

“It’s Pretty Eye-Opening”  
Mat-Su Reentry Coalition  
Hosts Simulation.....2-3

Mat-Su Reentry Events..... 3  
Knik Tribe Events.....3

Mat-Su Job Center Update....4

Monthly Highlight of  
Resources in the Mat-Su.....4

## February 2024 Mat-Su Reentry Simulation

Greetings,

February 28th was a cold and windy day, but that didn’t detour any of our volunteers and participants from showing up to partake in our first Mat-Su Reentry Simulation of the year. We had 55 people take part in the simulation. Of those: 34 were participants who went through the simulation and 21 were volunteers manning the different stations (such as transportation, career center, landlord, social services, counseling & treatment, employer, courthouse, and probation).

During the simulation, each participant assumes the identity of an ex-offender and receives a packet of materials, including a “Life Card.” The “Life Card” explains the reentrant’s criminal background, current living situation, current job situation, and the specific weekly tasks that must be accomplished to avoid the risk of being sent back to prison for non-compliance with the requirements of his or her supervised release.

The room is set up with approximately 17 stations. Each of these tables represent the many places a returning citizen must navigate when they are first released. Each table has random elements which produce real life uncertainty when dealing with each of these agencies and organizations.

Over the course of about 2 hours participants experience the first month of post-release life. Each week takes place in a 15-minute segment. If participants were successful in accomplishing the tasks on their “Life Card” they remain free to start another week, if they were unsuccessful, they might find themselves remanded back to jail. At the end of the Reentry Simulation, we do a short debrief discussion with all the participants; sharing how people felt about their experience with the activity.

The goal of our Reentry Simulation is for the participants to gain an understanding of the significant obstacles faced by men and women attempting to navigate the system upon their release from incarceration. 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.

According to the post-event survey, 95% stated that this activity was very impactful in teaching them about the challenges of reentry and 100% stated that it was very likely that they would recommend participating in a future reentry simulation to someone that does not work directly in prisoner reentry. Some comments from participants included, “Thank you for helping us understand the difficult process of navigating re-entry!” and “I feel the set-up is an accurate portrayal of what it’s really like in the “real” world for someone being released from incarceration.”

We hope to hold another Reentry Simulation in Fall 2024: If you are interested in volunteering to assist with or participate in our next Reentry Simulation, please e-mail me at [barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org](mailto:barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org).

*Barbara Mongar*  
**Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Coordinator**



*Participants at the Mat-Su Reentry Simulation trying to complete all their weekly tasks before time runs out.*

# “It’s pretty eye-opening.” Mat-Su Reentry Coalition hosts simulation, spotlights struggles, frustrations of prior inmates reentering society

By: Katie Stavick, Frontiersman.com / February 28, 2024

It’s your first few days tasting the freedom from prison. Maybe you committed a misdemeanor that landed you a few years behind bars. Or perhaps you are a repeat offender with drug and firearm convictions. Whatever it was, you are now free. Sort of. You now have a list of people and places to check in that may include meeting with a probation officer, attending NA or AA meetings, finding some type of housing, even getting food. And you now have to navigate all of this. Perhaps you’ve been in prison for so long that you need to acquire a new identification card or Social Security card so you can get a job.

Its challenges like these that can make navigating re-entry back into society frustrating and confusing, and leading some to recidivism. That was the point of the Mat-Su Reentry simulation held on February 28 at the Menard Center.

Hosted by the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition, the simulation set up stations and scenarios for people to work through in an effort to demonstrate the challenges that a lot of people face when re-entering society after serving time in prison.

Agencies involved include the Department of Adult Correction, the Office of State Human Resources and the Post-Release Supervision and Parole Commission.

“It’s a hands-on activity, and the reason that we do it is to make people understand how difficult it might be to come out of prison with very little resources and having to do a lot of the things people need to do when on probation or parole, and getting everything done in a reasonable amount of time,” explained Barbara Mongar, Coordinator, Mat-Su Reentry Coalition.

Participants received a packet ex-offender and receives a packet of materials, including a “Life Card” that explains the reentrant’s criminal background outlining what he or she served time for, how long, what they may have accomplished while in prison, such as earning a GED or participating in programs. Also, an explanation of the current financial situation including if employed or is help needed finding a job, housing needs, and other 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. Participants had a week to complete their tasks, which was simulated in 15 minutes.

One of the biggest challenges for people was acquiring a new Identification card to get the entire process started, while others got stuck overcoming trying to attend drug and alcohol treatment, AA/NA meetings, and also providing a clean UA to the probation officers. That led many to face having to return to the mock jail and find a way to meet the requirements.

“I missed more than one task, I haven’t reported to work, and I haven’t gotten food for several weeks, and went to jail my first week,” said Raven, a participant who had the opportunity to participate through work. While she works with the DOC program and Outpatient program at Set Free, for the simulation, she served 20 years for a felony violent crime along with possession of a firearm and drug possession, but had earned a GED while serving.

The event drew in dozens of participants, from a Wasilla Police officer, to a counselor from Set-Free and staff members from the Department of Juvenile Justice, to people who have experienced or are currently experiencing re-entry. **(Continues on Page 3)**



*“Raven” sits alone having experienced a simulated failure as part of the reentry simulation sponsored by the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition at the Menard Center Wednesday. Failures like those experienced in the simulation contribute to real world failures that send convicts back to incarceration.  
Katie Stavick/Frontiersman*

## “It’s pretty eye-opening.” Mat-Su Reentry Coalition hosts simulation, spotlights struggles, frustrations of prior inmates reentering society (Continued from page 2)

“I’ve never done this before, but I heard a lot about it over the years and was really excited to come,” Raven said after spending her time in the mock jail, opting to not bond herself out like many others had done. “I wouldn’t have been able to make it through the rest of the ‘week’ without it. That was so hard.”

And just as in real life, there were also wild cards thrown at some of the participants during their visits to the different stations, like leaving a AA/NA meeting for an emergency or taking too long for a break, being late on rent and incurring a late fee which was more than the money people might have on hand, or not having transportation to needing to pawn something to pay bills.

At the end of each “week,” participants were required to meet with their probation officers to determine how successful they were in satisfying the conditions of their release and accomplishing their assigned tasks. If they were successful they will remain free to start another week; if they were unsuccessful they might find themselves remanded back to jail.

At the end of the Reentry Simulation, Mongar held a short debrief discussion with all the participants, who were able to share takeaways from their experience with the activity.

One participant, who is currently on probation herself, shared that the simulation was very realistic to her own experiences, and another said that she hit a wall trying to get a job because “every time it was something,” she explained, whether it was failing a background check or not having work clothes, while another expressed frustration that no matter who he did, he ended up back in jail.

“Sometimes, a lot of people feel that way. We’ve seen it again and again, that no matter how hard they try, they can’t get everything done or it doesn’t turn out right, which is why we do these, so others can glimpse into the processes former inmates face,” said Mongar.

“The reentry program works with individuals that are releasing or have released from incarceration within the last six months, and all of those frustrations that you experienced today are legitimately what our clients go through every day, every week, and every month,” Brian Galloway, a Reentry Case Manager with the Mat-Su Reentry Program, who acted as a pretty forgiving probation officer during the simulation. He said one thing that was not part of the simulation was whether or not people needed to attend anger management, mental health assessments. “There’s a lot more that actually goes into reentry than we can put into one simulation.”

Galloway said that they do hear about people struggling quite frequently, which is why he and the coalition work so hard to put their names out into the public.

“Services for every single barrier that participants faced today are in place here in Mat-Su, not just through the Reentry Program, but through the Job Center, through the Probation office, through the courts. There is so much out there, and if you find somebody in the community struggling, send them our way. We will get them whatever services they need.”

For those considering participating, Raven says to do it. “Already, my heart, my compassion is growing for people, like my clients, who go through it in real life. Definitely do it, it’s been pretty eye-opening.”

To learn more about the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition, call 907-414-4077 or email [barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org](mailto:barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org)

### Mat-Su Reentry Events:

- **Virtual Mat-Su Reentry Services Forum**  
Wednesday, March 20  
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, April 2  
8:45 to 10:15 AM

Please join us for our Community – Wide Meeting. We will have several guest speakers presenting on different aspects of the Alaska legal system and sharing reentry success stories.

Click below for more details:  
[April 2 Meeting Flyer](#)

**For questions or zoom links to the above events please contact Barbara Mongar at:**  
[barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org](mailto: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](mailto: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)

## 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](mailto:Barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org) or go to our Webpage at [Mat-Su Valley Reentry Program | Valley Charities Inc](http://Mat-Su Valley Reentry Program | Valley Charities Inc)

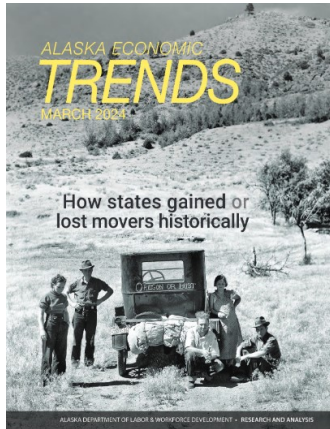


## Mat-Su Job Center Update

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!

The Mat-Su Employer Expo/Job Fair is March 27<sup>th</sup> we have over 130 employers, partners and vendors attending this annual event. Please help us get the word out to the public by sharing the flyer to your websites/social media pages, or in your business, send to your customers, friends and family and encourage them to attend. This is a great event for networking, learn about community resource, who's hiring, and what training and apprenticeship opportunities are available. See you there, March 27 at the Menard Center in Wasilla from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.



**March Trends:** To put Alaska's current streak of net migration losses into context, we looked at how it compares to the rest of the country over the last century.

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 self-sufficiency. Refer customers our way, or contact us to learn more.

For the most up to date information on recruitments, job fairs, virtual job readiness workshops and job training opportunities please visit Alaska's Job Center Network at <http://www.jobs.alaska.gov/> and choose from options on the right side of the main menu.

### Monthly Highlight of Resources in the Mat-Su

#### March is National Disability Awareness Month

- **Access Alaska:** They encourage and promote the total integration of people who experience a disability and senior Alaskans to live independently in the community of their choice.  
**Phone:** 907-357-5585; **Website:** <https://www.accessalaska.org>
- **Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR):** They help Alaskans with Disabilities get and keep good jobs.  
**Phone:** 907-352-2545; **Website:** [Vocational Rehabilitation \(alaska.gov\)](http://Vocational Rehabilitation (alaska.gov))
- **Mat-Su Services fro Children and Adults Inc.(MSSCA):** They provide a wide range of home and community based services for Mat-Su residents with intellectual/developmental disabilities.  
**Phone:** 907-352-1200; **Website:** <https://www.mssca.org>