

Anchorage Reentry Coalition
Meeting Minutes
7/9/20
Hosted online via Zoom

Representatives in attendance included those from the following organizations/groups: ONE2ONE Mentorship Program; Choosing Our Roots; U.S. Probation; Alaska Department of Corrections; Southcentral Foundation; Alaska Housing Finance Corporation; Recover Alaska; Running Free Alaska; Partners Reentry Center; Alaska Native Justice Center; ACLU of Alaska; Alaska Behavioral Health; Cook Inlet Housing Authority; Supporting Our Loved Ones Group; UAA Justice Center; Anchorage Public Library; McLaughlin Youth Center; Juvenile Probation; Department of Labor and Workforce Development; Norris House; North Star Behavioral Health Systems/Chris Kyle Patriots Hospital; Body Piercing Unlimited; Alaska Criminal Justice Commission; Division of Behavioral Health; Veterans Affairs; Alaska Mental Health Board; Off the Chain Bicycle Cooperative; Bean's Café.

Estimated Total Attendees: 49

*1. Introduction: Jonathan Pistotnik, Coalition Coordinator, Anchorage Reentry Coalition
(jpistotnik@nwaska.org)*

Mr. Pistotnik explained some of the background and format of the meeting, and introduced the speakers. It was explained that the intention of the meeting was to provide a means to share information and updates about programs and services, but also to provide an opportunity to bring the community together that engage in reentry and criminal justice system issues and share insights, challenges and concerns, and potential calls to action. It was highlighted that the work in the realm of criminal justice and reentry is very valuable and needed right now, with over 4,000 people still incarcerated in Alaska, nearly all of whom will eventually be released.

*2. Speaker: Janice Weiss, Reentry Program Manager, Department of Corrections
(janice.weiss@alaska.gov)*

Ms. Weiss stated that institutions are still closed to outside contractors and volunteers, but there is still a limited amount of education and reentry work occurring inside the institutions as Education Coordinators are able to meet one-on-one with inmates. It was stated that there are about 300 people being released to Anchorage on a monthly basis.

Ms. Weiss explained that currently every person that is remanded is being tested for COVID-19, amounting to about 600 people per day across the state. There have been three confirmed cases of COVID-19 thus far, which reflects much lower rates that what is being found in other correctional institutions around the country. Ms. Weiss acknowledged the concern among some service providers that had been attending in-reach events that are no longer allowed to engaged in those activities. It was clarified that all group programming and treatment is paused, which would make group in-reach activities conducted via a platform like Zoom not feasible at this time. Service providers that have information they would like to get to the inmates inside the institutions may contact the Education Coordinator(s) at the facility they are trying to get information into, as they are able to pass that along to the inmates.

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Ms. Weiss explained that the State of Alaska has made a commitment to reentry, and dedicated funding for the Reentry Unit within the Dept. of Corrections. Four new positions are being added to the unit, including two Program Coordinators, one Protective Services Specialist, and a Criminal Justice Technician. One Program Coordinator position has been filled by Michael Clark, and the other positions are in the process of being defined and posted. The goal of the unit is to be a statewide partner to the other organizations in reentry efforts, and to provide a linkage between in-prison education and treatment and the transition back into the community.

Peer mentorship is an important factor and is something that is being worked into their programming. It is anticipated that once the DHSS statewide peer mentorship certification is rolled out, that is a training and certification that could be offered inside the institutions prior to release.

Ms. Weiss explained that the Legislature must make a change to existing law regarding computer access by inmates before computer access can be expanded; there was a bill intended on changing the law, but COVID-19 happened and delayed voting on the bill. If such a bill was passed it would open up more computer-based options. It was explained that DOC is working on a procedure that would allow service providers to register and schedule a time to speak with a particular inmate, similar to other professions (e.g. attorneys), upon which they would be able to have a one-on-one phone conversation. Such calls would be at no-cost to the inmate. Until the procedure is finalized for service provider calls, Institutional Probation Officers and Education Coordinators may be resources that could arrange for information to be shared with particular inmates.

3. Speaker: John Hirst, Probation Officer II, Department of Corrections (john.hirst@alaska.gov)

Mr. Hirst explained that operations have continued and that staffing patterns are generally back to normal; for several months there were staffing modifications that reduced the number of people physically in the office at a time. Home visits have continued, but interactions have been largely telephonic; more face-to-face visits are occurring as time passes. Parole board hearings are continuing and adjudications at the court are beginning again.

Mr. Hirst explained that he is the Anchorage Reentry Probation Officer and is responsible for overseeing probationers that are involved in the Second Chance Grant in Anchorage. He explained that there were challenges early on in the COVID-19 lockdown period with people breaking curfew and not abiding by rules. He is connecting with people over the phone and has increased his check-ins to help maintain connections and overcome physical distancing. There are increasing numbers of people being released and engaged in the Second Chance Grant. Mr. Hirst explained that treatment and support groups (e.g. AA, NA) are starting up again.

Mr. Hirst explained that he thought that people were finding employment difficult to obtain, and that the process for getting hired is slower than normal. But overall, people are adapting to the current situation.

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4. *Speaker: Benny Briggs, Case Manager, Alaska Native Justice Center*

Mr. Briggs stated that he has been working from home since mid-March, but he has been given PPE and has been going into the community to assist program participants with meeting some of their needs (e.g. food assistance, obtaining cell phones and tablets, housing assistance).

It was stated that participants had expressed concern with not being able to access certain places that could help with workforce development, like DOLWD and PRC. Mr. Briggs reported that participants seem to really understand how important it is to stay in the community and engage with programming. Mr. Briggs reported that he had been holding meetings with program participants via Zoom since March, and that he estimated that 2 out of about 25 participants had dropped out during that time. Mr. Briggs expressed positive sentiment regarding the coming together of the reentry community during the pandemic, and also felt that the community was supportive of ANJC and their efforts during this time.

Mr. Briggs has been assisting participants with obtaining cell phones and tablets, partly to incentivize and facilitate continued participation in the ANJC Reentry Program. Participants are able to come into the CITC building for one-on-one sessions. Mr. Briggs also reported working closely with PRC and GEO Group for those newly released individuals.

The use of technology has been a barrier; utilizing Zoom, smart phones, and similar modern technologies has proven difficult for some people, particularly those that have been incarcerated for long periods of time. Mr. Briggs explained that this skill set needs to be developed and enhanced, especially in these times when use of technology is necessary to communicate and conduct day-to-day business. Teaching people how to use computers and cell phones is an important area of need right now.

Not only do people being released have to follow up with PO's, and handle potential SUD issues, but they also have to abide by quarantine rules. Mr. Briggs is observing many people doing the necessary work to stay in the community, and not return to prison. Mr. Briggs state that not being able to go into the prisons or halfway houses has been a difficulty, in terms of recruitment.

Mr. Briggs reported that Home Depot is hiring and will consider hiring someone with prior criminal justice involvement, and stated that ANJC may be able to help with housing for those enrolled in ANHC's program.

5. *Speaker: Christina Shadura, Case Manager, Partners Reentry Center*

Ms. Shadura stated that Partners Reentry Center's doors are open on a limited basis and are scheduling 6-7 clients per day, which is down from the 50-60 clients per day that were being seen when unscheduled walk-ins were allowed. Through the COVID-19 lockdown, PRC never stopped providing services, but re-opened the center early June. PRC had established a process to continue to house newly released people during the lockdown period; during this period it was reported that there were many no-shows.

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It was stated that PRC received a large donation of masks from the Alaska Coalition of Veteran & Military Families which are being distributed to clients at the center. Currently there are about 145 people housed. Of those, only about 15 are not employed (and of those 5-6 are likely SSDI candidates).

Ms. Shadura stated that obtaining identity documents has been a challenge. DMV appointments have become necessary during COVID-19; it is has been the experience of PRC staff that the DMV is over-booking appointments which means that being serviced at the DMV is not always guaranteed. The Social Security office is closed which has made obtaining a social security hard/impossible. The Department of Public Assistance is reportedly allowing applications to be dropped off, but a phone interview is necessary in order to be approved for food benefits. It was stated that access to a phone can be difficult for some clients. Ms. Shadura asked for advice on potential solutions to these challenges, and also stated that the heavy reliance on technology for communication poses a barrier for access services. Mr. Briggs stated that CITC Recovery Services is currently providing treatments.

Joshua Sopko, Director of PRC, also added that PRC is open, and offering orientations and workshops twice per day. Currently, there are up to seven people per class. If a reentrant wants to get into the computer lab they can schedule a time by calling the center at 258-1192. Former clients are being allowed to visit the center if they may have lost their job since mid-March when COVID-19 impacted the community. Support groups are being offered again, but individuals are asked to sign up ahead of time. Mr. Sopko suggested that it could be possible to hold the Friday Case Management meeting via Zoom if people were interested; that meeting is not currently being held, but if you are interested please reach out to Mr. Sopko or Ms. Shadura.

Demetria Veasy (269-4733; demetria.veasy@alaska.gov) Regional Manager, from the DOLWD mentioned that the sea food industry is hiring; an employment specialist that can speak more about current opportunities in this area can be reached 269-4746. It was also stated that Gov Delivery is a very good way for service providers to stay up to date on job opportunities through DOLWD. Midtown Job Center phone number: 907-269-4759.

6. Speaker: Cathleen McLaughlin, Shelter Operations Director, Bean's Café (phone: 342-5380)

Ms. McLaughlin stated that the shelter will tentatively be in place at the Sullivan Arena until September 1. Mass testing and spot testing has been taking place, and as of today there were no positive cases at the facility. The current capacity is 350 cots, and the daily average of occupied beds is 250-290. Bed space is available at this time. People that continue to show up have a small dedicated space and a tote in which they can keep their positions during the day. It was stated that the model at the shelter appears to be working.

It was stated that if someone is looking for another person (e.g. a client) at the shelter, you may send a text to Ms. McLaughlin and she will work with staff to try and locate the person. There has been an

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effort to keep the facility safe from weapons and clear of drugs, to minimize the risk of victimization at the shelter. Social service providers have setups at the arena and are providing services on-demand to clients and other homeless individuals. Contact Ms. McLaughlin if you are interested in participating.

Currently, there are job opportunities at the shelter for monitors and/or security positions; reentrants are being sought to fill some of these positions, as a prior criminal background is not a disqualifier. Shifts are 8 hours; pay starts at \$12/hr and can increase over time. Job expectations: positive attitude, be a team player, and be able to put the client first.

Shelter to Success Program is designed to take shelter volunteers that become hired as employees, place them into transitional housing while they find stability and accumulate financial savings, then help place them into an apartment.

Ms. McLaughlin can be reached at 342-5380 (text is the preferred method, if possible).

7. *Speaker: Angela Hall, Supporting Our Loved Ones Group (SOLOG) (sologrouplady@gmail.com)*

Ms. Hall is a founding member of the SOLOG which is a support group for family and friends of Alaska's incarcerated people, and support those who may be formerly incarcerated. Ms. Hall explained that she currently has a loved one that is incarcerated, and that she founded SOLOG based on the discovery that there was a lack of services, support, and information specifically for the family members who have loved ones that are incarcerated. Ms. Hall explained that there is a need for more information and support who were going through this experience; there is stigma for people who may have an incarcerated family member and anonymity is important for some people despite an interest in finding support. Ms. Hall explained that the voices and perspectives of family/friends of those who are incarcerated are also important and need to be heard, as policy decisions regarding justice-involved people can also impact them. There is an interest in removing the "us versus them" sentiment with the Department of Corrections, and increasing dialogue. Ms. Hall stated that weekly Zoom meetings provide a safe space for members to connect. The group is engaged in advocacy work also; they are currently working on "second look" policy changes that would allow for the review and possible modification of sentences for adults that have served at least 15 years of their sentence, but were convicted and sentenced when they were juveniles. SOLOG is also interested in advocacy work and policies stemming to COVID-19. Individuals that may be interested in joining the group or learning more may contact Ms. Hall (<https://www.solog.org/>).

8. *Speaker: Megan Edge, Communications Director, ACLUA of Alaska (medge@acluak.org)*

Prior to working with the ACLU of Alaska Ms. Edge was working with the AK Department of Corrections, which changed her perspective on working with people involved in the correctional system. Ms. Edge explained that the ACLU has taken an interest in working to protect those that are

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currently incarcerated from COVID-19, and work to ensure constitutionally guaranteed access to services during the pandemic. The ACLU has attempted to dialogue and work with the Gov. Dunleavy administration on these issues, and has sought transparency and information during the pandemic. The ACLU understands the extraordinary times DOC is operating in and is glad to see the increased COVID-19 testing, but basic access to information is still an area of need.

Ms. Edge explained there is a concern regarding access to programming inside correctional institutions at this current time, and the ACLU is interested in exploring alternatives. There is an interest in utilizing technology to deliver programming and training, particularly with the prohibition on volunteers entering the institutions and the restricted movement of inmates within the facilities. A change to existing law may be necessary, but that matter is being looked into and explored.

The ACLU of Alaska has formed a group of family members and loved ones of those who are currently incarcerated, and have met three times thus far to share information and concerns. It is believed that with time this group could engage in more advocacy work and use the collective voice of the group to make an impact. Contact Ms. Edge if you are interested in joining this group or learning more.

9. *Speaker: Stephanie Rhoades, Founder, ONE2ONE Mentorship Program (one2onementorship@gmail.com)*

Judge Rhoades explained that after retiring from being a Judge she founded ONE2ONE Mentorship for justice-involved women. It is a professional mentorship program that connects women in the community, working in a professional capacity, with criminal justice system involved women with a goal of helping lead women beyond entry-level work after they have returned to the community. Group meetings were being held at New Life Development; since the pandemic began those meetings have taken place via Zoom (Mondays at 6:30PM). There has been attempts to mobilize and engage with women located at other transitional housing providers but nothing has materialized. Zoom does open up some new means for connecting. Any housing providers interested in providing this opportunity to women in their program and joining the group meeting may reach out to Judge Rhoades for more information. Individual mentorship connections are continuing despite COVID-19, but are not taking place in person. Judge Rhoades stated that people in the community are relapsing, that access to timely interventions are lacking, and that UA's conducted by Probation are an accountability mechanism that have not been as routine as during pre-COVID-19.

Judge Rhoades stated that she is also a chair of the Recidivism Reduction, Rehabilitation, and Reentry Committee, a sub-committee of the Alaska Criminal Justice Commission. The next meeting is scheduled for July 23rd, from 1-4PM; the next scheduled meeting after that will be August 13, from 1-4PM. It was stated that presentations and information at the July 23rd meeting will include representatives from the Department of Corrections and will include information on in-prison programming. The intent of the committee is to make recommendations to the Commission, with the ultimate intent of forwarding them on to the Legislature. See the ACJC website for details of the upcoming meetings: <http://www.ajc.state.ak.us/acjc/>

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10. Update: Molly Mattingly, Program Coordinator, Recover Alaska (mmattingly@recoveralaska.org)

Ms. Mattingly explained that Recover Alaska is working with partners on the allocation of alcohol tax money that is anticipated to amount to \$11-15 million per year. Ms. Mattingly explained the money has to be dedicated to three different areas: public safety and first responders; domestic violence and sexual assault, and child abuse; and SUD, behavioral health treatment, and homelessness resources. Agnew::Beck has created a logic model and developed a theory of change pertaining to the funding and how it should be spent. If you would like to weigh in and offer suggestions about where funding should be directed to you may join in on the conversations that are taking place. Please contact Ms. Mattingly for more information about upcoming meetings and discussions.

11. Closing Remarks: Jonathan Pistotnik

Mr. Pistotnik explained that there was not enough time to touch on all the pertinent topics relevant to this community, such as treatment, behavioral health, employment, and more. Mr. Pistotnik explained that he was happy to continue to host meetings via Zoom and with greater frequency than each quarter if attendees would like to gather more often. Feedback is welcomed.

NEXT MEETING:

Part 2: Current State of Reentry in Anchorage

TENTATIVELY JULY 30th 9:30-11AM ON ZOOM