

**Community Assessment Team (CAT)  
San Diego County (California)**



**How do courts and diversion/probation programs work with youth and young adults charged with underage drinking offenses? Are the interventions assigned by the court and/or diversion or probation worker appropriate for tackling this often multi-faceted problem?**

Courts, diversion, and probation programs across the nation employ different strategies in working with youth and young adults charged with underage drinking and related offenses. However, no matter the diversity in strategies used, almost all practitioners agree that effective interventions begin with good assessment practices. Reliable and validated assessment practices support effective case management of the underage drinker, regardless of the charged offense. Accurate assessments of the offender's alcohol use, risk level, and need for services provide objective information that can be used to target interventions and allow for better resource allocation in difficult economic times. In addition, by targeting identified needs with the right resources, courts and diversion/probation programs have the potential to redirect a youth from a negative path onto a positive life path. The Community Assessment Team (CAT) in San Diego, California offers an example of how screening and assessment practices have been implemented within a diversion program to better target interventions to young offenders and their families.

The Community Assessment Team (CAT) is a multi-agency intervention and prevention program encompassing the greater San Diego County area. CAT is designed for families with age-appropriate youth (between 5 and 18 years old) who are either at risk of entering or at risk of progressing into the juvenile justice system. The process focuses on the unique strengths and needs of individual youths and teaches families how to access and receive services in the community in a timely fashion. The CAT program is composed of teams that include family

support workers (case managers), alcohol and drug specialists, parent educators, therapists, probation officers, teachers, and other professionals linked to services in San Diego County. The teams provide assessments, prevention and intervention counseling, and referral services to at-risk youth and their families.

The CAT program receives referrals from various sources including probation, the courts, law enforcement, schools, community-based agencies and self-referrals. Youth referred on formal charges/citations are most commonly charged with status or misdemeanor offenses such as curfew violations, truancy, petty theft, possession of a controlled substance, vandalism, battery, and prostitution. Although the program does not get many youth referred solely for underage drinking offenses (e.g., minor in possession of alcohol, underage consumption of alcohol), it is not uncommon to discover that youth referred for other offenses were under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the offense.

When a referral is received, a risk and needs assessment is conducted on the youth and his/her family using the San Diego County Probation Department's Risk and Resiliency Checkup instrument. In addition, the youth and family are screened for alcohol and other drug problems, and a substance abuse assessment is conducted by an Alcohol and Other Drug Specialist. The information gleaned from the assessment process is then used to determine the most appropriate level and type of services needed, and to design a case plan with the ultimate goal of assisting the youth and family to address the factors that led to the offense/issue that brought them into the CAT program.

The San Diego County Probation Department contracts with five community-based organizations that provide services to five regions within the county (North Inland, North Coastal, South, Central, and East). The services available through these organizations are capable of addressing most of the identified needs of the youth and families that are referred to the program. Through the use of good assessment strategies, youth and families receive

referrals for interventions and services based on their individually identified needs rather than solely on the type of offense or behavior initiating the referral.

*For more information on the Community Assessment Teams used in San Diego County, contact Secorra Getty via email at [Secorra.Getty@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:Secorra.Getty@sdcounty.ca.gov).*

## **Additional Resources**

If you are looking for information on various assessment tools (e.g., recidivism risk, substance abuse, etc.), the Council of State Governments Reentry Policy Council has developed a website that provides an overview of various assessment instruments and includes information and links for additional information. You can access this resource at the following link:

<http://tools.reentrypolicy.org/assessments/chart>

For more information on the San Diego Risk and Resiliency Checkup Instrument, contact Secorra Getty via email at [Secorra.Getty@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:Secorra.Getty@sdcounty.ca.gov).

To read an evaluation on the CAT program, go to

[http://www.sandag.org/uploads/publicationid/publicationid\\_1406\\_8965.pdf](http://www.sandag.org/uploads/publicationid/publicationid_1406_8965.pdf). The review of the program begins on page 13.

## **Acknowledgements**

*A special thanks to the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) team for authoring this case study; and special thanks to retired Judge Linda Chezem for her review and feedback contributions.*

The Judicial Probation Outreach Project is a program of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation and is supported by Grant No. 2007-AH-FX-K003 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). OJJDP is a component of the Office of Justice Programs. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not represent the official position or policies of the United States Department of Justice.