



# Newsletter

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## Inside this issue

- Domestic Abuse Survivor to Prison Pipeline.....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

## Lessons Learned at the 2024 National Reentry Workforce Collaborative (NRWC) Conference

Happy November everyone,

Cindy Yeager and I recently got back from the 2024 National Reentry Workforce Collaborative (NRWC) conference we attended in Denver, CO.

The conference was held October 15 through Oct 17th, and was packed full of informative sessions and information. While all the sessions were good, there are a few we would like to share with everyone.

One of Cindy’s favorite sessions was the session titled “Addressing Trauma and Cultivating Resiliency”. This session addressed the impacts of trauma exposure, vicarious trauma and trauma contagion on us as reentry professionals. They discussed compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma and how these types of trauma are not always acknowledged or viewed as “legitimate”. They gave some readily implementable skills and tools to assess and mitigate the negative impacts of these type of trauma and to ensure safe, healthy organizational cultures and promote staff well-being. Some of the individuals strategies included boundaries between work and home and using the trauma informed approach with you clients—viewing the behaviors of the individual through the lens of trauma.

One of my favorite sessions was titled “Best Practices for Serving Women in Reentry”. The PIVOT women’s reentry program is located in Baltimore. The program has been incredibly successful, with a recidivism rate of less than 8% compared to the recidivism rate in Baltimore City of over 70%. The program has grown from serving 20 women per year in 2018 to over 200 women per year today. They talked about how the needs of justice involved women differ from the needs of justice involved men, and what other organizations can do to bring these best practices to their own work and communities.

Another session I found very interesting was titled “Approaches to Family and Social Supports in Reentry”. Dr. Tolliny Rankins, a speaker from our 2023 Mat-Su Reentry Summit was a part of this panel. The panel discussed the importance of family and social supports to a reentrants success and the strategies and challenges for designing reentry programs that take these supports into consideration. The session included research driven approaches to integrating family, emotional, and social supports into programing and also strategies for self-care for family members of justice impacted individuals.

Another session that both Cindy and I found interesting was the session titled “Game Changing Technology in Reentry Workforce”. This session focused on programs utilizing tablets inside correctional institutions. It showed how incarcerated individuals were able to utilize LinkedIn training courses while they were still incarcerated to help them prepare for gainful employment after they were released. This session made us think about the technology bill that Alaska had tried to pass during our last legislative session. If this bill got passed it would be a game changer for justice involved individuals in Alaska because they would have access to training and educational courses while they were still incarcerated. This access would help them prepare for life after being released.

Attending conferences like this one helps us to think outside the box and improve our programs by learning about what is working in other states.

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



Cindy Yeager and Barbara Mongar at the 2024 National Reentry Workforce Collaborative Conference in Denver, CO.

# Sacramento Female Community Reentry Program provides women with tools for “the rest of their lives”

By: Kate Gonzales, Sacramento News & Review, September 17, 2024

Anyone who’s pursued a path to change knows that at least three things are needed to make it happen: the right environment and resources, and the will.

Sacramento nonprofit Saint John’s Program for Real Change, which has operated a shelter for women and children facing homelessness for nearly 40 years, is home to a voluntary reentry program for women incarcerated in California prisons who are eligible to carry out the remainder of their sentences in alternative custody — between 45 days and 32 months before being released on parole or probation.

A rotation of about 50 women who live in a private location known as “the house,” take slow but important steps toward change, like learning to manage their emotions and earning cell phone privileges, so they can make bigger strides, like enrolling in college or starting their careers. Each with different goals and backgrounds, the women are surrounded by the support of therapists and other professionals as they approach life after a prison sentence. “These women are doing amazing work,” said Nicole Brock, program director for [the local Female Community Reentry Program](#), or FCRP. Key to that, she said, is self-forgiveness for past mistakes. “When we come through the door, we leave it behind. ... We’re teaching them, forgive yourself.”

Participants of FCRP move through the four-phase program that delivers many of the same wraparound services as Saint John’s, albeit at a different location: therapy and substance use disorder counseling, money management courses, vocational training and case management. As they progress into the work world, and some into college, the women build community and a sense of self-reliance. This combination of focused skill-building and vital moral support is designed to help them transition more smoothly back into society with the goal of long-term success.

Part of [the state’s 20-year effort to reduce its prison populations](#), the female reentry program is run in [six locations](#) and overseen by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Last year, 110 women were served through Sacramento’s reentry program, a 50-bed facility, [according to Saint John’s 2023 Impact Report](#). “This program, it teaches you so much,” said Marina Brown, a current participant and unofficial “big sister” of the house. “But it’s only if you want to change.”

## Meeting women at phase one

It’s not unusual for women’s attitudes to shift as they progress through the program, and Brown admits hers wasn’t great when she arrived at the house last summer. Brock, the program director, remembered thinking: “I don’t know if we’re going to crack this one.”

In the program’s first phase, women begin one-on-one therapy and communication classes, to address the trauma that often accompanies a history of incarceration. Facing those painful memories isn’t easy.

“You start scratching the surface, you’ve got trauma from being abused,” trafficked, or surviving other traumas, explained Brock, who was a client at Saint John’s shelter in 2010. Three staff therapists help the women open up over time, with a patient approach. “They meet them where they’re at,” Brock said, “and they don’t push.”

Brown half-joked that therapy and group classes helped her in “controlling my ghetto” — which was key to altering her self-image from the product of her upbringing to “a reason out of my environment.” “A lot of us girls have resentment,” said Brown, explaining that she grew up with parents with alcoholism and inadequate emotional support. “A lot of us girls carry this anger inside and this sadness that eventually turns to anger when you don’t know how to communicate it.”

During a recent movie night at the house, these communication issues were on display when an argument broke out over snacks. Rather than join in any complaining, Brown reminded the group that they could still have a good time watching the movie together. She also welcomes newcomers to the reentry program, getting them “out of their oranges” and set up with six or seven outfits. “They always say the newest person is the most important,” in addiction treatment programs like Alcoholics Anonymous, she said. “And I believe in that 100%.”

During the first two phases of the program, Brock said staff accompany the women to appointments and any other outings, keeping them close. They can phase up in 60-day increments, but must meet milestones and goals to move up to the next phase. The women are also given access to cell phones during the second phase, so they can video chat with family and begin setting up their own appointments.

Brock now describes Brown as “the cream of the crop” and pointed out that she’s a “phase four” — the highest phase you can reach in the program. That means she’s trusted with privileges like solo outings to get her nails done, or to see a movie. In July, she went to a movie theater for the first time in years to see the latest “Bad Boys” movie. As Brown approaches her parole date next January, her confidence is no longer posturing, but rooted in who she’s become: a leader. “I know that I’m going to go home with tools I’m gonna use for the rest of my life,” she said.

**(Continues on page 3)**



*From left: Antinique Piggee, Nicole Brock and Marina Brown in the courtyard at Saint John’s Program for Real Change in Sacramento on Friday, Aug. 30. (Photo by Janine Mapurunga)*

# Sacramento Female Community Reentry Program provides women with tools for “the rest of their lives”

(Continued from page 2)

## Working through a program

As a former FCRP participant who’s now employed with Saint John’s, Piggee has been on both sides of the program: pushing herself to get through, and encouraging others to keep at it.

After completing her FCRP in 2023, Piggee joined Saint John’s shelter as an interventions services staff member — the go-to person for clients at any time of day. She was later also a case manager, and was a direct source of support in both roles for Saint John’s clients who shared similar struggles to what she’d faced in FCRP: occasional frustration with the pace of the program and tough personal work.

All [women served through the traditional shelter](#) at Saint John’s are unemployed and live below the poverty line. Piggee said grappling with her impulsivity issues during her FCRP sentence while being so close to freedom posed its challenges, but she stayed focused on her goals in the reentry program. “When you’re in a situation where you have to be a part of either one of these programs, you’re not coming from a fun place,” Piggee said. “It actually takes a lot of willingness and conscious decision-making to get through it.”

Each participant gets vocational training that includes help writing resumes and cover letters, and valuable practice through mock interviews. During phase three, when women must pursue either work or education, Piggee did both — taking university classes while working part-time. She credits FCRP services like therapy and the substance use disorder classes for supporting the inner-work that gave her patience and appreciation for her progress. “It just made me be more mindful that everything doesn’t have to be in crisis mode; everything doesn’t have to move fast,” she said. “Good things happen over time.”

Today, she works as a child care supervisor at Saint John’s and recently graduated from Sacramento State with her bachelor’s degree in family studies and human development.

## Beyond the program

Brock said she encourages the women to find work they take an interest in because once they’re hired, they commit to the job for at least six months.

In Brown’s case, her job is especially meaningful to her: packing commissary for incarcerated women for the company Aramark. With the long-term goal of owning a cosmetology business, the job she has today is helping her make strides. Thanks in part to the program’s practice of setting aside money from each paycheck, she has paid off the restitution she owes and will leave with some savings.

Brown is currently taking business classes at Sacramento City College, and she’s recommended a few other FCRP women for positions opening up at Aramark. This being the first time she’s had a company job or gone to college, Brown feels a real sense of achievement. “I love having my own, but not only that,” she said. “The money that I make, I worked for. It just makes you feel good.”

When she completes the program in January, Brown said she’ll be paroled out to Seattle, with plans to make up for lost time with her family — her three teen siblings and her father, James, who is dealing with health issues. “My dad is actually the one person who’s walked this whole thing down with me,” she said. “I’m going home to spend as much time with him as I can.”

Brock can proudly rattle off the professional successes of women who completed the program: one is general manager of catering at a local Sacramento events center; another is a professional dog groomer who recently won a regional competition. But it took time, as those in the program know.

One participant who reached phase four was waiting to hear back about a bakery job as she approached her parole date, and was struggling with whether to move away, closer to her family, or stay in Sacramento. Brock said the difference she’s seen in her from the beginning of the program is clear, even to a parole agent who took time off and hadn’t seen the woman in months.

“He just came back and was like, ‘What did you guys do to her? I never saw her smile one time,’” Brock said. “Now she just physically looks different, like she’s happy.” After getting word that she got the job, the woman took Brock’s advice that she could stay in Sacramento and transition to Saint John’s main house, which some FCRP participants choose to do to continue establishing themselves. “You can build your life anew here,” Brock recalled telling the woman. “She’s staying and we’re so excited for her.” **Link to story below:**

[Sacramento Female Community Reentry Program provides women with tools for ‘the rest of their lives’ • Sacramento News & Review](#)

## Mat-Su Reentry Events:

- **Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Steering Team Meeting**  
Tuesday, Nov 5, 2024  
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, Nov 5, 2024. All are welcome to attend.

- **Virtual Mat-Su Reentry Services Forum**  
Wednesday, Nov 20, 2024  
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. Service providers, PO’s, Case Managers, and anyone interested in attending are welcome.

- **Mat-Su Reentry Simulation**  
Tuesday, Nov 12, 2024  
10:00 AM to 12:00 PM  
Menard Sport Center

The Reentry Simulation is an interactive activity that helps educate people on some of the obstacles justice involved individuals face.

**For questions, to sign up, or for 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  
[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**
- **Youth Wellbriety Circle** —  
Fridays, from 1 to 3PM;  
Location: MyHouse, Wasilla, 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

As we go into the Thanksgiving season the staff here at the Mat-Su Job Center would like to extend our appreciation for all the amazing work being done in and around our community to reduce recidivism and assist those with barriers to employment meet their goals. We are grateful for the opportunity to work alongside you. Thank you for the important work you do!

Over the past month Mat-Su Job Center staff along with Valley Charities Reentry staff provided workshops and information to 34 inmates at Goose Creek, Palmer Correctional Center, and Point MacKenzie Institutions. The Reentry Workshop, Interviewing Strategies, Resume Basics and important community and supportive services are shared during these In-reach efforts.

The Veterans, Military Spouses and Alaska Residents Annual Job Fair will be held at the Alaska Airlines Center on November 7<sup>th</sup> from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. this event is open to the public, there is free parking and many employers planning to attend. Please see the flyer or contact the Anchorage Midtown Job Center at (907) 269-4777 for more information.

Join us for our JobX zoom meetings, this is a partnership/collaboration between agencies and employers to assist individuals with barriers find 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 training and 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 and learn more about local resources and agencies, please contact us at [matsu.jobcenter@alaska.gov](mailto:matsu.jobcenter@alaska.gov)

The Mat-Su Job Center is holding a regular monthly recruitment event in our office, this month it will be held on November 22<sup>nd</sup> from Noon to 3 p.m. this is open to the public and veterans are highly encouraged to attend. Come connect with local employers and community leaders and learn about a variety of resources available in the Mat-Su. Check out our Job Fairs page anytime to learn about current events happening around the state.

<https://www.jobs.alaska.gov/jobfairs/>



**November Trends:** *Fishing employment hit its lowest level since at least 2001 last year. Also in this issue: It's been a rough few years for seafood processing.*

### Monthly Highlight of Resources in the Mat-Su November is Homeless Youth Awareness Month

- **MyHouse**— We provide safe shelter and wrap-around services for all youth experiencing homelessness, and youth at risk of becoming homeless.  
**Phone:** 907-373-HELP; **Address:** 300 North Willow, Wasilla, AK 99654  
**Website:** [Our Vision is to End Homelessness... - MyHouse Mat-Su Homeless Youth Center](#)
- **Mat-Su Youth Action Board (YAB)** — A community of young leaders with lived experience of homelessness working to create a community where every young person is safely housed.  
**E-mail:** [matsuyouthactionboard@gmail.com](mailto:matsuyouthactionboard@gmail.com)  
**Website:** <https://www.matsuyouth.com/>

**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](#)