

DMC Action Network eNews

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Thinking Outside the Box: Baltimore City, Maryland's Approach to DMC Reduction

In November 2009, we highlighted Baltimore City's Pre-Adjudication Coordination and Transition Center, which was recognized by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention as a national best practice for DMC reduction. Nine months later, advocates are armed with new data that demonstrate the program's value for keeping youth in the community while preserving public safety. Samantha Mellerson, director of education and social justice initiatives at the Family League of Baltimore, shares how the PACT Center and other programs are helping to combat DMC in her jurisdiction.

When Baltimore City, a DMC Action Network partner site, [won an award for its evening reporting center from the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention](#), it earned bragging rights in the juvenile justice community. The award recognized that the city's Pre-Adjudication Coordination and Transition Center (PACT Center) was an innovation worth replicating in other parts of the country as an effective strategy to reduce racial and ethnic disparities.



The PACT Center (photo left) emerged from the recommendations of the city's DMC Advisory Board, which highlighted the need for community-based alternatives to secure detention. The program focuses on those youth who would otherwise be detained because of a lack of success in less intensive alternatives to detention. Located in West Baltimore, the program

provides support services to youth to ensure that they attend scheduled court hearings, avoid re-arrest, and appear in court with a comprehensive needs assessment and individualized plan that is designed to identify community resources that will help the youth avoid future delinquency.

Earning a national award from the federal government is no small thing, but it may not be enough to sell some stakeholders and community members on the benefits of programs such as the PACT Center. That's why the Family League of Baltimore, which coordinates the city's DMC reduction efforts, lined up an independent analysis of the PACT Center's effectiveness. Advocates believed that the independent evaluation would generate evidence that this strategy for reducing racial and ethnic disparities made sense from a public safety perspective.

DMC Action Network

The DMC Action Network is a project of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's [Models for Change](#) initiative.

The Network aims to share knowledge and accelerate progress in the reduction of racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system.

[Lisa Garry](#), DMC Policy Director for the Center for Children's Law and Policy, manages the DMC Action Network. [Travis Long](#), Project Coordinator, provides administrative and technical support to the Network.

Core States

Pennsylvania
Berks County
Philadelphia
Lancaster County

Illinois
Peoria

Louisiana
Jefferson Parish
Rapides Parish

Washington
Benton/Franklin Counties
Pierce County

Partner States

Maryland
Baltimore City
Baltimore County
Montgomery County
Prince George's County

Wisconsin
Rock County
Outagamie County
Kenosha County

They were right. [The evaluation](#) indicated that of the more than 400 youth served by the program since July of 2007, 98% appeared for their scheduled court hearings and 92% did not reoffend while participating in the program. Almost all (99%) of the youth that have been served at the PACT Center have been African American.

Samantha Mellerson, director of education and social justice initiatives at the Family League of Baltimore, noted that these numbers "will help justify continued funding for the PACT Center in the face of budget cuts." However, Mellerson noted that the evaluation was also important because "it demonstrated that we were getting better results than other community detention alternatives, even though we were taking in higher-risk youth who would otherwise be held in secure detention."

Baltimore City opened the PACT Center in 2007 to meet an unmet need in community-based alternatives to secure detention. Recently, stakeholders such as Mellerson have turned to identifying other unmet needs that impact DMC. For example, Mellerson helped bridge a partnership between the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services and the Baltimore City Public Schools to ensure that youth released from detention find appropriate school placements within five days of their release. The program has helped place 129 youth in school since April 2009, and Mellerson is poised to analyze data on engagement and truancy rates for those youth in the near future.

Mellerson and others at the Family League have also begun thinking about reducing DMC through youth workforce development. In Baltimore City, that meant looking at what job opportunities were available for youth in their own communities. After securing \$1 million in support from the Open Society Institute, which was matched by the Baltimore City Department of Social Services, the Family League was able to fund 310 year-long positions with local businesses that were committed to hiring youth from neighborhoods with the highest arrest rates and out-of-home placements. The goal is to generate positive experiences for youth that help them build their skills and their resumes.

"We wanted to think broadly about how to generate interest in DMC and how to impact delinquency. This was an opportunity to grow our DMC work and expand it into a new segment of the community by engaging employers committed to and experienced in working with underserved youth," said Mellerson. The Family League is working on building capacity to collect data on outcomes associated with the program, as well as ensuring that youth have resources and supports to stay engaged with their positions over the course of the year.

According to Mellerson, the ability to share new ideas and successful strategies for reducing racial and ethnic disparities is what makes the DMC Action Network a unique and valuable tool. For example, Berks County, Pennsylvania, whose evening reporting center is now a model for others throughout the Commonwealth, sent a team to learn about Baltimore City's PACT Center before deciding to design a similar program to meet the needs of its community. In Baltimore City, the PACT Center was one good idea that was worth sharing. It's certainly not the last.

For those interested in learning more about the Baltimore City PACT Center and the Berks County ERC, representatives from both jurisdictions will be conducting a joint workshop at the Coalition for Juvenile Justice's 2010 National DMC Conference. The event will take place from October 23rd to 35th in Jersey City, New Jersey. [Click here to obtain additional details about the event and to register online.](#)

Tell us how you're measuring success in DMC reduction in your jurisdiction: email jszanyi@cclp.org.

Kansas
Sedgwick County
Seward County
Lyon-Chase County

North Carolina
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Youth engage in activities at the Baltimore City Pre-Adjudication Coordination and Transition Center (PACT Center).

Once a DMC Action Network Member, Always a DMC Action Network Member

Since joining the DMC Action Network in 2007, Rock County, Wisconsin, has shown that data-driven approaches to DMC reduction work. After working in 2008 to expand the number and quality of detention alternatives, officials saw a 27% drop in the number of youth of color admitted to secure detention for probation violations. The increased use of detention alternatives, along with other DMC-focused initiatives, helped lower the number of youth who are locked up from an average of 20 youth per day in 2002 to an average of 14 per day in 2009.

A big part of Rock County's success stems from its commitment to building its data capacity and using data to take action. Ariel Barak, who served as Rock's DMC Data Analyst, was integral in making the case for change and keeping reforms on track by analyzing and distilling information from the County's system. In fact, Barak shared tips on how to let data speak for itself at the DMC Action Network's [Technical Assistance Seminar for DMC Coordinators this past December.](#)

Barak has just moved on to neighboring Dane County, where he now serves as a program analyst for the Department of Human Services. He notes, though, that he is "still invested in the DMC reduction efforts underway in Rock County." The Network wishes him the best, knowing that he will be a strong advocate for equity and fairness wherever he directs his talents.

MacArthur Foundation Releases Video Capturing Reforms in Berks County, PA

On August 3, the MacArthur foundation released a brief video that highlights the reforms that have occurred in Berks County, Pennsylvania, as a result of the jurisdiction's involvement in the Models for Change Initiative. The film, entitled Reforming Juvenile Justice in Pennsylvania, describes how stakeholders are helping to improve community safety while reducing the number of young people in secure detention. You can view the video by [clicking this link](#).

Wichita Eagle Features Programs Aimed at System-Involved Youth in Sedgwick County, Kansas

On August 13, the Wichita Eagle ran a front-page story on new initiatives serving system-involved youth in Sedgwick County, Kansas, a DMC Action Network partner site. The article reviews two programs aimed at connecting youth with paid work opportunities in the community, funded in part by the County's Crime Prevention Fund and modeled after a similar program operating in Los Angeles. You can read the full story by [clicking this link](#).

TA Tips: Practical Advice for Successful DMC Reduction

This section of our newsletter focuses on sharing strategies and insights that can help jurisdictions effectively and sustainably eliminate DMC in their juvenile justice systems.



This month's tip is to **summarize and share the successes in your jurisdiction**. Knowing that a new program or change in practices is working is certainly good news for those involved in reforms: promising results let individuals know that they are on the right track in terms of their analysis and approach to DMC reduction.

Stakeholders should also make the effort to translate results into materials that they can share with a broader community, be it legislators, community groups, or local foundations. For example, the Family League of Baltimore has developed [a summary of the evaluation of Baltimore City's evening reporting center](#) in order to help educate other individuals on the program's value. By highlighting key results, such as near-perfect court attendance, and illustrating the services that youth receive, the document helps any individual grasp the value of such a program - even someone who is not a juvenile justice professional.

If you have a tip you would like to share, or if you would like to hear more about a particular topic, let us know: email jszanyi@cclp.org.

The Newest DMC and Juvenile Justice Resources

- Boston Magazine has published a piece on sentencing youth with mental illness to life without parole for crimes committed as juveniles. The article, entitled *Teenage Wasteland*, [cites evidence of a stark racial disparity in Massachusetts](#), where African American youth "make up 6.5 percent of children in Massachusetts under age 18, but 47 percent of those sentenced to life without parole."
- The National Juvenile Justice Network has released a new policy platform on [youth reentry and aftercare](#). The publication outlines recommendations for best practices in data collection, programming, family and service integration, case planning, and other services.
- Child Advocacy 360 has published the results of an investigation into effective messaging strategies for advocates. The project, entitled [Solutions Storytelling: Messaging to Mobilize Support for Children's Issues](#), draws upon interviews, focus groups, surveys, and "talkback testing" - which involved showing several versions of stories to a group and monitoring how the various story angles influenced the conversation. You can review a video summary of the research, along with specific tips for advocates, through the link above.
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation has released the latest edition of its [KIDS COUNT Data Book](#), which captures national data and state-by-state data and rankings on 10 key indicators of child well-being. The report finds that overall improvements in child well-being that began in the late 1990s stalled in the years just before the current economic downturn.

The *DMC eNews* reports on efforts to reduce disproportionate minority contact in juvenile justice systems in the [DMC Action Network](#). [Lisa Garry](#), DMC Policy Director for the Center for Children's Law and Policy, manages the DMC Action Network. For a PDF version of this newsletter, [click here](#). You can also contact us anytime with comments or suggestions at jszanyi@cclp.org or 202-637-0377 x108.