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Local News

### **Meth addict travels road to recovery**

By Karen Iwamoto, The Daily Times

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FARMINGTON — Today, Tracy Gleason is a mother of three with a new career on the horizon.

A few months ago, she was stealing money to support her drug habit.

“I became a liar and a thief,” the 29-year-old Farmington resident said. “I was doing things I wouldn’t have done otherwise, just to get the dope.”

Gleason said her drug of choice was methamphetamine, a toxic mixture of ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, hydrochloric acid, drain cleaner and antifreeze, among other things. She started by smoking the drug, then snorting it, and eventually injecting the liquid form directly into her veins.

“I was snorting it until my nose was bleeding,” she recalled. “And then it got to the point where I shot up and immediately fell to the floor and started puking. And it felt good, but it was bad. It was disgusting.”

Meth also brought about a personality change in her.

“I was a mean mother to my three children,” she said. “I was abusive, and I didn’t even care. I never would have behaved that way before.”

There were days, she said, when she was sure she would end up dead.

Instead, now she is taking training courses to prepare for her new job as a counselor for some of Presbyterian Medical Services’ programs.

“One thing Tracy will be doing is teaching our Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) classes,” said Kristine Carlson, clinical director of behavioral health at PMS’s Farmington Community Health Center. “She’ll also be working in our drop-in center, which is a place for people to hang out when they need support.”

Gleason’s own recovery began with her arrest for possession of meth in August of 2003. She was sentenced to probation and ordered to comply with the San Juan County Drug Court program in October of 2003. At first, she said, she thought it was stupid.

“I hated the judge and my probation officer,” she said. “I thought the counselor was a joke.”

She refused to comply with the program and was arrested again in December of 2003.

This time, she spent two months in jail while her three children were sent to live with their maternal grandmother and it was enough, she said, to convince her to comply with the Drug Court program.

“I didn’t want to end up back in jail,” she said.

More than 50 people are currently enrolled in the San Juan County Drug Court program, which began in 1997, and all of them are battling meth addictions, said Drug Court Director Brad Ullrich.

Ullrich said the meth problem in San Juan County is “immense” and it’s impossible to determine which addicts will recover and become productive citizens and which will become lifelong slaves to addiction.

“There’s no way to predict who’s going to succeed and who’s going to fail,” he added.

“We get some people in the program we think would never make it and they end up flying through. We have others who we think could do it with no problem and they don’t. We’ve stopped predicting.”

Gleason said the judge who sentenced her told her he didn’t think she would make it. Resentment from that statement initially fueled her desire to graduate from Drug Court. “Then I started opening my mind to the program,” she said. “The support I got from my counselor and my probation officer really pulled me through.”

She graduated from Drug Court in April, almost a year after joining the program.

“On average, it takes a person about 13 months to graduate,” Ullrich said. “If they did everything perfectly, they could do it in 10, but that’s extremely rare.”

Gleason said she has been sober since graduating from Drug Court, but does not consider herself cured.

“I’m in recovery today,” she said. “I just take things day by day, and when I’m really stressed, I take things second by second.

She said she still suffers from some physical symptoms of meth use — a spotty memory, occasional twitches, difficulty sitting still and dental problems among them — and she still has to fight the urge to pick up a can of beer or a needle.

“I know if I pick up a beer, I’ll pick up a needle, and vice versa,” she said. “But today, the most important thing to me — more important than my kids even — is my sobriety. I know if I don’t have that, there’s no way I could raise my kids and be a good mother.

“I just want everyone to know that recovery is possible,” she added. “If I could do it, then anyone can do it.”

Karen Iwamoto: [kiwamoto@daily-times.com](mailto:kiwamoto@daily-times.com)