has reconnected with his family, started taking two philosophy courses, begun painting, playing guitar and bike riding again. He and some of the other drug court clients, on their own, started playing tennis and racquet ball on weekends.

The best thing to fill time, Richard finally learned, is life.

CHRIS PEARCE

Chris Pearce looks up from the table where he's fumbling with a day planner.

"A year ago you wouldn't see me with one of these things," he says.

When he got one at the start of his drug treatment court sentence six months ago, he thought, "I don't know about this."

The last time the 29-year-old used a planner, or needed one, was in grade school.

"Now I don't think I could live without it. I wouldn't be able to. It keeps me busy and it keeps my mind off wanting to use. That's an every minute of every day struggle."

For people in drug court, getting a planner means they have to plan. Getting organized means organizing their mind. It means getting a measure of control over a life that was out of control.

Pearce lost control a long time ago. As a boy, he couldn't get along with his alcoholic step-father. He started smoking at nine, drinking at 10 and soon after that smoking marijuana. His behaviour got him put in a foster home, and he bounced from home to home in St. Thomas and London.

He started selling drugs for a friend's mother, a prostitute, when he was about 15. Sometimes they'd sneak into the john's room to rip off money as well.

The serious crime began several years later when he started OxyContin, first snorting then injecting. His specialty was brazenly stealing large amounts of valuable items from stores, bagfuls of CD boxed sets, \$40 razor kits, steaks.

Of course, he often got caught.

"My record is definitely not a small one. Staying out of jail for two months would be good for me."

His most recent arrest was for theft, unlawfully at large and breach. He heard about drug treatment court in jail and decided to try it.

Almost every week he's had to stand in front of Justice Wayne Rabley and report he used. He's had a lot of sanctions, such as the house arrest he's under during this interview, for missing curfews or appointments.

"The hardest part? Being honest. Before it was just so easy to lie. That is the main thing in drug court is being honest. If you be honest and bear with it and take your punishment, it'll be good."

In the past three weeks, Pearce has used only twice. When someone in drug court declares a week of being clean, the court erupts in applause.

Does a round of applause really matter to hard-core addicts and criminals?

"Oh f--k ya," Pearce says. "It feels good, especially when you are somebody like me. I came from the bottom of the bottom. To tell everybody I haven't touched drugs for a whole week, that's big to me."

It's taken him much of the past six months just to get healthy enough to avoid drugs for a week. He's fought several infections in his mouth and has had surgery to remove eight teeth.

During an interview, he doesn't smile and he sometimes covers his mouth with his hand.

"I care about my smile. I am conscious of it."

The notes in a planner are a simple thing. Be here at this time. Get this surgery on this date. But they represent dozens of people trying to help Pearce. They represent his effort to change himself.

What Pearce says in an interview he means literally, but it's easy to see a deeper meaning.

"I am hoping," he says, "to get my smile back."

STEVE KILLIAM

Steve Killiam could have stayed on the pedestal.

He was the first drug addict to get accepted into London's new drug treatment court in June 2010. For a time, he was the only participant.

He was the first and only person in the original group to make it to 90 days clean.

He was the first to graduate, in December 2011.

For more than a year, he was the only graduate from a program many agencies and people are counting on to reduce drug addicted crime and help addicts in this city, yet has seen 24 participants expelled.

Given all that, it's no surprise Killiam today speaks cautiously about his experience and his future.

"The moment I put myself on a little pedestal, that I've beat these demons, that's when you fall. I fell a couple of times."

In the 15 months since graduating, Killiam has had a few short relapses, but done no crime. He doesn't have the structure people still inside drug treatment court have. He doesn't have the job that people still inside the program count on having after a year.

He does, however, have some peace and faith and determination to work slowly.

"I'll never say that I'm going to be clean forever. That is setting yourself up. I will tell you right now I will be clean today only because I am doing what I did yesterday."

Soft-spoken and spiritual, Killiam has a dry sense of humour. Where did you grow up? he's asked.

"I was born in Toronto, but I never grew up. Growing up is optional. Growing old is mandatory — that's what my sponsor says to me."

He sort of grew up in London's east end around the wrong people, a little older than him. His first drink at 13 turned into full-blown alcoholism about a decade later after he got a factory job where drinking was accepted not only at the union hall, but at work, too.

A move downtown connected him with people using drugs. He started to sell, then started to use a bit of what he sold, then more of it.

Alcohol fed his clinical depression, but he soon learned cocaine could serve as a pick-me-up. It seemed only a matter of time before he started injecting crack.

Not long after he was arrested for theft, possession, break and enter, justice and addiction treatment officials in London started the pilot drug treatment

court. Killiam was approached as a potential client.

"I figured I'd gotten as low as I could go. I tried committing suicide. I was dragging on the bottom, just a mess."

Drug court offered a way out, but it wasn't a smooth start.

He struggled to obey whatever rules were thrown at him.

He struggled as well with the idea court participants were allowed to use, without sanctions, as long as they were honest and trying to get their lives in order. He'd rather abstinence was the first step taken, then getting a life in order. That's the way it had to work for him.

"I decided for me harm reduction isn't going to work. Harm reduction is going to kill me."

Despite the conflict, Killiam found drug court gave him values he'd lost long ago.

"This program saved my life. It taught me to be honest. It taught me people cared about me. It taught me I could get out of this hole I dug for myself."

He's still wary of that hole. He's found a faith in God and slow and steady approach to recovery outside drug treatment court.

He's still working on getting into a training program to get a job. He still battles depression.

He surrounds himself with a quiet life, reading, praying, and being with the right people.

"I like myself a little bit more today," he says, but adds, "There is a lot of work to do."

Killiam seems as determined to avoid the pedestal as he is the gutter.

OTHER CITIES WITH THE COURTS

— Ottawa, Toronto, Guelph, Durham Region, Kitchener-Waterloo, Windsor, Peterborough

— Proposed: Kenora

HOW IT WORKS

- Police, Crown, and probation officials screen substance abusers facing jail time for non-violent crimes.
- Participants get out of jail in return for agreeing to intensive treatment programs.
- Participants must also agree to volunteer service, plus make other appointments.
- There is a 30-day assessment period.
- Support is provided for housing, bail supervision, health care, Ontario Works etc.
- Training/treatment is intensive at start, but eases off as participants gain control of their lives.
- Breaking curfew, missing appointments, not progressing lead to sanctions.
- Sanctions include essays, loss of privileges, house arrest, jail.
- New crime, lying, lack of commitment can lead to expulsion.
- Graduates undergo one year of probation.

BY THE NUMBERS

33: people accepted into program since June 2010

24: expelled or not making initial 30-day assessment period

2: graduates

1: expected to graduate within two months

7: current participants

\$189: estimated cost per night to keep person in jail

\$222: estimated cost per year per person for drug treatment (from one visit to a full year of visits)

Challenges for participants (besides addiction)

- Being honest
- Breaking from drug-addicted friends, family
- Filling time
- Organizing lives, going to appointments

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Surbhi Kotecha

Evan, I understand your position, but i believe differently. Behavioural change based on fear of punitive repercussions, while effective for short-term results, is not durable. For a person to conquer the deeply-ingrained emotional and mental dependance on drugs there must be, not just a counter-balancing, but motivating and empowering pull towards abstinence. The structural changes supporting a wilful change of lifestyle cannot be based on fear. What happens once the sanction is removed, after drug court is finished? True success is the good clean work of the person doing the work on his or her own of reaching out to the "good life" because of pure and clean striving for life.

Paul D. Boin

Seems like a no brainer that this program should continue, & have its funding exponentially increased, so as to save both lives & tax dollars. The simplistic "Graduation Rate" statistics also sell the benefits & efficient running of this program short, as most of those who fail screen themselves out in the first 30 days (thereby not diverting scarce resources away from those who are truly committed). Further,

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