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## The Rate of Incarcerated Women is on the Rise

In recognition of March being Woman’s History month, I decided to look at some of the history behind the increase rate of incarcerated women. What I found was that in the United States, the incarceration rate for women has increased significantly over the last 25 years. “Between 1980 and 2022, the number of incarcerated women increased by more than 585%, rising from a total of 26,326 in 1980 to 180,684 in 2022 ([Incarcerated-Women-and-Girls.pdf](#)).

The next question that came to mind was why has there been such a large increase in the rate of incarceration of woman? I delved into several different article on the matter and came to the conclusion that the increase started when policies shifted from concentrating on arresting individuals for major crimes, and started focusing on arresting people for minor offences (such as using drugs and shoplifting). Research shows that women are more likely to be incarcerated for non-violent crimes than men. “Twenty-five percent of women in prison have been convicted of a drug offence, compared to 12% of men in prison; and 19% of incarcerated women have been convicted of a property crime, compared to 13% among incarcerated men” ([Incarcerated-Women-and-Girls.pdf](#)).



Through my research I also found that a majority of women that are incarcerated come from backgrounds of poverty and trauma, and they are more likely than men to have been victims of physical and sexual abuse, suffer from severe substance use and mental health issues, and are also twice as likely than men to have been the primary caretakers of their children before they entered into incarceration. Due to these differences between men and women involved in the justice system and the increase rate of woman being incarcerated each year, creating programs both inside correctional institutions and outside, for when they are released, tailored to women and their needs is very important. “These programs should focus on trauma-informed care, parenting support, and vocational training to address the unique challenges women face” (<https://www.inmateaid.com/information/breaking-barriers-challenges-and-solutions-for-women-reentering-society-after-prison>).

I reached out to the Alaska Department of Corrections (DOC) Reentry, Education, and Vocational Services to see what type of programs they currently had at Hiland Mountain Correctional Center (HMCC), which is Alaska’s main correctional institution for women. DOC offers a large variety of educational and training programs throughout all of their correctional facilities, however many of these programs are either male centric or generalized. There are a few non-DOC partners offering gender specific programs at HMCC, one is [Running Free Alaska](#) and the other is Southcentral Foundation’s Family Wellness Warriors through their [Nu’iju Healing Place Program](#).

In the future, it would be ideal to see more programs inside HMCC specifically tailored toward the unique needs of incarcerated women. A PDF of the current [core educational/vocational programs](#) being offered inside correctional institutions is posted on the Alaska DOC website ([Home | Alaska Department of Corrections](#)), which can be found by going to the Reentry tab then scrolling down and clicking on the Education section.

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

# Women's History Month & Gender Equity in Prison Education

By: Victoria Scott, Resource Community in Higher Education in Prison (RCHEP), March 27, 2024

Women's History Month began as a congressional joint resolution in 1981 and a presidential proclamation from Jimmy Carter to declare a week of celebratory observance for *"American women of every race, class, and ethnic background whose roles and contributions had been consistently overlooked and undervalued in the body of American History."*

Between 1978 and 2007 incarceration rates for women rose by 560% compared with the 240% increase of men. Although the population of men has always been larger than the population of women incarcerated spaces, the alarmingly overlooked fact about incarcerated trends is that the incarceration of women has steadily outpaced the growth rates of men's incarceration. (<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-criminol-030421-041559>).

I first arrived at the Women's Center of Maine Correctional Center (MCC) in 2018. As a woman serving an 11-year sentence, I began to inquire about post-secondary education programs almost immediately. During my intake classification, my caseworker even included my request to take college psychology classes as part of my case plan. However, months later, I learned that there were *no* matriculated or credit-bearing programs for the women of MCC. How could this be? The men had a college program; surely this must be a misunderstanding that could be cured with a simple conversation.

I met with the woman who was the unit manager of the Women's Center at the time, hoping to receive permission to enroll in college, but the conversation was devastating. She told me that the Women's Center didn't have a degree program and that I would have to wait until I was transferred to the Southern Maine Women's Reentry Center. The tears that welled up in my eyes made me feel childish. My cheeks burned when I asked her, "You want me to wait? What am I supposed to do for six years? Why can't we start a program here for women like me?"

My story didn't end there, and "no" will not be the final word for other incarcerated women who are denied access to education. My next steps carried me to advocacy meetings; I opened a dialogue with the unit's mental health clinician so that she could document my struggle and help me cope until I found a solution; then, I put pen to paper and wrote to advocates, legislators, and central administration. I received a response from the Deputy Commissioner that pledged to establish post-secondary services for the women's population with a promise to support my endeavor to pilot matriculation for women serving sentences exceeding four years.

In 2019, I became the first woman in my facility to be enrolled in a degree program and in 2021, with the expansion of the university's Prison Education Partnership and generous funding from the Mellon Foundation that was applied for with assistance from the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition to create the first Liberal Arts associate cohort for women.

I may have walked out of that office feeling defeated and alone but I wasn't alone. There were more women like me - and there still are, all across the world - who want to invest their time and energy toward self-actualization, perhaps for the first time in their lives.

Title IX was passed in 1972 to prohibit sex discrimination in all educational programs that receive federal support, but sadly, incarcerated women continue to struggle against inequality in prison education spaces to this day, but despite this fact, many prisons and jails fail to offer program parity to female and gender-nonconforming prisoners in comparison to their male counterparts. A [2018 report by the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition](#) showed that men incarcerated in Texas had access to more than double the educational programming opportunities than were offered to women; this gender-based disparity in access to programs is a common phenomenon in prison systems. **(Continued on page 3)**



# Women's History Month & Gender Equity in Prison

## Education (Continued from page 2)

By: Victoria Scott, Resource Community in Higher Education in Prison (RCHEP), March 27, 2024

Alexa Garza, an accomplished scholar in a Texas women's prison, worked hard to earn her degrees in a system that limited achievements for women, first obtaining two associates degrees before earning her baccalaureate. Similar to my experience, Alexa advocated for an equal chance to pursue success in an institution that already had long-established pathways for incarcerated men to earn advanced degrees. Today, Alexa is a justice fellow for the Education Trust and I am a fellow for the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison; we are but two examples of women who have successfully challenged gender-disparate access to education from behind prison walls, and if this is your story too, I invite you to share it with us.

Since I took my first steps in prison education, I have had the opportunity to take philosophy and web design courses with The Educational Justice Institute at MIT and have served as a teaching assistant with their programs for the last three years; I have been blessed to engage in a *paid* work-learning position as a fellow with the Alliance since last March, and have used my wages to pay taxes, support my family, and save for reentry; and at the conclusion of the Fall 2024 semester, I will be graduating from the University of Maine at Augusta with a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies. Never say never. Never give up.

Educational journeys are not isolated experiences and any student, especially those who are incarcerated and particularly women, cannot thrive without support and allyship. Women face unique barriers in prison education that limits their futures in professional spaces by depriving them of academic and vocational engagement, reinforcing gender stereotypes in programming, and failing to properly resource women's facilities and units to be conducive to the achievement of marketable skills and credentials. In honor of Women's History Month, let us dedicate our efforts to making the neglect of women's educational needs a thing of the past.

Full Article: [Women's History Month & Gender Equity in Prison Education | RCHEP](#)

### Monthly Highlight of Resources in the Mat-Su (March is Woman's History Month)

- **Alaska Family Services (AFS):** AFS is a mission driven organization with a long history of service and excellence in supporting families and building healthy communities.  
**Phone:** 907-746-4080; **24-hour crisis line:** (907) 746-4080  
**Address:** 1825 S Chugach St, Palmer, AK 99645  
**Website:** [Home - Alaska Family Services](#)

\* **March 21, 2025, 6:00 to 9:00 PM:** Join Alaska Family Services for an unforgettable evening of celebrating Women's History Month at the historic Palmer Train Depot. This elegant event honors remarkable local women while raising essential funds to support AFS programs that uplift families and communities. Tickets are available at [Home - Alaska Family Services](#)

### Mat-Su Reentry Events:

- **Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Community-Wide Meeting**  
**Day:** Tuesday, April 1, 2025  
**Time:** 8:30 to 10:00AM  
**Location:** Mat-Su Health Foundation Meeting Rooms

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition will be holding a Community-Wide hybrid Meeting at the Mat-Su Health Foundation Building. We will have speakers from:

- ◇ MyHouse
- ◇ Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills Training (MASST)
- ◇ Set Free Alaska's Crisis Program
- ◇ Lived Experience Panel

All are welcome to attend, either in-person or virtually.

- **Virtual Mat-Su Reentry Services Forum**  
**Wed, March 19, 2025**  
**9:00 to 10:00 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

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

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 Updates & Upcoming Events

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

### Monthly Workshops at Local Correctional Facilities

The Mat-Su Job Center is proud to offer monthly employment workshops at Goose Creek Correctional Center, Palmer Correctional Center, and Pt. Mackenzie Correctional Farm. We are excited to have dedicated staff providing these critical services once again!

If you work with reentrants or individuals facing employment barriers, encourage them to connect with us. We offer assistance with job placement, grant funding for employment-related needs, and referrals to local community resources. Contact us at (907) 352-2500 or

[matsu.jobcenter@alaska.gov](mailto:matsu.jobcenter@alaska.gov)

### The Largest Job Fair in Mat-Su is This Month!

Help us spread the word about this incredible community event! Share our flyer on social media, post it on community boards, or forward it to your networks.

- ◇ What: Employer Expo – Meet & network with 120+ employers, community partners, and vocational program professionals
- ◇ Where: Menard Center
- ◇ When: March 26th, 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

This event is open to the public—job seekers, career changers, and professionals looking to connect. We can't wait to see you there!

### Career Resource & Connect Event – Monthly Hiring & Networking

Join us on the last Friday of every month for our Career Resource & Connect Event, where employers and community partners engage directly with job seekers.

When: 12:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Where: Mat-Su Job Center

This is a great opportunity to network, learn about available support services, and explore employment opportunities. Veterans are highly encouraged to attend! Employers and community partners interested in participating can reach out to our Business Connection Specialist, Faith Woolsey, at [matsu.employers@alaska.gov](mailto:matsu.employers@alaska.gov) to register.

### The Mat-Su Job Center – Here to Support You!

We are open Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., offering one-on-one employment and training assistance.

Visit us in person: 877 W. Commercial Drive, in Wasilla

Call us: (907) 352-2500 or Email us:

[matsu.jobcenter@alaska.gov](mailto:matsu.jobcenter@alaska.gov)

**March Trends:** The number of Alaskans 65 and older has skyrocketed over the last decade and a half, continuing to rise even as youth and working-age populations have declined.



**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)