

Badge of courage: Sheriff's daughter credits family, rehab in fight of her life

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BY SANDI HOOVER
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Kendra Furlong clearly remembers the blackness that had enveloped her 10 years ago when she was addicted to methamphetamine — a darkness so thick that her own father could not reach her.

"I remember my dad pulling me out of a Motel 6 and taking me home. We fought almost the whole night that night. He was trying to get through to me because I was failing in drug court. He finally went to bed, and I walked out the door," Kendra said.

But he never stopped trying, she said.

"He was in my face — all the time — with his arms reaching out to me saying, 'We can fix this,' begging me, but I just wasn't ready," she said.

"Another time in my apartment, I remember him saying, 'Please get up off this couch and take my hands. We'll walk out of here together.' And I could not do it," she said.

"I lost everything. I lost my home, my job, my family, and I gave up my two kids to my mom to raise," she said.

Kendra, now 32, and clean for about nine years, wasn't just any daughter with a desperate, broken-hearted parent. She was the Carson City sheriff's daughter, and as his only daughter, Kendra admits she was very much "Daddy's little girl."

But she recalls that when sheriff's officers knew they were being called



SHANNON LITZ/NEVADA APPEAL

Kendra Furlong talks Friday about her battle with drug addiction 10 years ago and how important it was to have her family's support despite her spiral into darkness.

to her house because of suspicious drug activity in the neighborhood, her father told them, "Go get her." He later also would refuse to bail her out of jail.

"The first time, I was more embarrassed and ashamed for my family, but I wasn't ready to get clean. I knew I couldn't go home, so I didn't know where to turn," she said.

Her second arrest occurred after she'd failed the drug court program in which she'd been placed.

"It was not the appropriate place for me. I was too far into drugs to walk away on my own," she said, adding that she smoked, ate and

snorted crystal meth, but never used needles.

"When someone offered it to me that way, a friend stood up between us and wouldn't let me. I believe I would have died if I'd started taking it intravenously," she said.

Back then, meth was Carson City's biggest drug problem. Today it's heroin. Kendra makes no distinction.

"A drug is a drug is a drug," Kendra said. "You're talking about an addiction. Most people start out looking to self-medicate, or to have a good time and they're not afraid of it, or because of social pressure. As times change, we go to the next drug and

the next drug. Heroin will just be a steppingstone until the next drug comes along."

She advises parents to keep their prescription drugs locked up because she believes, as do authorities, that they lead to more serious addictions.

"Kids will steal them and sell them or they'll take them themselves. And if you even allow your kids to smoke, you're opening the door. Nicotine is still a drug, and so is alcohol," she said.

Kendra credits her recovery to Step2, a long-term rehabilitation program offered in Reno, where she eventually ended up after her second arrest.

"I remember how it happened. I was talking to my dad, and I was just crying. I held out both my arms to show him that I'd cut my wrists, and I told him I was done," she said.

The Step2 program ended up being the key to Kendra's recovery.

"They helped me get clean, they reunited me with my kids and my family and gave me back my life skills. I believe in long-term rehab rather than a 30-day program," she said. "And I'd have to ask, 'How are we reaching out to people in their darkest hours?'"

Kendra said she is grateful to be clean and back on track with her life.

"In reflecting back, I'd have to say that my dad is my fire and determination, and my mother is my will. I would never have intentionally hurt anyone — that's not who I am. I tell

people that the face behind the drugs is not who you are. When consumed by drugs, it's like having multiple personalities," she said.

Sheriff Furlong said he doesn't even like to remember those days, and does not want to talk about it, but he is very proud of his daughter today, saying that she gets strength from sharing her message.

Kendra now does accounting work for the Nevada Arts Council but also has earned her associate's degree in human services management. She plans to go on for a bachelor's degree, and eventually get a master's so she can open a facility similar to Step2.

"I just want to help people," she said.

Kendra has several messages she'd like all victims of drug addiction to hear.

"The best message for people suffering with addictions is that they have to believe they're capable of moving on to a better life, because they are," she said.

"And to the families of addicts, don't give up. There is a significant power in the actions of parents. What my parents did was important, even though I had internal struggles at the time," she said.

"One of the things my dad said when I was getting clean which stuck with me was, 'It is so much easier to give up and walk away than to keep fighting,'" she said. "And I've applied that to so many things in my life since then."

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