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Drug Court gives man chance at redemption

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NASHUA – Shooting fentanyl, smoking crack and eating Xanax for several days in a row is how Ryan Haggerty prepared for his plea hearing to enroll into the Drug Court program at Hillsborough County Superior Court-South in 2016.

While under the influence from a concoction of drugs Haggerty took during the days-long binge, he stood before the judge to enter his plea.

However, less than two hours later, he found himself facing additional troubles and ultimately landed a spot in Manchester's Valley Street jail that night. After serving a few weeks there, and undergoing an incredibly harsh detox, he had the opportunity to reenter his plea because officials determined his original one was invalid, due to being intoxicated.

Despite plenty of bumps in the road, Haggerty eventually graduated from Drug Court. He is now building a better life for himself and his newborn son.

"The program itself, it's very intense, but that's what works about it," Haggerty said. "That is why Drug Court works and that is why I'm alive today."

The venture of drug court began as a pilot program in 2014 with a handful of participants. Organizers later received federal funding to implement a larger program. New Hampshire lawmakers then passed legislation to institute drug court statewide. Therefore, when the money from the federal grants expired, state officials began funding the program.

Since its inception, Nashua's program has conducted 11 graduation ceremonies, with 46 people, including Haggerty, graduating.

"In addition to increasing numbers, the funding has really been able to allow the program to fund specialized treatment providers and case managers to really be trained and to meet the needs of the particular population that we serve," Program Coordinator for the Hillsborough County South Adult Drug Court Julie Christenson-Collins said.

A DEATH LEADS TO DRUG USE

Haggerty said he never battled any addictions or legal troubles until reaching his 20s. His father passed away in 2008 when he was 23. Haggerty said this is when his drug use began.

"We never really saw eye-to-eye that well, but now I realize he was what kept me on track in life," Haggerty said of his late father. "He was the discipline that I needed in my life, so once he was gone, it was like a free for all."

"I didn't know how to grieve properly, so I resorted to using drugs because they were around at the time, which then led to me spending my whole inheritance from my father within a year, and then led to me saying, 'All right, I still need to feed this habit, so I need to sell pills.'"

Haggerty said that from 2008 to 2012, his drug use slowly began spiraling out of control. It was not until 2012, at age 27, that he first got into trouble with the law. While

driving in Nashua that year, he was pulled over by a police officer on Cedar Street – and found himself in a whole lot of trouble.

“I got pulled over and I had \$15,000 cash and like 300 Perc 30s (30 mg Percocet) in my car,” Haggerty said.

At this point in Haggerty’s life, he recalls selling massive amounts of these pills to support his opioid habit. That major possession incident caused police to launch an investigation into Haggerty, and secure a warrant for his house.

Haggerty bailed out of jail the next day. Although he knew police were watching him, he went right back to what he was doing without skipping a beat. He claims he illegally sold about 1,000 Percocets per day during this time.

Once that investigation began, he said law enforcement got a warrant to allow them to place a GPS tracking device on his vehicle. During the investigation, an undercover member of law enforcement bought drugs from Haggerty. After that transaction, Haggerty was located at Nashua club sometime in the fall of 2012. He was arrested on a multitude of charges. He said all the charges from that traffic stop and the sale were compiled into one major case, in which he later took a plea deal.

Haggerty said he did so because drug court was not yet an option. He received a year in county jail instead of a prison term. He ended up serving eight months of that sentence, four months pretrial and then another four afterward, before being released due to good behavior.

Upon completion of that program and continued care, Haggerty still had a deferred sentence looming. He remembers after that situation occurred, he was doing good for a while, before his addiction caught up with him causing him to use again.

Later, officials caught Haggerty in possession of Suboxone, an offense which was going to trigger his deferred sentence and add additional time behind bars for him if convicted.

A Rough Start To The Program

By this time, however, Nashua Drug Court was operating. He pleaded into the program in February 2016, nearly four years ago.

“For the days leading up to my plea to plea into drug court, I had just been up on a straight bender for days. I mean, shooting fentanyl, smoking crack, eating Xanax like an absolute maniac,” Haggerty said.

At this point, when he walked into the courthouse, he had been awake for about three straight days. He basically felt his life was finished and that everything was about to come to an end. As a result of the many substances running through his body, he said he did not know what he was doing and was completely out of his mind while in the

courtroom. Haggerty recalls the judge asking if he was OK, which he replied with the excuse of just being tired. He managed to convince the judge to take his plea and that he was not under the influence of drugs.

After leaving the courthouse, Haggerty went to check in with probation for the first time in his life, filling out his reporting form. From there, he was directed to meet with a case manager. While high, he did not realize he was going to be asked to take a drug test upon arrival.

“I’m like delusional at this point,” Haggerty said. “I go in the building with, I mean, fully loaded with spoons, needles, Xanax, fentanyl – all in my pockets.”

Once he followed his case manager to the bathroom to perform a urine sample, Haggerty was asked to empty his pockets, and he froze. He said the case manager looked down at his pockets, which had a syringe hanging out, and Haggerty was then questioned about what that was. He then went to pull the syringe out of his pocket, and that is when a 5-gram bag of fentanyl flew out with the syringe, landing on the floor.

“I just see my life flash in front of my eyes, and I take off out the door,” Haggerty said. “I run out to the parking lot and I’m like pouring my bottle of Xanax down my mouth, chewing up the Xanax, and he comes running out behind me.”

Due to the state he was in at the time, he does not really remember what transpired in the parking lot. However, Haggerty said the same probation officer he had seen less than two hours before showed up and caught him with a violation. While he was supposed to go into treatment that day, he ended up going straight to Valley Street, where he said he endured the worst detox imaginable.

“I almost died in that place,” Haggerty said. “I hallucinated for 23 days straight, like hallucinated, lost my mind.”

After his 23-day stint behind bars, he was released, and although he could have faced additional time locked up, the evidence was destroyed and he was given 23 days served.

Getting Down To Business

Haggerty said his brain finally began to start coming around again and he then had to redo his plea to participate in Nashua Drug Court. However, upon being released, he said the probation officer recognized that he needed some kind of monitoring, and he then wore a GPS anklet, and was on house arrest at the start of his drug court career, so to speak. He then got involved with the program in March 2016. When he first started, he thought everyone was out for him and wanted him in jail.

“I did pretty well at the beginning of the program,” Haggerty said. “I progressed through the first couple phases well, and then I got myself caught up in a relationship with a girl who was actively using at the time, and I thought that I could like save her

because I was clean and doing the right thing. So, I got really wrapped up in that for a while, and actually almost ended up getting terminated from drug court due to that.”

Haggerty said that while in early recovery, many people latch on to anything they can find to give them comfort and a feeling of being wanted. Drug court ultimately put a no-contact order in place between the couple, but he said he would violate it because he did not want his girlfriend at the time to die.

Haggerty claims that during the time they dated, while he was still in drug court, she overdosed seven times. One of these incidents took place at his house and he had to use Narcan (Naloxone, which can treat overdoses in an emergency situation) to save her. Although he relapsed once while dating her, his near termination was not because of using drugs.

From there, Haggerty moved into a sober house so he could be monitored for a short period of time. It was then, he said, that he said he had an “*ah-ha*” moment. Haggerty realized that he could now end up in prison because of a girl who is not going to care at all, and continue using drugs while moving on to her next boyfriend.

Haggerty was now out of chances, and had to work hard to remain in the program. From there, he realized the drug court team was not actually out to get him. Rather, they had his best interests in mind. He said he started being a little more willing to do all the things they were asking of him. He said the whole time, they were just trying to make the right decision for him because he was incapable of doing so himself at the time.

Haggerty said no one going into the program wants to take a deep look inside themselves to examine their flaws, defects and insecurities, and put them all on the table for everyone to see, let alone face them.

“Nobody wants to do that stuff, but that is what treatment in recovery is all about – becoming OK with yourself,” Haggerty said. *“Most of us, the reason we do drugs is because we were not OK with who we were.”*

He said the whole program is an intense struggle and very demanding of participants. Although the program demanded a lot from him, he credits drug court for being alive today. He graduated the program in November 2017.

“For me personally, I feel like the only way I was going to succeed is if I gave myself too much to lose, and for me, that meant, like working my ass off to give myself too much to lose,” Haggerty said.

After Drug Court

Haggerty worked to start a business from the ground up while participating in drug court, which he later founded in 2017 as Alpha Drywall and Construction. Drug court demanded a lot from him, so he was unable to start his full-time business, but still worked for himself part-time, while gaining some clientele.

“The guys that work for me, they were in the same boat that I was at some point, and they did their own work and they got themselves clean. But every day, I try to reinforce why life is so much better this way,” Haggerty said.

Aside from starting his own business, Haggerty also went on to buy his grandmother’s old house. Now, he is a business owner and home owner, but his success did not stop there.

He is now in a relationship with a woman who just celebrated five years of sobriety at the start of December. Together, they have a 7-month-old son. Haggerty is now 34, and will plans to celebrate his four years of sobriety milestone soon.

“He’s done phenomenal,” Revive Recovery Center Executive Director Jess Parnell said.

Parnell said Haggerty offers hope for others participating in the program. For her as a recovery coach on the drug court team, connecting people currently in the program with him or bringing him in every once in a while to talk and share is good experience. She said before entering the program, Haggerty was probably 100 pounds lighter than he is now, and looked 10 years older than he does today.

“It was probably one of the biggest changes I’ve ever seen in someone, to go from barely keeping himself alive, to keeping multiple people in recovery alive,” Parnell said.

Moreover, Haggerty said Judge Jacalyn Colburn does not get enough credit, nor do the people on the entire drug court team.

“I would not be alive today without her,” Haggerty said of Colburn. *“Somebody believed in me when just about nobody else did, and dealt with all my bulls**t long enough to get me through it.”*

Other Outcomes

Christenson-Collins said she has also heard from graduates that the program is life-changing, with many crediting it for them being alive. Despite changes through the years in the drugs people come into the program using, she knows the program is more effective in reducing recidivism than the alternative, which is prison.

When Christenson-Collins began the program in 2016, she said heroin and fentanyl were the primary drugs causing problems. Eventually, nearly all of the problems they saw involved fentanyl.

More recently, she said problems with the powerful stimulant, methamphetamine, are increasing.

“It’s something that’s being seen statewide, as well, the increase in methamphetamine use,” Christenson-Collins said.

However, she said officials are still seeing large amounts of fentanyl.

“What we know is that drug courts, as a model nationwide, and the research that’s been done, are more effective than the alternative, which is prison, in reducing recidivism,” Christenson-Collins said. *“So, it’s not that there’s a 100% success rate in regards to recidivism, but they’re much better than prisons and they’re more cost-effective.”*

Nashua Drug Court is a collaborative effort of law enforcement, criminal justice and treatment providers, such as Revive Recovery Center. Greater Nashua Mental Health Center is the primary provider of substance-use disorder treatment for participants. On average, the program typically takes 18 months to two years to complete. Currently, 63 people participating in the program.

Through it all, Haggerty was able to accept plenty of helping hands and get himself clean.

“I started doing the right thing and, literally, my dreams started coming true,” Haggerty said.

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Telegraph photo by ADAM URQUHART
Nashua Drug Court graduate Ryan Haggerty did not always strike a smile while at the Hillsborough County Superior Court-South in the past, but he now has something to smile about because he has been sober for nearly four years.

‘OK With Yourself’

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Hampshire lawmakers then passed legislation to institute drug court statewide. Therefore, when the money from the federal courts is within a year, and then led to me saying, ‘All right, I still need to feed this habit, so I need to sell pills.’”



Telegraph file photos by CAGEY JUNKING

Top-tier Democratic presidential candidates Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Pete Buttigieg of Indiana speak during the September New Hampshire Democratic Party Convention in Manchester. A recent disagreement between the candidates showcases the divisions within the Democratic Party.

Warren, Buttigieg scrap puts Dem divide on display

WASHINGTON (AP) — Elizabeth Warren spent weeks absorbing attacks from more moderate rivals looking to stop her steady summer rise in the polls. Now, as the center begins to assert itself in the Democratic presidential race, Warren is forthcoming about her past legal work representing corporate clients. “If @ewarren wants to have a debate about transparency, she can start by opening up the doors to the decades of tax returns she’s hiding from her work as a corporate lawyer.”