

## **'I want to stay clean -- can you help me?'**

The Edmonton Journal

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A 16-year-old young offender, whose name cannot be published, was ordered to write an essay for The Journal about his drug addiction and life on the streets as part of his punishment for trashing a reporter's car. Barely literate, he dictated his words instead of writing them down. This is his story.

Jan. 11, 2004

I am sitting here with my youth worker who works for my lawyer and another youth from YRAP.

At this very moment I am homeless. My group home kicked me out today. I got two hours notice to pack up and leave. The group home tried to get hold of my social worker but they never get back to you until the next day.

I called my mom, but I can't stay there because of her husband. Social Services owns me. My youth worker says they're my guardian.

We are eating (at) McDonald's and trying to come up with options of where I may live. Inner-city housing is full. Safehouse and other group homes need my social worker to make a referral. In the past, I slept in stairwells and laundromats. I still have my grandma to call, so I still have an option tonight.

The group home kicked me out because I lost my job. Also, instead of smoking meth when I get really bad cravings, I smoke pot or drink. The group home caught me being high, so I guess that is a reason, too.

I don't want to stay at the shelter because a lot of kids smoke meth and there is no structure. I need structure.

I really do well and I really do bad. When I go downhill, I start doing bad things like crime and I am worried I will start crystal meth.

The way things are going right now, I might want to start doing crystal meth again -- if I have no place to go. Because I'll have to stay up. If I have only the streets or alleyways, then I wait till the morning and sleep at Chapters when it opens.

AADAC doesn't work for me because I can't talk to them. I really need to trust somebody before I can talk to someone about my addictions and how they screwed up my life.

In my heart, crystal meth makes me forget about my problems. It's like I'm in my own little world. And I'm happy. When I use crystal meth over a long period of time, then I get sick. I get skinny. My skin is a different colour. I hallucinate. I can't explain it.

When I did the crime against Chris, I was on crystal meth for a month straight. When I went into Chris's garage, I was hallucinating, and I thought I was with my friends. But no one was there. I was alone.

When you use meth for a long period of time, you do stupid things to keep your meth habit going. I do crime.

My social worker put me in a treatment group home once, but I didn't even last a night. I wasn't ready to quit meth at that time. Now I have been clean off meth for over four months.

Like I said, I am at McDonald's. I have no place to live. I have no job and I don't go to school. I can't get hold of my social worker, and this is the worst situation I have been in over the last four months. I don't know what I am going to do tonight.

Can you tell me, can anybody tell me, what's going to happen tonight? I want to stay clean. I want to stay out of jail. I am 16 years old and a child. Can somebody help me?

Youth Sentencing

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