

## **Our Views: New Family Drug Court Can Break the Downward Spiral**

Posted: Friday, November 2, 2012 6:21 pm

**By The Chronicle**

Thursday's Chronicle carried a noteworthy letter from a jail inmate and self-described former "drug court flunkie" who now says the seeds planted by the tough love of the Lewis County justice system have saved her life and put her on a new path.

Noelle Straggi is serving a 29-month term in state prison for what she describes as choices she made after growing up in a multi-generational stew of drugs, abuse and crime.

She was offered time in drug court, but she flunked out. At first she blamed everyone else, but she said the positive lessons learned in Lewis County Drug Court have taken root during her time at the Mission Creek Corrections Center.

In her letter she even thanked Judge Richard Brosey for throwing the book at her.

Everyone in Lewis County pays a few dollars a year (\$20 or so, for families with an average income) for a new dedicated 0.1 percent sales tax set aside for drug court and other therapeutic alternatives to jail.

This tax has been in place for just over a year, with a goal to head off crime at the start, rather than punishing it at the end.

Last month the county created a new family drug court that involves more than a year of intensive drug and alcohol treatment, parenting classes, and, if needed, psychological counseling.

The goal is to help parents become stable so they can raise their children right, breaking the horrible and destructive cycle that has ensnared far too many of our families.

Some people might be angry that tax money is being spent on drug addicts and criminals.

However, remember that all the money spent on drug court, mental health treatment and other interventions is far less expensive than the cost of incarceration. More than that, the benefit to society of turning a criminal into a productive, taxpaying citizen cannot be quantified.

It's true that a percentage of these people will backslide or flunk out of the program.

As Straggi's letter points out, however, all is not lost if the first interdiction doesn't work.

What we as a county are doing is investing in fixing lives that were and are deeply broken.

This is a difficult task, one that requires an entire community's effort. The small tax we pay is focused like a laser onto the cancer of drug use, mental illness and multi-generational abuse.

Much more needs to be done, of course, through churches, family relationships, nonprofit enterprises and a growing economy that provides more jobs.

For now, though, we can all be proud of our work in saving our community, one life and one family at a time.

Posted: Thursday, November 1, 2012 9:47 am

**By The Chronicle**

**Drug Court Saved My Life and Set Me on the True Course**

To the editor:

Hello, my name is Noelle Straggi and I am responding to two of your letters to the editor, dated Aug. 21 and Sept. 6.

I am currently serving a 29-month sentence at Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women in Belfair for choices I've made in my life.

I used to hate my life and at one point my life felt like it was worthless. I was a Drug Court flunky is how I felt. But now I know it saved my life.

You see, I come from a long line of drugs, abuse and crime, and after my last two arrests, on Jan. 12 and 19, 2011, that's when I met Jennifer Sophia-Baker and officer Kevin Dickey. They came to my cell and told me I could have a life in recovery and that my life was worth living.

Well, I thought, I would try anything to get out of jail, so I signed up on Feb. 7, 2011.

I was released with the help of Drug Court to the Funny Farm, where my new life was to begin. Well, after 30 years of doing it my way, why would I change now? I lasted only 7 months in Drug Court, doing it my way, and was terminated in September and sentenced to my prison term.

At the time, I was mad. It was not my fault, I thought. It was always someone else's. But today, now that I have been in therapeutic community treatment for the last year, I now understand how recovery works and the steps it takes to live in recovery.

Today, I can honestly say Drug Court saved my life and planted the seed of recovery in me.

I want to say thank you to Sophia-Baker, Dickey, attorney Paul Dugaw and Judge Nelson Hunt. I even want to tell Judge Richard Brosey thank you for giving me the max at my sentencing hearing.

Without all of them I do know I would not be alive today. So again, thank you. And to everyone reading this, please understand how this program is. It might be rough and some might flunk out, but seed has been planted. I am being released soon, and am going to work release and already have college set up. I will be getting my associate of arts degree in social services, focusing on women's needs. I want to give back what was freely given to me.

Noelle Straggi

*Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women, Belfair*