

DMC Action Network eNews

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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

A Formula That Works: Community Engagement and Data-Driven Strategies for DMC Reduction in Benton-Franklin Counties

In Washington State's Benton-Franklin Counties, financial shortfalls have forced the counties to limit the population at their 80-bed detention center to 35 youth. That cap can help keep detention numbers down and encourage officials to think twice about which youth should spend time in detention. However, officials there are also hard at work engaging the community and identifying innovations aimed at reducing racial and ethnic disparities in their jurisdiction.

When Benton-Franklin Counties, Washington, joined the DMC Action Network as a core site in 2007, officials knew that their community was somewhat unique. For one, Benton-Franklin is a bi-county jurisdiction: it joins two historically rural counties that have recently experienced substantial growth, with a total population of about 230,000 residents. Additionally, Franklin is the first "majority-minority" county in the state, where 83% of youth aged 10 to 17 are Latino and 1% of youth are African-American.

Benton-Franklin may be different from other Action Network sites in some respects, but the jurisdiction's approach to DMC reduction is the same: identifying data-driven innovations to reduce racial and ethnic disparities. For Jacqueline van Wormer, the Counties' DMC Coordinator, that effort started with results of a survey of 530 community members and children, which indicated the need for better information on the intricacies of the juvenile justice system.

"We have many large families who live in the counties, which is a great protective factor for youth, but those families also have to be able to successfully navigate the system," said van Wormer, who was recognized as a "Champion for Change" by the MacArthur Foundation in 2008. In order to develop that guidance, Benton-Franklin convened a youth council to develop a brochure about the juvenile justice system that was specific to the local community. Additionally, youth council members helped write and act in a DVD illustrating the juvenile court process, which plays continuously in the Juvenile Justice Center's lobby. That DVD includes unscripted testimonials, offering tips and other advice, from youth and parents who have had experiences with the system.

Van Wormer and her colleagues have also focused their energies on ensuring that the system described in those materials treats all youth fairly. As part of its work with the DMC Action Network, Benton-Franklin has worked on lowering truancy rates and exploring graduated responses for youth accused of violating the terms of their probation. Most recently, stakeholders have turned to reducing the number of youth detained on bench warrants issued after failing to appear for scheduled court hearings. Van Wormer noted that "although our counties don't struggle with this issue as much as some other jurisdictions, we still wanted to do whatever we could to reduce the number of youth who ended up detained for that reason."

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

Kansas
Sedgwick County
Seward County
Lyon-Chase County

North Carolina
Union County
Carrabus County

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We Want Your

As part of its response, Benton-Franklin implemented a calling system to remind youth and family members of upcoming court hearings. Initially staffed by one volunteer, the program now has work-study funding for a part-time caller. Benton-Franklin is currently gathering data to determine the program's impact on detention admissions and DMC. At the same time, stakeholders are working to better understand the causes of failures to appear by surveying youth who are detained for that reason, as well as family members - data that will help the case for other improvements to reduce unnecessary detention admissions.

Engaging the community has always been an integral part of identifying and implementing causes of and solutions to DMC, according to van Wormer. In the past year, the Counties have convened a sixteen-member Latino community leaders group, which includes the head of the Latino chamber of commerce and the local community college's director of diversity and outreach. That group has started thinking about reaching out to the Latino community through talk radio on topics such as truancy laws and resources for youth. Similarly, the Counties



helped facilitate numerous meetings of African-American community leaders, a group that has taken on truancy prevention and disparate treatment in the jurisdiction's public schools.

Close community ties have also sparked direct outreach to youth. This past July, Dr. Novella Bridges, a scientist at Pacific Northwest National Laboratories (photo left), adapted a skills-building program promoted by her sorority, Delta Sigma Theta, for securely detained youth in Benton-Franklin. The program, known as Empowering Males to Build Opportunities for Developing Independence (EMBODI), aims to provide mentorship, service learning opportunities, and skill-building to African-American teenage males. Dr. Bridges noted that

although she lives in an area with a relatively small number of African-American youth, "DMC is still alive and well in the community." For her, the idea of adapting the program for African-American and Latino youth in detention made perfect sense, as "these were the youth who many individuals in the community had not been able to reach."

EMBODI was so well received by youth and staff that there are plans to repeat it in the coming months. According to van Wormer, Dr. Bridges' leadership in spearheading the program and her desire to help vulnerable youth represents the type of community involvement that makes a real difference in Benton-Franklin: "Engaging passionate people is absolutely critical to this work."

Tell us how you're engaging your community in DMC reduction: email jszanyi@cclp.org.

2010 Champions for Change Awards: Call for Nominations

Models for Change is now accepting nominations for the annual Champions for Change awards. The Champions for Change awards recognize excellence in Models for Change leaders and partners. In 2008 and 2009, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Coalition for Juvenile Justice were pleased to recognize one leader from each of the four core Models for Change states (Pennsylvania, Illinois, Louisiana, Washington) for outstanding work that exemplifies practice in improved and model systems.

New this year, the nomination process has been expanded to include nominations from the Models for Change Action Network partner states, one Champion for each of the Models for Change Action Networks focused on 1) Mental Health and Juvenile Justice, 2) Juvenile Indigent Defense, and 3) Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC).

Feedback!

We want to hear from you about how we can improve the DMC Action Network eNews.

Help us ensure that the eNews is a valuable resource for your work by [clicking here and completing a short online survey](#).

You can also contact us anytime with comments or suggestions at jszanyi@cclp.org or 202-637-0377 x108.

Nominations will be submitted to the Coalition for Juvenile Justice, and the Models for Change Executive Committee will select one Champion from each core state and one Champion from each of the three Action Networks. [Click here for additional details on the nomination process](#). **The deadline for submissions is tomorrow, September 30, 2010.**

Models for Change Quarterly Newsletter Features DMC Action Network

The most recent edition of the MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change quarterly newsletter highlights efforts in the DMC Action Network to make reforms last. The feature story focuses on several strategies in individual DMC Action Network Sites that are helping to sustain reforms that benefit youth of color in those jurisdictions. [Click here to view the current issue](#), or visit the Models for Change website to [view past issues of the quarterly newsletter](#).

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 **use data to spark a discussion among a new group of community members**. Facts and figures are necessary to gauge the impact of a particular innovation on racial and ethnic disparities. However, numbers can also play an important role in galvanizing community interest in DMC. In Benton-Franklin Counties, stakeholders employed data to do just that, convening groups of Latino and African-American community leaders and providing numbers on the juvenile justice system in their jurisdiction.

Those data became the foundation for a discussion about what to do to improve the situation of system-involved youth. In Benton-Franklin, letting community members work through the data with guidance from stakeholders ensured that community members felt a sense of ownership of reforms in their jurisdiction. That sense of ownership is critical to ensuring ongoing involvement with and support for work to reduce DMC.

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

- A new study published this month by the Southern Poverty Law Center reveals significant racial gaps in suspension rates among middle school students. Education researchers Daniel J. Rosen and Russell Skiba conducted the study, which found that 28% of African-American males were suspended at least once during a school year in a national sample of over 9,000 middle schools - nearly three times the 10% rate for white males. That disparity was even more significant in a subsample of eighteen urban school districts. You can download the full report, entitled *Suspended Education: Urban Middle Schools in Crisis*, by [clicking this link](#).

- A lack of data collection on disparities in education, housing, and employment opportunities hampers the ability to address racial, ethnic, and gender disparities in the criminal justice system, according to a new report by the W. Haywood Burns Institute and the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California. The report, [Balancing the Scales of Justice](#), gathers data from three California counties, presents findings from those jurisdictions, and outlines recommendations for future research.
- A new paper aims at helping advocates build effective coalitions to support juvenile justice reform. Robert M. Francis, Executive Director of RYSAP Catalyst for Community Change and Co-Chair of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, drafted the piece, [which includes two case studies of coalition building in Connecticut, as well as a description of strategies for success](#).
- The Justice Policy Institute (JPI) has released an analysis of the FBI's 2009 Uniform Crime Report, which indicates that crime has dropped in all regions of the country as prison growth has slowed in the wake of the recession. [The fact sheet](#) reports a 5.3% drop in violent crime and a 4.6% drop in property crimes. Building on that data, JPI also released a report entitled [Money Well Spent](#), which outlines the case for focusing spending on positive social services that improve public safety rather than expanding corrections and law enforcement.
- This month, *Time* [released a video feature on YouthBuild](#), a youth and community development program aimed at helping low-income youth ages 16 to 24 work toward their GEDs or high school diplomas, learn job skills, and serve their communities. The feature focuses on one of 273 YouthBuild sites around the country, describing the stories of two youth participating in the program in Newark, NJ.

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.