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Inside this issue

Emerging From Incarceration:
The Future of Reentry.....2-3

Upcoming Mat-Su Reentry
Events.....3

Knik Tribe Events.....3

Mat-Su Job Center Update...4

Newsletter

Lessons Learned from Attending the National Reentry Workforce Collaborative (NRWC) Conference

Greetings,

At the end of October, I got the chance to attend the NRWC Conference held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This is the second conference they have held and I am very glad I was able to attend.

This conference was a collaborative effort between reentry and workforce organizations. Some of the lessons learned were regarding the importance of building Fair Chance Hiring Partnerships. The panel session depicted in the attached photo explained how vital it is for businesses providing employment and community-based organizations to bring their expectations into alignment to ensure better outcomes for justice-impacted people in their communities. This panel included Executive Directors and Program Managers from organizations such as JPMorgan Chase Policy Center, American Family Insurance, MOD Pizza, Next Chapter, KeHE Distributors, and Goodwill Industries International.



Panel on Successful Fair Chance Hiring Partnerships: Employers & Community Based Organizations

The above-mentioned panel was just one of many presentations I attended that provided me with information and ideas to bring back to Alaska and incorporated in our reentry programs and partnerships. I also attended a session that highlighted the Bureau of Justice Assistance’s National Resource Center and its evidence-based Building Second Chances Reentry Toolkit that the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition will utilize to help to advance reentry to achieve a safer community.

Along with gaining some great tools from the conference I was also able to network with others in the reentry workforce collaborative space, such as Gene Downing, who co-leads an exciting initiative called the Second Chance Hiring Alliance. Within the next few weeks, I plan to set up a meeting with Gene to see how the Mat-Su Reentry Collation might be able to collaborate with them on their new initiative.

Barbara Mongar
Coordinator, Mat-Su Reentry Coalition

Emerging From Incarceration: The future Of Reentry

By: **Gabriel Saruhashi**, Forbes Technology Council/ Sept 1, 2023

Forbes Under 30. CEO at [Emerge Career](#), a prison-to-employment platform breaking the cycle of poverty through holistic vocational training.

Luis was one of the first justice-involved students we served in California. When he joined our Commercial Driver training program, he had just left an \$18/hour job at a waste disposal company. He had inhaled so many toxic fumes that he was placed on temporary medical leave. He was desperately looking for a way out. Luis's story is unfortunately not unique, and it shares similarities with the reality of millions of Americans. The toll of mass incarceration cannot be understated: with [2.3 million individuals currently incarcerated](#), [600,000 cycling in and out of jail every year](#), and [70 million living with arrest or conviction records](#). 95% of these individuals will eventually rejoin our communities. They will become our neighbors, coworkers and fellow citizens, shaping the future of our shared environment. Yet, despite this potential for transformation, our country is failing them in a critical regard. [A staggering 60% of the justice-involved population remains without work, while 27% struggle with unemployment](#). These aren't just faceless numbers—they embody real lives, individuals who deserve the chance to rise above their pasts and forge new paths forward. Faced with these pressing realities, the urgency to redefine reentry strategies has never been more palpable.

The Justice-Involved Are Excluded From The Workforce

With unemployment rates surpassing those of the Great Recession, the urgency to equip individuals for reintegration into the workforce is undeniable. [Over 80% of incarcerated people enter incarceration with no pre-incarceration earnings](#), making vocational readiness a paramount goal of any reentry model. Yet, the existing framework falls woefully short. [Job training opportunities are severely limited, with only one-third of incarcerated people ever participating](#). The available prison jobs offer meager wages, [often less than \\$1 per hour](#), further entrenching the cycle of poverty. [The vast majority of re-entrants are under the age of 55](#), at the peak of their productive years, but upon release, many face a bleak reality, armed with nothing more than a bus voucher, a nominal release check, and the daunting challenge of rebuilding their lives. These disheartening statistics underscore the imperative to overhaul the reentry system, investing in comprehensive programs that equip individuals with the tools necessary for post-incarceration success.

The Evolution of the Reentry Model

The future of the reentry model is built on four essential pillars.

More Job Opportunities

First, central to the new paradigm is the expansion of vocational training opportunities. This begins with strategic pre-release vocational preparation that serves as a cornerstone for success. Across the country, [various skilled trades are grappling with labor shortages, prompting desperate employer searches for new hires](#). Many of these trades don't demand high educational attainment for entry-level positions; however, [they offer wages that elevate individuals well above the poverty line](#).

(Continue on page 3)

Emerging From Incarceration: The future Of Reentry

(Continued from page 2)

Tech-Driven Reentry

Second, the integration of technology is pivotal in empowering reentry initiatives and expanding their reach. The [Michigan Vocational Village](#) serves as a prominent example of a successful prison-to-employment program across the country. While its results are impressive, its capacity is limited, accommodating only 165 vocational trade students. Correctional facilities have inherent spatial constraints, hindering scalability. However, technology presents an opportunity for exponential growth. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic expedited the integration of technology within the corrections system, creating an opportune moment to embrace technology as a fundamental element in re-envisioning reentry planning. Technology can effectively deliver educational training, empower correctional and government personnel to oversee programs and provide tailored educational support based on individual student journeys.

Empowering the Movement

Third, the adage "it takes a village" holds, particularly in reentry contexts. Often, we come across nominal partnerships listed on correctional department websites. Yet, by harnessing pre-release information, we can dynamically link individuals with the right Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), forging a collaborative network that caters to their unique needs as they embark on the reentry journey. This extends beyond organizational collaboration, encompassing an array of wraparound services that address re-entrants' attitudes and beliefs about crime, mental health issues, mentorship, education, job training, and connections with community resources. These wraparound services form a strong foundation, serving as protective factors.

Data-Driven Reentry

Fourth, the integration of technology into the future of re-entry brings data to the forefront of the discussion of effective programming. Currently, disjointed endeavors across government agencies culminate in isolated information pockets and redundant processes, exacerbating challenges for individuals seeking essential services. Furthermore, this decentralization exacerbates the lack of comprehensive insights, a [longstanding predicament in the criminal justice sector](#) that hampers informed policy-making. The evolution of reentry programming introduces transparency as multiple agencies and organizations intersect with reentrants. This transparency lays the foundation for collaborative synergy among stakeholders, working collectively to empower reentrants on their journey toward a fresh start.

In the journey to reform reentry, we need to recognize that our mission is not solely about overhauling systems; it's about transforming lives. Through the pillars of vocational empowerment, technology integration, and collaborative networks, we're crafting a path of opportunity, growth, and redemption. We're not just reimagining the framework; we're igniting hope and possibility. As we press forward, we cannot forget that the statistics we aim to change are reflections of real stories, and the impact of these discussions reaches far beyond policy adjustments. By championing reentry, we're championing individuals like Luis, giving them the chance they deserve to rise, thrive, and make a positive mark on the world.

Upcoming Mat-Su Reentry Events:

- **Virtual Mat-Su Reentry Services Forum**
Wednesday, Nov 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 anyone interested in attending are welcome.

- **Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Community-Wide Meeting**
Tuesday, Dec 5; 8:45 - 10:15AM
Mat-Su Health Foundation
Meeting Rooms

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition is holding a Community-Wide Meeting with speakers from Mat-Su Community Care Team and Mat-Su Food Bank and more.

All community members are welcome. This meeting will be held both in-person and via Zoom.

For questions or zoom links to the above events please contact Barbara Mongar at:
barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org

Knik Tribe Events:

- **Knik Tribe Family Culture Nights** — Every other Wednesday, 5:30 - 7:30 PM; Location: 758 Shoreline Dr. Wasilla, AK; Open to All Food / Family / Fun
Compact@KnikTribe.org
907-373-7991
- **Talking Circle**—Tuesday, at 6:30 and Wednesday at 5:30; Same location above;
Contact Ralph Lewis at 907-841-9773
- **Talking Circle**—Thursday, from 12 to 2PM; Location: Willow Library, Willow, AK

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 (DOC) 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 Alaska DOC to inform and promote reentry efforts in Alaska.



Mat-Su Job Center Update

By: Amanda Carlson, Mat-Su Job Center Manager

The 2024 Mat-Su Employer Expo is set for March 27 at the Menard Center. Registration is now open for employers and partners and this free event fills up fast. Please consider being a sponsor in support of this local event that connects employers and job seekers, last year we hosted 120 vendors and roughly 900 job seekers in attendance. Our staff are once again working with Mat-Su Borough School District Career & Technical Education staff and plan to have over 300 Junior & Senior class students bussed to the event to introduce them to a job fair and the many opportunities here in Alaska including --employers, training providers and community partners.

Mat-Su Job Center presents ...

2024 Mat-Su Employer Expo!

EMPLOYERS

- Meet outstanding and non-traditional candidates with diverse skills and backgrounds
- No-fee event
- Meet and network with other local and statewide businesses

BE A SPONSOR

- Increase your company's visibility and image
- Support a local event that contributes to connecting employers and job seekers
- Enjoy premier table placement at the event

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Or to become a sponsor, call Stacey Andrist at (907) 352-2523

REGISTER ONLINE:
forms.gle/CXuGZnAEP15ta8At5

Wednesday, March 27, 2024
10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Menard Center, 1001 S. Clapp St., Wasilla

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

Mat-Su Job Center Staff are available Monday through Friday 8am-5pm for both job seeker and business services. We offer various workshops at our job center anytime upon request, in addition to other services such as WOWI (world of work inventory) assessments, WorkKeys testing (required for most apprenticeship positions), and Typing/10-Key Certifications. Individuals who experience barriers to employment receive priority for funding under the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult & Dislocated Worker program, this funding is administered by our Career Support & Training staff and can be used for workforce preparation, career services, training services and job placement assistance needed to increase occupational skill attainment, obtain industry recognized credentials, and secure a good job that provides earnings that lead to family- sufficiency. Contact us at 907-352-2500 or stop in at 877 W. Commercial Drive in Wasilla.



November Trends: Another small decline in seafood harvesting jobs in 2022, and a look at the decades-long decrease in commercial fishing deaths

Note: For more information on the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition contact Barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org or go to our Webpage at Mat-Su Valley Reentry Program | Valley Charities Inc