

# SPECIALTY COURTS –

## A Catalyst for Positive Change

BY CHIEF JUDGE JERRY WIESE,  
EIGHTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT



Chief Judge Jerry Wiese presides over the TAP and OPEN specialty court programs for the Eighth Judicial District Court.

**If you find yourself in a Regional Justice Center (RJC) courtroom watching a specialty court docket, you may begin to realize you are in a room filled with defendants, all convicted of various felony charges.**

A courtroom filled with felons might make you a little uneasy, until you hear their stories and begin to understand you are in the company of a group of individuals working hard to make positive changes to better their lives through participation in one of the many Eighth Judicial District Court (EJDC) Specialty Court programs.

These are the words of a young woman, recently shared with my courtroom, at her specialty court graduation:

This has been a long journey, but it was all 100 percent worth it! I am so thankful that I was given the opportunity to be in this program because it saved my life. My addiction started around the age of 14. Day by day my addiction took over and I fell into this lifestyle that almost cost me my life. I lost so much, my family, my friends, my education, my kids, my willpower, almost lost it all. When I was first accepted into the program, I was grateful at the thought of staying out

of jail, but once I started the program, I realized it was so much more than that! ... I met an entire community that inspired me to change my life! At first, things were hard, my kids were in CPS custody, and I had no one out there for support. My counselor was my only support at the time, and my biggest advocate ...

Eventually, I got reunified with my children and began my IOP (intensive outpatient) treatment. Going back out into society was difficult. I stayed away from negative people, and I completely cut off anything and anyone that could have put my sobriety at risk. I did struggle with day care services, I struggled with transportation, but instead of waiting for things to happen, I reached out to my specialty court coordinator, to my case worker, to my mentor, to anyone that was willing to help.

Two years have gone by, and I am now 26 years old with a sobriety date of November 17, 2021. I'm a completely different person. I've learned a lot and have accomplished so much. I now have full custody of my kids and no CPS case, I have full family support, I got my high school diploma, and I finally have my life on track. This program has taught me how to manage my time properly and how to prioritize things that need

to be done. I've learned to live life on life's terms. I've grown as an individual that can accept their wrongs and I'm willing to work on fixing them. I am not perfect, but I strive to be better every day.

This graduate shared her success story with a great sense of pride, and her accomplishments were inspiring for the entire courtroom. It reminded me, once again, how important these programs are to our community, and I was motivated to spread the word about the great work we are doing in Specialty Court.

The EJDC Specialty Court program started in 1992 with Adult Drug Court, and it was one of the first drug courts in the nation. Since that time, the EJDC has expanded specialty courts to include 14 programs focused on providing participants with mental health and substance abuse treatment, life skills training, and opportunities for educational advancement. The most recent recidivism data indicates that of those who successfully completed the Adult Drug Court program, more than 92 percent did not commit a new crime within three years after discharge.

Most specialty courts must be applied for and ordered as a special condition of probation, imposed by the sentencing judge. Programs vary based upon individual needs and clinical evaluation but all focus on personal responsibility and accountability. In the Transitional Age Drug Court (TAP) program, which I directly oversee, participants are generally required to start in treatment and sober living, with GPS tracking (house arrest). They are allowed a two-hour window for personal needs, once a week. They must begin individual and group therapy sessions with licensed clinicians, and they are randomly drug tested on a regular basis. As they work the program and show progress with their treatment (negative drug tests, no missed appointments, etc.), they continue to advance in their program while in sober living. They may be taken off GPS monitoring, assisted with earning their GED or high school diploma, and eventually, encouraged to get a job. Once working and self-sufficient, they are moved out of sober living to a ¾ house, home with their families, or to independent living. Throughout the program, they have the support of probation officers, court coordinators, treatment counselors, judges, and other support staff to help them reach their goal of graduation from specialty court.

Graduation from a specialty court is rewarding for everyone involved, but it is no easy feat. An example of what must be achieved to graduate from a program (like TAP) looks like the following:

- No positive alcohol/drug tests, including missed or invalid tests, for a minimum of 180 consecutive days;
- Maintained consistent attendance at all court appearances and treatment appointments;
- Achieved a stable source of income, living arrangements, and healthy interpersonal relationships as determined by the treatment team;
- Achieved academic advancement, specific to each individual participant's needs;
- Achieved an understanding of personal problems of addiction, mental health, criminal behavior, and relapse prevention;

- Completed a definitive aftercare plan, which may include self-help meetings, outpatient counseling, or an alumni group;
- Fulfill all goals as stated in the individual treatment plan or positive progress toward appropriate long-term life goals; and
- All fee obligations met.

After graduation, participants are encouraged to participate in outside support meetings such as Self Management and Recovery Training (SMART) Recovery, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connection, Narcotics Anonymous, or Alcoholics Anonymous, to strengthen their recovery support.

Implementing specialty courts strikes the perfect balance of the validated trend toward therapeutic jurisprudence, the essential need for public safety, and the purpose of incarceration. Our programs provide an opportunity for participants to make positive life changes. For those of us who can be involved in seeing those changes occur, we care about and respect each of these individuals, we do everything we can to help them make positive changes, and every person who graduates and proves that they can change for the better provides us with an extreme sense of joy and fulfillment.

If you are not familiar with the Specialty Court programs offered in the Eighth Judicial District Court, the following list provides a brief summary of those programs:

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Renaissance Reno Downtown Hotel & Spa  
Topaz Room

Doors Open at 10:30 am  
Lunch + Formal Program at 11:30 am

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## Summary of the Eighth Judicial District Court Specialty Court Programs

<b>Adult Drug Court (ADC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified alcohol/substance abuse disorder</li> <li>Program length is a minimum of 18 months</li> </ul>
<b>Transitional Age Program (TAP)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drug court for individuals ages 18-26, with identified alcohol/substance abuse disorder</li> <li>Program length is a minimum of 18 months</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunity for Probation with Enforcement in Nevada (OPEN)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designed to confront and treat the behavioral concerns that contribute to criminal behavior, for those 18-26 years of age</li> <li>May include those with limited mental health issues, and/or alcohol/substance abuse disorders</li> <li>Program length is a minimum of 12 months</li> </ul>
<b>Co-Occurring Disorders Court (CODC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified mental health and substance abuse disorder (must have both)</li> <li>Program length is a minimum of 18 months</li> </ul>
<b>Mental Health Court (MHC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For individuals with a history of mental health treatment</li> <li>Severely Mentally Ill (SMI)</li> <li>For individuals whose symptoms are primarily driven by mental illness, and not substance abuse</li> <li>Program length is 15-18 months</li> </ul>
<b>Felony DUI Court (FDUI)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum of three DUI charges within a seven-year period</li> <li>Identified substance use disorder</li> <li>Program length is three to five years, in lieu of one to six years in prison</li> <li>Successful completion results in Felony DUI being reduced to a second offense Misdemeanor DUI conviction</li> </ul>
<b>Veterans' Treatment Court (VTC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants must be veterans or members of the U.S. military, and must qualify for services through the Veteran's Administration</li> <li>Service-related substance abuse or mental health issue</li> <li>Program length is a minimum of 18 months</li> </ul>
<b>Gamblers Treatment Diversion Court (GTDC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Per NRS 458A, individuals are eligible if convicted of a crime in furtherance or as a result of problem gambling; must be determined to be a problem gambler by a qualified professional</li> <li>Program length is a minimum of 12-36 months</li> </ul>
<b>Medically Assisted Treatment – Re-Entry Program (MAT)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For individuals eligible for parole, with a minimum of six to nine months of supervision time once released, or within two years of release from prison, per NRS 209.4886</li> <li>Identified opioid or stimulant use disorder diagnosis</li> </ul>
<b>Law Enforcement Intervention for Mental Health and Addiction (LIMA)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diversion from the justice system through treatment</li> <li>For chronically homeless individuals</li> <li>For those with substance use disorder or mental illness, and willing to participate in treatment</li> <li>Program length is a minimum of nine months</li> </ul>
<b>Family Treatment Court (FTC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For any parent/family with an open child welfare case, with a substance use disorder and/or mental health diagnosis</li> <li>Voluntary program to provide treatment and support to system involved parents/families</li> <li>Average length of program is eight to 10 months</li> </ul>
<b>Juvenile Treatment Court (JTC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14-17 years of age at time of referral</li> <li>Identified alcohol/substance abuse disorder</li> <li>YLS/CMI score is medium/moderate or higher risk</li> </ul>
<b>Detention Alternative for Autistic Youth (DAYY)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10-18 years of age</li> <li>Suspected or diagnosed Autism Spectrum Disorder</li> <li>Program is a minimum of six to 18 months</li> </ul>
<b>EMPOWER (Domestic Violence Program)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth 10-18 years of age</li> <li>Adjudicated and pre-adjudicated cases</li> <li>Any adolescent/family domestic violence coming through the juvenile justice system</li> </ul>

Specialty court applications are available on the Eighth Judicial District Court website at <http://www.clarkcountycourts.us/departments/specialty-courts/>.

**HON. JERRY WIESE** serves as the chief judge of the Eighth Judicial District Court. He worked in the private sector for approximately 16 years before being elected to the bench, and he has served as a district court judge for approximately 13 years. As the chief judge, he oversees all of the specialty courts, but is directly involved in presiding over the TAP and OPEN programs.

