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Judge makes case for Illawarra drug court

By DOMINIC GEIGER

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Judge Joseph Flies-Away and Illawarra solicitor Renata Matyear at Parramatta Drug Court.

A visiting native American judge has called for a more holistic approach to dealing with drug offenders before a University of Wollongong public forum on drug courts.

Judge Joseph Flies-Away, a member of the Hualapai first nation's tribe, was invited to speak by members of the Illawarra Law Society due to his work establishing "wellness" courts among American indigenous communities.

The Law Society has been spearheading a campaign to have a drug court established in the Illawarra, a move Judge Flies-Away said would "benefit humanity".

[Push for Illawarra drug court grows](http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/1934523/push-for-illawarra-drug-court-grows/)

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"Locking people up and throwing away the key doesn't serve humanity," Judge Flies-Away said.

"By and large, there are a whole group of people who, if they just had the support, treatment, and guidance ... then perhaps they'll become better."

In NSW, drug courts have been successfully established in Toronto near Newcastle, Parramatta and Sydney, and work by giving offenders convicted of drug-related crimes the option of rehabilitation, rather than prison.

Yesterday, Judge Flies-Away and Illawarra solicitor Renata Matyear visited the Parramatta Drug Court to gather information.

The US has had drug courts for decades and, in 1997, Judge Flies-Away helped establish the first Wellness Court to help members of his own Hualapai community.

He said many issues faced by indigenous people were the same around the world, and he hoped the idea of a court aiming to “work together to help individuals, families and the tribe” could assist Australian Aboriginal people.

“It’s going back to how we were ... before contact with outsiders,” he said.

“We thought tribally; what am I supposed to do for me, my family, my people.

Judge Flies-Away will appear as one of several speakers at the Breaking The Cycle Forum, McKinnon Building, University of Wollongong, tomorrow from 9am to 4pm.

Attendees are encouraged to register before the free event [here](http://lha.uow.edu.au/law/drugcourtforum/index.html) (<http://lha.uow.edu.au/law/drugcourtforum/index.html>).