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Newsletter

Random Acts of Kindness Day

Greetings,

While researching different National Days and I came across a very interesting one that falls on February 17th called “National Random Act of Kindness Day”. The history behind this day goes back to 1995 when it was initiated by a nonprofit organization in Denver Colorado called the “[Random Acts of Kindness Foundation](#)”.

Even though this particular National Day hasn’t been around that long, just a little under 30 years, acts of kindness existed long before this day was recognized. An example of a random act of kindness that someone did for me this winter, was my neighbor, who I wave to every once and awhile but really don’t know very well, took it upon himself to clear my driveway with his snowplow after a big snow fall just before Christmas. I was dreading having to go out and try to clear up all that snow but when I walked outside my driveway was already cleared. That was a wonderful surprise and it really made my day.

So, what I would like to propose is that we not wait until it is February 17th and then just do random acts of kindness for that one day a year. Instead, we should all make an effort to do random acts of kindness every day. These acts of kindness could be as small as complimenting a stranger you are passing in the store or as big as anonymously donating a large sum of money to a charity. It doesn't matter what the act of kindness is, it just matters that you try to be kind to others with no expectation of receiving anything in return.

When I was younger, my mom always told me and my brothers to treat people the way you wanted to be treated, which was great advise. I know it makes me feel good when someone I don’t know tells me they like the shirt I’m wearing or that I look nice, so why wouldn’t I want to make someone else feel good also.

I’m not saying these small acts of kindness are going to solve world hunger or change people’s lives, however if something we do can make someone smile or lift them up when they need it, isn’t the effort worth it. “Every small act of kindness is significant. It may seem like it doesn't accomplish much but, just like the domino effect, one act of kindness can lead to more positive outcomes.” ([NATIONAL RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS DAY - February 17, 2024 - National Today](#))

Barbara Mongar
Coordinator, Mat-Su Reentry Coalition



Alaska's domestic violence council explores restorative justice methods in court sentencing

By: Claire Stremple, Alaska Beacon / November 16, 2023

In a sunny room that faced towards the Gastineau Channel in Juneau, a group that included a city attorney, a tribal employee, corrections officers and domestic violence advocates and survivors sat around a circle of desks to discuss how a new vision of justice could reduce domestic violence and increase public health in Alaska.

A [court order](#) issued this fall lays out the process by which the state's courts may use restorative justice programs, but those programs are not compatible with domestic violence cases yet. The state's Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault brought the group in Juneau together to grapple with how courts might do that in the future.

Restorative justice is a method of resolution wherein people who are affected by a crime work together to address the harm caused and put things right, explained two researchers from the University of Alaska Anchorage. It is the opposite of how domestic violence cases are handled now, where the defendant and perpetrator are separated.

Dr. Ingrid Johnson from the University's Justice Center said the model is intended to solve a problem — data shows that many people who experience harms like domestic violence do not feel like they get justice.

"A lot of victims don't access our criminal justice system," she said. "The statistics are around 50% of victims of physical intimate partner violence are actually calling the police when they've been victimized."

Johnson said part of why they do not call, especially in cases of domestic violence, may be because they do not think a response from law enforcement or criminal proceedings will repair the harm they experienced. For the half of crime victims who do report domestic violence to law enforcement, the most recent [analysis](#) shows that fewer than half of those lead to a conviction.

"When you start asking victims of crime, you can actually get a list of over 20 different definitions of justice — at least in my research and the research that I've seen others doing," she said.

Johnson showed the group a data visualization where "accountability" was the most prominent definition, followed by other responses, like "belief and acknowledgement," "rehabilitation" and "connectedness" — conceptions of justice that diverge from traditional sentencing that usually includes fines or jail time.

She said the restorative justice method answers those needs by shifting the focus from the perpetrator of the crime to the effects of the crime itself and how the person who caused harm can fix it.

"It all sounds so fuzzy and utopian," Johnson conceded with a smile. But she and Dr. Rei Shimizu brought evidence that the practice is successful in pilot programs in other states.



The Dimond Courthouse building, home to the Juneau offices of the Alaska Department of Law, is seen across the street from the Alaska State Capitol on Friday, May 27, 2022. (Photo by Lisa Phu/Alaska Beacon)

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Alaska's domestic violence council explores restorative justice methods in court sentencing (Continued from page 2)

By: Claire Stremple, Alaska Beacon / November 16, 2023

The case for restorative justice

Some states already use restorative justice programs to address domestic violence. Shimizu, from the University of Alaska Anchorage's School of Social Work, studies them and said they [both reduce recidivism rates and result in greater victim satisfaction](#).

"It also shifts DV as an individual, 'hush-hush,' privatized issue to more of a community public health issue," she said. "It allows the community to participate in conversations about domestic violence."

Shimizu said it can be hard for community members to call out domestic violence without a framework for making those acknowledgements of harm result in positive change.

"In a small community where domestic violence is happening, it's hard for someone to just show up and say, 'Hey, what you're doing is wrong,' or, 'What you're doing actually impacts everyone in the community.' But the restorative justice processes provide a safe platform for everybody to be included in these conversations," she said.

One of the [studies](#) she worked on as a researcher with New York University showed that batterer intervention programs — the rehabilitation model the state currently uses — can reduce new arrests by more than 50% when paired with restorative justice. In another [study](#), restorative justice led to a reduction in mistreatment of children as well.

Lisa Morley, who organized the event for the state's Council for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, said her goal is to increase statewide understanding of the practice.

"Restorative justice is actually an option now in the court system, especially in the tribal courts, but it's not been very widely utilized. And it's definitely not being utilized for domestic violence," she said.

She said she hoped the discussions would be a "launching point" for potential development of a pilot project to see if restorative justice could have a positive effect in the state. She organized similar events in Anchorage and Fairbanks as well.

The council has been working on a plan to update its rehabilitation programs for offenders, commonly called "batterer intervention programs." Incorporating restorative justice into rehabilitation is one of the recommendations from its working group.

Morley said the state needs to strengthen monitoring and follow through for rehabilitation programs.

"If somebody is court ordered to take the class, they could take the class for a couple of sessions and then drop out, and there's really no consequences," she said.

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Mat-Su Reentry Events:

- **Virtual Mat-Su Reentry Services Forum**
Wednesday, February 21
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 Steering Team Meeting**
Tuesday, March 5
9:00 to 10:30 AM

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition has a virtual Steering Team Meeting on the first Tuesday of each month. The next meeting will be on Tuesday, March 5, 2024. All are welcome to attend.

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** — Bi-Weekly,
Wednesday, 5:30 - 7:30 PM;
Location: 758 Shoreline Dr.
Wasilla, AK; Open to All
(See Attached Calendar)
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
- **Positive Indian Parenting**
Feb 6—April 2, Tuesdays,
4-5 pm; Location: 1744
Prospect Dr. (Flyer Attached)
Contact Jackie Sexton:
907-373-7994 to sign up

Alaska's domestic violence council explores restorative justice methods in court sentencing

(Continued from page 3)

By: Claire Stremple, Alaska Beacon / November 16, 2023

Mixed reception from domestic violence advocates

There are concerns with restorative justice: Accused perpetrators have to admit guilt as a starting point, which could impede due process in legal proceedings, and victims must remain safe and not be re-traumatized.

Brenda Stanfill, one of the Talking Circle participants and the director of the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, said she was concerned about some of these aspects, but sees the need for change.

"We know that the criminal justice system doesn't work for anybody right now. If we're being reality based, if you talk to anyone, they are not satisfied," she said, pointing to the large number of assault cases that do not get tried in the state.

She said each time a case gets dropped, it sends the message that it wasn't a big issue. "We hear women say, 'After the charges were dropped twice, it even made him more bold about what he did, because he would say, 'You can call the cops, nobody's going to do anything. They're going to let me out the next day, and then it's going to be worse,' " she said.

She said anti-violence advocates and politicians used to think the criminal justice system could solve domestic violence, but she said so far it has not.

Stanfill said if restorative justice programs for domestic violence were victim-centered, they might work well.

That feeling was echoed by Saralyn Tabachnick, the Deputy Director for the Juneau domestic violence shelter. She runs its batterer's intervention programs in the community and in Lemon Creek Correctional Center.

She said she found restorative justice "interesting," but that victim safety needs to be at the forefront. "Domestic violence involves power imbalance, where someone is abusing power and control to instill fear in someone else. So the idea that those two people could meet and the victim would feel safe... I'm not sure it's realistic," she said.

But she and other participants wanted to learn more. The University of Alaska Anchorage will hold a virtual restorative justice panel in March. CDVSA will host another Restorative Justice Talking Circle in Fairbanks next January.

A full list of Alaska shelters and victim's services providers can be found [here](#).

Monthly Highlight of Resources in the Mat-Su

- **Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Services—Alaska Family Services:** 32-bed emergency shelter for women and their children seeking safety from domestic violence or sexual assault.
Address: 1825 S. Chugach St. Palmer AK 99645; 24-hour crisis line: Phone: (907) 746-8026 or Text: (907) 795-9246
Website: [Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Services - Alaska Family Services \(akafs.org\)](https://www.akafs.org/)
- **Connect Mat-Su:** Information and referral services for Mat-Su residents to provide connection to resources.
Address: 777 N. Crusey Street, Suite A101 Wasilla, AK
Website: <https://www.connectmatsu.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 (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.

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](https://www.valleycharities.org/mat-su-valley-reentry-program/)



Mat-Su Job Center Update

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

Mat-Su Job Center staff are available weekdays 8am-5pm for both job seeker and business services, our current labor market is abundant with opportunities. Whether you have barriers to employment, are new to the labor market, or have a job but would like a better one, come in and meet our staff to learn about our services and the many opportunities available. We are located at 877 W. Commercial Drive in Wasilla or call us at (907) 352-2500. We want to partner with you for the success of our fellow Alaskans!

We need your help to get the word out, please share our Employer Expo flyer by posting in your business, sharing with partners and encourage any job seekers you feel could benefit from attending our annual job fair. Save the date, this event is March 27, at the Menard Center in Wasilla.

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 needs one-on-one assistance with any employment and training services, please reach out to Ashley at (907) 352-2583 or Ashley.Smith@alaska.gov.

Join us for our JobX zoom meeting, this is a partnership/collaboration between agencies and employers to assist individuals with barriers to employment in finding suitable employment, the 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 vocational 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 JobX or would like to participate to learn more about local resources and agencies please contact our Business Connection staff Stacey Andrist at (907) 352-2523 or email to request an invitation to Stacey.Andrist@alaska.gov



February Trends: How many nonresidents an industry hires doesn't always tell the whole story. Here are a few Alaska industry examples from the two years after COVID hit and what different residency and worker count scenarios can signal about an industry or the economy.

Mark Your Calendar

The 2024 Mat-Su Reentry Summit is coming in September 2024. More details next month.