



Circuit Court of the First Judicial Circuit — THE JUDICIARY • STATE OF HAWAII
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R. MARK BROWNING
JUDGE, THIRD DIVISION

June 21, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

Three years ago, as the former Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Drug Court of the First Circuit Court of the State of Hawai'i, I incorporated the Spirit Surfrider Sessions program into our drug court. I did so because I believed that this program could make a difference in the lives of the participants of our Court. It did! Spirit Surfrider Sessions has become an essential part of our mission to turn kids away from a life of drugs and crime and transform them into responsible citizens. To say this program is unique is a gross understatement. The fact is no other program in the State of Hawai'i or in the entire United States incorporates the active mentorship that Spirit Surfrider does. I make this statement based upon my 15 years of Family Court judicial experience.

A majority of the youth involved in Juvenile Drug Court have suffered significant trauma which triggered their delinquent behaviors. Most come from dysfunctional families and lack support systems. In order for them to change and to become law abiding and productive members of our state, court-involved youth need to feel like they are a valuable part of the community, and that the community, in turn, cares about them.

Surfrider Spirit Sessions creates an environment in which this change can begin and true healing can occur. Spirit Sessions bolsters self-esteem, creates joy, and provides a nurturing and supportive environment in which they can thrive and succeed beyond their expectations. I have seen first-hand the pride and sense of achievement our kids experience when they successfully catch their first wave. But more importantly I have watched them grow to believe in themselves — to believe that their lives are important. They learn through the positive experience of spirit surfing that they are capable of achieving.

Surfrider Spirit Sessions offers youth access to a new pro-social community that is not part of the court system and does not label them as "bad" — rather, it gives these youth an opportunity to start over with a clean slate. They learn to give back to other youth, and many set goals of becoming Junior (peer) Mentors, willingly working as volunteer interns in order to earn the position. Spirit Sessions inspire our kids by providing opportunities for them to learn to give back through community service.

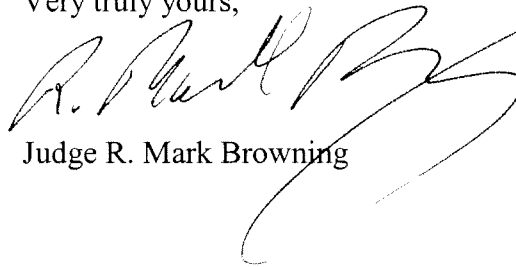
In addition, reports from Spirit Sessions mentors and staff provide the courts with

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valuable personal insights regarding our youth. While many of our juveniles present themselves carefully to judges and probation officers, they are less guarded and more genuine at Spirit Sessions. Through Spirit Sessions reports, our Court gets a more accurate picture of each youth's actual progress, needs, and problems and as such we, as a Court, are able to respond to each teen in a meaningful and significant way. Surfing Spirit Sessions is no less important than the counseling or therapy that we also provide to our children and their families. Can I say that Juvenile Drug Court would see the same success rate without Spirit Sessions? Absolutely not. Unique community driven programs like Spirit Surfing are rare and are very much needed. And sadly, the State cannot provide these kinds of services.

We, as a community, need to realize that these children belong to all of us. As a community we owe a debt of gratitude to the wonderful Spirit Surfing volunteers that give their time to helping our kids change their lives. Without Spirit Surfing many of these young people would continue their individual lives of crime – eventually becoming adult offenders. The mission of Spirit Surfing is one that all of us should embrace, for in doing so – we enrich the future of our State. It is a precious resource that we, as a community, cannot afford to lose.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Mark Browning', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Judge R. Mark Browning