



July 2024
Volume 5, Issue 7

Inside this issue

The Road to Rehabilitation: Post-Secondary Education in Prison Enhances Public Safety.....2-3
 Mat-Su Reentry Events..... 3
 Knik Tribe Events.....3
 Mat-Su Job Center Update....4
 Monthly Highlight of

Newsletter

In-reaches into Correctional Institutions assist justice involved individuals get a fresh start in life

Greetings,

On June 20, 2024, Cindy Yeager, the Mat-Su Reentry Program Coordinator, Brain Galloway, the Mat-Su Reentry Case Manager, and I participated in the Second Chance Connections Resource Fair held at Hiland Mountain Correctional Center.

There were approximately 19 organizations and services providers that participated in this event and approximately 36 incarcerated individuals that attended.

The organizations that attended this event included the following:



Representatives from organizations that participated in the Resource Fair

Alaska Housing Finance Corporation	Mat-Su Job Center— Alaska Department of Labor
Akeela	Partners Reentry Center
Alaska Addiction Services	Probation—Alaska Department of Corrections
Alaska Food Banks	Reentry Unit—Alaska Department of Corrections
Alaska Public Defender Agency	Mat-Su Reentry Programs— Valley Charities
Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center	NeighborWorks Alaska
Banyan Treatment Center	New Life Development
Cook Inlet Tribal Council	Set Free Alaska
Education & Reentry— Hiland Mountain Correctional Center	True North Recovery

Each organization was given around 2 minutes to explain what they could provide and after all the organizations spoke, the inmates were then given time to go up to the different organizational representatives and ask question.

It is important for both the inmates and the organizations that work directly with previously incarcerated individuals to be able to meet prior to the incarcerated individuals being released. Providing the opportunity for inmates to meet with service organizations before they are released from prison allows the participants to be proactive and learn what type of programs are available to assist them with possible obstacles to their success.

Alaska DOC is planning to conduct several more events like this one in the future at other Correctional Institutions around the state.

Barbara Mongar

Coordinator, Mat-Su Reentry Coalition

The Road to Rehabilitation: Post-Secondary Education in Prison Enhances Public Safety

By: Kris Black, [CAREERS Program](#)

In a world where second chances can be elusive, one program at the University of Alaska, Anchorage (UAA) is increasing those chances for incarcerated adults. The faculty at UAA recently ventured behind the walls of the criminal justice system, not to serve time, but to offer a chance for those serving time to reshape their futures.

In May, UAA's Automotive and Diesel department offered a three-week Introduction to Automotive class for justice-involved individuals at the Palmer Correctional Facility. Director Darrin Marshall spoke with [The Northern Light](#) about the program and how the Department of Corrections reached out to UAA to provide inmates with hands-on learning experiences.

Marshall explained that the entire Automotive and Diesel faculty collaborated to create a specialized educational program for 11 minimum-security prisoners. Their aim was to equip them with the necessary skills for employment after release. Classes were held five days a week, six and a half hours each day for three weeks. Marshall highlighted that offering the Intro to Automotive class to these individuals gave them a sense of achievement and a preview of the automotive sector. "I believe they are seeking a path to success once their sentence is completed. Many of them are evaluating whether this trade could be their career and if they can get started in this field," said Marshall.

The Introduction to Automotive course at Palmer Minimum, spearheaded by UAA's Automotive & Diesel Power Technology faculty, isn't just about learning to fix cars – it's about building futures and enhancing public safety. For those within the walls of correctional facilities, reentering society often feels like an uphill battle. But the Introduction to Automotive course offers a beacon of hope, providing inmates with the tools they need to reenter society successfully.

Post-secondary coursework in correctional facilities embodies a simple yet powerful idea: education within correctional facilities is fundamental to public safety. As participants master technical skills and develop problem-solving abilities, they don't just become mechanics; they become empowered individuals ready for workforce integration. This form of education not only prepares students for career pathways but also significantly contributes to public safety by aiding in the rehabilitation and successful reentry of incarcerated individuals.

Surveys conducted among students in the course revealed overwhelming positivity. One student remarked, "I really appreciated the course and hope to pursue more when I return home. I'd like to thank the DOC and UAA staff responsible for giving us the chance." This sentiment was echoed in student surveys, emphasizing the instructors' excellence and their ability to make learning enjoyable and engaging. Additionally, students appreciated gaining valuable skills that would be useful beyond prison walls. Many expressed interests in furthering their education or pursuing careers in the automotive industry.

Marshall also noted the enthusiasm of the participants, saying they "absorbed everything we had prepared to teach – so much that instructors frequently traveled between UAA and the facility to bring additional learning materials." The inmates' retention of the material led to the introduction of more advanced automotive techniques. Instructors started teaching how to repair vehicle axles, resolve rear differential issues, and tackle advanced electrical problems.

Instructors involved in the program expressed enthusiasm for the impact they were witnessing. One instructor noted, "I think the willingness and the enthusiasm from the students on the topics and systems being taught made teaching this course rewarding," reflecting on the energy and dedication displayed by participants. This mutual enthusiasm fostered an environment where education became a catalyst for personal growth and empowerment. **(Continued on page 3)**



Inmates at Palmer Correctional Center participating in UAA's Introduction to Automotive class

The Road to Rehabilitation: Post-Secondary Education in Prison Enhances Public Safety

(Continued from page 2)

By: Kristofer Black, Alaska DOC Reentry Unit —June 10, 2024

Another instructor highlighted the importance of vocational training in correctional facilities, stating, "Education increases the chance for success, reducing chances of repeat offenses." Their words emphasized the transformative potential of education, underscoring its role in providing practical skills and fostering a sense of purpose and direction.

Survey results underscored the program's success, with high ratings across various metrics. Students consistently rated the course content and teaching quality as excellent, with an average rating of 4.5 out of 5. Additionally, instructors reported high satisfaction with the students' engagement and performance, unanimously agreeing that students demonstrated a strong understanding of the material and significant improvement in critical thinking skills.

Beyond technical skills, the course promotes personal growth and development. Students not only learn automotive repair but also essential life skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and communication – all crucial for success in the workforce and life beyond bars. One student highlighted this holistic approach, stating, "I really enjoyed the course and would encourage having it repeat again next year. There are valuable things to be taught for individuals seeking further knowledge in automotive. I, myself, am now wanting to enroll in their larger classes to make a career out of it. UAA did an outstanding job considering the location."

Before embarking on the journey of teaching in a correctional facility, instructors had certain expectations. They anticipated challenges in safety, enjoyment, and the ability to work effectively with students. However, the reality they encountered was far more positive than anticipated. Initial concerns about safety and enjoyment were alleviated as instructors found themselves feeling very safe and enjoying the teaching experience more than expected. Working with students surpassed expectations, with instructors reporting a highly positive experience, contrary to the neutral expectations. As one instructor aptly put it, "I definitely had some concerns about what kind of engagement we would receive. Teaching this course absolutely dispelled those preconceived notions." This shift from initial expectations to the positive reality highlights the transformative potential of educational programs in correctional facilities. "I honestly had little to no expectations, simply due to not having prior experience in a correctional facility," shared one instructor. "The students showed a very high level of engagement, and the aptitude was at or above the average student we see in our program," they added, highlighting the remarkable dedication and proficiency demonstrated by the participants.

The course culminated in a firm handshake and a certificate of completion bearing UAA's emblem. Participants who completed the course were awarded a certificate of completion and earned three credits towards an Automotive degree at UAA. Upon registration, these students will not need to retake the Intro to Auto class, having already completed it at Palmer Correctional Facility. For many participants, this certificate represents the first piece of post-secondary coursework achieved within their family, a milestone that can be proudly displayed. The certificate, and the course itself, serve as a reminder—a shining example of how education can break cycles of incarceration and pave the way for brighter futures.

Mat-Su Reentry Events:

- **Virtual Mat-Su Reentry Services Forum**
Wednesday, July 17
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 Coalition Steering Team Meeting**
Tuesday, Aug 6, 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, 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:

- **Knik Tribe Family Culture Nights** — Bi-Weekly, Wednesday, 5:30 - 7:30 PM; Location: 758 Shoreline Dr. Wasilla, AK; Open to All (See Attached Calendar)
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
- **Talking Circle**—Thursday, from 12 to 2PM; Location: Willow Library, Willow, 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.

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



Mat-Su Job Center Update

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

The Mat-Su Job Center is open Monday-Friday 8am-5pm, our staff are available to assist one on one with employment or training needs. We currently offer the following workshops at our job center during normal business hours - Effective Resumes, Employment after Incarceration, Interviewing Strategies, Workplace Alaska (how to apply for State of Alaska Jobs), and Career Support & Training Orientation for grant funding. We also proctor WorkKeys and provided certified Typing/10-Key testing, all at no cost. You can reach us at (907) 352-2500 or in person at 877 West Commercial Drive, in Wasilla.

May's statewide job count was up by 9,300, or 2.9 percent, from May 2023. Construction added 2,500 jobs, with federally funded infrastructure projects contributing to the strong growth. Health care employment increased by 1,700, with gains in hospitals and outpatient care facilities. Mining was up by 1,000 jobs, with hard rock mining, oil, and gas both growing over the year. Most industries added jobs, but information (-200) and financial activities (-100) continued their long-term losses. Federal, State, and local government were up by a combined 1,200 jobs, with the most growth in federal employment. Alaska's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 4.5 percent in May and the U.S. rate was 4.0 percent. For more information regarding Alaska's economy, visit the Department of Labor & Workforce Development Research and Analysis website at <https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/>

If you would like to stay informed on current job openings, recruitments, or employment/training related happenings in the local Mat-Su area, please contact Stacey Andrist our Business Connection staff and request to be added to the Mat-Su mailing list. Stacey can be reached at (907) 352-2523 or send a quick email to Stacey.Andrist@alaska.gov.



Alaska Works Partnership has multiple upcoming pre-apprenticeship training this summer, training is hands-on and free. Space is limited if interested contact Alaska Works Partnership at (907) 457-2597 or www.alaskaworks.org or see attached flyer for a list of free training opportunities throughout the state.

July Trends: Alaska's inflation slowed to a more historically typical rate in 2023. See the second part of the article for cost comparisons around Alaska and comparisons to other U.S. cities.

Monthly Highlight of Resources in the Mat-Su July celebrates National Disability Pride Month

- **Access Alaska:** They encourage and promote the total integration of people who experience a disability and senior Alaskans to live independently in the community of their choice.
Address: 1075 E. Check Street, Suite 109, Wasilla, AK; **Phone:** (907) 357-2588
Website: Access Alaska
- **Mat-Su Aging & Disability Resource Centers (ADRC)- LINKS:** They provide free information and referral services that promote health, well-being and safety for individuals with disabilities, seniors and vulnerable adults by connecting them to quality services and supports that foster independence, personal choice and dignity.
Website: [Mat-Su Aging & Disability Resource Center – LINKS Resource Center \(linksprc.org\)](http://Mat-Su Aging & Disability Resource Center – LINKS Resource Center (linksprc.org))