

RHODE ISLAND FAMILY COURT IMPLEMENTS ALCOHOL CALENDAR



Chief Judge
Jeremiah S. Jeremiah

Tragedy has a way of advancing public policy agendas rapidly and in 2007 the Town of Barrington, Rhode Island experienced their second tragedy in as many years when 17 year old Jon Converse died and three others were injured in a crash in which the underage driver was charged with driving under the influence.¹

This heartbreaking death was the last straw for Judge Jeremiah S. Jeremiah Jr., Chief Judge of the Rhode Island Family Court.² In light of this tragedy and other high profile incidents involving juveniles and alcohol abuse, Judge Jeremiah used the power of the Court to bring about a diverse approach to the complex problems related to underage alcohol use in Rhode Island. With a full appreciation of the power of the bench Judge Jeremiah convened local and state partners to craft a state-wide response to the increasing incidents of high risk behaviors. The end result would be the development of an alcohol calendar with which the Court could employ a state-wide/system-wide response to the problem. .

Judge Jeremiah's plan to address the mounting problems needed a strong evaluation component at intake and the introduction of a high level of prevention, intervention strategies and resources to concentrate on the problem of juvenile alcohol abuse. While Rhode Island operates a unified court system there was no centralized process in place for law enforcement to address criteria for alcohol referrals and no system that could verify if a juvenile had been arrested in another judicial district.

Judge Jeremiah established a centralized process and record system that allows police across the state to check on the offender's history and determine whether the juvenile is a candidate for diversion or should be processed in a more traditional fashion. The approach blended the need for centralized records while still allowing local communities to retain discretion for referrals to the alcohol calendar

During the assessment phase the court took an inventory of local substance abuse providers and cataloged what type of specialized treatment would be available to juvenile on the alcohol calendar. It was important for specialized providers that would be part of the program to be aware of the reporting requirements used by the Court. The Court took advantage of the expertise found at Rhode Island's Brown University and formed a partnership with the Brown University Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies. This partnership has expanded the opportunity for alcohol intervention beyond the offending juvenile alone to include the family of the juvenile and their home environment producing a more comprehensive result.

As with many specialty court strategies Chief Jeremiah made participation in the alcohol calendar program voluntary and the youth must adhere to a list of conditions imposed as part of participation in the program including alcohol screens to ensure compliance with the program conditions. Supervision of the conditions is by trained court personnel rather

than probation services. Rhode Islands unified court system has allowed the alcohol calendar to function in such a way as to allow the juvenile to efficiently move within the system to receive evaluations, counseling, specialized treatment and supervision under the direction of a single court.

Juveniles who participate in the 3 month long alcohol calendar program are expected to complete all three of the specialized programs that make up the courts case management program. These programs include the Reducing Youthful Dangerous Driving Program (RYDD), the Teen Alcohol Prevention Program (TAPP) and participants have the option to involve themselves in the Special Community Out-Reach Education (SCORE) run by the Rhode Island Department of Corrections which provides a reflective overview of how certain actions can lead to incarceration.

Judge Jeremiah's vision has become reality in Rhode Island as he continues to engage the public³ on the topic of underage alcohol abuse and power of the Family Court as a catalyst for change. For more information on the Rhode Island Family Court's Alcohol Calendar Project please contact Aidan Moore, PIRE/OJJDP Judicial Project Program Director at 603-369-1766 or at amoore@pire.org.

Special thanks to Judge Jeremiah S. Jeremiah Jr. and Mr. Kevin P. Richard, Director of Juvenile Services/Specialty Courts for the Rhode Island Family Court in the preparation of this overview.

¹ "Barrington faces yet another teen death tied to alcohol"
<http://www.projo.com/news/content/projo-20071106-barrfatal.1e4c1da76.html>

² Barrington teen, 17, charged with 2nd-degree murder in boating death
http://www.projo.com/news/content/projo-20071203-greenberg_.6470355d.html

³ "Chat: Judge: Teen drinking not just problem for parents"
http://www.projo.com/ri/barrington/content/projo_111507_judge_chat.bf12725.html

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.