A change in federal law last year has ended a 117-year prohibition against alcohol on Canadian Indian reserves.

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OHSWEKEN — Prohibition has ended on the Six Nations Reserve.

On Dec. 28, a federal law passed last June came into effect, allowing natives to consume alcohol on reserves and giving their businesses and community organizations the right to apply for liquor licences and special occasion permits.

There is some disagreement among community leaders over the immediate impact on reserve life of the change in the law.

However, there is agreement on the political ramifications of the law. Many Six Nations leaders believe that the change is also tied to continuing discussions about native autonomy. They argue it represents another attempt by the federal government to impose its version of self-government on natives without consultation.



Chief Coun. Montour Political ramifications

The federal government had prohibited alcohol on reserves since 1868.



Wilton Bomberry Teach responsibility

- "Don't drink the fire-water because the water will quench the fire."

That is what native elders have been telling their young people since they were introduced to alcohol centuries ago. Despite the warning, natives remain victims of alcoholism. And the fire, symbol of the spirit, has suffered.

Cultures different

But natives are still vulnerable to alcoholism because of cultural differences, and this makes the native alcoholic one of the most misunderstood and loneliest victims of the disease.

One difference is that natives are taught to share whereas white people are taught to be competitive, Mr. Bomberry said. A native in a white environment suffers "culture shock."

"For a native who leaves the reserve, it's easier to socialize in a hotel room where there is alcohol rather than deal with the loneliness."

Mr. Bomberry, who has been sober for 13 years after a sevenyear drinking bout, speaks from experience.

Ten years ago, he earned \$25,000 a year as a diesel mechanic for the United States Air Force. Because he was single, he spent

most of his money on material pos-"I felt guilty," he confessed,

sessions and alcohol.

"but I didn't know why. In white

society I was considered success-

ful, but in native society I didn't

Indians should not demonstrate an-

of noninterference. Every natural

thing in the universe possesses a

spirit because it originated from

the Creator. Disrupting another

traditional Longhouse, every person had a role to perform and an-

ger was deemed disturbing. War

was considered the means for venting anger, one of the reasons the

Iroquois were such fierce warriors.

"In today's society, there isn't an appropriate outlet. When a na-

tive person drinks, his normal res-

training mechanism is lessened

and the anger that has built up is

ability to adjust. "Non-native so-

ciety has had 2,000 years to set up

norms for drinking, whereas native

society has only been allowed to

ing in native society differ from

those in white society, so does the

treatment. That is why it is im-

portant for a native to counsel a native. Mr. Bomberry said.

480 clients who use the centre

annually are native, which is the reason the seven staff members

are native. "The understanding is

already there. There is a basic uni-

ty. You don't have to say anything

because the other person already

Counsellors avoid a structured

ing that native culture is demo-

cratic. "When they (native

clients) are put into a counselling situation where one

person is domineering, it

is viewed as a power

setting, Mr. Bomberry said, add-

trip."

More than 98 per cent of the

Just as the reasons for drink-

drink legally for 30 years."

The bottom line is a society's

expelled."

knows.'

In the extended family of the

spirit upsets the Creator's plan.

According to Iroquoian ethics,

This ethic stems from the code

have a family to share it with."

ger, Mr. Bomberry said.

A native client who agrees to an appointment may not be ready to start at that time. But if he appears the next day, Mr. Bomberry offers his help.

"It throws time management right out the window, but that's when the best counselling sessions are. That's when the native is ready to talk and get rid of the excess luggage he has been carrying around."

The counsellor may employ humor to "break down the barrier of uncomfortableness". Because of the code of noninterference, natives are not accus-

tomed to seeking help from other people, Mr. Bomberry said. It is difficult for them to make that first

"If you're native, you don't

hang out your dirty laundry. Many natives feel that talking to another person about their feelings means they are being weak and burdening the other person's spirit." Aware of protocol

The same code means that na-

tives are conscious of protocol. A native needs time to adjust to the situation before he can respond to the counsellor's questions. Mr. Bomberry said. It is also important to remem-

ber that in native society eye contact is considered disrespectful. Often the client does not look at the counsellor, but that does not mean he is not listening. Such cultural differences are frequently perceived by white people as unwillingness to co-operate when it is really ignorance, Mr. Bomberry said.

for native clients, Mr. Bomberry said. Traditionally, each member of a native family is expected to perform a role and there is little praise for completing tasks. "Working with native clients,

Positive feedback is important

we reinforce the positive things they do so they will have the energy to work on changing the negative things." The problems of native alcohol-

ics are magnified for those who belong to the Confederacy, which adheres to the Longhouse culture, Mr. Bomberry said. They are removed from and dominated by both modern native and white so-

cieties. Because the Longhouse culture is based on traditional beliefs, the first step in treating its clients is to help them regain their perspective.

"Their beliefs are their foundation. Everything they do in life relates to them. You have to reinforce that there is nothing wrong with their beliefs." Since many of these beliefs are

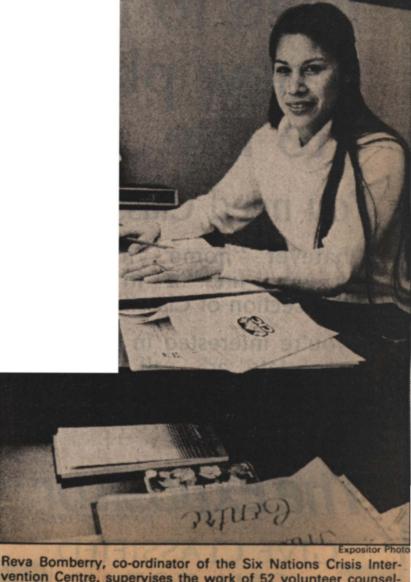
the natural world, Longhouse followers are more sensitive, more attuned to feelings and forces than the average person. They must be able to trust the counsellor before

based on living in harmony with

they are able to begin treatment. "You have to show faith in this person. If it's not from the heart, it's not going to reach the heart."



Joe Garlow is one of those fighting alcohol on the reserve



vention Centre, supervises the work of 52 volunteer counsellors.