

THE SECOND JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT'S NEW YOUTH OFFENDER DRUG COURT

BY JAMES POPOVICH AND JUDGE LIDIA S. STIGLICH

The state of Nevada has the fourth-highest drug overdose mortality rate in the United States, with 20.7 per 100,000 people suffering drug overdose fatalities, the majority of which are from opioids. This is an increase of 80 percent since 1999. Studies show that young adults, ages 18 to 24 years old, have the highest rates of dependence on, or abuse of, opioid analgesics and heroin. To combat this staggering epidemic, Second Judicial District Court Judge Lidia S. Stiglich and Judge Janet J. Berry spearheaded the Youth Offender Drug Court Pilot Program in May 2015. Since then, over 15 participants have entered the Youth Offender Drug Court. The first wave of successful participants is anticipated to graduate this summer.

The Second Judicial District Court already has in place many established and successful specialty courts aimed at rehabilitating criminal offenders and providing an opportunity to engage the drug-addicted offender in an intensive therapeutic jurisprudence intervention. The Youth Offender Drug Court program differs from the traditional Adult Drug Court by narrowing the age group served, providing an age-appropriate program, focusing on the opiate/heroin users, and separating young participants from older addicts, who are more entrenched in the criminal justice system. Youth Offender Drug Court participants must be between 18 and 24 years old, have an opiate/heroin

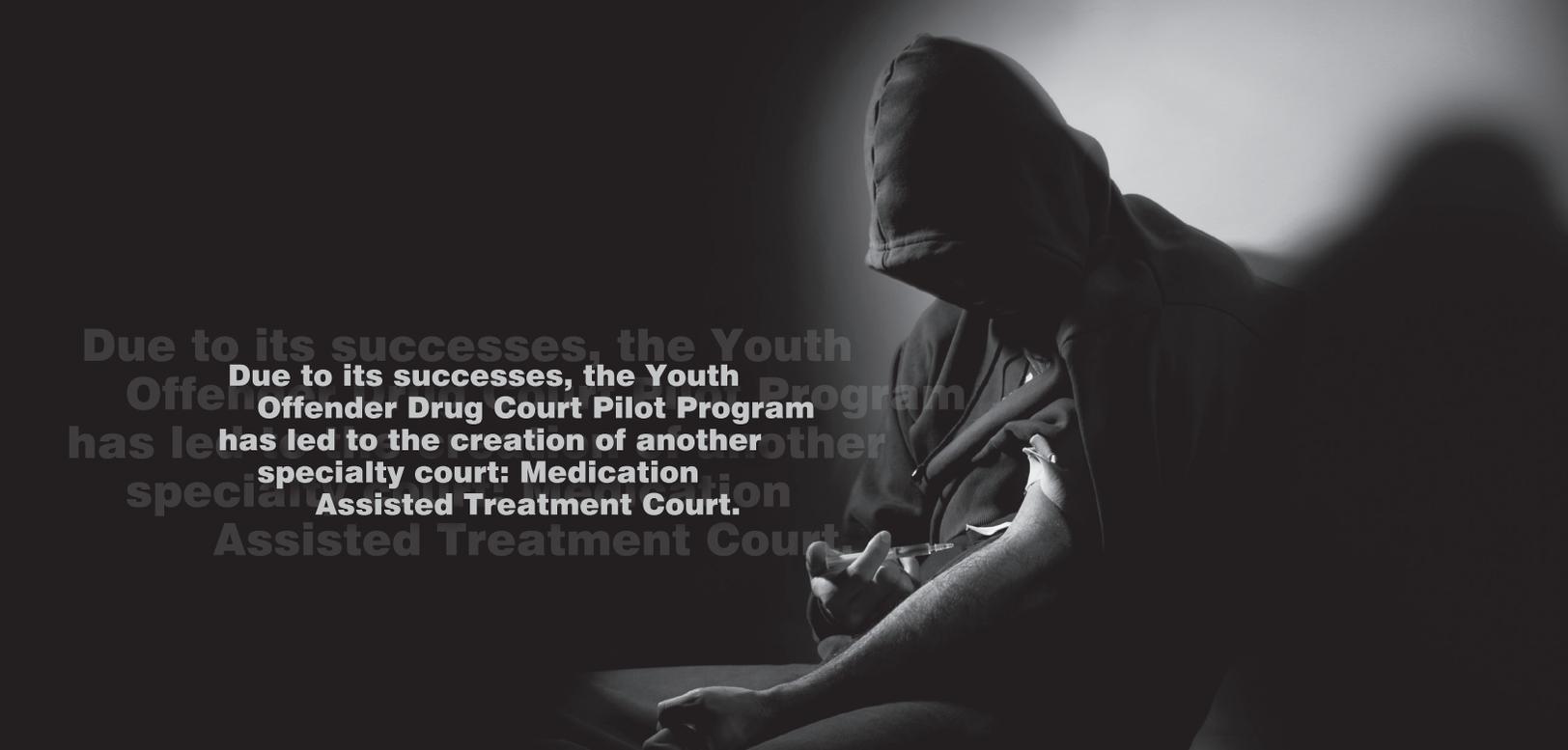
addiction and be charged with a felony. If the participant successfully completes the program, the felony charge is dismissed, and the criminal record is sealed as if the crime never took place.

Numerous and substantial research studies support specialized services to this age group due to their cognitive immaturity and criminogenic needs, which differ greatly from those of older defendants. The 18 to 24 age group has special needs in terms of motivation, education and employment. The goal of the Youth Offender Drug Court is to divert these young adults from a deeper involvement in the criminal justice system and the substance-abuse lifestyle.

The Youth Offender Drug Court enables the court to offer an individualized treatment approach through Medicaid's "medical necessity" provisions, including access to medication-assisted treatment, a newly mandated requirement for any specialty court receiving federal funding. The court also offers vocational and educational programming designed to assist this specific population by partnering with Children's Cabinet.

Stiglich and Berry have worked diligently to coordinate the specialized resources that will be provided by two community-based partners: Northern Nevada HOPES and Children's Cabinet. Northern Nevada HOPES provides the participants with access to primary health, behavioral health and psychiatric care. By providing all medical and behavioral health care, including medication-assisted treatment, HOPES ensures that the participants' medical needs are met, so that they can focus on life skills, such as obtaining jobs or education.

This is where the Children's Cabinet, through Kathleen Sandoval's leadership, steps in. The Children's Cabinet provides access to Face Forward, a federal vocational and life skills program, and Youth Build, an employment training program offering stipends, assistance with educational goals, mentoring and supervision. This training



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and support is vital to ensuring the young offenders have the opportunity to become vital, contributing members of the community. Additionally, it is anticipated that other community resources will be utilized as needed, including housing opportunities at Life Changes, Ridge House, Crossroads and other local agencies.

During the first year of the program, the costs were absorbed by Medicaid and program partners. Additionally, Doors to Recovery, which is a project of Transforming Youth Recovery under the Stacie Mathewson Foundation, donated \$5,000 for start-up costs. As of July 1, 2016, the Youth Offender Drug Court is supported by the Nevada state general fund, which is disbursed by the Administrative Office of the Courts. These funds will be used to provide medication-assisted treatment, behavioral health counseling and drug testing services. It is projected that there will be a total of 30 participants served during this second year.

Due to its successes, the Youth Offender Drug Court Pilot Program has led to the creation of another specialty court: Medication Assisted Treatment Court. Medication Assisted Treatment Court is designed to assist participants, 25 years and older, who are struggling with an opioid use disorder. Similar to Youth Offender Drug Court, the Medication Assisted Treatment Court offers medication-assisted treatment, along with intensive behavioral health counseling to address the causes and conditions that led to the substance use disorder and subsequent criminal activity. Since its inception in December 2015, this court has rapidly grown. It is currently serving 12 participants and is expected to serve a total of 40 participants during this next year.

Stiglich presides over Youth Offender Drug Court every Monday at 4 p.m. in the Department Eight courtroom of the Second Judicial District Court at 75 Court Street in downtown Reno. All court proceedings are open to the public. Prior to court, Stiglich leads the resource providers

in a staffing meeting, during which they discuss the status of each participant, including such details as: their current living arrangement, whether they are compliant with their prescribed medication, or if there have been any significant changes in the participant's life. These staffing meetings allow all of the providers to share their input with Stiglich so that she is fully informed about each participant's progress in the program.

For additional information regarding the Youth Offender Drug Court, please contact Judge Lidia S. Stiglich at Lidia.Stiglich@washocourts.us or James Popovich, Specialty Courts Manager, at the Second Judicial District Court at James.Popovich@washocourts.us. NL



HON. LIDIA S. STIGLICH was appointed to the Second Judicial District Court by Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval in November 2012, and was subsequently retained by voters in 2014. She is the presiding judge in Department Eight, serves as the probate judge for the district, and is the co-founder and presiding judge of the Youth Offender Drug Court. Stiglich is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of California, Hastings College of Law.



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