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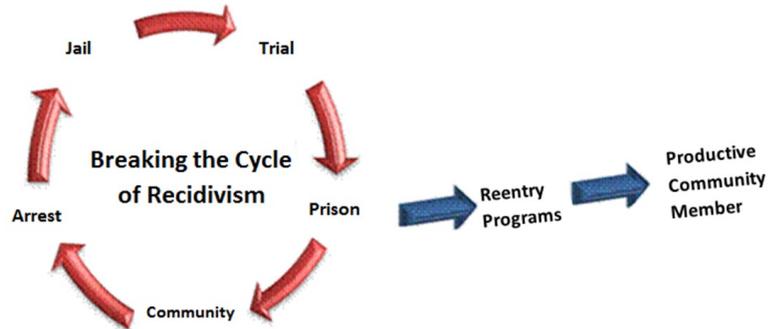
# Newsletter

## Reentry Services; What are they and Why are they Important?

From Barbara Mongar, the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Coordinator

*Reentry Services are services provided to individuals that are being released from prison in order to help them successfully “reenter” the community. Reentry Services can include assistance with housing, job training and employment, substance and mental health treatment, case management, peer support, transportation, and other things.*

*A large number of individuals get released from prison each year. In 2021, 5,586 individuals were released back into Alaska communities statewide and out of those, 593 individuals were released back into the Mat-Su. Most of these individuals being released from the correctional institutions have limited resources and no where to live.*



*If we, as a community, want these individuals to have a chance at succeeding and not recidivating, we need to make sure that there are Reentry Services in place to assist them.*

*In Alaska our Recidivism Rate is over 60%, which means that 6 out of every 10 individuals released from prison returns to prison within 3 years due to committing new crimes or supervision violations. Reducing recidivism is critical for community safety. Studies show that the best ways to reduce recidivism is through providing effective reentry services.*

*In the Mat-Su we have several different programs that we offer Reentry Services through; these services include “Wraparound” Case Management & Coordination, Employment Assistance, Information and Referral, Resource Navigation, Parole/Probation Supports, Comprehensive Goal and Transitioning Planning, Community Barrier Mitigation, and Housing Assistance. We also have partners in the Mat-Su we can refer formally incarcerated individuals to if they don’t qualify for any of our Reentry Service Programs. Contact me at [barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org](mailto:barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org), Cindy Yeager at [cindy.yeager@valleycharities.org](mailto:cindy.yeager@valleycharities.org), or Brian Galloway at [brian.galloway@valleycharities.org](mailto:brian.galloway@valleycharities.org) for more information.*

*Barbara Mongar*

**Coordinator, Mat-Su Reentry Coalition**

# New Mat-Su Facility Adds Sorley Needed Residential Detox Beds

By: Annie Berman, Anchorage Daily News, Alaska, February 6, 2023

More than five years ago, on the day her son died of a heroin overdose, Karen Malcolm-Smith vowed to help create a place where Alaskans suffering from addiction could get help when they need it most, when they're ready to embark on the often physically and emotionally grueling process of drug detoxification.

This winter, Malcolm-Smith's vow became reality with the opening of Dylan's Place, an eight-bed residential withdrawal management program in Wasilla named after her son, Dylan Fuhs, who died at age 25.

The program is the only residential detox option in Mat-Su and one of just a dozen residential facilities in Alaska offering help with this crucial step in the treatment and recovery process.

Withdrawing from opioids like heroin can be a dangerous and frightening experience without medical attention. There has long been a shortage of detox beds statewide, said James Savage, director of operations at Day One Center, the new facility that houses Dylan's Place. The center is operated by True North Recovery, a nonprofit drug and alcohol treatment center based in Wasilla.

The new facility was funded in part by the sale of Fuhs' Anchorage house. "The day he died, I just knew that the equity from his home is going to go to a withdrawal management center," Malcolm-Smith said. She donated the \$255,000 in profits from the sale of the home to True North to help purchase the building.

The total cost for the Day One Center and Dylan's Place was just over \$1.3 million, and was also funded by donations and grants from the Mat-Su Health Foundation, the state of Alaska and the Alaska Mental Health Trust, according to Karl Soderstrom, True North Recovery's CEO and founder. Dylan's Place is the only residential detox facility in Mat-Su.

Detox, also referred to as withdrawal management, is the process of clearing the chemical dependence on drugs from an addict's system before starting additional treatment. Opiate withdrawal symptoms can include nausea, sweating, shakiness, extreme anxiety and, in more severe cases and when not medically managed, seizures and death. Residential detox is particularly valuable because it decreases the likelihood of a relapse, according to Savage.

"It's a controlled environment," explained Theresa Johnson, state opioid treatment authority with the Alaska Division of Behavioral Health, when asked what makes a residential detox center unique. "So they have all the safety nets in place that they need: The staff is there to help them, and see if they have any other medical or social needs that are taken care of right in that space."

Johnson said the True North facility was the only detox treatment center in Mat-Su she was aware of, and one of just 12 residential detox facilities around the state.

There is a "significant need" for more detox beds and facilities in Alaska, a need that has been exacerbated by health care workforce shortage problems statewide, she said. "It's so vital. You can save a life by getting people into that appropriate treatment when they need it versus having to wait," Johnson said. By the first week of February all beds at the new center were occupied, and six people were on the waitlist, staff said.



*A plaque memorializes Dylan Fuhs, who died in 2017 from an opioid overdose, at Dylan's Place, part of the Day One Center withdrawal management center in Wasilla. **LOREN HOLMES / ADN***

**(Article Continued on Page 3)**

# New Mat-Su Facility Adds Sorley Needed Residential Detox Beds

(Continued from page 2)

This latest boost to the state's treatment options comes amid a surge of overdoses in the state and nationwide. In 2021, the most recent finalized data on record, Alaska reported the largest increase in overdose deaths of any state by a significant margin, according to data from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That year, 245 Alaskans died from drug overdoses compared to 146 in 2020.

Preliminary CDC data shows little decline in overdose deaths in Alaska last year with 247 overdose deaths reported between August 2021 and 2022. The Mat-Su has long had some of the highest rates of overdoses in the state.

Advocates say that increasing the state's detox beds has been a priority for years, and is key to preventing more overdose deaths statewide.

Savage, who is also in recovery from alcohol and substance addiction, said that the key with detox is immediate intake and prompt medical treatment. Because of the way addiction works, particularly with opioids, being put on a long waitlist is ineffective and sometimes deadly.

"We're talking about individuals where the window that they're willing to be helped is very small," he said.

Dylan's Place can accept same-day walk-ins and doesn't require potential patients to jump through hoops to get into treatment, Savage said. Many other facilities put patients on lengthy waitlists, and require doctor visits and other specialist visits before treatment.

"We have the ability to say yes, at a moment's notice, and all of the services that somebody could and would require to engage in long-term treatment, and the next steps of their life, is here," he said.

"They don't need to leave the building once they have decided to engage in withdrawal management."

The new facility, located in a light blue two-story house off a quiet side street near town, was formerly a birthing center and midwifery practice. That's fitting, said Michael Carson with the Mat-Su Opioid Task Force.



*The Day One Center, a withdrawal management center in Wasilla, on Jan. 26. **LOREN HOLMES** / ADN*

"Now, it gets to be a birthplace for recovery," Carson said.

Savage said True North purchased the building last spring "on a whole big leap of faith" after Malcolm-Smith's sizeable donation, money that also helped them secure additional grant funding.

Upstairs, where patients in recovery stay until they're stable and ready to move on, the space is decidedly non-clinical. It feels like a home, not a hospital. The decor features quiet rooms and hallways with framed pictures with inspiring quotes, blankets and comfy couches, big windows and soft touches.

Downstairs, where patients receive medical evaluations, many of the specialists who greet potential patients and complete their intake paperwork have personal experience with recovery and substance abuse, and are able "to meet them where they're at, without judgment," Savage said. That's also key for someone who's decided to get sober, he said: being met by people who understand what they're going through and provide a path forward.

Malcolm-Smith says her advocacy has long been focused on the lack of detox beds in the state, which she says frustrated her while her son was still alive and in the years since he died in 2017 of a heroin overdose.

Fuhs became dependent on opioids after being prescribed them following a serious ATV accident as a young teenager, Malcolm-Smith said. **(Article Continued on Page 4)**

# New Mat-Su Facility Adds Sorley Needed Residential Detox Beds

(Continued from page 3)

"The hardest part for me, even now, is reliving the moments of my son's life where he was a vibrant and creative man of exceptional character. He was a protector. He was a boxer and a musician," she said. "To watch him transition from this beautiful man of such high character, and then to recall how drugs hijacked his life, he was never the same."

Savage said that until now, the detox options for Mat-Su residents hoping to get sober are limited: There's Arctic Recovery, located within the Chris Kyle Patriots Hospital for veterans in Anchorage. There's a Southcentral Foundation program, also in Anchorage, and Serenity House on the Kenai. And that's about it, he said. Savage described trying to find detox beds in recent months and years as "a logistical nightmare."

Usually, there'd be about a two-week waitlist, which can be too long for someone who is addicted to opioids, he said.

For Malcolm-Smith's son, two weeks of waiting for help was deadly.

Fuhs was 25 years old. He told his mom he was ready to get sober. She tried to make an appointment with a local doctor who could prescribe an opioid blocker that "essentially makes it impossible to experience the effects of the drug; it's a psychological harm reductor," she said.

The soonest appointment with one of the four doctors in the state who would prescribe the drug was two weeks away, she said.

"Dylan died the day before the appointment. He relapsed," she said.

Nearly six years after her son died, Malcolm-Smith is still heartbroken by the loss. But she said that with Dylan's Place, she's found honor in helping save "even just one Alaskan from the incredible suffering that goes on with addiction."

"As parents, all we want is happiness for our children," she said. "And the one thing I always taught him was that in that all you do in life, always end well. And I think with the new Dylan's Place, he did that."

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## Knik Tribe Events for March 2023

Below are some upcoming Knik Tribe events: **(Flyers for the below events are attached)**

- **Ice Fishing**— Tuesday, March 14th, 11 AM—3 PM; Location: Finger Lake Recreation Are; Open to All  
Build your own fishing pole/ fire pit/s'mores/snowshoeing/ cross-country skiing/food/and much more.  
**Let us know your coming** <https://forms.office.com/r/VqJPHmdE6X>
- **TIK'U "Out in the Woods"** — Friday, March 17th, 11 AM—1 PM; Location: Eklutna Lake Hike; Open to All  
Meet at Lakeside Trailhead Parking Area. Children welcome, dress accordingly for weather, and pack water & snacks.  
**Contact Jessika Svetkovich at [jsvetkovich@kniktribe.org](mailto:jsvetkovich@kniktribe.org)**
- **Knik Tribe Family Culture Nights** — Wednesdays, 5:30 - 7:30 PM; Location: 758 Shoreline Dr. Wasilla, AK; Open to All  
Food / Family / Fun - **[Compact@KnikTribe.org](mailto:Compact@KnikTribe.org)** - **907-373-7991**
- **Talking Circle** — Tuesdays, 6:30 PM; Location: 758 Shoreline Dr. off of PW Highway, Palmer AK; All are Welcome  
Based on a traditional way of communication, the talking circle provides a space for sharing, healing, and connecting with

# DOC/ Reentry Unit Updates



ALASKA DOC  
REENTRY UNIT

**Staffing:** The Alaska DOC Reentry Unit continues to expand its capacity to provide comprehensive support to reentrants as they prepare to rejoin society. Staff positions to be filled in the next month include a career counselor, a protective services specialist (social worker), and a criminal justice technician. In addition, we are reviewing proposals received for a contract to house Reentry Planners within three of the institutions, Goose Creek Correctional Center, Palmer Correctional Center, and the Anchorage Correctional Complex.

We recently hired an Education Specialist. Heidi Olson, originally from Wisconsin, will be serving in the HARS Reentry Unit, Education Office, overseeing Education and Vocational programs for the Department of Corrections. Her position is responsible for serving as the staff advisor and subject matter expert in planning, developing, and maintaining standards for programs; in addition, she will be evaluating educational and vocational curricula, evaluating their delivery, and analyzing the results of the programs occurring in the institutions. Heidi has degrees in Science Education and Biology and has taught secondary sciences for 3 years, coached volleyball and managed community Parks and Recreation programs. In the last few years, Heidi has worked with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as a fisheries biologist, predominantly on commercial fishing boats monitoring fishing quotas and later as a fishing deckhand herself.

Palmer Correctional Center and Goose Creek Correctional Center are both in the recruitment and hiring process for Vocational Instructors. If you are interested, see the job description on Workplace Alaska.

**Reentry Services:** DOC continues to provide funding to assist reentrants that qualify with funding for transportation assistance, cell phones, clothing, transitional housing, etc. We have prepared a fact sheet regarding assistance that is available which will be sent out electronically. If you are interested in more information on how we can assist reentrants with whom you work, please contact [doc.reentry@alaska.gov](mailto:doc.reentry@alaska.gov).

The Second Chance Act Grant through DOC will be coming to an end this year. It is available to those releasing to supervision. Applications submitted through the institutional probation officers must be received while the participant is still incarcerated. We will be accepting applications through September 1, 2023.

Reentry services are available statewide.

## Upcoming Mat-Su Reentry Events:

- **Virtual Mat-Su Reentry Services Forum**  
Wednesday, March 15  
10:00 to 11:00 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 Coalition Community-Wide Meeting**  
Tuesday, March 7th  
8:30 to 10:15 AM

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition invites you to join us on March 7th for our Reentry Community-Wide Meeting being held at the Mat-Su Health Foundation Meeting Rooms.

The topics for the meeting are Mat-Su Housing and Employment. We will have speakers from the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, Mat-Su Job Center, DOC CAREERS Program, Valley Residential Services, Alaska Family Services Central Child Care Assistance Program, and Nine Star Education & Employment Services

**For questions on the above events contact Barbara Mongar at [barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org](mailto:barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org)**

## 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' wellbeing 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



## Mat-Su Job Center Update

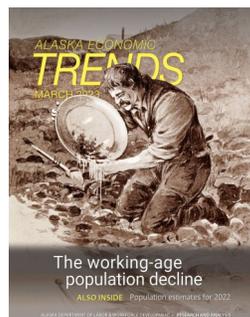
By: Amanda Carlson, Mat-Su Job Center Manager

Spring break is coming and that means the Mat-Su Job Center Employer Expo is right around the corner, please help us get the word out to the public. This is Alaska's largest job fair with 135 employers in attendance, please share and post on your social media pages, and encourage job seekers, partners and community members to attend and see the amazing opportunities available in the Mat-Su. A sharable flyer can be found on our job fairs page here <https://jobs.alaska.gov/jobfairs/>

Mat-Su job center staff are available Monday through Friday 8am-5pm for both job seeker and business services, our current labor market is abundant with many opportunities to succeed and grow. Our business connection staff reported well over 1,000 current job openings in our local area with 45 current State of Alaska openings in the Mat-Su. Whether you are new to the labor market, or currently working but would like a better job, or you have interest in training funds to gain a recognized credential, degree, diploma or license to make more money come in and meet our staff to learn about our services and the many opportunities available.

Ms. Ashley Smith is one of our Employment Services Technician's at the Mat-Su Job Center and works one-on-one with reentrants who are returning to the workforce. Ashley assesses their needs, focuses on their abilities and skills while addressing gaps that could use additional supports. Ashley provides a multitude of services and resources to assist those with barriers to employment become successful. If you are working with a reentrant that is in need of one-on-one assistance with any employment and training services please reach out to Ashley at 907-352-2583 or [Ashley.Smith@alaska.gov](mailto:Ashley.Smith@alaska.gov).

Join us for our Job X meetings, this is a partnership/collaboration between agencies and employers to assist individuals in finding suitable employment, this meeting is held twice monthly and highlights a local employer/business or partner who would like to express their business needs, market themselves, network with others in our community, and meet with professionals who provide employment services. Building relationships between agencies, community business partners, and employers is beneficial for everyone! If you would like to be a presenter at Job X or would like to participate to learn more about local resources and agencies please contact our Business Connection staff Lana Kosek at (907) 352-2515 or email and request an invitation to [Lana.Kosek@alaska.gov](mailto:Lana.Kosek@alaska.gov)



[MarchTrends](#): The decline in Alaska's working-age population, and new population estimates for 2022

**Mat-Su Job Center presents ...**

# 2023 Mat-Su Employer Expo!

**JOB SEEKERS**

- More than 100 companies are expected at this year's 2023 Employer Expo
- Interact with employers hiring for entry-level, technical, professional and seasonal positions
- Speak with university, vocational tech school, apprenticeship and union representatives
- Arrive early, be enthusiastic, ask questions, show initiative, collect business cards, network with others, and take notes
- Come dressed for success, bring plenty of resumes, have your 30 second pitch ready and put your best foot forward

**BE FULLY PREPARED**  
Visit your Mat-Su Job Center early and often for assistive workshops, career counseling, typing assessments, use of computer/copier resources and so much more ...

**All job center services are at no cost to you!**

We are an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
Contact the Mat-Su Job Center at (907) 352-2500

**10 a.m. to 3 p.m.**  
**Wednesday, March 29, 2023**  
Menard Center, 1001 S. Clapp St., Wasilla