

Mother of burned and bruised child escapes jail term

By Sonya McLean, Fiona Ferguson

A WOMAN whose 15-month-old son was found with cuts, bruises and burns to his body while lying in a bedroom that had "evidence of drug use" has been given a suspended sentence.

The 40-year-old mother-of-six, described in court as a chronic heroin addict, pleaded guilty at Dublin Circuit Criminal Court to wilfully neglecting the child on December 16, 2005. She cannot be named for legal reasons.

The toddler, the youngest of the family, was found with bruises of varying ages on his body, burns on his fingertips and scalp, cuts to his lips and palms and a swollen knee joint.

Gardai and Health Board workers arrived at the house in Dublin to find it in disarray with dirty nappies lying in the hallway and clothes strewn about.

listless

The baby was found on a bed in a sodden nappy with blood around his nose and mouth. He was listless and unresponsive and was lying next to a burnt spoon with empty beer cans thrown on the floor.

Judge Desmond Hogan said he was glad he had not imposed a custodial sentence on hearing the evidence last July because the woman had begun to address her drug addiction and the children, who are in long term foster care, were progressing well.

Judge Hogan said that while the welfare of the children was of "paramount importance" he also had to take into account that the woman's efforts to get herself "back on the straight and narrow" would benefit her children.

Judge Hogan imposed a two-year sentence which he suspended for four years on strict conditions.

Garda Sinead Connolly told the court that the woman said she had left the house four weeks previously following "an aggressive incident" with a man who was also living there.

She refused to return to the house until he moved out and although she had visited regularly, she spent most nights either sleeping in a car or in a friend's mother's house.

She told gardai that she was told by the other children that the toddler had fallen down the stairs and that the burns had probably been caused by him touching a hot radiator.

A social welfare report said that the little boy is now progressing well under the care of his foster mother.

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