

DMC Action Network eNews

Issue #20 | January 2011

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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 Children's Law and Policy,

Confronting the Challenges of DMC Reduction: Staying Focused on Reform in Rapides Parish, LA

Working to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in systems that serve at-risk youth is challenging, but knowing about strategies and tools to promote DMC reform can help jurisdictions that are committed to change anticipate and overcome obstacles. With that in mind, officials in a DMC Action Network core site share how they have improved their data collection capacity and built relationships with law enforcement as part of their work to improve outcomes for youth of color.

When Rapides Parish joined the DMC Action Network, officials there knew that tackling racial and ethnic disparities in their jurisdiction wouldn't be easy, but they were committed to making it work. As a small community where it often seems like everyone knows everyone else, it was not difficult to sell community members on DMC reduction from the standpoint of ensuring fairness and equality for youth and families. However, those same individuals did not anticipate that the most effective approach to DMC reduction would be so data-driven.

Three years later, Rapides has shown its willingness to press forward, instituting new data collection methods and structured decision making tools. And, according to Larry Spottsville, Director of Juvenile Services for the Ninth Judicial District Court in Rapides Parish, the work in Rapides has helped to "change the conversation" on racial and ethnic disparities in his jurisdiction.

In Rapides Parish, a primarily rural jurisdiction in central Louisiana of about 130,000 residents, youth of color represent approximately one-third of the population between the ages of 10 and 16. As Spottsville notes, "part of the initial logistical difficulty was gathering true data on DMC so that we could have a conversation with the key stakeholders based on information and not just impressions."



With financial assistance from the Models for Change initiative, Rapides purchased software that allowed it to gather data on youth entering the Parish's secure detention facility, the Renaissance Home for Youth (photo left, courtesy of Renaissance Home for Youth). Officials there also implemented the [MacArthur Foundation's](#)

manages the DMC Action Network.

Core States

Pennsylvania
Berks County
Philadelphia
Lancaster County

Illinois
Peoria

Louisiana
Jefferson Parish
Rapides Parish

Washington
Benton/Franklin Counties

Partner States

Maryland
Baltimore City
Montgomery County
Prince George's County

Wisconsin
Rock County
Outagamie County
Kenosha County

Kansas
Sedgwick County
Lyon-Chase County

North Carolina
Union County
Cabarrus County

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[guidance on accurate collection of race and ethnicity information through the use of a 2-question approach](#) to enhance the accuracy of information on youth in the system. Shauna Epps of the Center for Children's Law and Policy also helped Rapides develop a "Juvenile Contact" form to standardize the data that different law enforcement agencies collected on youth.

These data helped spark a dialogue among the Parish's juvenile justice officials. For example, in 2007, African-American and Latino youth represented approximately 83 percent of detention admissions in Rapides. According to Spottsville, his strong working relationships with judges and representatives of the Parish's three largest law enforcement agencies were instrumental in obtaining buy-in for discussions on reducing that overrepresentation.

As a result of these discussions, officials formed two committees. One focused specifically on the development of a detention screening instrument (DSI). The other focused on other DMC reduction strategies, such as identifying strategies to help youth on probation succeed and avoid secure detention for probation violations. Rapides chose the development of a DSI as one of its strategic innovations when it joined the DMC Action Network. The instrument aims to ensure that law enforcement officials make objective decisions about which youth should be detained.

The first committee's work led to the implementation of a DSI in February 2008, with a final version agreed upon in July of that year. According to Sylvia Singleton, the Parish's DMC Coordinator, one challenge in developing the DSI was convincing stakeholders that completing a standardized screening instrument was worthwhile in a rural jurisdiction where officers felt they knew many youth well enough to make appropriate detention decisions. "In a community where law enforcement officers were frustrated with seeing the same youth come through the system, it was a challenge to change their mindset and get them to look at the situation differently," said Singleton.

Rapides partnered with the University of New Orleans to conduct a validation study of the DSI this past fall. The study concluded that when law enforcement officers used the instrument, it resulted in a significant reduction in the proportion of African-American youth who were detained, without a reduction in the number of youth detained for violent offenses. Spottsville says that the DSI is a work in progress, as "stakeholders are still critiquing the instrument." Rapides officials have continued to train and re-train law enforcement officers on consistent use of the DSI, as some officers remain skeptical of the instrument's value. Singleton notes that although keeping stakeholders engaged in the process is not always easy, it's critical to ensuring that reforms stick.

Singleton has been "instrumental" in keeping work on track, according to Spottsville. That includes efforts to implement a graduated responses grid for probation violations. Singleton also assists Latino youth and families who come into contact with the system, having experience as a translator for the Ninth Judicial District Court.

Spottsville is excited about the progress that Rapides has made in the past few years, particularly the Parish's achievements in building its data collection capacity and relationships with law enforcement. He looks forward to sharing the fruits of the important procedural and cultural changes that have been made so far.

Share the challenges that you've encountered and overcome in your jurisdiction: email jszanyi@cclp.org.

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.

W. Haywood Burns Institute Receives MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions

This month, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation recognized the W. Haywood Burns Institute (BI) for its work to protect and improve the lives of youth of color and poor youth and the well-being of their communities. The BI has partnered with the Center for Children's Law and Policy in developing data collection tools and strategies to work to reduce DMC in juvenile justice systems in the DMC Action Network and throughout the country.

As a recipient of a 2011 MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions, the Burns Institute received \$750,000. The award will go toward augmenting its operating reserve and creating an online technical assistance training center to help jurisdictions better utilize the BI's tools and methods. [You can read more about the award and the BI's work by following 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 **think about how graduated responses for youth on probation could help reduce racial and ethnic disparities in your jurisdiction**. As one of the DMC Action Network's strategic innovations, the approach involves developing an array of responses to both youth compliance and noncompliance with probation. Consequences for noncompliance take into account seriousness of a specific probation violation and its risk to public safety when holding youth accountable for misbehavior. The strategy also emphasizes the importance of rewarding youth for meeting goals and expectations as a way of helping them succeed.

On January 20th, the DMC Action Network hosted a teleconference designed to help Network sites implement and hone graduated responses. James McCarron, Director of Probation Services for the Fairfax County, VA Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court shared his jurisdiction's experience developing and implementing that strategy for juvenile justice-involved youth.

While sharing practical pointers with Network members, McCarron stressed that the implementation of graduated responses is an ongoing and multi-year process. Jurisdictions should expect push back, particularly from more experienced probation staff. In overcoming that challenge, it is important to incorporate staff into the early development stages to prevent graduated responses from being perceived as something imposed solely from the top down. Involving line staff also ensures that they take ownership of the program and understand its underlying philosophy, not just the mechanics.

McCarron also noted that, at the outset, probation officers did not employ rewards as continuously as they did sanctions. To increase the use of incentives, administrators found it helpful to highlight some of the rewards that line staff already used, such as extending curfews or permitting sleepovers, as part of the rewards continuum. In Fairfax County, probation officers utilize early termination of probation most frequently as an incentive. Administrators are also working to obtain funding for more incentives, such as gift cards, in addition to exploring

new options to add to their sanctions continuum.

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 News and Resources

- This month, the television network A&E began broadcasting a new multi-episode show, [Beyond Scared Straight](#), which follows youth involved in several different "scared straight" programs throughout the country. In a public statement to A&E, the Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) highlighted research suggesting that "Scared Straight" interventions are ineffective for delinquency prevention and have been linked with higher rates of re-offending. Click here to read [CJJ's public statement](#), and [follow this link](#) for a fact sheet on existing studies of "Scared Straight" programs.
- The Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance has released a new report outlining how reforms in the state have benefitted youth and taxpayers, all while juvenile crime and recidivism rates have dropped. The publication, [Safe and Sound: A New Approach to Juvenile Justice and Its Effect on Public Safety and Spending in Connecticut](#), analyzes data on arrests, recidivism, status offenses, and diversion programs, in addition to outlining achievements and remaining challenges.
- The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) has published its Proposed Plan for Fiscal Year 2011, describing the discretionary program activities that OJJDP proposes to carry out during the year. The agency is soliciting comments on its proposed plan, which OJJDP will take into consideration in developing its Final Plan. [Click here to view OJJDP's Proposed Plan and detailed guidance on submitting comments, which are due by February 28th.](#)
- OJJDP has released a new bulletin, [Substance Use and Delinquent Behavior Among Serious Adolescent Offenders](#). The report presents results from the Pathways to Desistance study, which interviewed more than 1,300 juvenile offenders for the 7 years after their conviction to determine what leads them to persist in or desist from serious offending. The bulletin focuses on understanding the connection between substance use and serious offending. The research explores how these behaviors affect one another in adolescence and how they change in early adulthood.
- The Justice Department released a proposed rule on the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), which calls for the adoption of national standards aimed at combating sexual abuse in juvenile facilities, adult prisons and jails, lockups, and community confinement facilities. [Click here to view the proposed rule and learn how to submit comments on the proposed standards.](#)
- This month, the Juvenile Law Center introduced a new podcast series focused on the Luzerne County "kids for cash scandal," which JLC helped uncover two years ago. The series, [Reform in the Wake of Luzerne](#), discusses the practices and policies that allowed the abuses in Luzerne County to persist and the efforts underway to reform the juvenile justice system statewide.

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.