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The 2024 Mat-Su Reentry Summit: Building Bridges to Success was a Big Success!

Greetings,

We had a great turnout for our 2024 Mat-Su Reentry Summit. A total of 83 unduplicated participants attended the Reentry Summit this year. On Day 1 we had 64 people attend and on Day 2 we had 67 people attend.

We started our Summit with a Land Acknowledgement that was given by Jay Cross, Elder from Knik Tribe, and then Edna DeVries, the Mayor of the Mat-Su Borough, welcomed everyone to the Summit. Our two Keynote speakers on Day 1 and Day 2, Tanaine Jenkins and Dr. Sandra Smith, are both individuals with justice involved lived experience that shared information on the successful programs they were running in their states.

On Day 1, we also had local experts share their programs, such as simulation experiences for crisis response team members, a prison fellowship program, health insurance for reentrants, new skills for sobriety and a panel about the Crisis Now system being utilized in the Mat-Su. Here is the [Day 1 Agenda](#) and here are [short bios](#) on all of this years Reentry Summit speakers.



From left to right, Tanaine Jenkins, Barbara Mongar, Dr. Sandra Smith, and Cindy Yeager



On the screen to the far right is Chris Lisbenby, Owner of the Alaska Driving Academy, and from right to left at the table; Kristofer Black & Steven Flanery, DOC Reentry, Darrin Marchall, Automotive Technology, UAA, Lean Kinneveauk, Alaska Art Alliance, & Sean Williams, Alaska Native Heritage Center.

On Day 2, our statewide presenters included the Fairbanks Reentry Coalition Coordinator talking about how to build resilience through community corrections and peer support, the Director of Operations for Mat-Su Health Services explaining what a FQHC was and why it was important, a Educational Contractors Panel from DOC discussing the different programs going on inside the Correctional Institutions, and instructors from Knik Tribe presenting on Wellbriety, Warrior Down, Wellness Circles and Cultural Activities as a means to connecting and healing for justice involved youth and adults. Day 2 ended with a panel of individuals with justice involved lived experience and their road to success. Here is the [Day 2 Agenda](#).

Some comments we received after the Reentry Summit included the following:

- “All the speakers/presenters were amazing, with helpful and new info that will improve the services we provide to reentrants”
- “The fact that you are talking about solutions is a great way to spread knowledge and potentially solve some of the problems.”
- “Enjoyed hearing from people who have lived experience and the panel of lived experience”

The surveys collected after the Summit showed that 80% of those surveyed on Day 1 and 90% of those surveyed on Day 2 felt that the knowledge/skills and information gathered during the Reentry Summit will help them make improvement on their programs. Also, over 94% on Day 1 and 97% on Day 2 stated that it was likely they would recommend/attend future Mat-Su Reentry Summit.

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At Hiland Mountain Correctional Center, art classes help prisoners take a break and prepare for release

By: Rachel Cassandra, Alaska Public Media—Anchorage—May 15, 2024

On a recent Tuesday, Jamey Bradbury stood in front of about nine women, all wearing yellow jumpsuits. They were in a classroom inside Hiland Mountain Correctional Center in Eagle River, and Bradbury was leading the last session of her class, Tapping Into Your Creative Self. The aim was to show students that everyone has a creative side and you don't need elaborate materials to access it.

"What I like to do is kind of baby step people into creativity, into taking a risk that might be scary for them," Bradbury said.

Bradbury began by pulling out dozens of tiny packages of Play-Doh and distributing them across the table. She gave a few different prompts and the women started kneading and shaping the colorful dough.



Nanette Brown (left) and Tanya Parker (right) make art in a class at Hiland Mountain Correctional Center. (Matthew Faubion/Alaska Public Media)

Hiland currently houses about 350 women and 15 signed up for Bradbury's six-week class, though a few have been released during that time. Bradbury doesn't force any participation and when she held the acting session, two women chose to leave. But students have sometimes surprised themselves when they've tried new things, like Tanya Parker.

"I wrote my first poem a couple of weeks ago," Parker said. "I was so happy I did something like that. I was proud of myself, but I wouldn't have been able to do it if I didn't come to this class."

She pulled her poem out of a folder next to her.

"It's called 'My Home,'" Parker said. "My home is not made of bricks, my heart is not made of stone, my soul is not made of ashes..."

Parker said that since writing that poem, she's also reading poetry for the first time. The classes have also taught her to feel comfortable speaking in front of a group, she said, something she's always avoided. And she said that new confidence will help her once she's released, in under a month.

"I'm gonna stand up for myself," Parker said. "You know, if people don't like the way I say or what I say, they don't have to come around. I am who I am."

[About 5,000](#) Alaskans are incarcerated in almost [30](#) prisons and jails in the state, and the number of incarcerated Alaskans [has tripled](#) since the 1970s. Arts classes like Bradbury's [are shown to reduce](#) both violence inside prisons and the rates of recidivism, people returning to prison once released. But a spokesperson for the Department of Corrections said only a quarter of jails and prisons in Alaska offer some kind of arts class.

Bradbury began teaching writing classes here in 2018 and she's an unpaid volunteer. She said her understanding of what students want and need has evolved and so she's offered a wide variety of classes over the years, including poetry, journalism, and memoir writing.

One of the themes Bradbury talks about in her classes is the healing power of art. Studies have shown making art has many [health and mental health benefits](#).

That's something Jessica, one of Bradbury's students, has noticed. Jessica doesn't want to give her last name. "As Jamey has taught us, doing stuff with your hands allows your mind to go other places," Jessica said. "It's therapeutic and allows you to deal with issues or trauma that you need to work through that you don't necessarily have the opportunity to in here."

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(Continued from page 2)

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Jessica said the classes have transformed how she feels about her classmates. She said in prison, people often have to wear a metaphorical mask to get through the day, to try to not think about what they're missing on the outside. But she said Bradbury's classes are a safer space to be vulnerable.

"It allows us to be able to take off that mask that you have to wear in a place like this," Jessica said. "And we can smile at each other just in passing or in (the) food line, and know that it's not a fake smile... know a little bit about the person that we never would have known otherwise, because they live in a different house, or they keep us separate." Jessica said she plans to keep writing after she's released and hopes to publish something about her time in prison.

Bradbury said her students have processed intense emotions during writing classes. She said in a memoir class, several students chose to write about the crime that led to their incarceration and the students were surprised to see there were many similarities in those stories. Bradbury said everyone in class who shared their story cried.

But she said the classes also have lots of fun, light moments and can be a break from prison life. "You look around, and you see people in yellow jumpsuits, and you remember, 'Oh, I'm in a prison,' but you pretty quickly forget that," Bradbury said. "And I think that for a few minutes, at least in the class, they're able to forget that too, and it's just a group of women crafting together, hanging out together, laughing together."

Bradbury said she hopes this class has taught her students they can find ways to be creative wherever they are, inside the prison or after release.

The 2024 Mat-Su Reentry Summit: Building Bridges to Success was a Big Success! (Continued from page 1)

I would like to give a big thank you to all of the amazing speakers, planning committee members, and volunteers that helped to make this years Reentry Summit a success. Also, I would like to thank the Mat-Su Health Foundation for supplying the funding for our Annual Mat-Su Reentry Summit. We will have the filmed sessions of the Reentry Summit up on our Reentry Website in October.

Barbara Mongar,
Coordinator, Mat-Su Reentry Coalition

Monthly Highlight of Resources in the Mat-Su

September is National Alcohol & Drug Addiction Recovery Month

- **Set Free Alaska: Christian treatment center that uses a mind-body-spirit approach to recovery**
Address: 7010 E. Bogard Rd, Wasilla, AK; **Phone:** 907-373-4732; **24/7 Hotline -** 907-521-5239
Website: [Set Free Alaska](#) | [Substance Abuse Treatment](#) | [Alcohol and Drug Rehab](#)
- **True North Recovery: Substance Misuse and Dual Diagnosis Treatment, Recovery, And Crisis Services**
Address: 591 S. Knik Goose Bay Rd, Wasilla, AK; **Phone:** 907-313-1333
Website: [Alaska Drug and Alcohol Treatment Center, Addiction Treatment Program \(tnrak.org\)](#)

Mat-Su Reentry Events:

- **Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Steering Team Meeting**
Tuesday, Oct 1, 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, Oct 1, 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.

SAVE THE DATE!!!

November 18 & 19, 2024

The 2024 Reducing Recidivism and Reentry Conference will be held on November 18 & 19, 2024 in Anchorage. More info to come.

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 Flyer for dates)
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

Free fidelity bonds help employers hire skilled workers. Fidelity bonding is an effective job placement tool that helps concerned employers and at-risk job seekers. It is proven to combat recidivism. The Alaska Fidelity Bonding Program offers no-cost, no-deductible bonds to employers who hire at-risk employees such as people recovering from substance abuse, those with poor work or credit histories, and other workers who are not otherwise bondable. It is the only program that bonds ex-offenders. Bonds insure employers against any job-related theft, forgery, larceny, or embezzlement by an employee, on or off the work site. Obtaining a free fidelity bond allows the employer to focus on a worker's skills and productivity while mitigating risk of worker dishonesty. While self-employed individuals are not eligible, employers can bond any full- or part-time, permanent, or temporary, new, or returning employee who meets the state's legal age requirement to work. Under some circumstances, no-cost bonds may also be available to promote or retain at-risk workers. Bonds may be issued without the need to sign forms. It takes just a few minutes for Alaska job center staff to take down information about the employer, employee, and hire date for the bond to take effect. Up to five \$5,000 bonds are effective for six months, with renewals through the Fidelity Bonding Program available in some circumstances. Employers may also continue coverage directly with the underwriter if there were no claims in the first six months. For more information about Alaska's Fidelity Bonding Program, visit <https://labor.alaska.gov/bonding/> and contact your nearest Alaska job center at <https://jobs.alaska.gov/offices> to obtain bonds.

The August edition of Alaska Economic Trends highlighted Trends in Household Debt. To see the full edition visit <https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/> also included a message from the Department of Labor & Workforce Development Commissioner Catherine Munoz "The Department of Labor and Workforce Development is ready to financially support Alaskans who want to start careers in the skilled trades. With recent changes to the Technical Vocational and Education Program, TVEP, more training providers will receive funds from the state's unemployment insurance trust fund to prepare Alaskans for good careers in the skilled trades. Through our Job Center network, eligible Alaskans seeking financial support to start their career can apply for funding through the State Training and Employment Program, or STEP, which also funds individual training and grants for providers using a portion of the unemployment insurance trust fund. The demand for skilled tradespeople in Alaska shows no signs of waning. The department projects that by 2030, the need for electricians will grow by 11 percent, creating 187 jobs. The demand for plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters is also expected to grow by more than 11 percent, to 141 additional jobs. From advancements in renewable energy to the modernization of infrastructure, skilled trades will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping our state's growth and resilience. The Department of Labor and Workforce Development is ready to help Alaskans prepare to work in all of Alaska's high-demand industries".

The Department of Labor & Workforce Development has 13 job centers statewide to connect job seekers and employers, our centers are open Monday-Friday 8 a.m.- 5 p.m. The most up to date contact information for each job center can be found by visiting <https://jobs.alaska.gov/offices/>.

The Mat-Su job center is located at 877 W. Commercial Drive in Wasilla, and our main line is (907) 352-2500. Our center has two conference rooms available for partners or community members at no cost that can accommodate recruitments, staff training, testing, or meetings. One of the conference rooms has a computer lab of 15 computers available. If you are interested in learning more or to schedule a time to see the space, call our main line.



Alaska Economic Trends, September 2024:

[Anchorage Neighborhoods](#)—Diverse areas reflect broader trends in Alaska's largest city

Also Inside: Rent increases vary by area

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](#)