

## Why Work Matters

In this edition of our newsletter, we reflect on the ways SAIL has helped people with disabilities find safe, gainful employment, and build the skills they need for success. We have seen the employment landscape dramatically shift throughout this pandemic, and finding work has become even more challenging for people experiencing disabilities.

Meaningful employment is more than just income – it fosters camaraderie, dignity and a sense of purpose. It is through the support of donors like you, as well as integral partnerships with community organizations, state agencies and local and tribal governments, that SAIL is able to make a difference in the lives of adults and teens who want to work a win for our consumers, a win for employers, and a win for our communities!

Our hard work continues as Covid 19 cases rise throughout our region, but we hope you will celebrate these successes with us and know that the spirit of personal independence is strong in Southeast Alaska.



Joan O'Keefe  
SAIL Executive Director

## What Happens in Vegas, Stays in Vegas

For John, that's a good thing! **Early in 2021, John desperately needed a change in scenery.** He decided to make the move from the desert to the rainforest of southeast Alaska, ultimately landing in Ketchikan. Before his move he was connected with SAIL Independent



Living Advocate Rock Eddy, and it was clear that John had a fierce sense of independence.

"John could have written a manual on how to self advocate!" chuckled Rocky. "I could see how articulate, driven, and passionate he was about his own health and well-being, and how ready he was to leave an unhealthy life in Las Vegas behind him."

*"Rocky and SAIL are a big part of my success. They were able to plug me into resources that got me fully prepared for school and work."*

In addition to addiction troubling numerous family members in Las Vegas, John battled his own mental health issues most of his adult life, taking a toll on his overall well-being. Having at one point tipped the scales at more than 600 pounds, John's

current 300 pound frame dealt him many associated joint issues, making it difficult to do much of anything outside of his home.

John had a clear idea of where he *continued on page 3...*

# Scenes From Around Southeast: Teen Summer Work Programs



*"These teens get things done!"*



*"It's a great program to get used to the working field, what it's like to work alongside others and what is expected of you while on the job."*

More teens than ever before spent summer employed through SAIL's work programs! Teens across Southeast had the opportunity to bring home a paycheck, develop their education and vocational goals, and cultivate the soft skills necessary to put them on a path for success. In all, 38 youth, supported by four peer mentors were served. Partnerships with local businesses and organizations throughout our region, with funding from the Alaska Department of Labor Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, made it all possible.

In Juneau, our partners at the Arch Gordon Youth Center and Juneau's Parks and Recreation team kept teens busy working on local trails and parks. From weed whacking to trail building to safe use of power tools, there was always something new for the crew to learn.

A highlight for many was building a yurt for the recently reopened SAIL Challenge Course at the Eagle Valley Center. The group did everything from building a strong foundation at the start to tying the canvas on at the end. **Problem solving, communication, team work, safety protocols, and sharing new skills were key to the success of their mission.**

In Haines, teens were busy gardening, maintaining local hiking trails, organizing a rummage sale, and recycling fish nets...they even helped prepare for the return of the Southeast Alaska State Fair! The students completed projects nearly as fast as staff could think of them while numerous local organizations benefited from their hard work. As the fair's Maddy Witek exclaimed, "These teens get things done!"

Our inaugural Ketchikan program was a huge success. In partnership with the State's Department of Natural Resources, the crew of eleven spent six weeks cleaning campsites, hauling gravel, clipping brush, repairing grip tape on boardwalks, and participating in beach erosion control. The group also visited local businesses to learn about job opportunities and the life skills needed to live and work independently after high school. They learned about careers in the ship building industry, visited a local bank to understand the basics of personal finance, and lucked out with a fishing charter outing for some team bonding!

Over on Baranof Island, our Sitka crew worked with several community partners to build and maintain trails. One student wrote, "The Summer Work Program was my first experience with a physically intense job and I absolutely loved it!" This is the second year of summer work in Sitka and teens were able to build off previous projects and relationships developed during 2020's inaugural season. We look forward to continuing our momentum into next summer!



*"The Summer Work Program was my first experience with a physically intense job and I absolutely loved it!"*



## What Happens in Vegas...

*...continued from front page* wanted to go with his life, and what kind of support he needed to get there. With two successful college years behind him, he wanted to finish his degree. However, in addition to the expenses associated with furthering his education, he needed transportation assistance to get to and from his job, as well as new clothing that would fit his shrinking frame.

**Now, 6-months after John's arrival, he has a steady job at a local social service provider.** It is on the bus line and in the mental health field--an area he is personally passionate about. He is making great connections professionally, and is thankful for the income.

"Work is great," confided John. **"I really enjoy working with our clients and making a difference in their lives. It is exactly what I was looking for in a job."**

With employment secured and a bus pass in-hand, Rocky assisted John with grant applications for a pass to the Ketchikan Rec Center swimming has been an integral part of his weight loss, not to mention good for his mental health, well-fitting clothes, and a laptop and printer for his online college classes.

**Life couldn't get much better for John right now.** He enjoys his job, is enrolled for fall college courses, is getting around well, and his health continues to improve. Just the other day John was seen walking past the SAIL office, daughter on one side while holding the hand of his joy-filled granddaughter on his other. All laughing, all happy to be together, without a care about the life he left behind in Las Vegas.

**"I can honestly say that Rocky and SAIL are a big part of my success.** They were able to plug me into resources that got me fully prepared for school and work. It is obvious that everyone at SAIL has a passion for the work they do. They went the extra mile for me."

## The Long Road to Getting Back to Work



A 2017 graduate of Juneau-Douglas Yadaa.at Kalé, **David made an impact on his fellow students during his time in school.** From track and field athlete to basketball team manager, David soaked up every opportunity to engage alongside his peers. Now, as an adult, David hopes to do the same with a meaningful career in the community.

*“I am so ready to go back to work!”*

After completing a work experience in the medical field through Project SEARCH, **David knew he’d need long-term on-the-job assistance to be successful.** This meant his only

opportunity for sustained employment support was through a Developmental Disability Medicaid Waiver. This comprehensive set of wrap-around services allows individuals with developmental disabilities to live dignified, independent lives of their choosing. **For David, working was a way to combat his increasing sense of isolation and boredom.** “I have been stuck at my house and I want to get out,” he lamented.

This is where Leone Marx, SAIL’s Developmental Disability Resource Connection DDRC Coordinator, jumped into action. After helping David and his mom, Jackie, through the application and eligibility process, David was initially drawn for a waiver that provided only limited services and didn’t cover the assistance David needed in the home or out in the community, including employment.

But that didn’t stop David. **After nearly three years, several more application attempts, and some hard-earned advocacy victories, David was finally drawn for a full Medicaid Waiver and is excited to get back to work with the right set of employment supports.**

So how does David feel about the possibility of working in the community again? “I am so ready to go back to work!”

## A New Home for SAIL

SAIL is excited to be a part of the innovative effort to build a social services hub in Juneau. **Teal Street Center** will house eight nonprofits, and will serve thousands of people each year of all ages, cultures and socioeconomic groups.

SAIL is a committed partner in the campaign to bring Teal Street Center to fruition because we know it will transform the way social services are delivered in Juneau. It is designed to eliminate the difficulties of transportation, time and cost for those trying to meet with scattered providers, and strengthen quality social service delivery by creating a one stop shop.

Our new home will maximize efficiencies for SAIL and other tenants with shared spaces like a large conference room, lobby, reception, and operating costs, plus convenient

collaboration so we can focus our resources on positive outcomes for our consumers.



Teal Street Center breaks ground this fall, with an opening date in late 2022. Stay tuned for ways you can get involved, and learn more at [www.TealStreetCenter.org](http://www.TealStreetCenter.org).