



SAFESTREETS

Sept. 22, 2016

Safe Streets Stories: Young mom looks to get her life back on track

From time to time, we share streets reports and successes from our police, social workers and other City staff. Today's story comes from Kaitlyn Dowd, an [embedded social worker](#) with Everett Police.

I met Alyssa* on July 26. She was participating in the [Safe Streets Work Crew](#), where she had developed a good relationship with Jack Jessup, a retired Everett Police officer who supervises participants.

As an officer, Jessup had frequent interactions with her over the last two years while she was living on the streets in the north end of the city. He contacted me directly and asked for help getting Alyssa into treatment for her drug addiction.

When I first met with Alyssa she shared that she was an intravenous heroin user who also used methamphetamines. She dropped out of high school at age 16, and began using alcohol and cocaine.

Just three years later she started using prescription opiates, then heroin and meth. Alyssa attempted to get clean on her own multiple times, but continued getting kicked out of her housing, struggled with finding a safe place to sleep at night, and continued to be arrested for low-level crimes like trespassing.

Two years ago, she gave birth to her son. Despite not being able to be a consistent part of his life thus far, Alyssa, now 25 years old, said that he is a major motivator for her.

“No parent is a good parent if they are using heroin,” Alyssa said. “You can’t fully be there for your child if you are constantly nodding off.”

At the end of August, social worker Staci McCole, Officer Michael Dutson, and Officer Duane Wantland, and I transported Alyssa to Sea-Tac, where she flew to California for long-term residential drug treatment at the Bella Monte Recovery Center through our partnership with the

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[Police Assisted Addiction Recovery Initiative \(PAARD\)](#). In the month before she left, I worked with Alyssa nearly every day, and she opened up to me about the challenges of being homeless.

Alyssa explained that she couldn't fall asleep on the street without worrying about her own safety. Her body would ache from the random places she found to sit down, she didn't have running water to clean herself or use the restroom, and she was constantly getting sick or getting an infection. Like many people experiencing homelessness, Alyssa also dealt with depression and anxiety, which made daily living a challenge.

"It's too hard to *just* be homeless," Alyssa told me. "You use drugs to curb the pain, and once you use, you can't get away from it. It's everywhere you go, it's everyone you know."

Alyssa recognizes that people who aren't experiencing homelessness can have trouble understanding those challenges, especially the need for stable housing in order for a person to address their addiction.

"They tell us to go get clean, get a house, get a job, and be a contributing member of society but what they don't understand is that there is no housing, no place for us to go once we are clean," Alyssa explained. "What are we supposed to do when we get out of treatment? Come back to the streets? Get a job that you can't shower before, and try to stay clean? That will never work."

Fortunately, Alyssa has sober family who will support her when she returns from treatment and give her a place to stay until she can save enough money for her own place. She knows that not everyone on the streets has a family that is willing to take another chance on them.

"All that they have is their street family, and who would want to leave the only family that they know?" Alyssa said. "Who would want to leave the only family that will keep them safe and look out for them?"

As part of her treatment Alyssa will get assistance in developing a discharge plan and she will continue to get outpatient treatment to support her sobriety. She will also receive treatment for both chemical dependency and mental health.

Alyssa is motivated to get clean, is looking forward to getting a job, her own place, and being a mom to her son. Learn more about [Everett Safe Streets Plan](#).

**Name has been changed.*

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