

**Anchorage Reentry Coalition
Quarterly Meeting Minutes
4/25/19**

Representatives in attendance from the following organizations/groups: Partners Reentry Center; Alaska National Guard, Counterdrug Support Program; Akeela Development Corporation; Alaska Department of Corrections, Anchorage Probation; NeighborWorks Alaska; Public Defenders Agency (AmeriCorps); Arctic Recovery/Chris Kyle Patriot's Hospital; Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development, Midtown Job Center; Recover Alaska; Turiya of Alaska; Arctic Circle Counseling; Bean's Café; Anchorage Community Mental Health Services; Alaska Department of Corrections; Cook Inlet Tribal Council; Veteran's Affairs; Volunteers of America; Mat-Su Reentry Coalition; NAMI Anchorage; U.S. Probation; Southcentral Foundation.

1. Introductions.

2. Presentation: David Westlake, Darcy Stein, Deana Benedetti, and Bronson Frye from Turiya of Alaska. Mr. Westlake, and the rest of the Turiya of Alaska Team spoke about their involvement in teaching yoga inside Alaska correctional facilities over the last year and a half. The members of Turiya shared their very powerful and personal experiences teaching yoga inside the various adult correctional institutions that they visit around the State. Turiya of Alaska has more recently expanded their work to include yoga sessions to other settings such as McLaughlin Youth Center, VOA's ARCH program, Partners Reentry Center (PRC), and CITC's Chanlyut program. They have also offered yoga instructor trainings to currently incarcerated inmates. Mr. Frye also runs a construction union for the State of Alaska that has an apprenticeship program that teaches men and women vocational skills such as paint, drywall, glazing and glasswork; a criminal background does not necessarily impede a person's ability to get hired in one of these trades/jobs, and will not impede one's ability to get into an apprenticeship program Turiya of Alaska is in the process of establishing itself as a non-profit.

3. Presentation: Cheryl Charic, Anchorage Community Mental Health Services.

Ms. Charic presented on Anchorage Community Mental Health Services (ACMHS) and the 811 Housing Program. ACMHS provides a range of mental health support services, including both intensive support and more moderate support for those with less acute needs. Ms. Charic provided a brief overview of the 811 Program and stated that the State of Alaska was awarded funding through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to provide housing assistance to 200 individuals statewide. Assistance can last for up to five years. ACMHS works with NeighborWorks Alaska, which is the agency that is responsible for screening applicants and is currently the only participating landlord in Anchorage.

ACMHS aims to provide housing placement for up to 40 individuals over the coming year. After completing an initial piloting phase, ACMHS is moving into the second phase of the project and is seeking to place individuals into housing that have been released from institutional care within the last 12 months, including those that have been discharged from an inpatient psychiatric or residential treatment facility, jail or prison, or a long-term nursing home stay (over 6 months). Eligibility includes: meeting the HUD definition of a disabled person or family; demonstrate extremely low-income (\$20,850/yr or less for an Anchorage resident in 2018); be eligible to receive community-based

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services from a Division of Behavioral Health funded Community Behavioral Health Services Provider or Senior and Disabilities Services funded provider; and be between the ages of 18-62 at the time of entry into a housing unit.

There are certain excluding factors: having been evicted in the last three years from federally assisted housing for drug-related criminal activity; being currently engaged in abusive alcohol use, illegal use of drugs, or have a pattern of behaviors that may interfere with the health, safety, and right to peaceful enjoyment of the property by other residents; being on a State sex offender list; or having a history of manufacturing methamphetamines on the premises of federally assisted housing.

Additionally, the ACMHS Residential Team offers other supportive services to: assist qualified people in the program application process; help people identify funding to set up apartments; help people acquire and apply skills to maintain housing on their own; and identify other supportive services for long-term stability. *[Presentation is available via the Coalition Coordinator]*

4. Presentation: Mercy Rains, MSW Student/Reentry Coalition Intern.

Mercy Rains is a Master's of Social Work student at UAA and has been completing her practicum with the Anchorage Reentry Coalition by assisting with increasing the sustainability of the backpack project (Star Packs). Ms. Rains provided an overview of the history of the project, including the origins, current status, and background as to why the Anchorage Reentry Coalition is engaged in the project. Ms. Rains provide information about her research into what other similar projects have found. She stated that her intention was to initially evaluate the effectiveness of the project, however unforeseen barriers prevented her from completing the evaluation as planned; details on a possible evaluation design was presented. The backpacks contain basic essential items that many individuals need when they are released back to the community (toothbrush, soap, deodorant, shampoo, etc.). To date, all the items that have been acquired for the purposes of giving to reentrants have been donations. There was a recent influx of clothing donations as well. Currently, the backpacks are given to individuals that work with the Coalition Case Manager; however, an increased inventory could result in expanded reach of the project. Sarah Caldwell, the Coalition Case Manager added that the people that receive the backpacks do express appreciation for receiving them. The backpacks address some basic human needs and serve to implicitly acknowledge the dignity of the individuals that receive them. *[Presentation is available via the Coalition Coordinator]*

5. Presentation: Michael Berger, Active Citizen & Community Member.

Mr. Berger presented some photos that he has taken in the community and presented his perspectives about what he is seeing in the community. Mr. Berger expressed his concern regarding the impacts of drugs and alcohol in the community, in particular, among those individuals that are living on the streets or in homeless camps in Anchorage. As someone living in recovery himself, he emphasized the importance of emotional support and caring that are vital to lifting people out of addiction and despair.

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6. Update: Jonathan Pistotnik, Anchorage Reentry Coalition.

On April 17th the Anchorage Reentry Coalition host a reentry simulation. There were a total of 43 people that attended (24 people participating as “reentrants” and 19 people that helped facilitate the activity). Reentry Simulations are a hands-on activity that aim to give people a sense of the real-life challenges a person may face when they are released to the community after incarceration. The simulation increases knowledge and awareness, and is an opportunity to educate the community about reentry in Anchorage. Based on the feedback provided by attendees, it was very well received. Given that it was a new activity and the physical space was a limiting factor, the first simulation was not widely broadcast to the entire coalition/community. The next simulation is scheduled for the morning of Monday, June 24th at the BP Energy Center. The Coalition, with support from Yulonda Candelario of the U.S. Attorney’s Office, District of Alaska intends to put on other reentry simulations in the future beyond the June event.

7. Update: Isaac Diboue, Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development, Midtown Job Center.

The Hiring Event held at the Midtown Job Center on June 24th had upwards of 90 people in attendance, which was an improvement in terms of the number of job seekers over the previous year. Mr. Diboue stated that one of the employers present already had followed up with some applicants in regards to next steps in the hiring process. He stated that job seekers should not be afraid of applying for jobs, because there are a lot of employers that are willing to hire the right candidate despite what may have occurred in one’s past. There are thoughts of holding another Hiring Event, specifically targeting reentrants in several months (possibly September).

Next Quarterly Coalition Meeting:

July 25th at the NeighborWorks Alaska Office, from 9:30am-11am