



# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOT:

## Muscogee Nation

Concerned the State of Oklahoma wasn't doing enough to prepare its people who were leaving prison for life outside of it, MCN established its Reintegration Program (RIP) in 2004. Committed to protecting the public by "re-invest[ing] positive citizens back into our communities,"<sup>1</sup> RIP provides its clients an array of restorative support services rooted in Muscogee culture.<sup>2</sup> These include pre-release needs assessments, GED acquisition, life skills and vocational training programs, resumé preparation, college tuition assistance, behavioral/mental health supports, legal services, work clothing and tools, financial assistance for housing and groceries, and job placement services – whatever each client needs to avoid reoffending, get a job, and build a career.<sup>3</sup> RIP clients must work or be actively pursuing employment; when not working, they must "pay it forward" by volunteering to perform community services, from mowing tribal elders' lawns to picking up roadside trash.<sup>4</sup> In 2021, RIP launched its Fiber Optic Technician (FOT) program, which teaches 15-participant cohorts trade-critical skills in the high-growth field.<sup>5</sup> After eight weeks, trainees complete four-week paid internships before seeking employment. FOT boasts a 100% job placement rate for its graduates, who can make upwards of \$100,000 a year working for RIP's network of employers.<sup>6</sup> Trainees who need housing reside *and* train at RIP's campus, which features a 36-bed transitional living facility for eligible RIP clients, "state-of-the-art educational and vocational training" classrooms, and RIP's administrative headquarters.<sup>7</sup> RIP also recently opened a call center on site to employ RIP clients while they reside there. By eliminating *all* of the barriers – such as a lack of transportation – standing in the way of participants' success, RIP makes its exceedingly difficult for them to fail, which explains the 6.9% recidivism rate among RIP clients (dramatically lower than Oklahoma's 15.6% rate).<sup>8</sup> Following the *McGirt* Supreme Court decision, RIP expanded its services to support justice-involved MCN members *during* their sentencing processes, which has enabled many to avoid prison by completing RIP-customized diversionary plans.<sup>9</sup>

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[Muscogee Nation Reintegration Program](#)

[Tribal Access to Justice Innovation: Muscogee Creek Reintegration Program](#)

[What Does Reintegration Mean to You? The Muscogee \(Creek\) Nation Reintegration Program \(video\)](#)

[Harvard Honoring Nations: Muscogee Nation Reintegration Program](#)

[Tony Fish: The Muscogee Creek Nation Reintegration Program \(video\)](#)

[Making Reentry Work in Tribal Communities \(video\)](#)

[Mvskoke Media: Nine Muscogee citizens graduate Fiber Optic Tech Program](#)

[Mvskoke Media: Breaking generational curses with training opportunity](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Muscogee Nation Reintegration Department, <https://www.muscogeenation.com/department-of-education-and-training/reintegration/>, accessed June 26, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> For example, RIP “facilitates cleansing ceremonies to help inmates prepare spiritually for reentry into society. Reintegration Program staff work with prison chapels to provide rocks for sweats, offer blessings, and coordinate sponsors.” As RIP Program Manager Tony Fish explains, “Traditionally in our culture, once you pay your debt to society, we brought you back in, we restored you back into the tribe. And that’s the philosophy we’re trying to instill in our citizens” (Tribal Access to Justice Innovation, “Muscogee Nation Reintegration Program” profile, 2023 (<https://tribaljustice.org/places/corrections-reentry/muscogee-creek-reintegration-program/>, accessed June 26, 2024)).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. RIP’s activities are supported by an evolving mix of federal grants coupled with increasing MCN funding, which sits at \$2 million annually (MCN funding for RIP was \$400,000 in its first year of operation). RIP staff invite MCN’s political leadership to RIP events so they can “see what the tribal dollars are funding,” which has been key to the Nation’s sustained political and financial support of RIP and the ultimate goals it seeks to achieve (Tony Fish, Manager, Muscogee Nation Reintegration Program, Conversation with NCAI, June 26, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. The activities that are a part of RIP’s “Service Pay Back” initiative “help clients build personal connections, make a contribution to the community, and show society that they have changed” (Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, “Muscogee Creek Nation Reintegration Program, Honoring Nations: 2008 Honoree, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2009 ([https://hwpi.harvard.edu/files/hpaied/files/muscogee\\_creek\\_nation\\_reintegration\\_program.pdf?m=1639579104](https://hwpi.harvard.edu/files/hpaied/files/muscogee_creek_nation_reintegration_program.pdf?m=1639579104), accessed April 29, 2024).

<sup>5</sup> Training topics include “pole climbing; including learning to climb in the power zone, jigging or pulling fiber from start to finish, introduction to fiber splicing; both residential and commercial, learning to splice, hanging strand and fiber and lashing them together, hanging self- support and sagging to proper tension & troubleshooting. OSHA 10 and CPR certification are also included” (Muscogee Nation Reintegration Department (<https://www.muscogeenation.com/department-of-education-and-training/reintegration/>, accessed June 26, 2024)).

<sup>6</sup> Tony Fish, Conversation with NCAI, June 26, 2024. According to Fish, RIP chose the fiber optic technician occupation for its training program because the field is “offender-friendly” and because the skill sets the program teaches are in incredibly high demand: “We cannot train enough people to fill all of the positions area and regional employers have available” (Ibid.).

<sup>7</sup> Tribal Access to Justice Innovation, “Muscogee Nation Reintegration Program” profile, 2023 (<https://tribaljustice.org/places/corrections-reentry/muscogee-creek-reintegration-program/>, accessed June 26, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Of the 101 clients served by RIP over the past two years, only seven have reoffended (Muscogee Nation, *MCN Reintegration Recidivism Rate (2004-2024)*, July 1, 2024; OKLAHOMA Transparent Safety Performance, “Investing in Our Safety and Infrastructure,” April 11, 2024 (<https://oklahoma.gov/top/performance-goals/safety.html> , accessed July 2, 2024).

<sup>9</sup> Tony Fish, Conversation with NCAI, June 26, 2024. In *McGirt v. Oklahoma* (2020), the U.S. Supreme Court held that crimes committed by Native people on tribal lands must be prosecuted by either tribal authorities or the federal government - not the state government (Laura Temme, “McGirt v. Oklahoma Case Summary,” FindLaw, July 18, 2022 (<https://supreme.findlaw.com/supreme-court-insights/mcgirt-v--oklahoma-case-summary.html#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20the%20U.S.%20Supreme,Media%20coverage%20McGirt%20v.,> accessed June 26, 2024)). The ruling has afforded MCN – through its reintegration program – the ability to directly engage the sentencing process on the behalf of RIP clients.