DON'T LET MY BOY DIE

Dad's plea for addict son

By LINDA CHRISTIE

GAVIN Smith looks the picture of contentment as he lies asleep on his dad's sofa, but the truth behind this picture is heartrending.

Gavin, 19, who has abused heroin for nearly three years, is in a drug-induced stupor and his dad Jeffrey fears he may not live beyond Christmas.

The news is all the more tragic as the Smith family lost their son Paul, 20, when he was stabbed to death by a paranoid schizophrenic four years ago. Now 18-year-old Jeffrey has been moved to make a desperate appeal through the Echo for someone to step forward and help them.

Sounding tired and strained as he spoke from his home in Nelson Road, Basildon, Jeffrey told how Gavin:

- Turned to drugs after his brother's brutal death
- Broke down in his dad's arms crying, begging for help and claiming he wanted to die
- Socked his mother's wedding ring to pay for heroin
- Failed to give up the killer drug despite three rehabilitation programmes at Basildon Hospital.

Jeffrey said: "He has been asleep 24 hours. As soon as he wakes up..."

Continued P3

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Don’t let my boy die

From P1

he will have something to eat, then go out looking for drugs again.

“When he cried in my arms and asked me to help I felt so
defeated because there is nothing I can do.

“No-one’s willing to help him because he can’t help himself.

“Although he’s had the best
treatment available, there’s a limit to what
the doctors can do. My son is dying and I feel so powerless.

“We hoped when we
donated all his possessions to the police he
would get locked-up and that might solve the problem, but
he was put on probation.”

“Jeffrey is full of praise for
the hospitals and probation
service, but said their powers
are limited.

“Instead he’s had to watch
his son fade away.

“Gavin has lost two stone,
his arms have become
scrawny with needle tracks,
and he suffers memory loss
and drowsiness. Now he just
wants to escape the pain.

“Gavin’s habit has led him to
steal around £500 of jew-
ellery and mementos from
his parents and he has
appeared in court three
times on charges of theft.

“He was arrested again on
Monday night for allegedly
stealing packets of bacon
from a store.

“He will be sentenced
on October 26.

“Gavin said today: “My
day consists of sleeping
and doing heroin. I have
had it up to here and if I don’t
get help soon I will do
myself in.”

“Jeffrey, a maintenance
worker at Ford, would like to see
his son attend a residential
rehabilitation course, after
several outpatient
sessions failed.

None appears to be avail-
able.

MP Angela to probe case

GAVIN’S story is one which has
touched Basildon and East
Thurrock with sympathy.
She is looking into his case
for the Labour
party.

Spending the Labour
party’s conference in Blackpool,
she said she has a classic illus-
tration of how drugs can
wreck the lives of not just users,
but their families too.

“It also shows how important
it is to provide help and support
to get people off drugs and to pre-
vent other people from falling on that road.”

Gavin is on probation for
stealing from his parents to feed his
habit.

Although John Dudd, assistant
court probation officer in Essex,
said he was unable to comment on
individual cases, he was able
to talk about the service’s policy
on drugs.

He said: “We don’t condone
drug taking but we recognise
people, particularly with heroin
addiction, find it very difficult to
lead drug-free lives.”

“We work with them and spe-
cialist drug agencies in the com-
unity on fairly intensive pro-
grams to offer people alterna-
tives.”

Death of Gavin’s brother

YOUNG dad Paul Smith was
on his way to buy shoes for his
son when he was fatally
stabbed in the heart by a para-
noid schizophrenic.

The 20-year-old, who was
attacked at Southend in
Basildon, was chased to a
house in nearby Long Rid-
ingwhere he collapsed and died
from his injuries.

A kitchen knife, wielded by
killer Leon Edward Edgley,
had pierced Paul’s heart and
lung.

Edgley, 29, formerly of
North Crockenford, Vange,
was locked up in Rampton
secure hospital indefinitely
after a jury took less than 15
minutes to decide he had
inflicted the fatal wound.

Paul’s family and girlfriend
Carrie, the mother of his two-
year-old son Luke, were left
devastated by the random
attack in October 1994.

Ironically, goes wrong.

Claimed at the time that Paul’s
death was drugs-related, but it
was his younger brother
Gavin who was to turn to
heroin to cope with the pain of
bereavement.