

Lawmakers look to culturally rooted programs to break the cycle of incarceration of Alaska Natives.....2-3

Reentry, Knik Tribe & Chickaloon Village Events.....3

Mat-Su Job Center Update.....4

Monthly Resource Highlights...4

Why Having Reentry Services in the Community is Important

Reentry services play a vital role in helping individuals successfully transition back into the community after incarceration. These programs provide essential supports such as housing assistance, employment services, life-skills development, and referrals to mental health and substance use treatment. Research consistently shows that when formerly incarcerated individuals have access to these resources, they are more likely to achieve stability and less likely to reoffend. As a result, communities benefit from reduced recidivism rates and improved public safety.

The challenges faced by individuals returning from incarceration can be significant. Many encounter barriers to finding employment, securing stable housing, rebuilding relationships, and accessing healthcare. Without adequate support, these obstacles can increase the risk of returning to the criminal justice system. Reentry programs help address these challenges by providing guidance, resources, and ongoing support during this critical transition period.

In addition to improving outcomes for individuals, reentry services also benefit the broader community. By helping formerly incarcerated individuals become productive, self-sufficient members of society, these programs strengthen families, increase workforce participation, and reduce the social and financial costs associated with repeat incarceration. Reentry services also help reduce the stigma often associated with incarceration by creating opportunities for individuals to demonstrate personal growth and make positive contributions to their communities.

In the Mat-Su Valley, there are currently two reentry programs available to assist individuals returning to the community. One is the Mat-Su Reentry Program through Valley Charities, and the other is the Daybreak Reentry Program. While both programs provide comprehensive wraparound services and supports, they have slightly different eligibility requirements and program guidelines.

If you are interested in learning more about either of these programs, please contact:

Mat-Su Reentry Program

Phone: 907-521-1854

Email: reentry@valleycharities.org

Daybreak Reentry Program

Phone: 907-232-7125

Email: brian@daybreakmhsc.com

Reentry services are about more than helping individuals reintegrate into society after incarceration. They are an investment in safer neighborhoods, stronger families, and healthier communities. By providing support, encouragement, and opportunities for success, reentry programs help break the cycle of incarceration and create pathways for individuals to build stable, productive lives. When communities support successful reentry, everyone benefits.

Barbara Mongar

Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Coordinator

Lawmakers look to culturally rooted programs to break the cycle of incarceration of Alaska Natives

By: Matt Acuna Buxton, The Alaska Current, April 22, 2026

Alaska Natives make up less than 20% of the state’s population, but account for more than 40% of the state’s prison population — a trend that has worsened in recent years.

It’s an issue that has come into sharp focus this year as state officials, lawmakers and Alaska Native groups have worked on understanding the drivers and potential solutions to the over-incarceration of Alaska Native people. That work has produced [a 167-page study](#) released last week, coordinated by the Alaska Federation of Natives, the University of Alaska and the Department of Corrections.

The key takeaway is that the high rates are in large part due to the cultural and generational trauma inflicted upon Alaska Native people — especially around colonial efforts to sever people’s connection to their culture — and that healing those wounds relies in large part on reconnecting people to their culture and communities.

“We really need to approach this with a more holistic lens in order to address the challenges,” Dr. Katie Cueva, a Research Associate Professor at the UAF Center for Alaska Native Health Research and lead author, [told the House Tribal Affairs Committee on Tuesday](#). “Individuals who are able to be started on a good way in life are more likely to avoid incarceration than those who are approached later in life, and offerings that support cultural identity, stabilize housing or address mental health and substance misuse through community-based and Alaska Native approaches are more likely to be effective.”

She noted that many Alaska Native people face historical and ongoing trauma and systemic inequities, which result in them living with issues, such as poverty, trauma, homelessness and substance abuse issues, that are often drivers of crime. Addressing those issues early, especially when people are young, and in culturally relevant ways that strengthen their connections to their communities, she said, has been proven to be the most effective use of resources.

“It’s not a matter of individual or personal responsibility so much as the environments that individuals live and work and grow in,” she said. “So, these early childhood interventions tend to have the greatest impact, including things like prenatal care or family support, culturally relevant family support that can prevent fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, parent training programs, as well as reduced-cost culturally relevant child care.” As part of the research project, researchers spoke with several programs that work with inmates and are grounded in Alaska Native cultural practices. Lawmakers heard from several at the House Tribal Affairs Committee meeting this week.

“This is a trauma-informed place where individuals can identify some thinking errors, where they can heal from trauma, where they can strengthen relationships,” explained Bobbi Outton, the director of the Family Wellness Warriors program at the Southcentral Foundation that works with inmates. “Really, it’s a holistic approach, where it’s a process of healing where they can come back to that as a healed, whole person.”

Family Wellness Warriors has operated several programs in Alaska prisons for more than two decades. It has two therapeutic communities at [Hiland Mountain Correctional Center](#), a women’s prison, and Palmer Correctional Center, a men’s prison, that are 12 to 18 months long and include peer support, mentoring and learning circles. They also have a re-entry program and a two-week course at Hiland Mountain that serves as an alternative to solitary confinement.

“It’s an opportunity for people to be able to get some coping skills, to understand why their behavior is continuing the way it is,” she said of the Hiland Mountain course. “It’s two weeks long, and they are able to join learning circles for healthy coping, whether it’s codependency or boundaries or recovery support grief and loss, depending on what their need is, they’re offered learning circles. So we’ve been doing this since 2004, and I would say what this program does really well is give people hope, as well as the tools and skills to live life differently.”

(Continued on page 3)



Family Wellness Warriors employee connects with a resident of Hiland Mountain Correctional Center.

Lawmakers look to culturally rooted programs to break the cycle of incarceration of Alaska Natives (Continued from page 2)

Outton noted that people who have gone through the programs are far less likely to commit new crimes, with a recidivism rate of about 28% compared to about 66% for all inmates. Other care providers reported similar results.

Caitlin Hickey, who works with the Cook Inlet Tribal Council's Youth Reentry Program and McLaughlin Youth Center, stressed that it's important to understand where people are coming from and their cultural connections.

"I would like to say that I think culture is so powerful because it's so adaptive. I think that's what's made it resilient through generations. It's able to evolve with us while also grounding us," she said. "To me, I think meeting someone where they're at is more than just showing up in their environment. It's also taking that time to understand how they view the world and how they think."

Integrating Alaska Native culture and other culturally relevant lessons into programs serving young people broadens their horizons, she said, noting that the program is not restricted to Alaska Native youth inmates.

"I think it's such a fun thing to watch them find connection in their differences," she said, "and it's been pretty helpful to create that environment where they can have curiosity towards each other without conflict."

She said, though, that while people generally accept that culturally grounded programs are important for inmates, it's not always clear what that actually looks like or how those fit into the rigid structures of a state prison.

"I also wanted to mention that I think groups that are based in traditional knowledge really require organizations that are going to commit to these ethical standards and train staff how to teach culture that's not their own," she said, outlining the efforts she's made with her staff to be respectful of the content.

Others called for increased state investments in early childhood interventions such as child care, mental health screenings, housing, workforce training, parent training and other measures that make life a little easier for people. While most commended the state prison system for generally being open to the efforts, some said the state could do better at allowing volunteers to become authorized to help with these programs.

Cueva, the UAF researcher, told the committee that legislators should consider concrete actions to advance the recommendations, noting that much of what's being recommended now is what was recommended 20 years ago.

"In 20 years, I don't want to be doing an interview saying the same things, and nothing has changed," she said. "So, to develop a task force to develop and ensure that these recommendations are culturally grounded and implemented could be another strategy to move this forward." And she also stressed that one of the biggest changes would be to see more Alaska Natives working in the criminal justice system.

"We need more Alaska Native lawyers. We need Alaska Native judges. We need Alaska Native behavioral health experts," she said. "We need everyone that touches the lives of individuals to have some amount of individuals who are Alaska Natives, and for those that aren't to be receiving training so they're aware of the unique cultures and contexts of Alaska Native people."

Link to full article: [Lawmakers look to culturally rooted programs to break the cycle of incarceration of Alaska Natives - The Alaska Current](#)

Mat-Su Reentry Events:

- **Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Team Meeting**
Tuesday, July 7, 2026
9:00 to 10:00 AM

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition invites you to attend their Monthly Steering Team Meeting via Zoom

- **Mat-Su Reentry Forum**
Wed, June 17, 2026
9:00 to 10:00 AM

The Mat-Su Reentry Forum is every third Wednesday of the month. Services Providers, Field PO's, Case Managers, and any others interested in attending are welcome.

For questions, to sign up, or for 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,
Wednesdays, 5:30 - 7:30 PM;
Location: 758 Shoreline Dr.
Wasilla, AK; (Open to All)
Compact@KnikTribe.org
907-373-7991
- **Youth Wellbriety Circle**
Fridays, from 1 to 3PM;
Location: MyHouse, Wasilla

Chickaloon Village Traditional Council Events:

- **Wellbriety Talking Circle**
Wednesdays, 1 to 3PM;
Location: Sutton Library
More Info: 907-761-3912

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



ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
& WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Mat-Su Job Center Update

By: **Michele Bentz**, Mat-Su Job Center Manager

Statewide Job Center Services

The Department of Labor & Workforce Development operates 13 job centers statewide to connect job seekers and employers. Centers are open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Find the most up-to-date contact information for each location at: <https://jobs.alaska.gov/offices/>.

The Mat-Su Job Center, located at **877 W. Commercial Drive in Wasilla**, can be reached at **(907) 352-2500** or by email at matsu.jobcenter@alaska.gov. The center offers two conference rooms available at no cost for partners and community members. These rooms can accommodate recruitment events, staff training, testing, or meetings. One room also includes a computer lab with 15 stations. To learn more or schedule a tour, call our main line.

Seafood and Maritime Employment Opportunities

The Seafood Employment Office is actively recruiting workers for seafood and fishing jobs throughout Alaska. Many positions offer room, board, and transportation, making them a strong option for job seekers looking to get started quickly.

Learn more or apply at: <https://jobs.alaska.gov/seafood/> or contact the Seafood Employment Office at the Anchorage Job Center Midtown: **(907) 269-4746**.

Another industry with ongoing demand and similar benefits is the maritime industry. Explore training and career opportunities at: <https://mymaritimecareer.org>

Stay Connected

For current information on recruitments, job fairs, virtual job readiness workshops, and training opportunities, visit Alaska's Job Center Network: <http://www.jobs.alaska.gov/>
Select from the options on the right-hand menu to get started.



June Trends: Alaskans' debt hits a decade low. **Also in this issue:** Modernizing Alaska's unemployment insurance benefits

Monthly Highlight of Resources in the Mat-Su

- **Knik Tribe Social & Client Services:** The Knik Tribe Social Services Department is dedicated to supporting the well-being of our community through a variety of programs and services. We are here to assist with Childcare and Assistance, Elders Support, Elders Meal, Family Contact, Victims of Crime Outreach Support, Family Culture Nights, Talking Circles, Advocacy and Case Management, and Parenting Classes.
Phone: 907-373-7991 / Website: [Alaska Knik Tribe | Social & Client Services](#)
- **Benteh Nuutah Primary Care Clinic:** Located in Wasilla. In partnership with Chickaloon Village and Knik Tribal Council, services are open to Alaska Native and American Indian community members.
Phone: 907-631-7600 / Website: [Primary Care Clinics - Southcentral Foundation](#)