



Newsletter

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Inside this issue

Empowering Returning Citizens to Connect to Higher Education and Employment Opportunities.....	2
DOC Reentry Unit Update...	3
Upcoming Mat-Su Events....	3
Reentry Simulation Photos..	3
Mat-Su Job Center Update..	4
Mat-Su Reentry Coalition....	4

Mat-Su Reentry Simulation

From Barbara Mongar, the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Coordinator

Reentry Simulations are a tool used by Reentry Coalitions throughout Alaska to simulate the struggles and challenges faced by individuals who are transitioning from incarceration back into society.

The goal of conducting reentry simulations is for participants to gain an understanding of the significant obstacles faced by men and women attempting to navigate the system upon their release from incarceration and returning home to their communities. To walk in the shoes of one who is returning home gives invaluable insight for professionals who are tasked with helping those individuals achieve a successful reentry back into society.

Each participant assumes the identity of a formally incarcerated individual and receives a packet of materials, and over the course of about 2 hours participants experience the first month of post-release life. Each week takes place in 15 minute segments. The packet that a participant receives explains the reentrant's criminal background, current living situation, current job situation, and the specific weekly tasks that must be accomplished in order to avoid the risk of being sent back to prison for non-compliance with the requirements of his or her supervised release. At the end of the event participants engage in a guided discussion, reflecting on their successes and failures.

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition held a Reentry Simulation on November 3, 2022 at the Menard Sport Center in Wasilla, AK. Twenty-five community members participated and 20 volunteers assisted with the simulation (see Reentry Simulation images on the bottom of page 3).

Some of the comments from participants include the following:

- Scott Anderson, a Mat-Su Job Center Resource Room staff, stated:
"I found the Mat-Su Reentry simulation to be very informative and illuminating. It helped me to understand the financial and physical barriers experienced by reentrants as they try to join the community. After experiencing frustration, confusion, hopelessness, and helplessness as I tried to complete the goals of the simulation, I now empathize with reentrants who are trying to make a life for themselves as they rejoin their communities. As a result of my experience, I'm more willing to step out and help where it is needed. I'm thankful for the opportunity to be a part of this exercise!"
- Jay L. Easter, the Disable Veteran Outreach/Career Support & Training staff from the Mat-Su Job Center, stated:
"I personally found this event to be very eye opening and informative. The steps that are required to get back into the community are definitely arduous but they can be accomplished with cooperation from the client and the community. It definitely gives me a new perspective on the cooperation that is needed to reduce recidivism and build up our local community creating opportunities for both the client and the employers."

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition plans to hold another Reentry Simulation in the Spring of 2023. If you are interested in volunteering or participating in this simulation e-mail me at Barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org.

Barbara Mongar

Coordinator, Mat-Su Reentry Coalition

Empowering Returning Citizens To Connect To Higher Education And Employment Opportunities

By Rachel Hirsh, National Governors Association (NGA), Apr. 29, 2022

When people leave prison or jail and reenter society, they often face a variety of barriers that can make it difficult to successfully and permanently reacclimatize and avoid returning to old destructive habits. One factor in whether reentry is successful is whether returning citizens can find good jobs and careers that not only keep them financially stable but also allow them to solidify a sense of community, structure, and purpose. Governors support strategies that assist these individuals in successful reentry for many reasons, such as reducing recidivism, helping people get back on their feet and attain financial stability, and helping employers find talented employees to fill their in-demand jobs.

This important issue was highlighted recently at the [2022 NGA Winter Workforce Symposium](#), which the NGA Center For Best Practices convenes twice yearly to bring together state workforce development leaders, including members of two affiliate associations: the [National Association of State Liaisons for Workforce Development Partnerships](#) and the [National Association of State Workforce Board Chairs](#). This year's Symposium, which brought together leaders from 29 states and the District of Columbia, featured a session on empowering returning citizens in the workforce through connecting them to higher education and employment opportunities, with speakers from [Center for Employment Opportunities](#) (CEO), [Anti-Recidivism Coalition](#) (ARC), and [Dave's Killer Bread Foundation](#).

Sam Lewis, now Executive Director of ARC, who had been previously serving a life sentence, spoke about the importance of starting meaningful engagement with folks while they are still incarcerated – whether that's through job training, education, mental health services, and/or preparations for when they are released. The hand off immediately after reentry is also incredibly important, and organizations like CEO help aid in this pivotal period by providing returning citizens with transitional jobs. Leah Bacon, Senior Policy Associate at CEO, described how the organization achieves success in this area and provides participants not only with paid work experience but also with support in other areas of their life. These transitional jobs can help keep these individuals stable during a critical time and give them necessary experience to get into a more permanent career soon after.

However, employers often need training and guidance themselves on how best to engage these returning citizens. Genevieve Martin, Executive Director of Dave's Killer Bread Foundation, spoke to how employers need to be taught how best to accommodate and support formerly incarcerated employees. Dave's Killer Bread has made a point of hiring many justice-impacted employees and now, through their foundation, they offer training and peer learning to employers who seek to do the same. Many companies have found that formerly incarcerated employees are some of their most dedicated workers, which is certainly attractive to businesses in this competitive and transient job market.

States can consider multiple lines of effort to support successful reentry, including but not limited to:

- expanding access to higher education and job training in correctional facilities that connects individuals directly to further education or employment upon release;
- encouraging partnerships between departments of corrections, workforce and education, and community-based organizations;
- funding supportive services for returning citizens;
- assisting employers in hiring and retaining justice-involved workers; and
- enacting a variety of criminal justice policies that reduce burdens upon reentry, such as reducing fines and fees or assistance in obtaining a driver's license.

In addition, states can make strategic plans now to prepare for the 2023 [legislative change](#) that will allow eligible incarcerated students to access Pell Grants. Connections and alignment between higher education and departments of corrections are especially critical at this juncture, and governors can take a leadership role in ensuring these groups work together closely to take full advantage of this upcoming change. The NGA Center is currently providing technical assistance to the [Iowa Consortium for Higher Education in Prison](#) to assist in scaling these critical educational offerings in prison, and has also helped Kansas create a plan to achieve broad criminal justice reform.



DOC Reentry Unit Update

- Reentry Services funding continues to be available to recent reentrants who have been incarcerated for at least 30 days. A third party, such as a probation officer, case manager, or peer support specialist, must sign the application. For an application and instructions, write to doc.reentry@alaska.gov. Assistance is available for housing, clothing, transportation, household items, and other needs.
- Programs and classes continue at the institutions:
 - Goose Creek Correctional Center:** Parenting, Adult Basic Education, GED, ESL, Flagger, Intro to Construction Trades, Welding, Electrical, Plumbing, Barber Program, Forklift, Blood Borne Pathogens, and First Aid & CPR
 - Hiland Mountain Correctional Center:** Reentry, Adult Basic Education, GED, ESL, Career Skills, Food Worker Card, Computer Literacy, and Welding
 - Palmer Correctional Center:** Parenting, Thinking for a Change, Reentry, Intro to Construction Trades, Budgeting, Effective Communication, and Time Management Skills
 - Point McKenzie Correctional Farm:** Parenting, Thinking for a Change, Reentry, Adult Basic Education, GED, ESL, Food Worker Card, Stress Management, Computer Literacy, Chainsaw Safety, Forklift, and Ag Tractor
- DOC Reentry Unit staff Kris Black and Julie Weathersby continues to recruit for participation in the CAREERS grant program in the facilities (PCC, PMCF, GCCC, SCCC, and Wildwood). Julie says, "We have several individuals who VERY recently released to Mat-Su and I'm making those referral-introductory emails as we speak." The goal of this program is to provide the reentrant with the skills and knowledge needed to obtain a job that leads to a career.
- The Second Chance Act Grant reentry program continues through September 30, 2023. To see if they qualify, those incarcerated can speak with their institutional probation officer.
- Three positions will be posted on Workplace Alaska for the DOC Reentry Unit: Education Specialist, Protective Services Specialist, and Grant Administration Manager. We welcome all qualified applicants.
- The DOC Reentry Unit currently has two positions posted on Workplace Alaska: Education Specialist I and a Protective Services Specialist II. We invite you to read through the job descriptions and apply to join our dynamic team!

Upcoming Mat-Su Events:

- **Mat-Su Reentry Services Forum**
Wednesday, November 16th
10:00 to 11:30 AM

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition and Reentry Case Management Program invites you to join us in a virtual Reentry Services Forum every third Wednesday of the month. Service providers, Field PO's, Institutional PO's, Case Managers, and any others who are interested in attending are welcome.

- **Knik Tribe is holding a Men's Talking Circles**

The next one is on Monday, November 14, 2022; These are held every other Monday

Where: **Band of Brothers, 2050 N. Merciful Cir., Wasilla**
When: 6 pm—8 pm

The talking circle Provides a safe space for sharing, healing, and connecting with others who have experienced crime victimization.

For more information contact Jessica Svetkovich at 907-671-6872 or jsvetkovich@kniktribe.org

Mat-Su Reentry Simulation Photos - November 3, 2022





ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Mat-Su Job Center Update

By: **Amanda Carlson**, Mat-Su Job Center Manager

Mat-Su Reentry Coalition

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition is a collaboration of individuals, community stakeholders, public and not-for-profit agencies, faith-based and business partners who are united and committed to reducing recidivism among returning citizens to the Mat-Su community.

Our Mission

To promote public safety by identifying and implementing strategies that increase former prisoners' well-being within the community and reduce the likelihood of their return to prison through recidivating.

We will accomplish this by:

- Improved communication and collaboration between Alaska Department of Corrections and the community.
- Building community partnerships to strengthen local services.
- Identifying barriers for those being released from incarceration and taking an active role in addressing those concerns.
- Promoting community educational and training opportunities for those releasing regarding resources.
- Work in conjunction with the Department of Corrections to inform and promote reentry efforts in Alaska.

The Mat-Su Job Center is open to the public Monday-Friday 8am-5pm, call us at 352-2500 or visit the resource room at 877 W. Commercial Drive in Wasilla. Our dedicated staff are here to assist both job seekers and employers with their employment and training needs, come in and see us.

Alaska is joining the 2022 National Apprenticeship Week celebration and will be hosting "Think Apprenticeship! Bridging the Workforce Gap" where partners and employers can find solutions for their business workforce challenges. This event will be held at the Loussac Library on November 16th starting at 10am. If you are working with job seekers interested in learning more about Apprenticeship opportunities please have them contact us at 907-352-2500 or visit <https://awib.alaska.gov/apprentice/index.html> to learn more.

The Mat-Su Job Center staff are gearing up for our Annual Employer Expo and are now taking employer registrations. Please reach out to Lana Kosek to register early for this free event lane.kosek@alaska.gov, or visit our job fairs page for the registration form at <https://jobs.alaska.gov/jobfairs/> this is one of our states largest job fairs with over 100 employers and 700+ job seekers in attendance last year. Register early so you don't miss this upcoming event.

Are you interested in learning more about occupations expected to grow in Alaska, Inflation and cost of living, or what it means that Alaska's population is aging and how age structure is projected to change?

The Department of Labor and Workforce Development Research and Analysis staff have recorded webinars available to the public, to learn more their page at <https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/cen/presentations>



[November Trends](#): Fish harvesting jobs in 2021. Also inside: Adak

