



## Rehabilitation helps the young

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Hooked on crack cocaine and homeless since she was 13, Pamela wanted to finally go straight. If not for herself, than for the child that had been growing in her belly for 4 1/2 months.

"I can stay living here in the closet, and I can get clean on my own," the 22-year-old Calgarian said, crying, over the phone at the crack house. Intake workers came the next day from Aventa, Alberta's lone women-only addiction treatment centre.

Pamela wasn't clean. They put her through detox, got her weight back well above 100 pounds, and put her through Aventa's six-week program twice.

She's stayed off crack and alcohol since, and gets babysitting services to take care of her infant while she attends her follow-up sessions with another agency, said Mara Thorlavson, clinical director at Aventa.

"This is not an unusual story," she said of Pamela, whose real name cannot be used. Many of the young women Aventa treats are pregnant, and most will be hooked on tobacco, liquor and drugs. While Aventa tries to limit the severity of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder the children are born with, the clients often have the development-hindering disorder themselves.

The Alberta government on Friday announced the opening of eight new residential treatment beds for young women at Aventa, and five for males and seven for females at a centre near Edmonton.

Health Minister Ron Liepert said 20 new spaces may not sound like much, but the \$1.5-million investment will help hundreds of young people.

These are the first of 100 beds for addictions treatment promised last year by the Stelmach Tories, in response to a task force on community safety. The province is on track to fund the rest by 2010, Justice Minister Alison Redford said.

It's part of the government's renewed efforts to tackle the root causes of crime and keep teens and young adults out of the justice system, so "we're doing a much better job than assuming everyone needs to go to jail," Redford said.

Aventa's new youth-only treatment beds opened last month, the first major expansion since it opened its 36-bed facility in the Mission neighbourhood four years ago.

The addition covers beds to treat people aged 18 to 24. One-third of Albertans seeking addictions services are female, according to the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission.

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