

Kenaitze Indian Tribe

PROGRAM

Henu Community Wellness Court

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AUTHORS

TBD

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Audrey Strickland, the Kenaitze Indian Tribe and the Henu Community Wellness Court for their hard work, innovation, and heartfelt contributions to their community.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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SUMMARY

The Henu Community Wellness Court is a joint-jurisdictional court operated by the Kenaitze Indian Tribal Court and the Alaska State Court systems. Henu is the Dena'ina word for hard work, job or task. The court exists to serve adults facing legal trouble stemming from substance use, primarily focusing on drug and alcohol issues. Cases involving Children In Need of Aid (CINA) and property crime cases stemming from substance use are also a priority. Henu focuses its efforts on healing participants through promoting and maintaining sobriety while incorporating tribal and individual cultures into both treatment and court processes. Throughout a participant's journey in Henu, they work closely with their probation officer and the multidisciplinary court team to receive substance abuse treatment and mental health counseling as needed. Henu participants receive support from the Kenaitze Indian Tribe's Dena'ina Wellness Center Behavioral Health, Social Services, Housing and Elder's programs.

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ONE TRIBAL DEMOGRAPHICS

1. LOCATION

Southcentral Alaska, Kenai Peninsula, Kenai, Alaska

2. LAND CHARACTERISTICS

Within historic “Old Town” Kenai, near the mouth of the Kenai River, on Cook Inlet.

3. POPULATION

The Kenaitze Indian Tribe was federally recognized in 1971. Today there are more than 1,600 tribal members. Of the approximate 700 living in Alaska, approximately 400 live in Kenai area; the rest live throughout the United States



TWO BACKGROUND

1. PROBLEM TO BE ADDRESSED

The Henu Community Wellness Court (Henu) was established to address substance abuse issues; the root cause of many offenses.

2. TARGET POPULATION

Henu aims to serve any adult, Native or non-native, living on the Western Kenai Peninsula who has committed a crime stemming from substance abuse.

3. PROGRAM HISTORY

Henu started in an effort to address the high number of Alaskan Natives incarcerated for substance abuse related crimes and to tackle the high rates of recidivism in the community. The idea of Henu was modeled after a similar court in Minnesota where Cass/Itasca County and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe formed a joint jurisdictional court; the difference being that the Henu joint jurisdiction is with the State of Alaska, not a county. The shared jurisdiction between the Kenaitze Indian Tribe and the State of Alaska makes the Henu Community Wellness Court one of a kind.

When the joint jurisdictional court was identified as a possible solution, its structure had to be determined. One of the key aspects of Henu is that it is based on the Kenaitze Traditional Values, which permeate throughout the Court and its treatment programs, beginning with its name. In the Kahtnuht'anaDena'ina language, *henu* literally means work, job, or task. The Court impresses upon its participants the importance and willingness to work hard, to cooperate and to be helpful. The four phases of the court are also centered on the Kenaitze values – *Naghe'a*, meaning honesty (Orientation and Trust phase), *Daggeyi* meaning fellowship, working with others (Belonging phase), *Vishayaghelisht'a* meaning wellness (Living Well phase), and *Yaghelich'* meaning goodness the right way



(Restoration phase). The graduation ceremony is called *Yaghelichdatl'*, meaning to walk in beauty. Elder, judge and tribal leader, Mary Ann Mills, who named the ceremony, said it is a "sacred path that is always achievable. Though there have been changes in judges and court and treatment personnel, the Henu multidisciplinary team focus and commitment to the healing and wellness of the participants remains the same. The vision of Henu Community Wellness Court is "*Transforming lives for a healthier community*" through supporting the wellness and rehabilitation of those in need through a cooperative justice program.

THREE PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

1. PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Henu is an 18-month program that brings together substance use treatment and community resources by using a team approach that focuses on the individual while promoting sobriety and traditional values. The joint



jurisdictional court approaches client healing through seven main priorities: (1) treating and healing substance use; (2) restoring participant ties to the community; (3) restoring participant relationships with friends and family; (4) increasing self-sufficiency; (5) breaking the cycle of addiction and recidivism; (6) placing children in safe homes; and (7) giving back to the community through volunteer efforts.

2. PROGRAM DESIGN

Henu offers a variety of services including sober living supports, substance abuse treatment, mental health counseling and Peacemaking Circles, to name a few. Kenaitze traditional values and activities are infused throughout. Participants work closely with their tribal probation officer and the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) to ensure their progress. Random drug testing and intensive outpatient therapy assist in the maintenance of sobriety. All individuals are required to take Moral Recognition Therapy (MRT) and participate in Peacemaking Circles. Participants, known as un'ina, meaning those who come to us, also take part in the traditional components of Henu, for example, daily lunch with elders, use of the Tribal Wellness facilities and support from Na'ini Social Services. The Kenaitze Tribal Court and the State of Alaska Court have Project Coordinator counterparts who work together. Weekly status hearings are held in the Kenaitze Tribal courthouse. Administrative team meetings are held regularly.



Eligibility Criteria: To take part in the Henu Community Wellness Court a participant's offense must be committed as a result of substance use. Eligible participants are approved by both the Kenaitze Tribal Court and the Kenai Superior Court multidisciplinary team members. Both Native and non-native persons are eligible for Henu.

Referral Process: Anyone can recommend a participant. Applicants are referred through both court systems.

Supervision and Compliance: Participants work closely with tribal probation officers, behavioral health clinicians and the court teams throughout the 18-month program. Participants take part in frequent random drug testing, attend individual and group intensive outpatient treatment services and other tribally provided activities.

Termination Criteria: A participant that repeatedly fails to comply with the Henu rules are discharged. Funding for Henu comes from grants and allocations through the Kenaitze Indian Tribe. There are no fee requirements for participation. The Kenaitze Indian Tribe received outside technical assistance for its development from Project T.E.A.M. Other wellness court models such as the joint jurisdictional court in Minnesota were examined. Evaluations by Project T.E.A.M., Northwest Professional Consultants and SAMSHA have been ongoing. The joint jurisdictional court is a partnership in and of itself. Many entities and agencies support the efforts of Henu, including Kenaitze Tribal Housing Authority, Partners for Progress, Re-entry Coalition, Alaska Alumni Group, and the Nu'it'tun Sober Living House. Faith-based organizations such as the Friendship Mission, Freedom House, and Love, INC provide a variety of needs for individual participants. The success of Henu is a direct result of its staff and community dedication to the holistic justice approach. Additionally, the joint jurisdictional design allows access to resources from agencies and programs run by the Tribe and the State. The Kenaitze Tribal courthouse houses Tribal Probation and is located on a campus with the Dena'ina Wellness Center, Na'ini Family Services, Tyotkas Elder Center, and Toyon Apartments. All are close to Tribal Security. The close proximity of all the services makes it easy for the participants to access them and to spend time together. Another important contributing factor is that the Dena'ina Wellness Center Behavioral Health is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).

The qualifying criterion set in the planning stages has limited the types of cases that can be accepted and has given exclusive veto power of the District Attorney's Office on any application.

- Early on during the weekly status hearings, only the State court judge that addressed the participants. An evaluator recommended taking turns between Tribal Judge and State Judge to address each participant. This created a better interaction with the participants and improved trust relationship between the two court systems.
- Henu has also proven the power and impact of the traditional tribal values of respect, honesty and cooperation. The Peacemaking Circle, called Ts'itq'u meaning "coming together as one," is used for the participants to address personal issues; for the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) to discuss concerns, staff changes and planning; and at times to address appropriate sanctions. Both native and non-native participants, judges, and court staff have experienced the healing power of the Circle. The use of the traditional medicine bag in which symbols of healing and personal power added in ceremony are used as teaching tools on tribal customs and culture. Objects such as the agate, dentalium, spruce hen feathers and fur, tied together with the Dena'ina traditional stories, tell of their significance and teach the participants of their personal value to themselves, their families and their community.
- Developing the Henu process by using another wellness court's policy and procedures created confusion when the P&Ps did not address the practical needs of the Court. Frequent administrative team meetings are important to address issues and update the P&Ps.
- In the beginning, the whole team did not review applications. Once the Team began reviewing applications together, more varied insight has been helpful in deciding if an applicant was a "fit" for Henu.
- The ability for the MDT to attend trainings together is invaluable, although not always practicable; however, sharing what is learned in training during administrative meetings is important.
- Public presentations at the local prison, the Chamber of Commerce, the local Bar Association, Office of Children Services, and services providers are helpful in advertising the Court.

- Henu has no policy, procedure or plan for graduate aftercare; for keeping them connected to Henu and the services available to them.
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“Henu has also proven the power and impact of the traditional tribal values of respect, honesty, and cooperation.”

Currently there are six Henu participants and four successful graduates. One accepted applicant is awaiting the Rule 11 agreement; three applicants are awaiting required assessments, and three applicants are awaiting DA approval. Henu has been very successful thus far. Four graduated in 2018. The inaugural graduates have continued to mentor new participants and organize a local alumni group. One graduate represented Kenaitze and Henu by invitation at the Annual Eyak Sobriety Celebration in Cordova, Alaska.

- Henu is well recognized both within the State of Alaska and nationwide. There have been many invitations in the past year to present at the Tanana Chief Conference, Alaska BIA Providers Conference, National American Indian Court Judges Association, TJA and Indian Nations.
 - In August 2018, during a visit to the State of Alaska, the United States Surgeon General visited the Kenaitze Indian Tribe and Tribal Court where he spent time interviewing several Participants. When asked what Henu does to help with sobriety, one Participant, responded “they won’t let us fail.”
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“When asked what Henu does to help with sobriety, one Participant responded, ‘they won’t let us fail.’”

The Kenaitze Indian Tribe and the greater community of Kenai has been very supportive of Henu. Throughout its development, Henu Team members have hosted community presentations to ensure that the community understands the role, approach, and objectives of the Court. Since inception, community partners have continued to support Henu. There are numerous highlights and successes.

- The first graduates have heartwarming stories. One completed three weeks of training toward substance abuse counseling, completed MRT with the goal of becoming a

facilitator, is working with the Henu Alumni and has become the Ambassador for Henu, speaking at various forums. During the program, he got a waiver from the Council to work for the Tribe, completed the extensive paperwork for a State of Alaska Variance which was approved, he got his driver's license back, and mentors participants entering into the program. He was given the Dena'ina name *Biq'dik'edet* meaning "his heart always giving."

- Another graduate was given the name *Bidleq' nazdlu*, "he's always smiling" as suggested by his mother because "he truly is happy." He said "people like to be around me now. They don't like being around a drunk. I'm not that person anymore." He is also eligible to receive his driver's license.
- One participant graduated without ever having a missed, dilute or dirty UA, had never received a sanction, was the first to complete MRT, is an on-call crisis responder for addicts, and is the first family member to attend college, all while holding down a job.

