



# **Motivating and Incentivizing Youth Toward their Goals in Youth Healing to Wellness Courts (YHWCs)**

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**Youth with High-Risk/High-Need**

Thursday, August 28, 2025

# Presenters

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# Learning Objectives

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**This presentation will cover:**

1. The Youth Healing to Wellness Court (YHWC) model for court-involved youth with substance use (high criminogenic risk and need)
2. The connection between goal setting in wellness co-planning and management with youth
3. Effective design and implementation of a YHWC Incentives and Sanctions (IS) Protocol
4. The debates surrounding the application of this model and protocol in rural locales and with cultural adaptation

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# The Youth Healing to Wellness Court (YHWC) Model

for court-involved youth with substance use  
(high criminogenic risk and need)

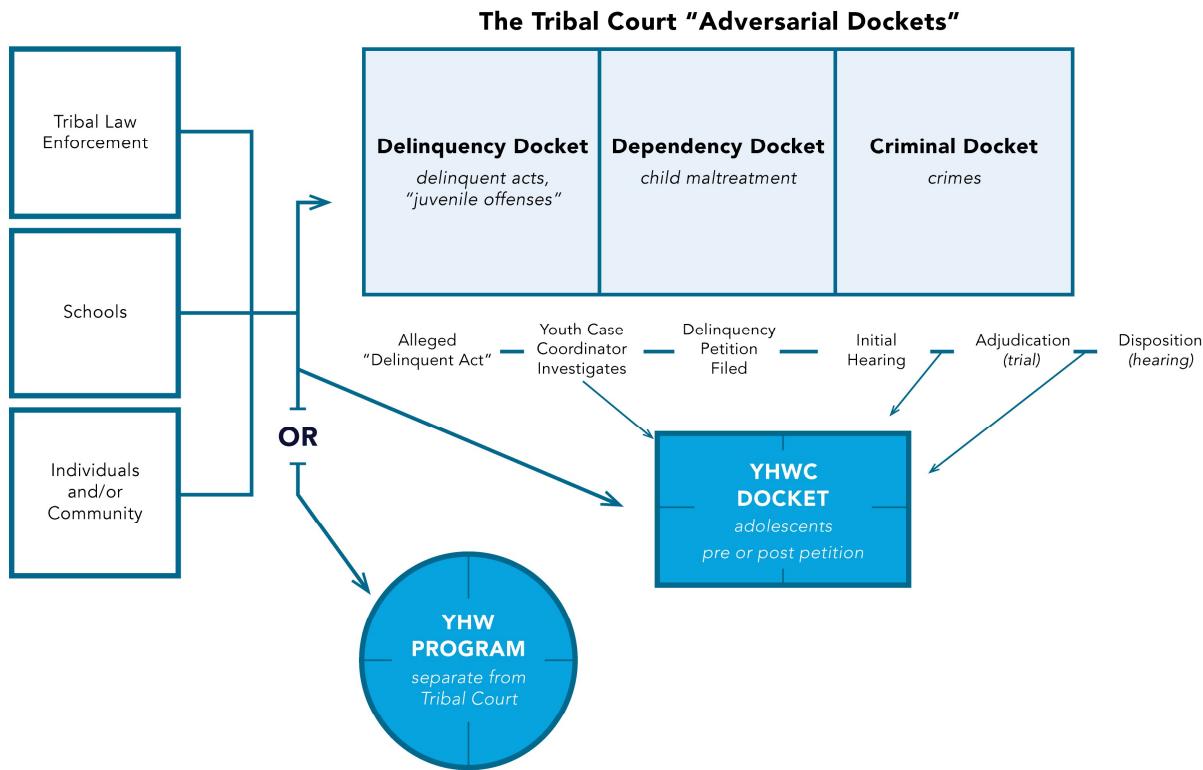


(Illustration by Tomás Karmelo Amaya, Indian Country Today)

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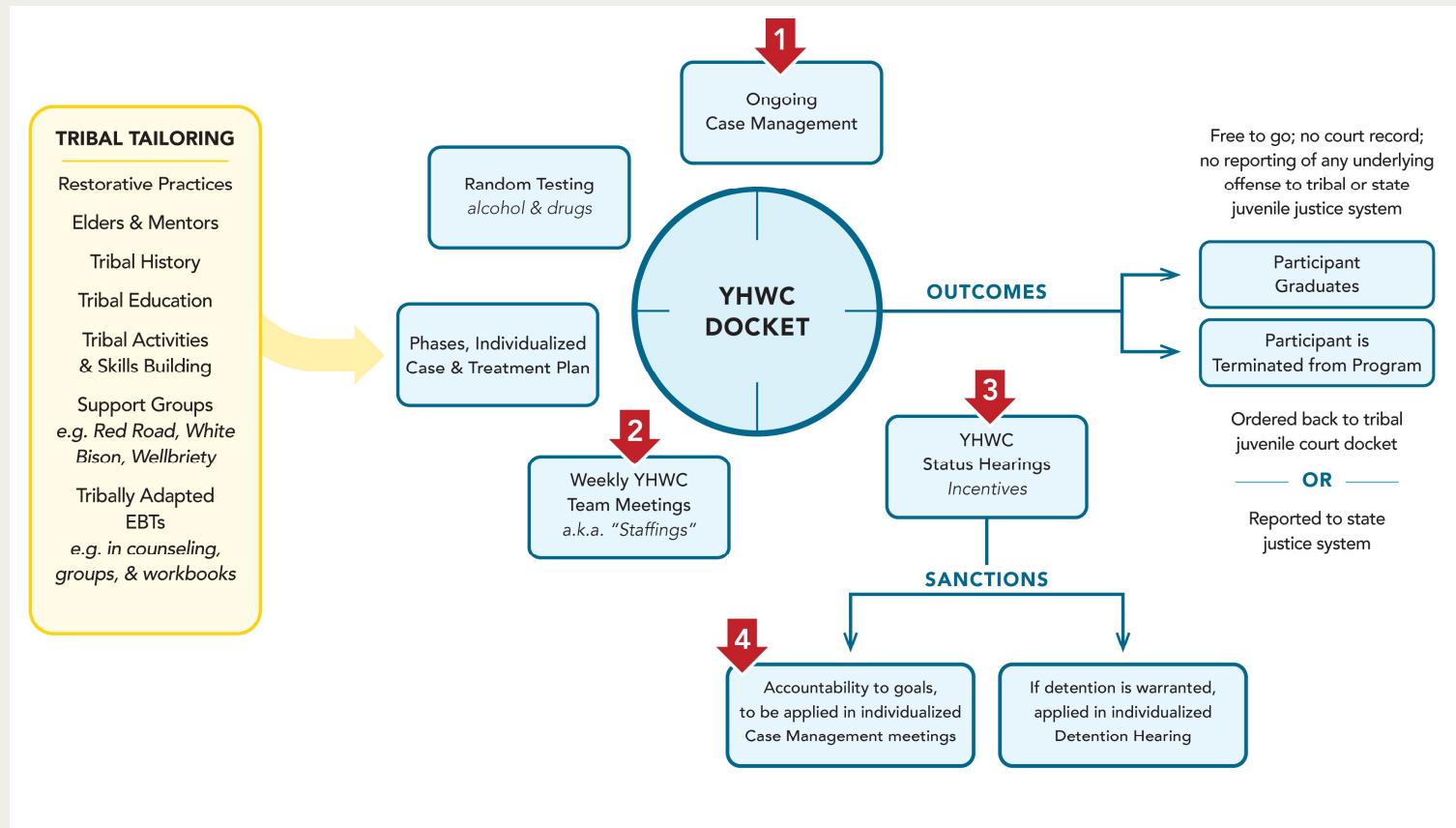
# YHWC Dockets Are New Court Dockets



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# YHWC Dockets are Therapeutic and Culturally Adapted



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# Goals and Wellness Planning

The connection between goal setting and  
incentives/sanctions

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# Polling Question #1

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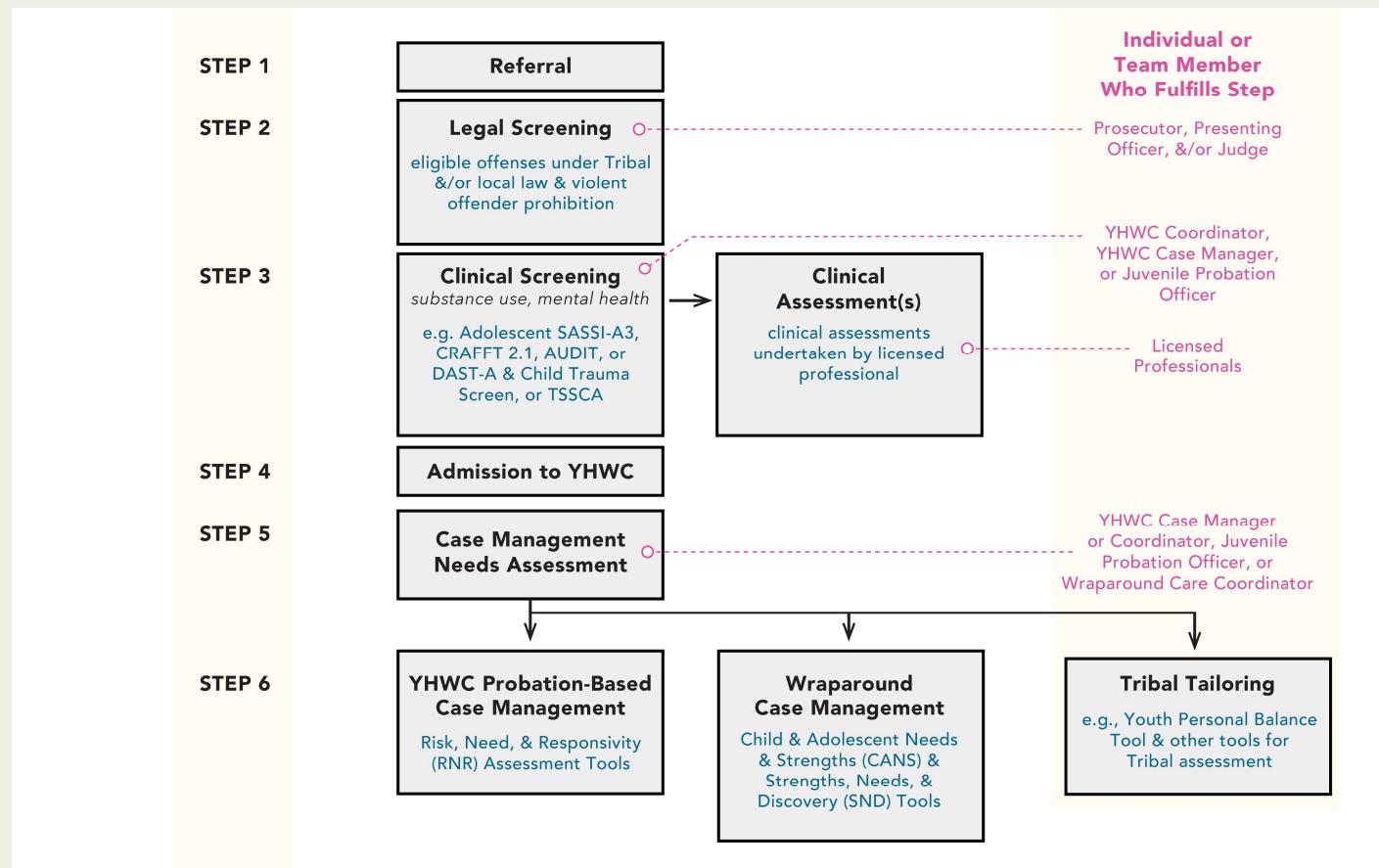
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# Wellness Planning Begins at Steps 5 & 6 in YHWCs



*Goal setting is a central part of case (wellness) planning and management.*

*But whose goals are they?*

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# A Co-Developed Wellness Plan

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## The Wellness Plan:

- Launches a youth into the wellness process
  - A YHWC Case Manager co-develops an individualized Wellness Plan with the youth and their parent(s), guardian, or caregiver
- Coordinates treatment and service providers, and other supports
- Incorporates relevant portions of the treatment goals/plan
- Includes a Behavior Contract with co-developed goals to guide the youth throughout their participation in the YHWC



# The Behavior Contract has the YHWC Goals

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The Behavior Contract contains the YHWC Goals as follows:

1. The goals the youth identifies
2. Goals related to reducing substance use or the goal of abstinence
3. Goals related to improving physical and mental health
4. Education and/or work goals
5. Family goals
6. Goals related to community connection and involvement
7. Goals related to building and engaging a support system

## **YHWC Behavior Contract**

YHWC Participant Name:

This Behavior Contract will be reviewed initially and then during every phase by the youth, their family, and the YHWC Case Manager. Goals should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART) and provide a clear framework for setting and achieving objectives.

### **I. Youth's Identified Personal Goal(s)**

Case Manager:

Goals:

1. Reduce substance use OR abstinence
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### **II. Substance Use**

Substance Use Treatment Provider:

Goals:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### **III. Physical and Mental Health**

Medical Provider:

Mental Health Treatment Provider (including for trauma):

Goals:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### **IV. Education**

School:

Goals:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### **V. Work**

Department, Agency, or Other Entity:

Goals:

4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_



# YHWC

# Incentives and

# Sanctions (IS)

# Protocol

How to build and use the protocol to  
change behavior

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## Polling Question #2

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Input will be anonymous.



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# The Research Base for Incentives and Sanctions ("Contingency Management")

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The results of a comprehensive meta-analysis answered the question – what do successful interventions with juvenile offenders look like?

The results identified what worked to reduce offense rates, including:

- using a therapeutic versus a control philosophy

AND

- the use of behavioral program types (e.g., behavior contracting and cognitive behavioral programs)



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# The Research Base for Incentives and Sanctions ("Contingency Management") (cont.)

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## **Tribal Key Component 6 – Incentives and Sanctions**

*Progressive rewards (or incentives) and consequences (or sanctions) are used to encourage participant compliance with the Tribal Healing to Wellness Court requirements.*

Another term for “incentives and sanctions” is **“Contingency Management (CM)”**

Contingency Management:

- “is one of the most extensively researched and best validated interventions in the field of substance abuse treatment”\*
- techniques are based on cognitive-behavioral and behavior therapy principles
- adapted for use in the Juvenile Drug Treatment Courts
- may be used where parents are absent or where their participation is low

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A Program of OJJDP

# Elements of the YHWC Incentives and Sanctions (IS) Protocol

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An effective IS Protocol includes:

1. A Wellness Plan with a Behavior Contract, which includes goals
2. A Checklist for the youth participant
3. A Rewards System
4. Weekly Progress Sheet
5. Weekly Staffing Report
6. Policies and Procedures including the IS Protocol
7. Youth- and Family- friendly descriptions of how the protocol works and what is expected of them in a Participant Handbook



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# A Progress Checklist for the Youth Participant

The checklist tracks phase and/or milestone progression in the YHWC, and includes:

1. The youth's goals and a checklist to track progress on BOTH goals and meeting YHWC requirements
2. The YHWC requirements
  - Court
  - Wellness, Mentoring, and Supervision
  - Treatment
3. How progress is measured
4. Requirements change from one phase to the next

## **YHWC Goals, Requirements, and Phase Progression Checklist**

<b>Phase I –</b> Name: Projected Phase Length:	
<b>YHWC Requirements</b>	<b>My Goals and Checklist</b>
Judicial <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Attend meeting with YHWC team</li> <li>2. Attend weekly YHWC Status Hearings</li> <li>3. Parent/Guardian/Caregiver attend Parent Group sessions</li> </ol>	<input type="checkbox"/> I attended my meeting with the YHWC team and helped them figure out how I can succeed in the YHWC on this date:  <input type="checkbox"/> I've attended the following court sessions (enter dates):  <input type="checkbox"/> My parent/guardian/caregiver attended Parent Group Sessions on the following dates:
As measured by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 100% attendance rate</li> </ul>	
Wellness, Mentoring, & Supervision <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Complete Wellness Plan assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Co-develop comprehensive Wellness Plan &amp; Behavior Contract with SMART goals</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Meet with Case Manager weekly</li> <li>3. Participate in random alcohol &amp; drug testing weekly</li> <li>4. Set curfew M-F, Sat.-Sun.</li> <li>5. Determine Education Needs (IEP or 504 Plan)</li> </ol>	<input type="checkbox"/> I met with my Case Manager and completed the required Wellness Plan assessments on this date:  <input type="checkbox"/> My Case Manager helped me develop a Wellness Plan & Contract on (date):  <input type="checkbox"/> My Goals are:    <input type="checkbox"/> I met with the person supervising my curfew. My curfew for M-F is: My curfew for Sat. & Sun. is:  I met with my Case Manager when we discussed my education needs and my education plan on (date):
As measured by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Completion of Assessment, Wellness Plan &amp; Behavior Contract, with SMART goals</li> <li>▪ Meetings completed</li> <li>▪ # of shows to tests and tests provided &amp; collected</li> <li>▪ Set curfew</li> </ul>	

# Strength-Based Versus Deficit-Based Approaches

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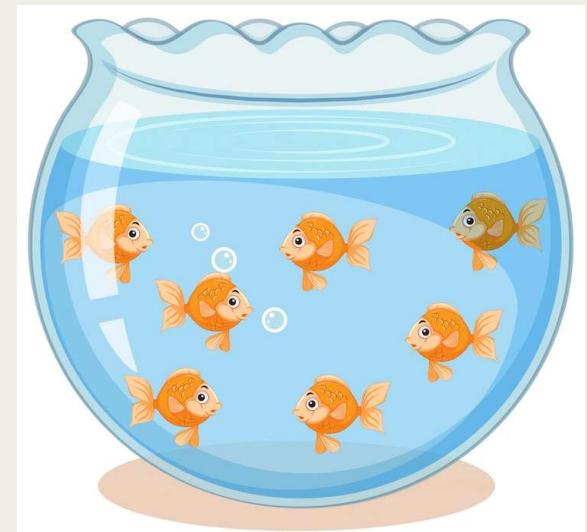
<b>Strength-Based Processes – The Team:</b>	<b>Deficit-Based Processes – The Team:</b>
discusses small successes, strengths, and positive outcomes first	discusses problems, issues, challenges first during staffing and/or court
highlights positive behavior with tangible incentives	a lot of the good things the kids are doing go unnoticed
court process rewards youth who have had a positive week	court process responds to youth who have had a negative week first
uses precise language when discussing drug test results “positive”	uses deficit-based language when discussing drug test results “dirty”
handles sensitive topics in separate, closed hearings	handles sensitive topics in open court
if detention as sanction - a separate closed hearing with attorneys	If detention as sanction - handled in open court, with other YHWC youth and families
interacts with youth and families in a setting outside of court	mandates support groups and parenting classes but rarely interacts with youth and families outside of court and scheduled wellness management meetings

## Program-Wide Drawings (Fishbowl)

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A program-wide drawing is a raffle or a fishbowl where participants get tickets which are entered into a drawing for a prize:

- Every time a youth exhibits positive or encouraged behavior, a YHWC team or family member immediately nominates the youth
- The youth gets a ticket
- The ticket is entered into the drawing for a chance to win a small, medium, or large prize
- During a formal drawing in the YHWC Status Hearing

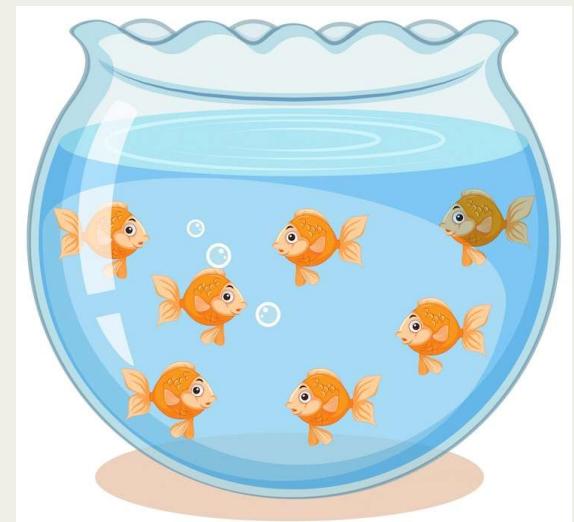


# Program-Wide Drawings (Fishbowl) (cont.)

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## Recommendations:

1. Seek to promote positive behavior that the team is looking for in youth
2. Create opportunities to earn that are equally available to all youth
3. Incorporate youth voice into the development and implementation of the drawing or raffle

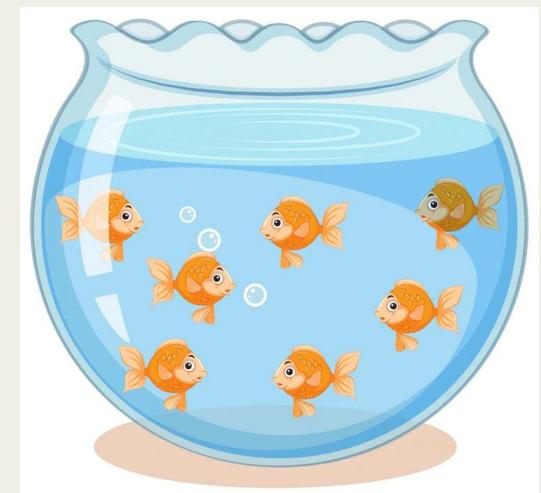


## Program-Wide Drawings (Fishbowl) (cont.)

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### Recommendations (cont.):

4. Create visuals and graphic elements that encourage excitement and participation
5. Add a separate responsible caregiver drawing to show appreciation for their time and participation
6. Resist the temptation not to give a reward earned to a youth who otherwise had a bad week (“if they did it, they get it”)



## Examples of Small, Medium, & Large Prizes

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Small Prizes	Medium Prizes	Large Prizes
Express line in court. Leave court early	Credit for 3 hours of community service*	Credit for 5 hours of community service*
Credit for 1 hour of community service*	Extended curfew for 1 hour	Extended curfew for 2 hours on 1 day
\$5 Gift Card	\$10 Gift Card	\$15 Gift Card
3 Extra Points	5 Extra Points	10 Extra Points

# Discussion in Chat

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Take a moment and brainstorm some rewards/prizes for youth that:



- Enhance their daily living
- Support their self-care
- Engage them, their families, and the community

Do we think these types of rewards/prizes will motivate youth?



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# A Token-Based Micro-Economy

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Another technique to motivate behavior change in youth, is the creation of a **“micro-economy”** as a system of positive reinforcers to motivate youth.

Tokens = points, tickets, tokens, coins, vouchers, or fake currency

A micro-economy:

- offers tokens for wanted behavior that can then be traded for tangible rewards (prizes)
- is appropriate for promoting positive change through reward seeking behavior, which is a normal part of adolescent brain development



Picture of Presenter Pat Sekaquaptewa and Helen Sekaquaptewa



*About this age, the Hopi Day School used a token economy where each of us had a kitchen apron with pockets made for us by our moms and grandmothers (which is a very important piece of apparel for Hopi ladies). As we worked in class through the school day, the teacher would give us little red plastic tokens. At the end of the week there would be a classroom store, and we could use the tokens to buy books, toys, and dolls. This is how I learned to read. – Pat Sekaquaptewa*

# A Token-Based Micro-Economy (cont.)

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## Tracking Youth's Progress

YHWC teams should recognize that being in a therapeutic court can be overwhelming and that a youth may not remember expectations or have the capacity to follow rules right away.

YHWC teams should:

1. Track the overall progress related to youth compliance
2. Develop a way to aggregate individual youth level data
3. Create a spreadsheet to review aggregated youth level data objectively during pre-court staffing

Sample Individual Participant Progress Tracking Sheet – Week 1

Week 1	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Actual	Needed	%
Treatment	1		1	1				3	3	100%
School	1	1		1	1			4	5	80%
Call-to-Test	1	1		1			1	4	7	57%
Testing Shows			1				1	1	3	33%
Testing Results	M**		P**	M				0	3	0%

\*M = Missed

\*\*P = Positive

\*\*\*N = Negative

Yellow – indicates days the youth was randomly selected to submit an alcohol/drug test screen

Note: look for patterns of improvement (percentages) across multiple weeks.

# A Token-Based Micro-Economy (cont.)

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To create a micro-economy that serves as a comprehensive reward system, YHWC teams need to make the following decisions:

- 1. Determine the type of token that will be used**
- 2. Determine the behaviors that will be incentivized**
- 3. Assign values to the desired behaviors**

**Point-Based Reward System Compliance Grid**

Earning Full Points	Amount	Earning Partial Points	Amount	Earning Zero Points
Attend treatment with no absences	2	Attend treatment with only one absence	1	Two or more treatment absences
Attend school with no absences	2	Attend school with only one absence	1	Two or more school absences
Call-to-Test with no missed days	2	Call-to-Test with only one missed day	1	Two or more missed Call-to-Test
Show up for all required drug tests	2	N/A	N/A	One or more missed drug test
Negative drug test results	2	N/A	N/A	One or more positive drug test
Reward Program		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>These points can be traded for rewards (see Rewards Menu for options).</li><li>Each participant must keep track of their points with a checkbook and a balance sheet which is located in their handbooks.</li></ul>		
Bonus Points		Accomplishing Healthy Choice Days – Negative Alcohol & Drug Tests		
		30 Negative Tests – 10 points	120 Negative Tests – 25 points	
		60 Negative Tests – 15 points	150 Negative Tests – 30 points	
		90 Negative Tests – 20 points	200 Negative Tests – 35 points	

# A Token-Based Micro-Economy (cont.)

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## Micro-economy (cont.)

- 4. Develop a reward menu**
- 5. Assign values to the list of rewards**
- 6. Create a written policy and procedures for how the incentive program will operate**
- 7. In a youth- and family-friendly way, describe how this will work in a Participant Handbook**

Rewards, Costs, and Purchasing Guidelines

Reward Options		
Reward	Cost	Purchasing Guidelines
Leave court early	5 points	Must be attending treatment.
\$5 gift card	10 points	Must be attending treatment.
Extend curfew on 1 day for 1 hour	10 points	Must be checking in. Cannot have a curfew violation in the past week.
\$10 gift card	20 points	Must be attending treatment.
Extend curfew on 1 day for 2 hours	20 points	Must be checking in. Cannot have a curfew violation in past 2 weeks.
\$15 gift card	30 points	Must be attending treatment.
Extend curfew on 1 day for 3 hours	30 points	Must be checking in. Cannot have a curfew violation in past 3 weeks.
<b>Spending Points</b>	If a participant meets the purchasing guidelines, then they can submit a reward check for review and approval. Reward requests should be submitted to your Case Manager. Each reward request will be reviewed and responded to within 24 hours. Any weekend reward requests must be submitted no later than Thursday by 5 p.m. All reward requests require parent/guardian/caretaker approval.	

# Rocket Docket

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**Draft a team and court room protocol that uses a strength-based approach:**

- a way of conducting business during YHWC Status Hearings and in related team meetings
- it prioritizes youth and families who have made progress since the last court session, so that they go first in the status hearing



**100% negative drug tests  
Perfect attendance in treatment  
Perfect attendance in school**

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# Rocket Docket (cont.)

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## In the YHWC Status Hearing:

1. List the special Rocket Docket requirements that get a reward
2. The judge ask the youth why they get to go first
3. This is followed by the judge's strength-seeking conversations
  - focusing on achievable goals identified during wellness planning
  - identifying a youth's strengths, interest, hopes, and vision
4. Respond to unwanted behavior in wellness management meetings, instead of delivering sanctions in court



**100% negative drug tests  
Perfect attendance in treatment  
Perfect attendance in school**

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# Lessons Learned

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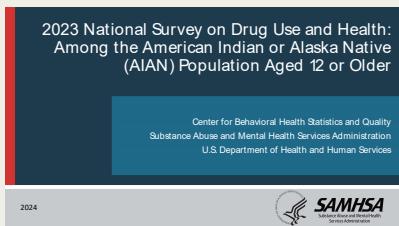


1. The YHWC model was designed for court-involved youth with substance use (high criminogenic risk and need);
2. There is a critical connection between the co-developed goals set in wellness planning and the effective use of incentives and sanctions; and
3. In order for incentives and sanctions to work, each YHWC team will need to develop an Incentives and Sanctions (IS) Protocol, that takes into account your culture, law, resources, and joint expertise.

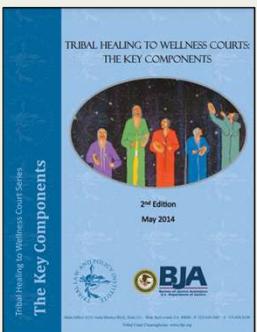
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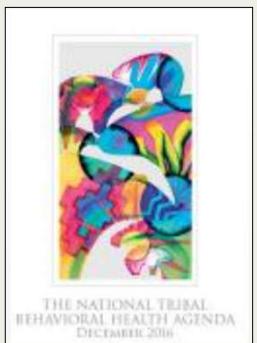
# YHWC Resources



2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health:  
Among the American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN) Population Aged 12 or Older

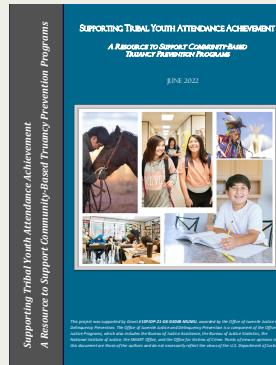


The Tribal Healing to Wellness Court Key Components (2014)



The National Tribal Health Agenda (2016)

2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health:  
Among the American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN) Population Aged 12 or Older



Supporting Tribal Youth Attendance Achievement - A Resource to Support Community-Based Truancy Prevention Programs (2022)



Attendance Playbook,  
Smart Strategies for  
Reducing Student  
Absenteeism Post-  
Pandemic (2023)

Tribal Youth Resource Center  
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# Contact Us

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