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Drug court grad thriving after yearslong struggle

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Payton Hogan has built himself quite the résumé. He has bachelor's degrees in criminal justice and political science from Wayne State College, a master's in counseling from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and is the owner of a private mental health therapy and consulting operation — Bear Co. Hogan works with a diverse group of 10- to 22-year-olds in the metropolitan area as a way to “give back and help the youth grow because that's what I wanted and needed the most.” Hogan admitted that he wasn't always on the straight and narrow. The Omaha native was a smart, active kid, but he endured traumatic experiences during his childhood that he said made him angry. Hogan, who loved playing basketball, said he started making choices that

drew him away from the sport. His parents pulled him from basketball as a result. “When they removed me, I started filling my time with things that were not good — doing drugs, selling drugs,” Hogan said. “I made the choices that weren't the best.” Hogan started playing basketball again when he got to Omaha Central High School. At this point in his life, Hogan was using marijuana regularly but refrained from doing so during basketball season. But “a bad attitude” played a role in the eventual derailment of Hogan's basketball career, he said. Hogan said he was kicked out of a practice during his sophomore year and interpreted being kicked out as having been booted off the team. “So I went right back to what I was doing,” he said. During Hogan's sophomore year of high school, a

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PAYTON HOGAN is a licensed mental health professional in Omaha. He graduated with a bachelor's degree from Wayne State College after successfully completing a drug court program.

Thriving

mentor pressed him into playing sports, telling Hogan that he was too athletic not to be a student-athlete. So Hogan played football for the Eagles as an offensive lineman and became a multi-year letter winner and a key part of the school's run to the Class A state semifinals in 2011.

Hogan's success on the gridiron caught the attention of Wayne State, and he was offered a scholarship to play for the Wildcats.

Things were pointing in the right direction for Hogan, but his drug use and sales didn't stop.

HOGAN'S INVOLVEMENT with drugs came to a head in the spring of 2013, when he was hit with multiple felony charges and was looking at 10 to 15 years in prison, a yearlong suspension from Wayne State and dismissal from the football team.

"It was right after a snowstorm; we didn't have practice," Hogan said. "We were shoveling ice, and I remember after I was done, I went back to my room and my roommate said campus security was here and said they want to talk to you. So I went to campus security, and the police were there. They told me I was under arrest, read me my charges and took me to the Pierce County Jail, where I sat for a week or so."

At first, Hogan said, he wanted to fight the charges brought against him and go to trial. But by June 2013, Hogan said his family, friends and attorney convinced him that problem-

solving court was a great opportunity.

So Hogan moved from Wayne to Norfolk and enrolled in the Northeast Nebraska Adult Drug Court program, which can result in felony charges being dismissed if successfully completed. Hogan didn't know anybody in Norfolk, missed his teammates and could get permission to leave the area and visit his family once or twice every few months, which made that period in his life an extremely difficult one.

But after about six months in the problem-solving court, good fortune gravitated toward Hogan.

HOGAN TALKED to the admissions dean at Wayne State, who said Hogan's suspension could be reduced from a year to a semester if he continued meeting all of the drug court's requirements. Wayne State also told Hogan that it would reinstate his scholarship.

Hogan enrolled in classes at Northeast Community College in the fall of 2013, worked full time and was meeting the strict requirements of drug testing and treatment classes that drug court required.

Then toward the end of 2013, Wayne State kept its promise and reinstated Hogan. Further, both the judge and the drug court program allowed Hogan to move back to Wayne to continue his studies and rejoin the football team.

"That's the moment I realized I can accomplish anything," Hogan said. "If I set my mind on something, I can make it out."

About a year into drug court, a friend of Hogan's who worked at Good Life Counseling in Norfolk asked Hogan to work at the day reporting center. Hogan applied for the job and coordinated intensive family preservation, drug testing, GPS tracking and more. Working at Good Life Counseling helped Hogan develop a passion for helping people, he said.

AFTER GRADUATING drug court in the minimum 18 months, Hogan went on to play football for two seasons at Wayne State and graduated in 2016.

Hogan said drug court helped him take his level of discipline to a new level.

The Omaha native had developed a passion for therapy and also wanted to return home, prompting him to pursue his master's degree at UNO.

Hogan has practiced counseling and consulting in Omaha for three years and has set forth a goal to impact young people on a daily basis. He has work published in the American Journal of Men's Health and NOISE Omaha.

One of the keys to Hogan's success, he said, is establishing a healthy mindset.

"I learned how to take bad circumstances and obstacles and utilize them to cultivate a mind that can get (clients) through it," he said. "If you can conquer your mind, you can create anything in life."

"I beat the odds, and that's because of my mindset."

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