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Newsletter

Are Reentrants finding it easier to get meaningful Employment in Alaska?

From Barbara Mongar, the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Coordinator

During the pandemic, millions of workers left the workforce, this includes individuals who retired early, individuals who were challenged with daycare, and also individuals who were concerned for their health due to the pandemic. A recent [research paper](#) from the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis found that workers who disappeared from the workforce during the pandemic were dominated by accelerated retirements and the need to stay home to care for someone.

Due to this it is reported that there is over 11 million unfilled job openings in the United States and at the same time, the country is experiencing low unemployment.

According to Josh Cunningham from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL): With the demand for workers showing no signs of easing, and too few job seekers to fill openings, states are looking at long-term strategies for growing the size of their labor force. These actions can help states meet the needs of employers and the economy as well as their own state government workforce needs.

Workforce preparation strategies provide various avenues to individuals with the skills needed to secure gainful employment. States can modernize these strategies to better align with industry needs and target populations historically underrepresented in the labor force, including people with disabilities, women, people of color and formerly incarcerated individuals.

Meeting the needs of the 21st century economy requires an all-hands-on deck approach to workforce development that taps into existing institutional knowledge, like vocational rehabilitation, and directly engages with public, nonprofit and private sector stakeholders. A key step to addressing this challenge involves modernizing higher education systems, as well as alternative career pipelines such as apprenticeships and work-based learning. See NCSL's additional resources on [Workforce Participation Shortages](#).

According to Brian Galloway, our Mat-Su Reentry Case Manager, "Plenty of our reentry clients have been getting employment either through a specific referral through their transitional living program or through the Mat-Su Job center. We continue to send individuals over to the Mat-Su Job center. They have been doing an amazing job of helping reentrants get their resume together, identifying those strengths and weaknesses, and getting them into additional trainings. We have also been partnering with the Mat-Su Job Center on helping to cover any cost for employment for the reentrants we refer to them, for example, we helped some individuals get their SERVSAFE Cards and their CHARR/TAP cards, as well as helping some individuals with getting the tools and work clothes they needed for successful employment. We have also had success with getting employment for our hardest to place reentrants, Sexual Offenders, which shows that there is almost no barrier right now for getting employment in the Mat-Su if the individual is serious about getting employed right away."

Barbara Mongar

Coordinator, Mat-Su Reentry Coalition

Why Second-Chance Hires Can be a Vital Resource for Employers

By Sam Blum, HR Brew, October 5, 2022

Advocates of “second-chance hiring” - hiring people with criminal records—say the practice isn’t just altruistic, especially in today’s hiring climate.

For anyone intoning the modern cliché, “nobody wants to work anymore,” according to proponents of second-chance hiring who spoke with HR Brew, there are millions of potential applicants waiting in the wings: the formerly incarcerated. But these applicants’ pursuit of employment is often thwarted at square one—filling out a job application—or during background checks, when criminal histories are flagged.

Advocates of second-chance hiring—or hiring people with criminal records—say the practice isn’t just altruistic, especially in today’s hiring climate.

“People who are rebuilding their lives have resilience and grit like you’ve never seen...facing rejection after rejection, and just getting up every morning and having to just keep applying for jobs,” Ashley Furst, senior program manager at the nonprofit Responsible Business Initiative for Justice, told HR Brew.

Even as societal stigma lingers, she said that leaders hesitant to implement a second-chance program can be convinced after a hard look at the data and case studies. “Businesses are risk-averse. But if you do your research, it’s really not as big of a risk as you think it might be,” she explained.

A solution in a tight labor market? There are nearly 2 million people behind bars in the US and its territories, a March Prison Policy Initiative report found. An additional 70 million civilians with a criminal arrest history live in the US, and 600,000 people are released from prison annually, according to the US Chamber of Commerce.

Tony Lowden, VP of reintegration and community engagement at ViaPath Technologies, which provides communications technology for the criminal justice system, aims to get these people jobs—building bridges with HR departments along the way. “We have to look at ways of being able to work with HRs across the nation, as companies struggle to identify strong candidates,” he told HR Brew. There are 70 million people “wanting to sit down with the HR person and tell them their story.”

But employers are often wary of hiring people with criminal records. Furst said willingness needs to come from a company’s top brass. “Your VP, your C-suite, they need to have the ultimate buy-in, because actually...HR and general counsel is where things kind of get hung up, because chance implies risk.”

HR professionals at organizations with second-chance programs seem to cherish them. In a survey last year, the Society of Human Resources Management found that 75% of HR managers believe “workers with criminal records were just as or more dependable than workers without criminal records,” while 72% said second-chance hires are “as good as or better than” traditional hires at retaining jobs.

In 2014, a Toyota manufacturing plant in Georgetown, Kentucky, struggled to add talent to payroll. The company partnered with staffing firm Kelly Services to implement a second-chance program, but first had to update hiring practices, including its background check policy, that often presented barriers for the formerly incarcerated. “Many times these policies are so outdated, they haven’t been dusted off in decades,” said Pam Sands, the firm’s VP of product management and partnerships. After the firm revamped the employment requirements, the applicant floodgates opened: Kelly Services placed 645 contingent workers with nonviolent convictions at the Toyota facility, increasing its total talent pool by 20%, the company claimed.

Other success stories abound at large employers: JPMorgan enacted a second-chance program in 2019, while Walmart, Kroger, and a variety of large employers routinely look to the second-chance market. For Ashley Furst, the evidence is clear. “As far as the business case, the data really speaks pretty clearly: You have increased retention, you have increased loyalty, you have increased productivity.”



DOC Reentry Unit Update



ALASKA DOC
REENTRY UNIT

- 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 continue 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.

UAA Child Welfare Academy Free Virtual Alaska Family Strengthening Training



Strengthening Families™
ALASKA through Connections

Strengthening Families™ is a researched-informed, strength-based approach focused on engaging families, programs, and communities in building five protective factors that help families succeed and thrive, even in the face of risk and challenges: parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children. The overarching goal is the promotion of child and family well-being.

Participate in a two half-day virtual training for bringing the Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors to life in your work.

Time: 8:30 am – 12:30 pm, *free to attend*
Where: Zoom, link will be provided



Register for October 20-21

Upcoming Mat-Su Events:

- **Mat-Su Reentry Services Forum**
Wednesday, October 19th
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.

- **Mat-Su Reentry Simulation**
Thursday, November 3rd
8:30 to 10:15 AM
At the Menard Center,
Wasilla

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition would like to give you an opportunity to learn more about the real-life challenges associated with prisoner reentry and invites you to participate in a Reentry Simulation.

This hands-on activity will put participants into the role of a reentrant where one must balance decisions regarding entering the workforce, obtaining identification, and finding housing while also complying with supervision and managing limited resources.

Space is limited! Please RSVP to Barbara Mongar by COB October 28th at (907) 414-4077 or barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org

- **Knik Tribe is holding a Men's Talking Circles on Monday, October 17, 2022**
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



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 open house was a great success, thank you to all our partners who attended to learn more about our services in order to better assist our common customers. This will be an annual event held in September for Workforce Development Month. Our job center is open to the public Monday-Friday from 8am-5pm, we are located at 877 W. Commercial Drive in Wasilla. You can contact us by phone at 907-352-2500 or email matsu.jobcenter@alaska.gov

The Veterans, Military Spouses & Alaska Residents Job Fair will be held November 9th at the Muldoon Mall in Anchorage from 10am-2pm, this event is open to the public.

Come explore the many career opportunities available. If you are working with any veterans or military spouses please have them connect with our staff who work with the Jobs for Veterans State Grants, Holly Brien 907-352-2516 or Jay Easter 907-352-2558. These dedicated staff provide specialized services to our local Veteran population such as intensive job search assistance, resume building, interviewing skills, and they administer State and Federal grant funding for job related training and supportive services.



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.

[October 2022 Alaska Economic Trends](#) : Projections for Alaska industries and occupations through 2020