

IN OUR OPINION

# New drug-treatment centre offers ray of hope for B.C. addicts

Last week, 18-year-old Lauren Gill described her terrible ordeal as a teenager in Vancouver, hooked on a life of drugs and crime: "I was like a bird with no wings."

Gill was telling her story at the public announcement of a long-term residential centre for young people suffering from serious addictions. It will be the first of its kind in this province.

A great barrier to B.C. youths wishing to free themselves from drug and alcohol addictions has been the almost total lack of long-term treatment facilities available to them.

Across the province, only 158 out of a total of 1,038 treatment beds are exclusively for young people. And even these are limited to detox and short-stay patients.

Concerned parents therefore will welcome with open arms news of the centre, which is the result of long negotiations between concerned community agencies and the provincial government.

Seven years ago, prompted by a radio interview he had heard, lawyer Peter Spencer told colleagues at the Central City Foundation, a 100-year-old Vancouver charity, that "something had to be done" about the growing problem of teenage addictions.

Within a year, the foundation had acquired for around \$500,000 the former Similkameen Adventure Ranch, a 23-hectare spread near Keremeos. The foundation will be

seeking \$6 million to rebuild the site in time for a scheduled opening next summer. It's a fundraising campaign we urge all to support.

Health Minister George Abbott has already shown commendable good sense in committing the provincial government to paying the operating costs of about \$2.4 million a year.

At the outset, the centre will have accommodations for around 42 people, girls and boys aged from 14 to 24. To qualify, they must be able to show a willingness to fight their addictions and be prepared to spend from six months to a year in residence.

The centre will be run by the Portage Program for Drug Dependencies, which has earned rave reviews for its success in other parts of Canada.

And Lauren Gill, who attended a Portage program in Quebec, gave powerful testimony on its behalf, describing a regimen that not only ended her addictive habits but gave her a whole new sense of self-worth.

From Grief to Action, a group formed by parents of addicts, has also played an important role in helping bring the centre to our province.

In a week of otherwise grim news, this was a brilliant ray of hope for troubled teens.



Concerned parents will welcome with open arms news of the long-term residential facility for young addicts near Keremeos

MURPHY'S VIEW



IN QUOTES

**"Mr. Trudeau has been a great prime minister. I don't need to say more. It's too (much of) a cheap shot to deserve a long answer."**

— Federal Liberal Stéphane Dion reacts to former PM Brian Mulroney's allegation that Pierre Trudeau's failure as a young man to support the war against Nazi Germany showed he was unfit to lead Canada. Mulroney's memoirs are to be publicly released tomorrow.

# Let's open our hearts to U.S. cancer victim who seeks Canadian spouse

Jeanne Sather is an American looking for a husband. There's nothing too unusual about that in a country of over 300 million people.

Jeanne, however, may be unique. According to her Internet ad, interested bachelors will only be considered if they are Canadian citizens.

Jeanne has incurable cancer. She can no longer afford her treatment in the U.S., so she hopes that, if she marries a Canadian, she will gain access to our publicly funded health-care system.

Her personal health-care costs have been punishing. She figures she's spent close to \$200,000 since she was diagnosed. She adds that what she pays is only a fraction of the cost to treat her disease. The bill for treating her cancer, which has spread to her bones, is about \$300,000 a year.

Since her story hit the news, she's gotten some pretty



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angry e-mails from Canadians telling her that what she's proposing to do is fraud.

She didn't pay a penny in taxes in this country while she was healthy. And now she wants to find a way in to use our taxpayer-funded health-care system because she's ill. That might be opportunistic, but sure isn't fraud.

Sather is completely upfront about why she wants to marry a Canadian. Her critics may call her selfish, but they can't properly accuse her of being a liar.

She's also got some e-mails

from interested men (and, by the way, she says she'll only choose one if she thinks she can fall in love with him).

Apparently, Canada is home to more than a few men with hearts big enough to marry someone with an incurable disease.

But if she finds Mr. Right, her problems won't be quickly solved. Sather and her new husband will have an uphill battle getting benefits for her — but not because she's sick.

Immigration lawyer Richard Kurland says that it is a common misconception that serious health issues automatically disqualify all prospective immigrants from obtaining Canadian citizenship.

He points out that, under recent changes, foreigners married to Canadians have been exempted from that rule. But they are only allowed in, if immigration authorities are satisfied they married for legitimate reasons.

In order to qualify, she and her husband will have to do much more than consume their marriage. They'll have to merge their assets, perhaps buy a home together. They'll have to demonstrate they've lived together for a few years and share a chequing account.

All that will take years to establish. Sadly for Jeanne, her diagnosis may mean she doesn't make it that far. If she does, I hope she finds herself in a Canadian hospital.

This is, after all, the same country that is still providing health benefits to Laibar Singh, who entered Canada illegally and dodged his deportation order by seeking "sanctuary" in a temple.

None of that's true for Jeanne Sather. She can't afford the care she needs in the U.S. And she hasn't lied to come here. If she finds a man she can love, we should welcome her.

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