

Drug treatment court aims to rehabilitate

# Former addicts find their way

By Lindsey Cole  
The Oshawa Express

Roxanne's small voice trembles as it echoes throughout the courtroom.

Her hands shake as she struggles to get through her hand-written letter to the court.

"What I did during my addiction wasn't really me," she says of her journey through her addition to crack cocaine and alcohol.

"The change is incredible and the gratitude is overwhelming. I learned from you guys how to be honest."

The 'guys' she is referring to are the many court officials, officers and volunteers who donate their time to make the Durham Drug Treatment and Mental Health Court in Oshawa possible.

At 16, Roxanne (not her real name) was with her high school sweetheart. By 22, she had three kids and a happy life, she says.

Then, at 38, she lost her husband and one of her children in a car crash. Four years later she couldn't cope with the emotions.

"I was going out to the bars every night."

Then she tried crack cocaine.

"Sure didn't take long to control me. I sold my soul for another fix, how sick is that?" she told the court.

Roxanne recently graduated from court, which aims to rehabilitate addicts by providing a system where they can get their lives on track.

"This is a harm reduction, therapeutic program," says Justice Katrina Mulligan, who oversees the cases. "It stops that revolving door cycle."

The cycle she is referring to is when a person enters the court system, is convicted, goes to jail, then is released and offends again. She says this often happens with addicts because they haven't undergone treatment while in the system.

Drug treatment court offers a unique system that gives addicts another chance – but there are some strict guidelines that must be followed.

In order to be involved with drug treatment court, participants must meet a certain criteria before they are chosen.

Crown Attorney Jocelyne Boissonneault says referrals come from different places to take part in the program and the crown then reviews those files and decides whether the person is eligible or not.

Durham Regional Police Constable Jeff Tucker further investigates the cases and the charges the accused may be up against. The offence has to be non-violent and the drug vio-

lation can't be for trafficking for commercial gain, says Boissonneault, adding minor assaults can be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

"We discuss it as a group whether it's appropriate," she says, explaining the drug treatment court team consists of police, youth and adult probation, a federal prosecutor, provincial prosecutor, Durham Mental Health, a judge, defense counsel and a Pinewood Treatment provider to name a few.

If participants are eligible they plead guilty to their charges and are placed on a strict bail or recognizance. From there they undergo a 30-day probation period to see if they are taking the program seriously. The guilty plea is withdrawn if they don't fit with the program and then they go through the regular system.

After 30 days if they get expelled the plea sticks.

As part of the rehabilitation program, participants must attend court every Monday, and take part in one-on-one meetings once a week with a treatment provider, group sessions and regular urine screens.

But the most important aspect to the program is that participants learn the importance of honesty.

"They won't be sanctioned for using drugs," says Boissonneault, adding people can relapse in court, but it's a sign of progress if they can admit their mistakes and continue treatment. "If they lie about use, that's the ultimate no-no."

"We want to help them as best we can," explains Constable Tucker, adding if they do well, there are rewards for them like gift cards.

"When they go into the system they don't get treatment."

In order to graduate from drug treatment court a person has to be clean for at least three months, have stable housing and their mental health has to be under control.

Drug treatment court stints can last anywhere from nine months to two years. The average is 12 to 18 months, and two years is the cutoff.

Justice Mulligan says seeing the success stories are what make the program worthwhile, despite having some challenges with funding.

"What we do is going to make a difference in the community. I am so proud of the drug treatment team. The team's the whole community," she says.

Currently, there are 11 drug treatment courts in Canada. Seven of those are federally

funded, but Oshawa is not one of them. Because of that, the court can only take on seven adult participants at a time.

"Oshawa has put together a business plan," she says, adding in 2006 they were turned down because of the court's proximity to Toronto and Ottawa. "Our court always has a waiting list."

Through grants, funding initiatives and the generosity of community members, the court is able to operate. However, Justice Mulligan says donations are and can be made to the Pinewood Treatment Centre for the court.

The money will go to good use, she says, adding everyone needs to see just how valuable the program can be. Such is the reason why they invited Mayor John Henry to Roxanne's graduation. It was a defining moment for Mayor Henry, he says, as he handed Roxanne a certificate from the City.

"I was absolutely amazed at what they were trying to do. I will support it in whatever way I can," he says. "(Roxanne) we've never met, but I know a lot about you. This is probably the best thing I've done in a long time."

Roxanne couldn't agree more. She says this court is the best thing that ever happened to her.

Sabrina Scanlan was also on hand during the ceremony to support Roxanne. She was the first graduate of Drug Treatment Court and says she knew Roxanne when they were both addicts.

"It's been a while since I've been in this court. I couldn't be here for a better reason," she says. "Just over four years ago I stood here. I was broken. I was hopeless. There's a place where people can go where they can earn trust. People actually cared whether I lived or died."

She has now been clean four-and-a-half years.

"You (Roxanne) are an amazing example...you are going to help these other women," Scanlan says, pointing to other participants in the program who line the courtroom benches.

As Roxanne receives praise from all those involved in the court for being nine months clean, she tells a story about a life filled with pain and struggle.

But then she entered drug treatment court.

"Everything I thought was impossible is possible. There is help and it is possible to change. I don't have to run anymore," she says. "Today I am a caring mother to my children. I can smile, I can laugh."

"As I continue this life, I know it only gets better."



Photo by Lindsey Cole/The Oshawa Express

Durham Regional Police Constable Jeff Tucker stands outside the Durham Region Courthouse on Bond Street. He, along with a team of court officials and counsellors, help operate the Durham Drug Treatment and Mental Health Court, which aims to help addicts through a treatment program if they choose the program over going through the system.

First Civic reno project opens

## Artificial sports turf sprouts up in Oshawa

By Katie Richard  
The Oshawa Express

Two young soccer teams, the Oshawa Kicks and Oshawa Turuls, got the chance to be the first to test out the new artificial terrain at the Civic Recreation Complex on opening day.

The friendly soccer scrimmage marked the opening day of the city's first ever-outdoor artificial turf field.

"Our beloved Civic Recreation Complex, built by the people of Oshawa for the people of Oshawa, continues its legacy of service to the community and sport user groups. Extended seasonal play, between March and November, provides much needed additional indoor and outdoor multi-use sport field capacity. All three levels of government have played a significant role in the project's funding to make the renewal of the complex a reality. Oshawa's first outdoor artificial turf is just the tip of the iceberg of more good things to come at the Civic, stay tuned," says Oshawa Mayor John Henry.

The field, which many community groups have been waiting for, will serve the needs of outdoor sports teams in soccer, football, lacrosse and ultimate Frisbee.

It was also provide an opportunity for extended seasonal play in the early spring and late fall, before and after natural fields are available, a release by the City says.

The Civic Recreation Complex Renewal project, which the artificial turf is a part of, began in 2009. This is the first grand opening since then. But it won't be the last.

Residents can expect to see the opening of the indoor field house, which will include a second indoor artificial turf, a multi-purpose room for community use and a youth room.

In August, the upgraded stadium featuring a new Mondo track surface and a renovated track and field facility will open.

The City says the official full grand opening of the Civic Recreation Complex is planned for fall 2011.

The federal and provincial governments, through the Infrastructure Stimulus Fund and

the Community Adjustment Fund, have funded the Civic Recreation Complex Renewal project.

From the Infrastructure Stimulus Fund, the federal and provincial governments have each contributed one third of the project's costs or \$6,183,333 each with the City of Oshawa contributing the remaining third, the release says.

Under the Community Adjustment Fund, the federal government has contributed half of the project costs, \$2,119,500, with

the City of Oshawa contributing the remainder of the project costs.



Photo supplied

Members of the Oshawa Kicks and Oshawa Turuls got the chance to be the first to test out the new artificial terrain at the Civic Recreation Complex on opening day recently.