

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.

Committing to Change, Getting Results

What can you do about DMC with relatively little funding but a big commitment to racial and ethnic fairness? Outagamie County, Wisconsin, answers that question by sharing how it engaged community members to reduce arrests, divert youth from entering the juvenile justice system, and improve services.

In some respects, Outagamie County, Wisconsin, resembles many counties throughout the United States. A community of around 175,000 residents, Outagamie includes a range of small communities surrounding a mid-sized city. The county's juvenile justice agency serves an increasingly diverse group, with Latino youth the fastest growing segment of its youth population.

So what makes Outagamie County special in terms of DMC reduction? A serious commitment to improve outcomes for children of color and a willingness to take action.

Outagamie joined the DMC Action Network as a replication site in the fall of 2009. At that time, officials had already been working to reduce racial and ethnic disparities. However, the county continued to struggle with disparities in certain areas. "We've had historically high and disproportionate arrest rates for certain offenses, such as disorderly conduct," notes Mark Mertens, Manager of the Youth and Family Services Division of the Outagamie County Health and Human Services Department.

As part of the Action Network, Outagamie officials focused on reducing the number of disorderly conduct arrests as a way of keeping children of color from entering the juvenile justice system altogether. In just a year's time, disorderly conduct arrests dropped almost 20%. Although youth of color are still disproportionately represented at the point of arrest, Outagamie is continuing to work on strategies to reduce disparities.

According to Mertens, community engagement plays a key role in explaining the county's progress in reducing the number of kids of color who enter the system. "DMC reduction isn't about finding a magic program that will eliminate disparities," says Mertens. "It's about building relationships with partners in the community that will help improve policies and practices."

The county has a strong, diverse DMC governing body which is co-chaired by the county's deputy district attorney. Mertens emphasizes the importance of having a group of stakeholders identify and monitor reforms. But DMC reduction has meant more than just meetings. "We're making a real effort to work with

[Lisa Garry](#), DMC Policy Director for the Center for Children’s Law and Policy, 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

individual police officers, juvenile justice professionals, and other decisionmakers to show them that DMC reduction isn’t about giving a break to kids of color. It’s about good juvenile justice practice.”

Officials have introduced two reforms aimed at reducing disorderly conduct arrests in the county’s public schools. The first, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, or PBIS, equips school officials with a broader range of techniques to manage conflict situations on school grounds. The second, the Police-School Resource Program, aims to prevent kids from entering the juvenile justice system by linking them with services and supports that address disruptive behavior. “We saw that many kids were getting arrested just to obtain services that wouldn’t otherwise be available to them,” says Mertens. The county now contracts for a full-time counselor who connects youth with those services, such as social skills training, anger management, family counseling, on-site behavior support and intervention, and other wraparound services, without formal involvement in the system.

These programs, along with other changes, helped Outagamie raise its diversion rate at arrest from 33 percent in 2004 to more than 50% today. The county has also changed practices to better serve kids who do enter the system.

“Thanks to the Action Network, we’re now using a risk assessment instrument, the YASI, that helps us objectively identify the strengths and needs of particular youth,” explains Mertens. At the county’s evening reporting center, staff use the YASI to tailor programming. Mertens sees the value in having a community-based alternative to detention that is not simply “one-size-fits-all,” but that is flexible enough to respond to the needs of individual youth. As a result, he is planning to expand services at the reporting center by allocating additional funding in next year’s budget.

In the next couple of years, Mertens hopes to build on the county’s early accomplishments as a DMC Action Network site. Thanks to funding from the MacArthur Foundation, Outagamie was able to hire a consultant who is helping officials develop a system of graduated responses for youth compliance and noncompliance with probation. The county is also using that additional capacity to examine recidivism data and better understand how to reduce disparities at the deep end of the system.

Mertens highlights the Action Network’s value in bringing new ideas to his jurisdiction. He is working with Wisconsin’s other DMC Action Network sites, Rock County and Kenosha County, to sustain and expand that partnership after the end of the Models for Change initiative: “I’m really proud of what we’ve done, and we’re all eager to show others throughout the state that we have a process that works.”

Tell us about how you’ve partnered with others to reduce DMC: email jszanyi@cclp.org.

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We Want Your

Berks County, PA Selected as Demonstration Site for Georgetown University Program

Georgetown University Public Policy Institute’s Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJRR) has selected Pennsylvania as one of four states to implement its Juvenile Justice System Improvement Project, or JJSIP. Moreover, CJRR will use Berks County as Pennsylvania’s local demonstration site for the project. Berks County is one of the DMC Action Network’s core sites and a leader in work to reduce racial and ethnic disparities.

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

The JJSIP is designed to help states reduce recidivism and improve other outcomes for juvenile justice-involved youth by better translating knowledge on "what works" into everyday practice and policy. Through a competitive application process, CJRR selected Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Florida, and Arizona to participate in the program.

Shay Bilchik, the Director of CJRR and former administrator of the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, said "We hope that implementing the JJSIP provides the field with more information on how to take research we have about effectively serving juvenile justice-involved youth and apply it to improve outcomes for all youth who touch the system. This has been a key challenge facing our work—a challenge we believe the JJSIP will help address."

[Click here to download the full press release.](#)

American Bar Association Proposes New Standards for Courts Serving Limited English Proficient Individuals

This month, the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants proposed ten new standards for language access in courts. The proposed standards incorporate federal guidance from the Justice Department, [discussed in the April eNews](#), regarding the need for recipients of federal funding to take reasonable steps to accommodate speakers with limited English proficiency (LEP).

Thirty ABA members from various segments of the juvenile and criminal justice system formed an advisory committee to create the draft standards. The standards seek to improve the structural and day-to-day interactions between LEP speakers and the courts. Among other things, the standards urge courts to:

- Promulgate rules to aid LEP individuals in understanding their rights and the services available to them;
- Improve data collection, allow individuals to self-identify as LEP, and work to identify potential LEP individuals;
- Provide interpreters throughout the entirety of court proceedings to a broad spectrum of individuals, including witnesses, guardians and parents of youth, and others who may have a special interest in the proceedings;
- Provide interpretation services free of charge;
- Offer legible translations of court documents that are reviewed for accuracy;
- Make efforts to provide interpreters during other court-mandated services; and
- Screen prospective interpreters and translators and provide them with ongoing education.

The Committee will submit the draft standards for final approval at the annual ABA meeting in August. [Click here to review the standards and to learn more about the project.](#)

The Newest DMC and Juvenile Justice Resources

- New research published in the journal *Science* shows that children who lack access to early childhood education programs face poorer educational opportunities and a higher likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system than youth who do have access to those programs. The study, conducted by the University of Minnesota, tracked the development of 1,400 low-income youth of color from Chicago over a 25 year period. [Click here to find out more about the study and its findings.](#)
- This month OJJDP released its findings from the 2009 National Youth Gang Survey. [The fact](#) sheet tracks nationwide data from 2002 to 2009. The publication also includes information on the factors that influence local gang violence and compares statistics from rural, suburban, and larger cities.
- In a landmark decision, the United States Supreme Court ruled that police must consider a child's age when determining whether he or she is "in custody" for the purpose of administering a *Miranda* warning. In *J.D.B. v. North Carolina*, the Court ruled in the case of a 13 year old who confessed when questioned in school by police officers. [Click here to read Juvenile Law Center's summary of the case.](#)
- The Coalition for Juvenile Justice has published a new fact sheet, *Deinstitutionalizing Status Offenders (DSO)*. The publication includes data on the number of juveniles in residential placement for status offenses, as well state-level policy changes aimed at avoiding the incarceration of status offenders. [Click here to learn more.](#)

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.