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"Something physical I had made, so silly, so much, showed me that I wasn't worthless. It showed me that I was important." — Kristin, a recovering drug addict

Local schools come up short in House plan
 Majority of money would go to larger cities under proposed budget

By AN O'NEILL
 The House plan for fiscal 2007, unveiled last week, has a major impact on local schools. The plan would cut \$100 million from the state budget, with a large portion of that going to education. Under the plan, the state would cut \$100 million from the state budget, with a large portion of that going to education. Under the plan, the state would cut \$100 million from the state budget, with a large portion of that going to education.

Knitting, crocheting projects help addicts find peace during recovery

By JULIE KIRKWOOD
 Kristin had a nervous breakdown last summer and checked herself into a rehabilitation clinic in Plymouth. That's when she asked her grandmother to bring her some yarn.

Smith pupils plant bushes, trees near rescued pond

By JANE JAMISON
 The Smith family has a special place in their hearts. It's a small pond near their home that was once a dumping ground for trash. Now it's a beautiful spot where the family and their neighbors have planted bushes and trees.

STORING THEIR STUFF
 Self-storage a growing industry on N. Shore

By KRISTEN KILGUS
 In the northeast, self-storage is a hot new industry. It's a place where you can store your stuff, whether it's furniture, appliances, or even a car.

Knitting, crocheting projects help addicts find peace during recovery

By **JULIE KIRKWOOD**
News staff

SALEM — A 32-year-old woman with a tired smile picks at the yarn in her palm with a crochet hook.

"I started doing drugs at 10," she says. Her fingers pull at the thin yarn, and she tugs it through another loop.

"At 19, I had just had my daughter, and my mother died," she says, and hooks another loop. "That's when my ex-husband introduced me to heroin."

The woman, who asked to be identified as Kristen, is now going through a drug treatment program at CAB Health and Recovery in Salem. As she talks, she is cro-

cheting part of a blanket.

This is not idle fidgeting. Kristen is one of several women at CAB who have started using needlework to relax, to help them focus on their therapy groups and to keep busy so they're not tempted to go back to drugs.

Kristen began smoking cigarettes at 8 years old. She smoked her first marijuana joint at age 10 and started drinking alcohol in her early teens. By age 19, she was using LSD, mescaline, cocaine and prescription pills.

She describes her 20s as a series of two-week detox programs, escapes from abusive relationships, and relapses into drugs.

Kristen had a nervous breakdown last

summer and checked herself into a rehabilitation clinic in Plymouth. That's when she asked her grandmother to bring her some yarn.

At the clinic Kristen couldn't watch television or listen to music, and she was too embarrassed to call her family and friends.

"I couldn't find anything to give me comfort or peace," she says.

So she started making tiny crocheted squares in her free time. She didn't know what she would do with the squares. But just the act of crocheting took her mind off feeling disgusted with herself.

"At the end of an hour when I had completed this little square, it was pretty," she

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says. "All the (yarn) tension was the same. It was good."

The squares were a symbol, a proof to herself that she could still make something worthwhile — and make something worthwhile out of her life.

"Something physical I had made, as silly as it sounds, showed me that I wasn't worthless. It showed me that I was competent."

Now Kristen is living in Peabody while she goes through follow-up treatment at CAB in Salem. And her work is proof to anybody that she can indeed make something beautiful.

She brings her most recent crocheting project, a water lily blanket, to support group meetings and counseling sessions. The people around her marvel as her ball of yarn turns into a golden sunburst or a downy white blanket.

Angela Genovese, a clinician at CAB, welcomes needlework in her groups. In fact, she has started teaching knitting as part of her recovery programs.

Most addicts have been so busy finding, paying for and using drugs all their lives that they haven't developed hobbies, she says. That's one of the things that makes recovery so difficult.

"We're finding there's a lot of idle time," Genovese says. "It's just kind of a trigger to go back and use."

Knitting can be a good way to pass that time.

So Genovese gathers all the scrap yarn and any knitting needles she can find, and teaches women to knit. If she can't find knitting needles, she improvises. She recently taught a class to knit using pencils.

'Quiets my head'

Some find knitting frustrating. Others, like Andrea, a 19-year-old

recovering heroin addict, fall in love with it.

"It gives me something to do with my hands," Andrea says. "It kind of quiets my head when I'm stressed out."

Andrea started knitting when she was living at a CAB shelter in Danvers, waiting to get into a halfway house. She was Genovese's first knitting student.

"I knit all the time then, just to keep my mind occupied," she says. "When I'm not occupied, that's when I get into trouble."

Now she's living in a sober house in Lynn and working her way back into society. In her free time she still knits scarfs, blankets and baby clothes for her friends.

She finds it especially soothing at night before bed. "It helps me get calm," Andrea says.

Genovese had a hunch knitting would be therapeutic in her groups because it helped her through her own life crisis.

When Genovese was younger, she set off for Washington, D.C., to enroll in law school. After only three days of school she knew it wasn't going to work out.

"I dropped out," she says, "and I knit a sweater in 10 days to just kind of figure out what to do next."

She came to the conclusion she belonged back in New England, and she decided to work her way back here.

A soothing rhythm

Knitting soothes, she explains, because of its rhythm. The sound of the needles — click, click, click — reminds her of her grandmother.

"It's repeated, almost ritualized behavior," she says. "It seems to fit real well with addiction."

It is also distracting.

Kristen finds when she focuses on crocheting, it chases other thoughts out of her head.

But somehow it still captures exactly what she's feeling.

Kristen has a blanket she started with a bright, putrid green yarn, "a disgusting color," as she says.

But then she turned it sideways and added another color, then another. "It ended up turning into one of the most beautiful pieces of work that I've done."

Kristen's boyfriend likes to hold it up and point out the ugly stripes, which she crocheted when they lost their apartment and didn't know where they would live. Or the stormy stripe she made when their dog died. A happy stripe represents the time they found housing.

"It so represents your mood at the time when you were making it," she says.

She holds a little square in her palm, one of the first pieces she crocheted in recovery. It is black and blue with big, angled stitches. It looks nothing like the tight, fancy designs she crochets now.

Kristen explains that she hasn't made anything out of those squares yet. But maybe someday, when she is a safer distance from the dark place they represent, she will try.