

“Anchorage Wellness Court” Issues Outcome Report: Native Alaskans Successfully Treated

In April 2003, the Anchorage, Alaska Wellness Court issued a summary of findings and outcomes from the court’s operation during 2001-2002. The report, titled “Anchorage Wellness Court: 2001-2002 Summary of Facts,” was authored by Tessa De Long a graduate student at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

The Wellness Court was established in 1999 as an alternative for misdemeanor defendants who were charged with alcohol-related offenses and/or other misdemeanants who admitted to alcoholism. The program is voluntary, but screens out potentially violent misdemeanants.

The program is multimodal and rests upon a framework of frequent monitoring by the court and a monitored behavioral contract. Treatment elements consist of alcohol and drug counseling, Naltrexone medication for 120 days, 12-step meetings, drug/alcohol usage testing, and participation in Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT®).

Two-thirds of the 79 program participants in 2001 and 2002 were male with the mean age 42 years. Nearly 90% of participants were Alaska Natives or Caucasian. Regarding the efficacy of the program to Native Alaskans, the report stated, “The Wellness Court was not developed to be culturally relevant to any particular ethnicity. Some individuals may suggest that because of that, it may not work as effectively for individuals of a particular cultural background e.g. Native Alaskan heritage. Initial findings from this report refute such an assumption that Alaskan Natives might not succeed.” In fact, the report concluded, “that Native Alaskans have succeeded at a higher rate than other ethnic groups in the Wellness Court program.”

The study collected the rearrest rates of the 2001 and 2002 participants ($n = 34$ and $n = 45$, respectively) and formed a comparison group ($n = 30$) of misdemeanants who did not participate in the program. The rearrest rates of the 2001 and 2002 participants (35% and 20%, respectively) were substantially lower than the comparison group (63%).