

Alaska Reentry Simulation

The Alaska Experience

The United States Attorney's Office, District of Alaska prioritizes and supports local reentry efforts as part of the Department of Justice's Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) initiative. The Reentry Simulation is an educational outreach event which highlights the struggles and challenges faced by individuals who are transitioning from incarceration back into their communities. The Reentry Simulation provides an opportunity for participants to gain an understanding of the significant obstacles and barriers faced by men and women upon their release from incarceration and return to their communities.

Each participant assumes the identity of a reentrant and receives a packet of materials, including a "Life Card." The "Life Card" describes the reentrant's criminal background, current living situation, employment status, and the specific weekly tasks that must be accomplished in order to avoid the risk of being sent back to jail for non-compliance with the requirements of his or her supervised release. The simulation begins with an explanation and instructions from the facilitator. The "Reentrants" then set out to navigate the challenges of reentry.

The room is set up with approximately 15 stations. Each of the stations represents the many places a returning citizen must navigate when they are first released. Each table has random elements which produce real life uncertainty when dealing with each of these stations and social service organizations. Some of the stations include Identification, Probation, Court, Education, Bank, Employer, Social Services, Church, Pawn Shop, Landlord/Rent, Transportation, Health Clinic, and Substance Abuse Treatment.

Over the course of about an hour, participants experience a simulated first month of post-release life. Each week takes place in a 15 minute segment. In between each of these segments, Reentrants are required to complete a probation check in, and depending on how successful they were in satisfying the conditions of their release and accomplishing their assigned tasks, the Reentrants are either remanded to jail, or returned to their assigned housing.

The Reentry Simulation provides visibility into the perspectives of the returning citizens who those in the field are tasked to help. The District's aim is to represent a realistic landscape of what individuals face when coming home. By experiencing these complex obstacles and barriers which reentrants must navigate post release, participants not only gain visibility into their individual perspective, but also discover innovative ways to help reentrants succeed. Successful reentry into the community is something which is difficult. It is a complex process. Since each person has different individual needs, resources, and histories, each person's life path is different. Successful reentry is not something that happens automatically upon release from incarceration, but is something which has a greater chance of occurring if planned for accordingly.

Partnering with Reentry Coalitions throughout the state, the United States Attorney's Office, District of Alaska, has co-hosted over 20 simulations in the past year, and educated well over 1,500 people on the challenges to reentry. The events have been well received, and attended by legislators, prosecutors and defense attorneys, social service providers, mental health professionals, employers and employment assistance professionals, criminal justice professionals, law enforcement, probation, parole and corrections professionals, religious organizations, high school and college students.

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Media coverage of events:

<https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/news/archive/2019/11/students-simulate-prisoner-reentry-grasp-hurdles.cshhtml>

<https://www.ktuu.com/content/news/Understanding-recidivism-in-Alaska-through-simulation-565259192.html>

<https://www.webcenter11.com/content/news/Reentry-Simulation-demonstrates-difficulties-of-prisoners-returning-to-society-562140681.html>

<https://www.juneauempire.com/news/breaking-the-cycle-community-leaders-roleplay-a-rough-reentry-to-society/>

Special Thank You

After attending the USAO, Southern District of Florida's Second Annual Reentry Simulation in West Palm Beach, Florida in March 2019 (<https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdfl/pr/us-attorney-s-office-hosts-second-annual-reentry-simulation>), The USAO, District of Alaska was inspired to bring this event to life in Alaska -tailoring the experience to reflective of Alaskan Communities.

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Alaska Contact Information

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