EVENING ECHO, Tuesday, August 4, 2009



on juvenile justice, Security Correspondent Ann Murphy hears the story of a juvenile offender as told by his devastated mother

dicted to drugs and drink.

These are the heartbroken words of Rachel — not her real name — whose son is serving a

sentence in St Patrick's Institu-

tion for assaulting gardaí

when they were attempting to

This is John's second stretch

Now, Rachel is terrified that

in St Patrick's since he turned

a life in the criminal justice

system awaits him if his addic-

She has managed to secure a

bed for him in a treatment

centre for underage youths but

fears he will lose the bed if he

cannot get into the drug-free

unit in St Patrick's before his

release. He needs to be drug

free for three weeks before he

can take up the place in the

drinking since he was 12 years

age of 12, back in 2005, I think.

He was hanging around with

older lads at that stage," she

"His behaviour became er-

ratic and he would go missing

for days at a time. He could go

to school on a Thursday morn-

ing and not be seen again until

Tuesday. He would go from

house to house and I would not

She spent several nights and

She said: "I spent two years

She said that his behaviour

She enlisted the help of the

(HSE) and a social worker was

ointed to the family.

members of her family.

was different.

to go to school.

Service Executive

know where he was. He was

days driving around in her car,

never here at weekends.

trying to find him.

"He started drinking at the

arrest him.

Y SON is two diferent boys — the nice one and the

Problems started at age of 12

*JOHN's issues began four years ago at the age of 12 when he had his first alcoholic drink.

It led to a downward spiral which resulted in him currently serving a sentence 16 years old in January. in St Patrick's Institution. 2006: First got into trouble, when he was just 13 years old. He and friends interfered tions to alcohol and drugs are with scaffolding at a site and not treated. gardaí were alerted. He was processed through the juvenile liaison office and was given an informal caution. He was given four further cautions after that. His mother contacted the Health Service Executive

appointed. treatment centre. Rachel's life has been im-2007: His mother realised he mersed in dealing with John's had started using drugs, starting with cannabis. He problems over the past two went on to use other drugs vears. But the difficulties she including horse tranquillisers, and her family encountered stem from the fact that John not his real name — has been

and a social worker was

Benzylpiperazine, ecstasy 2008: He continued his addictions to alcohol and drugs, and was regularly missing from the family home. He went into foster care for a weekend to give his mother a break but was unhappy and ended up sleeping in a Cork garda station for a night because gardaí could not contact a social worker. He was treated for his addictions in the Aislinn Centre in Kilkenny and in a facility in Dublin over Christmas. 2009: In February, he was sentenced to St Patrick's Institution for young offenders for breaking windows. When he returned addictive habits, after being

on the road at all hours of the home, he had returned to his day and night looking for him but I could never find him. It drug-free between was like a game of cat and November and February. mouse. He was hospitalised twice in May for drink and had gone out of control by the drug-related incidents. He is end of 2006, just before his 14th now back in St Patrick's birthday. Institution, serving a number Health Not his real name

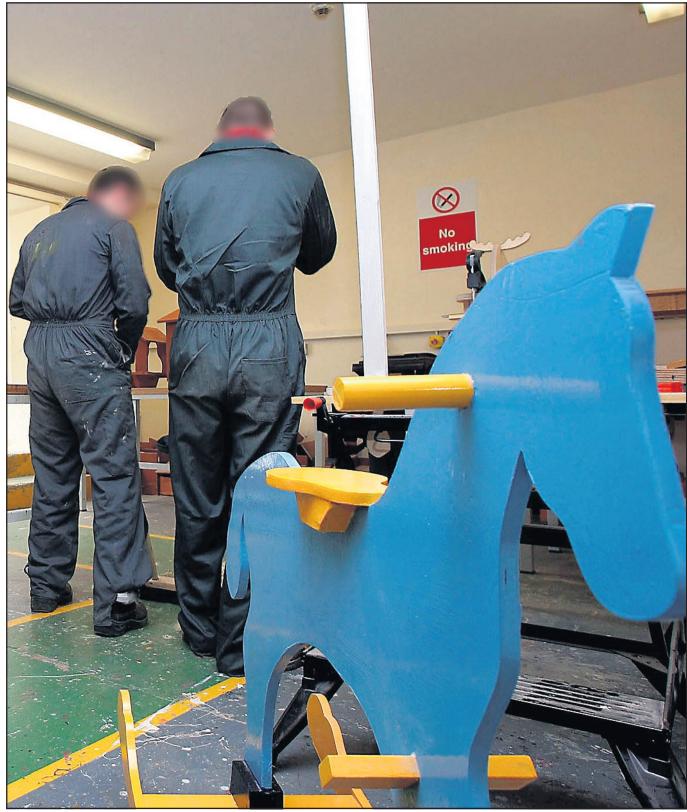
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A mother's

How one woman's son became a criminal



SCENES FROM INSIDE: Inmates make children's toys in the woodwork class in St Patrick's Institution in Dublin. Opposite, life in the prison — including the visitor's meeting area, corridors outside the cells, and the central circle.

Picture: Maura Hickey

All the while, Rachel hid her the HSE. John's behaviour did one weekend last summer. not improve and by the end of with the help of the HSE. son's problems from other 2007, he was hooked on a range She said: "I didn't want of drugs. His habit not only and wanted to return home, people to look at him as if he brought him into contact with and ended up sleeping in a drug dealers but also led him garda station for a night be- Gardaí were alerted and they

The only bright part was to commit crimes in alcohol despite his disappearand drug-fuelled aggression. ances from home, he continued His addictions led to him being arrested for criminal

She said: "He is highly inteldamage and drunken behaligent and very bright, and has the potential to be whatever he Needing a break, Rachel

Despite the intervention of ary foster care for her son for did not know where he was."

However, John was unhappy cause gardaí could not get in tracked him down. touch with social workers after

business hours. the foster family.

"He rang me and wanted to

She was concerned that he would run away from the family and when she made contact with them, they told her he had already gone.

She continued: "As he was Rachel explained: "He did care, I could not just go and get not even spend one night with him until gardaí could contact a social worker.

They were unable to do so as managed to organise tempor- come home the first day but I it was after 5pm and John had late last year and early this

to sleep in the garda station that night.

She said that plans announced last week by Minister for Children Barry Andrews for a pilot out-of-hours social work service are too late for

still supposed to be in foster come it for other families as there are so many out there in situations like mine, and even

Despite getting treatment







year, John got into trouble again in recent months — something Rachel connects with a sentence he served in St Patrick's Institution in February. He failed a drugs test after coming out of St Patrick's, despite having been clean between November and February. She is angry that drugs are available in prisons and said it is ironic that there should have to be a drug-free wing in a prison.

She said: "There should not be any drugs there in the first

Not long after returning home from St Patrick's, John disappeared out of his bedroom window even though he was on a 12-month court-imposed curfew. He was not seen for three days.

She said: "The only way to keep him in would be to have him in a cellar with no windows."

In May, he assaulted two gardaí when they were trying to arrest him while he was drunk and aggressive. He was given two three-month sentences in court last week for the offences

after becoming an addict Day out marred as son had drugs overdose

friend when she got a call to say her son was in garda custody and needed to be taken to hospital The date was May 12, and her son had taken a dangerous combination of alcohol and cocaine.

worst nightmare

She was on a day out in Killarnev with her friend when she had a premonition that all was not well at

When she could not get through to John on his mobile phone, she became worried.

When she eventually got to speak to him before 7pm that evening, he was incoherent and she phoned gardaí to tell them her son was in trouble. They tracked him down and arrested

Shortly afterwards, a doctor was called and he was rushed to hospital as he had fallen unconscious. Rachel said medical staff had to suscitate him and a nurse told her the following morning that he had



COCAINE: One of the drugs that John was abusing. Picture: Posed by model

been lucky to pull through. Two weeks later, he was back in hospital again, after mixing alcohol with Benzylpiperazine, a recreational drug similar to MDMA which can cause acute psychosis, renal toxicity

He was not as seriously ill on that

occasion. She said it was the third time in six months that he had been treated in hospital because of his addictions.

He is now choosing to work on the landings in St Patrick's Institution to earn €10 a week, instead of attending classes in the facility.

She sadly said he has never expressed any interest in following any course or career after school. despite being very intelligent.

And she added: "He was a very good soccer player as well but he has also lost interest in that." Last summer, she decided to

take him on holidays to Spain for a break. But the holiday turned into a nightmare on the very first

He had managed to source drugs vithin 24 hours of arriving and Rachel was forced to pay for early flights home because of his disruptive behaviour.

But although she is frustrated, she says she loves her son and that his problems are fuelled by his addictions to drugs and alcohol.

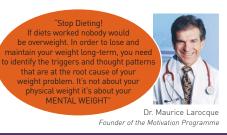
She said: "To me, this is an illness, an addiction. He cannot help it. Without drugs, he would never do what he does. The normal part of him knows the difference between right and wrong but when he is on drugs, he has no inhibitions and no reasoning.'

She said she is not fearful of her son as he has never attacked her or other members of his family. Rachel hopes there is a future

outside the justice system for him but she is fearful that unless he gets treated for his addictions, a ifetime of disruptive behaviour lies ahead of him.

She said: "He knows we love him and will do anything to help him. I am not afraid of him but I am afraid of what is going to happen to him.

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