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Sometimes you need push back against the system — How one reentrant did and ended up on top.

Greetings,

In last month’s newsletter I mentioned the National Association of Reentry Professionals (NARP) Reentry 2024: A “Wholistic Approach to Reentry” Conference that was held in Franklin, Tennessee and promised to go into details about some of the inspiring presentations we attended. One of the sessions that stood out to us was titled “From the Loosing Loop to the Winner Circle”, by Shelly Winner, a formally incarcerated individual who is now a Resolute Restorative Justice Activist and the top sales representative at a global tech firm.

When Shelly was released from prison she got a job for an International Tech Company, however once her background check came back, they rescinded the job offer. When that happened, instead of giving up, Shelly decided that she was going to push back. She learned about an ordinance in San Francisco called the Fair Chance Ordinance, and she was able to use this to challenge Microsoft and say, “Hey, I am not my past, here is everything that I have done to turn my life around, and here is why you should hire me.” Shelly is very glad she decided to stand up for herself, because she has now been with the company for over 5 years and has had 3 promotions since she started working there.

The lesson behind Shelly’s presentation is that you shouldn’t be afraid to stand up for yourself and others, sometimes it just takes that one person to say something for things to change for the better. Along with holding down her job at Microsoft, Shelly advocates for hiring formally incarcerated individuals through conducting presentations at Reentry Conferences and she also did a TEDx Talk on the subject, which you can find it at [Hiring the formerly incarcerated is best for your team](#).

Approximately 37 states and over 150 cities and counties have adopted some type of Fair Chance Hiring Law. These laws try to prevent discrimination against those who have a previous criminal record, especially those convicted of minor or non-violent crimes.

While Alaska does not have a Fair Chance Law in place, we do have a Fair Chance Employment Practices Fact Sheet that was created by the Alaska Workforce Investment Board which encourages employers to take certain steps to give formally incarcerated individuals a fair chance at being hired (for more information on this Fact Sheet go to page 3)

Unfortunately, while the fact sheet has good information on it and encourages employers to follow Fair Chance Employment Practices, it still leaves the decision to do so up to the employer. However, if Alaska were to pass a Fair Chance Law, as 37 other states have already done, employers would be required to follow what was outlined in the law, instead of just being encouraged to do so.

Barbara Mongar
Coordinator, Mat-Su Reentry Coalition

More Employers Taking a Closer Look at Candidates with Criminal Histories

By: Paul Bergeron / April 16, 2024 / Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)

About one-third of U.S. citizens have a criminal record. Employers that exclude these individuals from their pool of potential job candidates may be making it more difficult to fill positions and potentially missing an opportunity to work with talented individuals.

Second-chance hiring practices—also known as fair-chance hiring—were discussed during a session called “Bold, Brave and Transformed: The Journey from Incarceration to Employment” at the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Talent Conference & Expo 2024 on April 15 in Las Vegas. The session was led by moderator Elisabeth Voigt, senior manager of environmental, social, and governance programs and partnerships at Indeed.

She was joined by Genevieve Rimer, senior director of inclusive hiring at the Center for Employment Opportunities, and Vincent Bragg, founder and CEO of ConCreates Inc., both of whom were previously incarcerated.

Amelia Nickerson, CEO of First Step Staffing, also participated. Her group has helped thousands of people with criminal histories gain employment nationwide.

Second-chance hiring practices have been gaining traction throughout the U.S. to give people who were previously incarcerated an opportunity to secure a job.

According to Indeed, 37 states; Washington, D.C.; and over 150 counties and cities have adopted a second-chance hiring policy for public sector employment. Furthermore, 15 of those states along with 22 counties and cities have extended their policy to private employment. In recent years, support for second-chance hiring practices has increased in popularity not only at the state and local levels but also federally.

Second-Chance Hiring Contributes to Business Success

Rimer said that after her incarceration, she felt embarrassed of her history.

“I thought I wore a scarlet F on my sleeve for failure, but I’ve taken all of that, transformed it ... and so now I sit before you bravely, and I’m able to talk about my past,” she said. “I’m really proud of who I am today, and a part of that is because of who I used to be. We’re working for much more than a paycheck; we’re working to create a whole new identity.”

Bragg said that previously incarcerated people have different “lived experiences,” which can help companies achieve inclusion, equity and diversity goals. “These people not only want to work the hardest, but they also want to do the best,” he said.

Nickerson said data shows the success rates of employers who hire applicants who were previously incarcerated.

“Our retention rates [show] that the employees stay longer ... than any every group except the veterans,” Nickerson said. “They’re hungry employees; you want them in your warehouse and you want them on your manufacturing lines, because they’re going to show up on time and get the job done.

Nickerson’s firm works with HR professionals to help them craft second-chance hiring policies and meets with front-line hiring managers to coach them through interviewing and hiring the candidates.



From left, Amelia Nickerson, CEO of First Step Staffing; Vincent Bragg, founder and CEO of ConCreates, Inc.; and Genevieve Rimer, senior director of inclusive hiring at the Center for Employment Opportunities, speak at SHRM Talent 2024.

Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) Fact Sheet on why Fair Chance Employment Practices are good for Businesses and for Alaska

Fact: Nearly 1 in 3 adults in the U.S., an estimated 70 million, have been arrested or convicted of a crime. In Alaska, over 210,000 people have a criminal record, which is 34% of our population.

Fact: U.S. anti-discrimination laws prohibit employers from practicing a blanket bans against hiring any person with a record.

Fact: Major employers such as Walmart, Target, Starbucks, and Koch Industries have removed prior conviction inquiries from their initial hiring process.

Consider This: Not hiring individuals with records narrows your applicant pool of qualified workers, even in cases where a prior conviction has no relevancy to the job. We all benefit when individuals who have exited the criminal justice system can take advantage of employment opportunities. Employment can be a significant factor in reducing recidivism rates. Supporting fair chance employment opportunities for individuals with prior convictions bolsters our economy and strengthens our communities.

What Can Employers Do?

- Remove questions related to prior convictions from your application, and delay such inquiries or background checks until later in the hiring process.
- Limit the information sought during hiring to what is relevant to the scope of work for the position.
- Consider each applicant on a case-by-case basis.
- Ensure your hiring policies are aligned with federal law.
- Limit overly broad criminal record inquiries; national databases may not reflect if charges were dropped or did not result in convictions.
- Limit the “lookback” period considered when inquiring about past crimes. Instead of a life-time lookback, focus on set period such as the past 5-10 years.
- Promote transparent guidance regarding what types of past offenses could result in disqualification from employment.

Visit [Employers \(alaska.gov\)](https://alaska.gov/employers) to learn more about ways the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development is assisting employers of those with past convictions, such as:

Work Opportunity Tax Credits [WOTC \(alaska.gov\)](https://alaska.gov/wotc) and the **Fidelity Bonding Program** [Fidelity Bonding Program \(alaska.gov\)](https://alaska.gov/fidelity)

Note: For Fact Sheet go to:

[AWIB Fair Chance Employment Practices Fact Sheet.pdf \(alaska.gov\)](#)

Mat-Su Reentry Events:

- **Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Steering Team Meeting**
Tuesday, July 2
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, July 2, 2024. All are welcome to attend.

SAVE THE DATE!!!

September 5 & 6, 2024

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition will be holding its 2024 Mat-Su Reentry Summit on Sept 5 & 6 at the Menard Sport Center, Wasilla. 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:

- **Wellness/Wellbriety Circle**
Days/Times: Tuesday, at 6:30 and Wednesday at 6:00;
Food (Potlach themed) starts 30 minutes prior to circles
Location: 758 Shoreline Dr. Wasilla, AK; Open to All
Contact Ralph Lewis at 907-373-7991
- **Talking Circle**
Day/Time: Fridays, 1-3 pm
Location: MyHouse, Wasilla
Open to the community
- **14th Annual Tribal Celebration & Health Fair**
Day/Time: Saturday, June 15
11:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Health & Wellness Vendors/ Drumming and Dancing/ Traditional Food & BBQ/ Fun Family Activities/ Regalia Contest/Prize Giveaways
Location: Raven Hall, Alaska State Fairgrounds

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

Summertime in Alaska is upon us, staff at the Mat-Su Job Center are busy assisting customers for the summer season and apprenticeship openings all over the state. We are located in Wasilla at 877 W. Commercial Drive and are open to the public M-F 8am-5pm, stop in and see us or refer customers for any employment and training needs.

The Alaska Vocational Technical Center (AVTEC) is proud to announce the launch of an innovative training program designed to provide students with cross-industry maintenance and repair skills. The Industrial Machine and Maintenance program will engage in coursework covering precision measurement, blueprint interpretation, conventional and CNC machining processes and cutting tool and material selection. Hands-on experience in Computer Aided Drafting (CADD) will ensure proficiency in the latest industry-relevant technologies. In addition to core coursework, participants will benefit from supplementary modules on 3D modeling, 3D printing, and tool maintenance/repair, seamlessly integrated throughout the term. Applications are currently being accepted for this program, to learn about potential funding available through Career Support & Training Services, contact us at (907) 352-2500.

Alaska's fire season is upon us and the State of Alaska Division of Natural Resources is recruiting for their Emergency Fire Fighter positions. Contact the job center at (907) 352-2500 to obtain an application and instructions to apply, or you can come in for more one on one assistance with the application process or to submit your application.

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 main menu.



June Trends: A look at women in construction, a heavily male industry. **Also in this issue:** How private-sector and government jobs interact

Monthly Highlight of Resources in the Mat-Su

- **Mat-Su Division of Vocational Rehabilitation: They help Alaskans with disabilities get & keep good jobs**
Address: 913 W. Commercial Dr., Wasilla, AK; **Phone:** (907) 352-2545
Website: <https://labor.alaska.gov/dvr/contact.htm>
- **Mat-Su Job Center:** Located at 877 W. Commercial Dr., Wasilla, AK; **Phone:** (907) 352-2500
E-Mails: Job seekers: matsu.jobcenter@alaska.gov / **Employers:** matsu.employers@alaska.gov
- **NINE STAR Education & Employment Services: Through Education and Employment Services they help Alaskans get a job, keep a job, and advance on the job.**
Address: Westside Center, 899 W. Commercial Dr., Wasilla, AK; **Phone:** 907-373-7833
Website: <https://ninestar.org/mat-su-adult-education/>

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