

Anchorage Reentry Coalition
Meeting Minutes
9/10/20
Hosted online via Zoom

Representatives in attendance included those from the following organizations/groups: Alaska Department of Corrections; Southcentral Foundation; Partners Reentry Center; Alaska Behavioral Health; Department of Labor and Workforce Development; Alaska Public Defender Agency; Alaska Native Justice Center; Kenai Reentry Coalition; Akeela Development Corporation; Choosing Our Roots; NeighborWorks Alaska; Fairbanks Reentry Coalition; Running Free Alaska; Alaska Housing Finance Corporation; Aging & Disability Resource Center, Anchorage Health Department; Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center; Division of Behavioral Health; Office of Rep. Matt Claman; Bristol Bay Native Association; Christian Health Associates; Supporting Our Loved Ones Group; Anchorage Public Library.

Estimated Total Attendees: 41

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

Mr. Pistotnik welcomed and introduced the agenda of speakers and presenters for the meeting.

2. *Jen Galvan, Peer Support Program Manager, Alaska Behavioral Health (jgalvan@akbh.org; 907-444-3666)*

Ms. Galvan introduced herself and explained that she has been working with the AKBH residential team to build a peer program and training modules. It was stated that the State of Alaska approved of the training program in July, indicating it will meet the forthcoming state certification criteria regarding peer support training. The training entails completing an online application that pushes applicants to consider the stories that they will be sharing during the training process. Following that there is a lengthy PowerPoint presentation and some training videos (role of peers, origins, history, partnering with agencies, etc.). Then participants select a training, either an in-person class or Zoom, for a total of 35 hours. Ms. Galvan explained that there are a few training offerings available, including in Anchorage and Fairbanks. Current projections are that 200 people will be trained this year. Ms. Galvan explained that the training is a general peer support certification, although she has heard feedback regarding interest in forensic specialists, substance use peer support, family navigators. Ms. Galvan went on to explain that the training she is involved with is a core competency and can inform any specialized peer support track one may choose to pursue. Feedback on the training has been positive so far and information about the trainings can be shared with anyone who may be interested. The current grant will cover trainings up to Nov. 21, 2020, but there is an expectation that more classes will be arranged after that date and that classes will be offered at no-cost to participants. Ms. Galvan explained that this training is a statewide opportunity, that she is engaging with folks from Fairbanks, Juneau, Ketchikan, and that this opportunity is open to all regardless of location.

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3. *Jocelyn Ciarlone and Tom Duggan, AmeriCorps Volunteers, Public Defender Agency AmeriCorps Program (jocelyn.ciarlone@alaska.gov ; thomas.duggan@alaska.gov)*

Ms. Ciarlone and Mr. Duggan explained that they are AmeriCorps volunteers based at the Public Defender Agency in Anchorage. Ms. Ciarlone explained that AmeriCorps is a federal program, similar to a domestic version of the PeaceCorps, traditionally tasked with working with underserved communities. Ms. Ciarlone stated that the team they work on is spread across the state (Anchorage, Palmer, Juneau, Fairbanks, Ketchikan, and Kodiak), and that they are dedicated to working with clients of the Public Defender Agency and aim to connect clients with social services. Team members serve for 11 months; Ms. Ciarlone and Mr. Duggan will be ending their terms in September and November respectively, but four new members will be joining the team in October.

Mr. Duggan explained further that they connect clients with an array of services and applications, the main ones being SUD treatment and housing/shelter services, but also have included transportation and bus passes, job resources and training. Mr. Duggan stated that one thing that makes their clientele unique is that majority have open cases, and that lining up treatment services and/or housing can impact how the court handles their case in terms of bail and sentencing. In other instances, a client may be released on bail and in search of housing or other services. It was stated that many clients have few resources and that it can be a struggle to access services. Ms. Ciarlone reiterated that a lot of their work is centered on assistance with applications for various services and resources; in the past, that often entailed going into the jail but with COVID-19 that process has transitioned to phone and mail communication. Ms. Ciarlone explained that they are oftentimes put in positions to advocate for their clients reentering the community to service providers and resources who may be ineligible for certain services because they have an open case.

Mr. Duggan explained that in terms of accessing SUD treatment there are oftentimes delays that impact access to treatment (e.g. communication challenges between parties, lack of awareness), and that the barrier to accessing transitional housing is oftentimes rooted in a lack of access to funding. It was explained that the AmeriCorps team is tasked with locating applicable resources and that opportunities to connect with appropriate services and resources providers is very valuable. Demetria Veasy (Manager, DOLWD Midtown Job Center) offered up the Job Centers as an employment resource. Julia Terry suggested connecting with the Homeless Resource Advisory Council around the Tiny Homes Projects that they have been discussing. Mr. Duggan explained that enrollment in treatment or finding housing can possibly have an impact on sentencing.

4. *Jonathan Pistotnik, Coalition Coordinator, Anchorage Reentry Coalition*

Mr. Pistotnik explained that on an annual basis the Department of Corrections shares a limited amount of data regarding the reentry population that enters back into the community to the Mental Health Trust-funded reentry coalitions. It was stated that about two months ago, with the help of Janice Weiss at DOC, reentry data was shared with the coalition coordinators for CY2019. Mr. Pistotnik proceeded to present some of the data via a PowerPoint presentation. To begin, it was stated that according to AJiC, the State of Alaska inmate population stood at about 4,300 people as of 7/31/20 and that in comparison the Los Angeles County Sheriff Dept. (responsible for operating the county jail system in Los Angeles County) held

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more than 13,000 inmates as of 9/8/20. Mr. Pistotnik suggested that compared to other communities the numbers of people in the criminal justice system in Alaska are smaller and more manageable, and that recidivism could likely be reduced with proper allocation of time and resources.

Mr. Pistotnik explained that the data he received stated that in 2019 more than 3,200 people were released from DOC to Anchorage, representing 46% of all releases that year; to add context, Census data suggests that Anchorage has about 39% of the population, meaning that there is over-representation of reentrants coming to Anchorage compared to other communities. Mr. Pistotnik presented data that showed the percentage of releases to other communities: Fairbanks (10%), Mat-Su (10%), Kenai (6%), Bethel (4%), Nome (3%), and Juneau (3%).

In terms of demographics, Mr. Pistotnik stated that the data indicated 38% of reentrants to Anchorage were identified as White, 35% were Alaskan Native, and 12% were African American; 80% of releases were comprised of individuals between 20-44 years old; and 78% were males and 22% were females. The data indicated that in terms of offense, releases for misdemeanors comprised 57% and those for felonies comprised 43%; according to DOC, 83% of releases to Anchorage reflected non-violent offenses.

Mr. Pistotnik explained briefly that DOC uses the LSI-R tool to help determine needs and risks of those releasing to the community, and that it can be used to guide release planning and help determine eligibility for certain programs. It was stated that the data indicated that of those individuals with an LSI-R score releasing to Anchorage in 2019, over 50% of releases reflected individuals deemed to be low-risk. Alternatively, examination of the data reveals that among all those with the highest LSI-R scores (highest need, highest risk), almost 60% (+600 individuals) were released to Anchorage.

In total, the data reinforces the need for an array of services and support that will aid those with minimal needs and those with high needs. Mr. Pistotnik touched on the fact that there is over representation of Alaskan Natives and African Americans engaged in the Alaska criminal justice system, and that despite the fact that there is a larger discussion around the topic of systemic racism and inequalities across the country, it has been his perspective that these things are not new issues for people that have been directly working in, or impacted by, criminal justice issues.

[A complete summary of this data can be found on the Anchorage Reentry Coalition Website, by following the link to the "Data Sheet" link: <https://www.anchoragereentry.org/resources>]

5. *Christina Shadura, Anchorage Community Coalition Case Manager & PRC Reentry Case Manager (christinashadura@pfpalaska.org; Work Cell: 268-1356; Office Phone: 258-1195)*

Mr. Pistotnik introduced Ms. Shadura by explaining that he sees the Coalition Case Manager (CCM) position as complementing his own in that he works on community organizing, macro-level issues and that Ms. Shadura is able to do the individual case management and one-on-one work. Ms. Shadura explained that Partners Reentry Center (PRC) signed an MOA with NeighborWorks Alaska last November to provide case management services in accordance with this program. Ms. Shadura stated that upon

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getting ACOMS access that she became fully functional in her role as CCM (around January, 2020). It was explained the position was designed to work with DOC and can have a caseload of up to 40 individuals at a given time, and entails pre and post-release contacts to coordinate access and delivery of services for those releasing into the Anchorage area; individuals can be released from any correctional institution in the state. Ms. Shadura explained she tracks short and long-term outcomes, and performs data entry into AKAIMS as part of this program. It was also explained that the origins of this project occurred around the time that SB91 was implemented and concurrent to funding recidivism reduction efforts, and that the grant that funds the program is through the Alaska Department of Health of Human Services, Division of Behavioral Health.

Ms. Shadura then discussed program eligibility: both men and women releasing within the next 90 days to Anchorage are eligible for her caseload; individuals must have a felony offense and are medium to high risk (based on LSI-R score), or an individual with a misdemeanor offense that are high risk, or those with a sex offense charge. The program is intended to serve and work with clients for up to six months post-release. Ms. Shadura explained that one way to view the program is in stages: referral, pre-release, and post-release. The referral and pre-release processes, it was explained, take place up to three months prior to releasing to the community; the remainder of the program is the six months in the community. It was stated that most client referrals come to Ms. Shadura via the DOC ACOMS database from Institutional Probation Officers working inside the correctional institutions around the state, and that she is able to see Offender Management Plans that are intended to help the case manager with service planning and post-release service.

Ms. Shadura explained that one of her primary focuses is securing transitional housing pre-release so that individuals do not release to homelessness. As a staff member at PRC, Ms. Shadura has access to transitional housing resources and locations. It was stated that post-release, clients work with the case manager, develop a case plan and establish goals, and utilize the resources offered through PRC, including: a computer lab for job searching, employment workshops, treatment referrals, peer support groups, clothing vouchers, bus passes, public assistance application support. Ms. Shadura stated that she is also tasked with developing transition plans with clients and performing AKAIMS data entry.

Ms. Shadura stated that it can be a balancing act between meeting all the data tracking needs and data input, along with providing the direct services to clients. It was highlighted that this grant provides a small amount of supplemental funding that can be used for a limited type of services for clients which is of great value. Ms. Shadura stated that she currently has 27 active clients, each of whom has spent an average of 12 years incarcerated; the majority of clients are sex offenders; all but one are males; and clients are either very young or older in age. It was pointed out that the Second Chance Grant is a different program; this program is unrelated and there is a need to educate people of that fact (potential clients and staff). Ms. Shadura stated that referrals have continued during COVID-19, but they have slowed some and it is suspected that more clients are signing up for the Second Change Grant rather than going with this program. Ms. Shadura explained that she is developing informational flyers for DOC staff and for potential clients.

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Client access to information was identified as a major challenge; with PRC being closed to walk-in clients, Ms. Shadura stated that she feels that she is spending a lot of time providing basic information. Ms. Shadura stated that she has been helping clients with obtaining Social Security cards and identity documents (currently a major barrier), assisting with safety net program applications, and obtaining information regarding service availability (e.g. hours, processes and service availability during COVID-19). Ms. Shadura stated that there is oftentimes employment instability attributable to COVID-19 among clients.

6. *Angela Hall, Supporting Our Loved Ones Group*
(*sologrouplady@gmail.com; 907-315-2573; www.solog.org*)

Ms. Hall introduced herself as a member of the Supporting Our Loved Ones Group (SOLOG), whose husband is serving a virtual life sentence in Alaska. She explained that SOLOG is a support group for the families and friends of incarcerated persons in Alaska.

Ms. Hall shared about the impacts of incarceration on family members, including the stigma associated with having a loved one incarcerated; enduring through trials where they may be vilified for being a family member of the accused; suffering emotional tolls and public condemnation, while also carrying grief and guilt for the negative impacts and harm caused to others. It was stated that the totality of this may lead some to isolation, depression, suicide, and health complications stemming from stress and anxiety.

Ms. Hall stated that additional stress comes from having to navigate the correctional system: understanding policies; learning visitation etiquette and rules; adhering to mail regulations; setting up phone accounts; sending commissary money. Ms. Hall presented an example of arriving for visitation at a prison to visit a loved one, after driving hours to a remote location, just to arrive a few minutes late and be turned away; or being turned away because ones clothes or footwear; or enduring through the whims of the DOC staff who dictate how a visitation may go.

Ms. Hall expressed her frustration that visitations have been suspended for over six months, with an emphasis on why it cannot be allowed rather than on alternatives and solutions. Ms. Hall raised the issue about the resistance to utilizing technology, whether it be because of a state statute or security issues, it hadn't stopped video calls, mini tablets, and email capabilities from being implemented. It was stated that recent discussions surrounding the cost of infrastructure to make internet access possible, leading to more education access, reentry programs, and video calls, has not included discussions around the impact that a lack of visitation and programming has had on the mental health of incarcerated people and family members in the community; nor have discussions acknowledged the negative impacts on children and families. It was stated the threat of sending people out of state to be incarcerated elsewhere is evidence that families are overlooked.

Ms. Hall explained that families bear financial burdens including exorbitant telephone call fees, including long distance fees. One example that was presented: \$3.50 for a phone call through the telephone provider Securus to a prison might otherwise cost about \$1.00 in normal situations or be free altogether. Securus also puts a cap on the amount that someone can load onto an account, which also comes with a \$5 fee each time a \$50 deposit is made. It was stated that the State is responsible for negotiating and contracting with Securus. Ms. Hall stated that the current policy, during COVID-19, is to allow three 15

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minute phone calls at no charge to try and maintain family connections, but questioned whether 45 minutes of communication was sufficient for maintaining family connections. It was expressed that there is constant concern about loved one and communication is vital.

Ms. Hall requested that whatever solutions may be enacted by DOC to aid communication, that they be reasonable. It was shared that court fees, phone calls, commissary costs, in addition to travel costs associated with visitations places a substantial financial burden on those with a loved one who is incarcerated. Ms. Hall posited to meeting attendees: what would you do if you had a loved one who was incarcerated, would you support them or treat them like a disposable commodity? Ms. Hall closed by asking the reentry community and DOC staff to understand the role of families and loved ones in the community, and how they can impact successful rehabilitation and reentry, and serve as an added incentive and motivation to do better. Ms. Hall stated that there is an interest in working together, but families need to be engaged in conversations too, afforded reasonable visitation policies, be asked to pay communication and commissary fees that are affordable, and allow peer support and counseling opportunities.

7. Jonathan Pistotnik, Coalition Coordinator, Anchorage Reentry Coalition

Mr. Pistotnik offered attendees the opportunity to provide updates. Lindsey Hajduk introduced herself as the new Director of Community Development at NeighborWorks Alaska. Michael Farrell introduced himself as the new Jesuit Volunteer/AmeriCorps member based out of Partners Reentry Center.

Mr. Pistotnik mentioned that the next coalition meeting has not yet been scheduled, and that the platform for presenting at a coalition meeting is always open to anyone who is interested; please contact Mr. Pistotnik if interested.

Next Coalition Meeting
TBD