

BANGOR DAILY NEWS

Local mom first graduate of Family Treatment Drug Court in Bangor



Kate Collins | BDN

"I love this little girl so much," Kim Sargent says of her youngest daughter as they play in the toy-filled playroom of their Bangor apartment on Saturday. Sargent, a mother of three and a recovering alcoholic, lost custody of her children because of her drinking, but was reunited with the youngest after graduating from Family Drug Court last week. *Buy Photo*

By [Nok-Noi Ricker](#), BDN Staff
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BANGOR, Maine — Those who know Kim Sargent know she loved to drink alcohol and drink heavily.

Drinking consumed her life for many years, and she said on Saturday that she hurt a lot of people who cared for her because she was drunk all the time, including her children whom she neglected.

"I started drinking when I was 14," the 28-year-old mother said. "That's all I ever did. I thought everyone drank. I didn't know people did things any other way."

Her drinking got so bad that when her youngest daughter was only 19 days old, child protection agents

with the [Department of Health and Human Services](#) came into her home and took her baby and two older siblings.

“It was the fourth time they took my oldest daughter, the third time they took my son and the first time they took my daughter, Shayna,” Sargent said while sitting in her [Bangor](#) home.

Sargent said she had been drinking all that August 2009 day, and she was in bed when the child protection agents raided her home an hour before midnight.

“I don’t really remember [what happened] because I was drinking,” she said. “After they left, I just kept on drinking.”

She knows now that “I was too drunk to take care of my children.”

Six months after her children were taken, Sargent enrolled in a new Bangor program designed to help parents who drink or do drugs learn how to sober up, gain control of their lives and, it is hoped, regain custody of their children.

Family Treatment Drug Court, which falls under the Maine Judicial Branch, is the third such court to open in Maine and is designed to improve outcomes in child protective cases affected by parental substance abuse, said Heather Trask, case manager for Bangor’s program. The two other Family Treatment Drug Courts in Maine are in Lewiston and [Augusta](#).

“We focus on families struggling with [drug abuse](#),” she said. “Our goal is to help them, obviously become sober, work on recovery and ultimately be reunified with their children.”

The program is completely voluntary. It is a partnership among the court system, Maine Pretrial Services, the Attorney General’s Office, law enforcement, area clinicians and the DHHS, and involves random drug tests given two or three times a week and court visits twice a month.

Family Treatment Drug Court is set up in four phases that must be completed along with at least six months of sobriety for participants to graduate.

Phase one is designing a treatment plan individually suited for the enrollee, Trask said.

“Phase two is abstinence and improving skills, life skills, coping skills,” she said.

Parents who reach phase two get increased visits with their children, she said. Phase three involves maintaining abstinence and working on creating stability with housing and finding a job or enrolling in school.

Once the person has demonstrated they’re sober, can support themselves and have a safe, stable place to live, “this is usually when child placement is introduced” and phase four begins, Trask said. “They’ve learned all these skills, and we want to see how they work.”

There is no set time limit to complete the Family Treatment Drug Court program, but it typically takes nine months to a year, Trask said.

“Some folks can complete the program sooner, but it’s usually a year,” she said. “I work with parents and link them with wrap-around programs — housing, transportation, pro-social activities — while they’re learning to live their lives sober.”

Teaching former drug addicts and alcoholics how to become part of the community and engage in activities, have quality one-on-one time with their children and get out into the work force are some of the things Trask helps with.

“We also strongly encourage all our parents to engage in AA, Al-Anon, or Narcotics Anonymous or other program, depending on their need, and getting a sponsor,” she said.

Sargent, a 2001 Hampden Academy graduate, walked into a local recovery center known as “The Barn” and found Bangor resident Mary Drew, an Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor who stopped drinking 26 years ago.

Drew was hesitant about becoming Sargent’s AA sponsor at first, but after three months of getting to know her, she actually allowed her to move in.

“I told her I wasn’t going to work harder than her,” Drew said Saturday while standing in Sargent’s home.

Drew simply modeled normal, sober behavior for Sargent and taught her that she did not have to use alcohol as a crutch.

“What she was able to do was learn to stand up for herself” and do things on her own, Drew said, adding, “I don’t have any regrets.”

Sargent, who enrolled in Family Treatment Drug Court in January 2010, said she still drank after starting the program and was sent to a 28-day rehab program at Crossroads for Women in Windham in April 2010, but even that didn’t stop her entirely.

Six months into the program and a year after her children were taken into custody, Sargent heard the words that changed her life. Her oldest daughter was living with her dad, her son was with his father, but her youngest was in foster care.

“My caseworker sat me down and told me my daughter’s foster mother was willing to adopt her,” Sargent said. She was told that “the attorney general was willing to close my case and terminate my parental rights.”

“Right when she said it, I thought, ‘Oh God’ and I didn’t feel like drinking,” she said.

A bitter taste entered her mouth and she said she was finally ready to try to turn her life around. Sargent said Saturday that it was her turning point.

“After they terminate your rights, you don’t have a chance to change that,” Sargent said. She asked herself, “Who would I be, what would I be without them?”

She did not like the answer to that question and finally was able to begin to take control of her life.

That conversation between Sargent and her caseworker happened on Shayna’s birthday visit. Her youngest daughter turned 1 year old the next day.

“My last drink was on Aug. 2, 2010,” she said. “My sobriety date, Aug. 3, is her birthday. I didn’t plan that. It just kind of happened.”

Sargent had been going through the steps of Family Treatment Drug Court, but never really committed until that date. She said the program gave her the structure she needed.

“I have a routine. I get up for breakfast. I never did that before,” Sargent said. “I have a job that I go to sober. I have friends who I don’t get nervous to call” because she was drunk the night before and did something stupid.

Sargent lists one friend, Hannah, and the father of her older daughter as people who stood by her through her years of drinking. She said Saturday that now that she is sober she has others.

“I have people in my life, and I have this apartment,” she said. “These may seem like little things, but

they're huge.”

In addition to helping Sargent get a job and find a home, Family Treatment Drug Court also has taught her some important life lessons about how her behaviors while drinking have tainted how people perceive her now.

“It's helped me understand why people have treated me the way they have and why some of the relationships that I have are strained right now,” Sargent said.

With six months of sobriety and after completing the four-phase Family Treatment Drug Court program, Sargent last week became the first person to graduate from the new Bangor program.

Without the program, “I would not be sitting in this apartment with my daughter,” Sargent said, smiling at the mention of the child.

Shayna, now 18 months old, is living with Sargent, but she is still a ward of the DHHS. She spent Saturday afternoon running all over her mom's apartment playing with her toys.

While Sargent was talking about her reasons for staying sober, including improving relationships with her other children, Drew stopped her and asked in a motherly way, “Do you really want to stop drinking?”

Sargent said that in the past she may have told people she wanted to stop drinking, but this time she truly means it.

“I want to stay sober. I've had it,” she said. “I've never been sober for this long before. I just enjoy so many things these days that I'm not willing to give it up. Life is pretty good. I guess I never realized that before.”

She also said she knows she cannot change the fact that she has burned many bridges in her past, but is working to rebuild the important ones, piece by piece.

<http://new.bangordailynews.com/2011/02/20/news/bangor/local-mom-first-graduate-of-family-treatment-drug-court-in-bangor/> printed on February 22, 2011