

HISTORIC TORONTO 2015
 Totally Teens
 WEATHER TROVA
2015 Calendars have arrived!
 STAR STORE.ca
 MORE →

ORDER NOW!
CAPTIVATING CANADIANA
 STAR STORE.ca

Tuesday, November 4, 2014
 2:25 PM EST

Search The Star Search the archives

Like

GTA

Sign In

HOME

NEWS

GTA

- Queen's Park
- Canada
- World
- Investigations
- Crime

YOUR TORONTO

OPINION

SPORTS

BUSINESS

ENTERTAINMENT

LIFE

AUTOS

PHOTOS

DIVERSIONS

CLASSIFIEDS

OBITUARIES

Inside the Star

News / GTA

Mom buoyed as addict son climbs back

Two years ago, Patrick O'Hara was a panhandler addicted to OxyContin who was living on Toronto's streets, estranged from his mother.



RENÉ JOHNSTON / TORONTO STAR [Order this photo](#)

Kathy Rasmussens leaves her son's home with a smile. After years on the street, Patrick O'Hara appears to have turned his life around. (Jan. 15, 2010)

By: Donovan Vincent Staff Reporter, Published on Wed Jan 20 2010

Two years ago, Patrick O'Hara was a panhandler addicted to OxyContin who was living on Toronto's streets, estranged from his mother.

The recovering addict has since reconnected with his mom, Kathy Rasmussens, and has housing, thanks to a program run through Toronto's drug treatment court at Old City Hall. It allows non-violent offenders with drug problems to avoid jail when they are charged for offences such as drug possession, trafficking or property crimes.

Participants must provide regular urine samples, attend group counselling sessions and submit to drug treatment. O'Hara, 25, must appear in drug court twice a week to update a judge on his progress. The program lasts about a year.

O'Hara maintains he has turned his life around.

Rasmussens remains cautiously optimistic given that he lived on the streets for about five years and began using drugs at age 16.

The *Star* first ran stories about O'Hara in 2008 after Rasmussens, a Collingwood real estate agent, wrote a letter to the paper in a desperate bid to get her son off the streets and off drugs.

She had agonized over her son's addictions for years, and spent countless hours driving

Top News

- NEW** Ontario fairness commissioner's expenses include \$3,400 for limos ¶
- NEW** Liberal government accused of ignoring sexual harassment ¶
- NEW** German psychiatrist describes killer Luka Magnotta's twisted ramblings
- Police chief stays silent on Jian Ghomeshi investigation
- NEW** Brock University will not discipline blackface costume winners ¶
- Mayor and wife arrested in case of 43 missing Mexican students
- Mother speaks out against guns after third child gunned down
- Scotiabank cuts will eliminate 'good, middle-class jobs' ¶



Mother speaks out against guns after third child gunned down



Q producer taking time off as CBC seeks 'clarity' around Jian Ghomeshi allegations



Second GTA physician no longer allowed to treat women

down from Collingwood and scouring Toronto streets in search of him.

In the two years since his mother's letter, O'Hara has continued to battle his demons. However, there are signs of improvement. Gone is the mental fog. His clothes are tidier, and he's more expressive, emotionally and verbally.

But he admits he still struggles with cravings for crack cocaine and the addictive painkiller OxyContin.

About a month ago, those urges won out. O'Hara, who first wound up in drug court for trafficking last fall, decided to beat his program's 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. curfew.

A police officer comes to his home every other night or so to check up on him. But this time he had a plan.

"I waited for (the officer) to come. He came and I went back out," O'Hara says.

He headed for Queen and Spadina, a favourite spot to hang out and purchase drugs. "It only took a matter of 10 minutes standing on the corner for the police to pull up. The officer said, 'Mr. O'Hara.' I kind of ignored him and started walking. He said, 'Mr. O'Hara, I'm a fast runner, don't even think about it.'"

O'Hara said he broke the rules because "boredom got the better of me." Though he bought and used cocaine, he claims that was his only relapse in the past four months.

O'Hara has had housing since November, sharing a five-bedroom home with two others and covering the \$350 monthly rent with his Ontario Works cheque.

His mother doesn't delude herself into believing he is cured. Still, she takes comfort in the fact he's back in her life and keeps in touch.

At Christmas, O'Hara returned to Collingwood to be with his mother, stepfather and teenaged brother and sister. He hadn't been home in over five years. "That was the best Christmas present I ever had ... unbelievable," O'Hara says.

Getting off the streets has helped him express love for his family, he says. "I've got my emotions back. When you're on the street that long you lose your emotions. You wake up in the morning, and go panhandle, and then do drugs. When you have a routine like that for a couple years, you forget what your life was before. You slip into the underground and your soul gets lost. It's a pretty scary thing."

O'Hara interrupts the interview to say he must head out to provide a urine sample for his program, then get to drug treatment court at Old City Hall for 2 p.m.

His parents drop him off for his urine sample, but he insists he can make his own way to court.

At 2 p.m., Justice Paul Bentley is presiding, as he has since the drug court's inception in 1998.

First-time observers will notice something unique: Bentley allows program participants to applaud whenever one of their peers reports he or she is not using drugs.

But there will be no applause for O'Hara today because he isn't here.

So Bentley issues a bench warrant with discretion, meaning O'Hara must appear for his next court date for the arrest warrant to be cancelled.

More on thestar.com



10 ways to get 10 mins of exercise Brock University will not discipline blackface co... Cars Ontario fairness



Cancer survivor guides others towards recovery



PARTNER CONTENT

Recruiting in Motion hits expansion snag

Sportonomics: Wiggins Workout



Dangerous gas a killer for all seasons

Toronto.com Now Open: Buna

Classic Canadian Literature
Signed By Award Winning Authors

LIMITED AUTOGRAPHED COPIES AVAILABLE - ORDER NOW!

STAR STORE.CA MORE →

Municipal Elections

905 Election Coverage
Tue Nov 04 2014



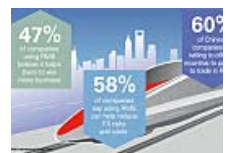
Toronto Election Coverage
Tue Nov 04 2014



From around the web



Photos: What This Guy Did With His Backyard is Hard to...
Viral Nova



4 Reasons You Want to Start Using This Currency
HSBC Global Connections



The Pros and Cons of Choosing Cremation or Burial
Yellowpages

List: 30 Child Actors Who Tragically Died Young
Celebrity Gossip Answers

Recommended by

Energy East Pipeline

energyeastpipeline.com

A project to bring Western Canadian oil to Eastern Canada.

Popular Photo Galleries

News | Toronto Star
Zombie Walk and Halloween Parade



Photos

News | Toronto Star
Dawn in the Beaches



Photos

News | Toronto Star
NOW program helps Toronto newcomers as they enter the school system



Photos



Win a Cottage!
Order Princess Margaret tickets, LL#6628



MENKES STOREYS
Building New Homes & Condos in THE GTA



Want a new VW?
Large inventory-great deals-401 Dixie VW



Sunny Isles Beach
Exclusive VIP Access Florida Oceanfront



All New 2015 RC!
Here Now, Limited Quantities.



Rid tomato fungus
Try rotating crops & putting calcium...

thestar.com

News
Your Toronto
Opinion

Wheels.ca
Insurance Hotline
New in Homes

Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd.

About
Atkinson Principles
Statement of Principles

Advertise with us

Advertising Terms
Mediakit
Online Advertising

Initiatives

Santa Claus Fund
Fresh Air Fund
Speakers Bureau

Connect with Us

RSS feeds
Twitter Updates
News Alerts

We value respectful and thoughtful discussion. Readers are encouraged to flag comments that fail to meet the standards outlined in our [Community Code of Conduct](#). For further information, including our legal guidelines, please see our full website [Terms and Conditions](#).

Commenting is now closed.

[Login](#)

Newest ▼

0 Comments

powered by:



Write your comment here

Submit

There are no comments yet.

Sports
Business
Entertainment
Life
Diversions
Classifieds
Site Map

Star Store
Blogs
Contests
Lottery Results
Obituaries
Corrections
Public Editor
Behavioural Targeting
Today's News

Get Home Delivery
My Subscription
Contact Us
Contact Webmaster
FAQ
News Releases
Star Internships
Careers @ the Star

Print Advertising
Special Features

Classroom Connection
Pages of the Past
Report on Community
Giving

Newsletters
Mobile Devices