

Anchorage Reentry Coalition
Meeting Minutes
7/22/21
Hosted online via Zoom

Representatives in attendance included those from the following organizations/groups:

Alaska Department of Corrections (Reentry Unit; Anchorage Probation; Anchorage Correctional Complex; Spring Creek Correctional Center); GEO Group (Parkview; Midtown); Partners Reentry Center; Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development; Southcentral Foundation, Family Wellness Warriors; Alaska Native Justice Center; Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center; Alaska VA; Alaska Housing Finance Corporation; U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Alaska; Municipality of Anchorage (Aging & Disability Resource Center; Housing & Homeless Services); Fairbanks Reentry Coalition; Juneau Reentry Coalition; Running Free Alaska; Anchorage FACT; Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness; Arc of Anchorage; NeighborWorks Alaska; Alaska Public Defender Agency; Disability Law Service of Alaska; Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; Division of Behavioral Health; Dept. of Health and Social Services (Ladies First); Division of Juvenile Justice; U.S. Probation; Akeela Development Corp.; United Way; Nine Star (Net2Ladder Services Program); Alaska Criminal Justice Commission; Alaska Mental Health Board/Advisory Board on Alcoholism & Drug Abuse; Christian Health Associates; True North Recovery; Office of Rep. Tarr; Recover Alaska; The Bridge; Mountain View Urgent Care;

Estimated Total Attendees: 59

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

Mr. Pistotnik opened the meeting by introducing the speakers for the meeting, and acknowledged the members of the Reentry Coalition Steering Team for their willingness to serve on the Steering Team and for their continued efforts in this work. Members of the Steering Team include: Chet Adkins; John Boullion (PRC); Christina Shadura (PRC); Benny Briggs (ANJC); Sam Adams-Lahti (VA); Demetria Veasy (DOLWD); Stacie Williamson (DOC Reentry); Lindsey Hajduk (NeighborWorks Alaska); Ret. Judge Stephanie Rhoades (One2One Mentorship Program); Yulonda Candelario (US Attorney's Office, Alaska); and John Hirst (Anchorage Probation).

2. *Presentation:*

Dave Berube, Legal Rights Advocate II, Disability Law Center of AK (dberube@dlcak.org; 907-771-8811)
Abigail Gurgiolo, Legal Rights Advocate, Disability Law Center of AK (agurgiolo@dlcak.org; 907-771-8814)

Mr. Berube explained that SOAR started in 2005 in the Lower 48 and that the trainings were introduced in Alaska in 2008. The idea is that case managers be trained in the SOAR technique, so that they can better work with individuals that are eligible for benefits (SSI, SSDI), assist them, and get them into treatment. Mr. Berube explained that through SOAR in 2020 there were more than 47,000 persons who were approved on initial applications for benefits representing a 65% approval rate – this exceeds unassisted applicants.

Mr. Berube described some of the complexities of the process involved when someone is denied, and the long drawn-out process some individuals experience when trying to appeal and resolve an application that can sometimes take up to 3-4 years. It was explained that when the process takes so long, many will simply give up pursuing these benefits. SOAR is geared to help improve these outcomes. Mr. Berube

Anchorage Reentry Coalition
Meeting Minutes
7/22/21
Hosted online via Zoom

explained that helping to guide people into recovery and into recovery services has positive financial impacts (fewer 911 calls, ER visits, and jail visits), and that the focus on recovery within the SOAR model helps guide people into housing, employment, and other needed social services. Mr. Berube explained that there are no designated staff people in Anchorage to specifically provide this particular service because of funding, although there is a person in Juneau doing this work in that community.

Ms. Girgiolo explained that the PABSS (Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security) grant is a grant that is funded by the Social Security Administration that is assigned to every protection and advocacy organization across the country; the Disability Law Center of Alaska is the protection agency in Alaska. It was stated that the goal of the PABSS grant is to assist those on SSI/SSDI that want to work, but face barriers to employment; the grant is intended to reduce barriers to employment for people with disabilities. Ms. Girgiolo stated that eligibility requirements for an individual to be serviced by this grant include: client must be on SSI due to a disability or on SSDI; must be seeking information regarding vocational or employment services; be on extended Medicare or on Medicaid under section 1619(b).

Ms. Girgiolo stated that this opportunity does not exclude those that may have justice involvement. Through the PABSS grant there are efforts to provide information and advocacy around employment rights, employability, job promotion and career advancement, discrimination, maintaining employment, and navigating employment networks. Staff working on the PABSS grant can also assist with job referrals, career development, vocational training, housing, responding to job discrimination, and more. It was explained that sometimes beneficiaries end up owing money back to the Social Security Administration; with some caveats, PABSS grant funding can potentially be used to assist with this over-payment situation. Ms. Girgiolo expressed interest in further enhancing relationships and connections with other organizations in the community, for the benefit of their clients.

It was explained that calling or emailing DLCAK is a good method for referring over a client that could stand to benefit from PABSS; it is through the intake process that it will be determined which supportive services might best help the potential client. It was further clarified that while the target population of SOAR began with homeless individuals, it is also available for transitional aged youth and children. Mr. Berube explained that here in Alaska there is no one person within the prison system that he is aware of that is dedicated to providing this type of assistance; through conversation it was suggested that there are Educational staff inside the facilities that can assist with disability paperwork and applications prior to release but the success rate of among such applications is unknown.

[Please refer to the SOAR White Paper and the PABSS White Paper that accompanied these presentations for more details about each opportunity]

3. *Presentation: John Boullion, Center Director, Partners Reentry Center (johnboullion@pfpalaska.org; 907-272-1192 x208)*

Mr. Boullion explained that the program at PRC typically runs for about six months (sometimes longer depending on the needs of the individual), and that PRC typically serves those have just returned to the community from incarceration. It was stated that staff have begun to do in-reach again, with visits to

Anchorage Reentry Coalition
Meeting Minutes
7/22/21
Hosted online via Zoom

Hiland and Anchorage Correctional Complex, and that the process for visiting Spring Creek and Goose Creek has been started; this is important, as there are things that PRC can do to help clients set up housing and establish an address before they are released to contribute to a more seamless process when returning to the community.

Mr. Boullion explained that there have been some changes and adjustments at PRC. The center has moved/expanded and is now located at 208 E. 4th Ave (same building, but different entrance), and there are currently discussions and arrangements being made to have ANJC, SCF Family Wellness Warriors, and Money Management be on-site in the old space to provide complementary services. Mr. Boullion explained there is a vision to have more of a one-stop-shop for clients that come to PRC. PRC has some new staff on board, the organization is working to adapt to the conditions in the community in response to COVID-19, and is continuing to refine how the program is structured.

Mr. Boullion stated that during the first month, clients are expected to work on the basics such as obtaining an ID, SS card, birth certificate, and attending PRC orientation workshops; clients are also encouraged to engage in pro-social activities. The Alaska Native Reentry Group is a support group that meets at PRC on Fridays, there is a peer support group that meets weekly, and there are plans to host other support groups through ANJC and SCF.

PRC will assist clients with housing for the first three months, and between months 4-6 the client is expected to do a part-pay for housing. Clients that successfully complete six months of PRC programming can receive assistance with transitioning into more long-term housing. PRC can assist clients with bus passes, clothing, work tools; assistance with setting up treatment or connection to other service providers in the community. Mr. Boullion explained that each Friday at 1:15pm there is a standing case management meeting and people are welcome to attend, and utilize that opportunity to introduce themselves and program. PRC will be hosting an open house on September 10th; those invitations are still forthcoming.

Mr. Pistotnik shared his perspective that PRC is very integral to helping to protect against housing and homelessness in Anchorage, and that it is his opinion that larger conversations happening around homelessness may overlook the role that reentry and reentry services plays. Mr. Boullion stated that he estimates that their organization works with about 12 different housing providers in the community and explained that most of the clients that do get assistance with housing would otherwise be homeless; there are conversations taking place to explore ways that PRC might be able to become more directly involved in working with the Municipality around the issue of housing currently homeless people.

4. *Presentation: Stacie Williamson, Program Coordinator, Dept. of Corrections Reentry Unit*
(Stacie.williamson@alaska.gov)

Ms. Williamson began by explaining that the DOC Reentry Unit has continued to develop, and is now comprised of eight staff members with one more set to join in the next month. Palmer Correctional Center is opening in August, and individuals will slowly be transferred to that facility as it becomes operational.

Anchorage Reentry Coalition
Meeting Minutes
7/22/21
Hosted online via Zoom

Contracts between DOC and educational providers are being re-established, and there are efforts to amplify engagement and delivery of services within the correctional institutions. It was stated that with COVID-19-related restrictions, programming inside the institutions was largely unavailable. Ms. Williamson stated that things are continuing to move forward after much of the disruption wrought by the pandemic.

Ms. Williamson stated that there has been fewer sign-ups for the Second Chance Grant program lately, and is attributed in part to the idea that the grant was ending; DOC is planning on extending this opportunity out to September 30, 2022 and it is anticipated that funding will last another year beyond that. The application process to apply for this opportunity is also being simplified down to a 1-page application with hopes that will improve engagement; if the applicant meets basic eligibility criteria, then an intake process will Caroline Cingel, the Protective Service Specialist, will take place.

Ms. Williamson clarified that in order for individuals to qualify they must be deemed to be medium to high risk, be actively engaged with programming while incarcerated, be 18 years of age or older, and be incarcerated for at least 30 days. This program is able to provide housing support, referrals to appropriate agencies, covering the cost of certain services such as relevant assessments, classes, or trainings, clothing vouchers, cell phones, bus passes, bicycles, and more. Currently, this opportunity is only available to individuals that are releasing to Anchorage, Mat-Su, and Fairbanks; there are hopes to expand in the future to other areas of Alaska. Individuals that are releasing from EM, furlough and halfway house can be eligible for this opportunity if they are under supervision, but referrals must begin prior to release from an institution. Unsented and pre-trial individuals are not eligible at this time. It was stated that DOC can assist individuals with getting connected with various training opportunities, depending on their interests and abilities.

5. Updates & Information Sharing:

Jonathan Pistotnik, Coalition Coordinator, Anchorage Reentry Coalition - Mr. Pistotnik shared that he had the opportunity to visit Spring Creek Correctional Center a few days ago, and visited with a small group of about 6 men there. While there, Mr. Pistotnik stated that he heard about the frustrations over the inability to access programming and treatment, and that they expressed an eagerness to get back to substantively rehabilitating and working on themselves. Mr. Pistotnik stated that a primary take-away was that the men he spoke with were hungry for pro-social engagement and substantive programming, and he encouraged the service providers and those engaged in in-prison programming to get in touch with their DOC contacts to help get the ball rolling on getting back into the institutions to engage with the inmates. Mr. Pistotnik stated that while he only made one visit to Spring Creek, he believes this sentiment is likely shared by others in other DOC institutions as well.

Mr. Pistotnik also shared that the Downtown Hope Center's Feed Me Hope Culinary and Bakery Job Training Program is conducting interviews for their next cohort Wednesday, July 28th @ 9:00am, and

Anchorage Reentry Coalition
Meeting Minutes
7/22/21
Hosted online via Zoom

stated that if your organization has referred clients to this program in the past that there is another opportunity to do so coming up.

Kim Miller, Net2Ladder Services Program, Nine Star (kimm@ninestar.org, 907-231-1144, call or text) - Ms. Miller shared that Nine Star's Net2Ladder Services Program is a program that is geared towards getting people employed, particularly above minimum wage. Through the Net2Ladder program there is a holistic effort to assist people with overcoming potential barriers to job placement and employment by working on soft skills, supporting emotional and behavioral health, promoting learning and skill building, assisting with career planning, and assisting with other needs. Ms. Miller expressed interest in collaborating with others including those working with people reentering the community. Potential clients can be referred directly to Ms. Miller.

Demetria Veasy, Department of Labor & Workforce Development/Alaska Job Center Network (demtria.veasy@alaska.gov) - Ms. Veasy stated that there is great deal of need to fill jobs, and that job seekers can obtain employment if they are serious about doing so. Ms. Veasy stated that the job centers are open, and that they are working with employers to fill vacancies. Ms. Veasy stated that some employers may be willing to hire the right individual despite prior justice involvement, especially if the referral comes through a trusted partner like the Job Center; there are likely some employers that are willing to give someone a second chance right now. Ms. Miller echoed this sentiment about more employers willing to hire someone with a background, especially smaller businesses. Ms. Williamson added that Pizza Man in Eagle River is paying \$15-19/hour and is willing to hire reentrants.

Shirley Staten from the Net2Ladder Services Program inquired about what opportunities currently exist to connect those who are about to release with potential employers in the community, prior to leaving incarceration. Ms. Williamson of DOC responded that the CAREERS Grant that is in the process of being implemented is intended to assist individuals with finding a career path; one staff person was hired to help implement this grant and a second staff person will be coming aboard in the near future. Ms. Williamson also clarified that individuals are referred to existing case management resources in their communities that can assist with linkages to employment opportunities. Mr. Pistotnik added that it is his perspective that there are opportunities to improve linkages between individuals seeking job and employment opportunities prior to someone releasing from incarceration.

Rep. Geran Tarr shared a Living Wage Calculator developed by MIT, and stated that while the Alaska minimum wage is \$10.34/hour, a living wage for a single person is \$15.27/hour and a living wage for a single adult and one child is \$30.21 (<https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/02020>). Rep. Tarr stated that financial stress is an important issue, and that meeting basic financial needs is an important topic that should be considered when we are having these conversations around employment. Ms. Miller from Nine Star concurred that financial stress is an important issue, and that right now there are opportunities to

Anchorage Reentry Coalition
Meeting Minutes
7/22/21
Hosted online via Zoom

have negotiations with employers regarding starting wages and raises that can help employees access living wages. Alaska Career Information System (AKCIS) was shared as a resource (<https://acpe.alaska.gov/PLANNING/AKCIS>). Ms. Veasy from DOLWD stated that even pre-pandemic there were conversations around offering living wages, and agreed that some employers are increasing their wages and offering hiring bonuses right now to incentive applicants.

Roger Branson shared that the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness has its database online (<https://aceh.org/data>) and expressed an interest in enhanced collaboration between ACEH and the reentry community. Mr. Branson stated that the database does contain statewide data, and that while there have been some critiques about the data it is the best known data available. Mr. Pistotnik shared his sentiment that he believed that reentry supports and reentry-centric service providers are important in protecting against homelessness, but that sometimes they are overlooked in larger conversations around homelessness in Anchorage since they funnel through state-funded efforts rather than through the Municipality; Mr. Pistotnik expressed interest in continuing to bridge the homeless service provider community and the reentry service provider community.

Other Information Provided In the Chat Box Separate from Speakers:

- Micro Enterprise Grants: <https://alaskamentalhealthtrust.org/alaska-mental-health-trust-authority/grants/micro-enterprise/>
- Anchorage Community Land Trust also has a entrepreneurship program: <https://anchorageandtrust.org/set-up-shop/>
- Trish Main (Anchorage Muni Aging & Disability Resource Center) - Please email me at adrc@muni.org if you'd like to receive our quarterly newsletter or for immediate consumers' needs our main line is 907-343-7770 www.muni.org/ADRC.

Next Meeting
TBD