

## Innovation Brief

# Bridging the Divide: Enhancing Collaboration between the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems to Respond to the Needs of Dually Involved Youth

In DuPage County, Illinois, youth who have concurrent involvement with both the delinquency and child welfare systems comprise only a small percentage of youth in the juvenile justice system. However, officials believed that the complex and intensive needs of these dually involved youth warranted a specialized response.

DuPage County officials developed a set of integrated, cross-system responses to decrease arrests of youth in congregate child welfare placements, prevent unnecessary or prolonged stays in secure detention, and integrate juvenile justice and child welfare case planning while youth are on probation supervision. With the success of these innovations, DuPage County not only improved cross-system collaboration and outcomes for dually involved youth, but they also began to address dual juvenile justice and child welfare system involvement as a source of racial and ethnic disparities within the juvenile justice system.

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### About This Innovation Brief

This innovation brief is one in a series to highlight reforms from the *Models for Change* initiative that had a measurable impact on children of color in the state of Illinois. This innovation brief describes how DuPage County, Illinois used strategic data analyses to define the extent and nature of child welfare system involvement among youth in the local juvenile justice system, examine the effects of race and ethnicity on juvenile justice outcomes for dually involved youth, and develop

a continuum of integrated, multi-system responses that would improve outcomes for this high-need subpopulation of juvenile justice involved youth.

### The Issues

Consistent with national norms, the DuPage County child welfare and juvenile justice systems have traditionally operated in silos, with each system working separately to provide services to the youth in their care. Although research has demonstrated that child maltreatment is

*Models for Change* is a national initiative funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to accelerate reform of juvenile justice systems across the country. The initiative aims to create replicable models of reform that hold young people accountable for their actions, provide for their rehabilitation, protect them from harm, increase their life chances, and manage the risk they pose to themselves and to public safety. Through *Models for Change*, the MacArthur Foundation has supported work in sixteen different states around the country.

One of the primary goals of *Models for Change* is to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in juvenile justice systems—also referred to as “disproportionate minority contact” or “DMC.” To achieve that goal, *Models for Change* has supported improved data collection and analysis to help identify the causes of disparities. The initiative also promoted effective responses to findings from the data, including objective decision-making tools, improved language and cultural competency, education and workforce development, and detention alternative and nontraditional services. As part of this effort, the MacArthur Foundation launched the DMC Action Network, a group of 17 jurisdictions working together to share knowledge and accelerate progress in the reduction of racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system.

a strong risk factor for juvenile delinquency and that it is common for youth to have involvement with both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, many jurisdictions lack an effective standard of practice to ensure collaborative planning and management of dually involved cases.

In 2002, the DuPage County Department of Probation and Court Services (Probation) acknowledged the need for a specialized response for youth on probation who also had concurrent involvement with the child welfare system. Probation assigned a dedicated staff person to monitor all such cases and provide tailored case-planning and intervention services to dually involved youth. Centralized handling of these cases revealed a troubling pattern: youth on the dually involved caseload seemed to be admitted more frequently to secure detention and spend longer periods there than their counterparts who were not involved with the child welfare system.

In 2006, when DuPage County received funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to implement juvenile justice systems reform through the *Models for Change* Initiative, county officials saw a unique opportunity to build on Probation’s case-management intervention for dually involved youth. With these new resources, DuPage County officials established a multi-disciplinary workgroup, which included core representation from Probation, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS, the child welfare authority), local law enforcement, researchers, and local congregate care facilities. The workgroup sought to do three things: 1) document baseline data on the scope and nature of dually involved youth in DuPage County, 2) foster a shared vision and strategic approach for an integrated child welfare/juvenile justice system response, and 3) reduce the unnecessary entry and penetration of dually involved youth into the juvenile justice system. As stakeholders would later learn, these efforts to improve outcomes for dually involved youth would also begin to address a source of racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system.

Working internally with administrative probation data, the DuPage County workgroup conducted an initial analysis that confirmed what they had already observed anecdotally. DuPage County’s dually involved youth showed a higher incidence of secure detention admission and had an average length of stay in detention that exceeded the median length of stay. Analyses also revealed that a significant number of these youth resided at one particular residential child welfare placement facility which specialized in treating children and adolescents with severe emotional and behavioral issues. The workgroup also determined that many of the dually involved youth were initially placed on probation pursuant to arrests that occurred at the facility.

In 2010, the DuPage County workgroup expanded the scope of its work beyond dually involved youth in the congregate care setting to look more broadly at youth on probation who may have had previous or current involvement with DCFS. To investigate further, the workgroup partnered with the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign’s Children and Family Resource

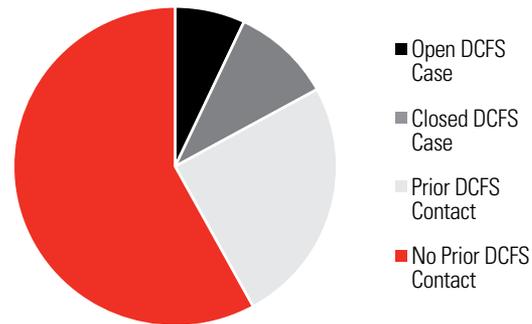
Center (UI). The UI research team matched nine years of juvenile justice data with nearly 20 years of administrative data from DCFS.

The University of Illinois data analyses revealed that the incidence of dual system involvement among youth at arrest, detention, and probation placement was much higher than DuPage officials previously understood. At the point of arrest, for example, 15% of youth had a prior DCFS contact, while 5% had a previous open DCFS case and 3% had a current open case. Among youth on probation, 19% had a contact history with DCFS, 7% had a prior open case, and 5% had a current open case. The most striking of the research findings were at secure detention. The data showed that a full 42% of youth in secure detention had a prior or current relationship with DCFS: 7% had a current open case, 10% percent had a prior open case, and 25% had a prior DCFS contact.

The UI study also investigated the correlation of dual history and dual involvement with other factors, including a youth's race, ethnicity, gender, offense type, and system service history. These analyses uncovered very significant differences across race and ethnicity demographics. For example, African American youth accounted for 28.3% of all secure detention cases, which is a significant overrepresentation considering that African American youth comprise approximately 7.3% of DuPage County's youth population as a whole. Researchers also found that African American youth accounted for 45% of detained youth with DCFS contact histories, 63% of detained youth with prior open case histories, and 61% of detained youth with current open cases while in secure detention. The investigation also showed that while open DCFS cases accounted for only 7% of detention cases overall, they accounted for 13% of all African American males entering detention and a full 27% of all African American females entering secure detention.

The investigators concluded that the child welfare system is an important pathway for African American youth to enter the DuPage County juvenile justice system. While the DuPage stakeholders did not contemplate an effort to reduce racial and ethnic disparities when they first set out to develop an integrated response for dually involved

## DuPage County Detention Admissions



youth, these research findings made it clear that dual system history and involvement were significant sources of racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system<sup>1</sup>. Thus, improving outcomes for DuPage County's dually involved youth would also have implications for reducing the overrepresentation and disparate treatment of youth of color in the local juvenile justice system.

## Innovations

DuPage County officials knew that in order to meet the needs of dual history and dually involved youth, the juvenile justice and child welfare systems would have to fashion innovative system responses that acknowledge the unique needs of these subpopulations. With independent planning and management of cases occurring in each system, there were many opportunities for dually involved youth to fall through the cracks. In order to meet the needs of dually involved youth, DuPage County stakeholders knew that they would have to mend the culture of this fragmented system through substantive policy and practice reform.

## Congregate Care Response Model

Based on early data findings, the workgroup initiated a partnership between Probation, the residential facility, and the local police department to develop a Congregate Care Response Model. The plan was to promote better management of disruptive behavior at the group home, thereby decreasing police contacts and youth arrests at the facility. The workgroup discovered that facility staff would often call 911 for youth exhibiting threatening or aggressive behaviors at the facility when other

interventions may have successfully addressed the conduct without resulting in arrest or detention. Although staff and administrators could anticipate these behaviors when working with youth with histories of trauma and behavioral health issues, administrative guidelines provided no clear policy on when staff should contact police. In the absence of clear administrative guidance and oversight, staff made decisions subjectively on a case-by-case basis. Inevitably, once police responded to the facility, the likelihood that the incident would result in an arrest was increased significantly.

To address this issue, the facility implemented a new policy, which outlined how staff should respond to aggressive behavior and established clear and objective criteria for when staff should request police intervention at the facility. This policy ensured that staff would call police only when youth presented a clear and immediate danger and each call required supervisory review and oversight for these decisions. The response model included enhanced staff training and professional development resources to improve crisis-management skills among facility staff so that they would be better able to manage aggressive behaviors internally, thereby decreasing the need to contact police and subsequent opportunities for arrest that inevitably follow those contacts.

A key element of the response model was to dispel the perception of group home residents as violent delinquent offenders by educating law enforcement personnel about the facility's role as a placement for youth with histories of abuse and neglect. The model also sought to enhance law enforcement's understanding of the behavioral health and trauma issues experienced by youth at the facility and how these histories might cause youth to respond aggressively or defiantly and escalate interactions with police. As a result, police officers were better able to understand aggressive or challenging behaviors exhibited by youth within a child maltreatment framework and also have the skills to deescalate interactions and decrease the likelihood of arrest. While not an official element of the model, this increased training and collaboration prompted police officers to volunteer at the facility teaching youth chess, playing basketball, and improving the recreation space available to residents. Officers and police

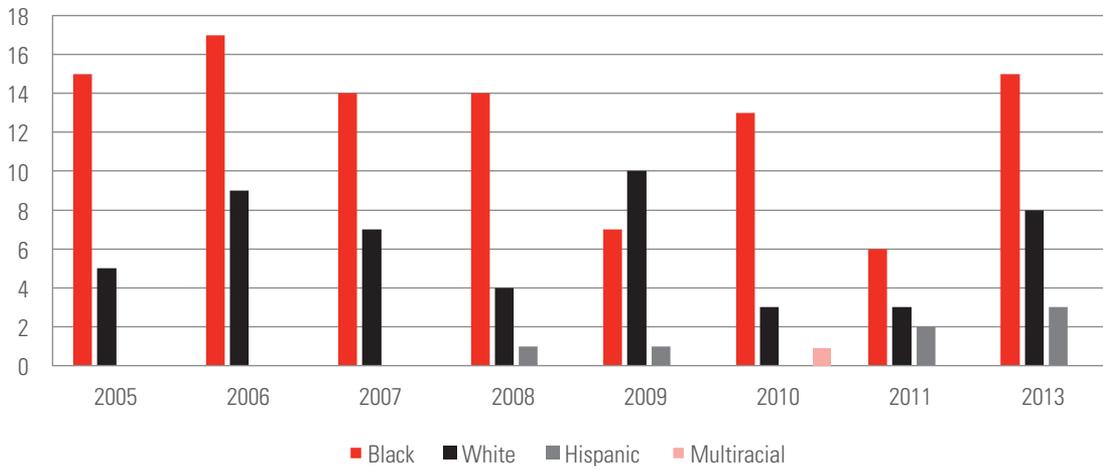
leadership also reported that improved policies, training, and communication made their jobs easier and more rewarding. Staff, in turn, reported that youth responded differently when police were called to the facility, further reducing arrests.

The Congregate Care Response Model proved to be a low-cost, common-sense solution that would reduce unnecessary entry and penetration of dually involved youth into DuPage County's juvenile justice system and ultimately have a marked impact on racial and ethnic disparities in the system. By implementing clear and objective criteria and a structure of accountability for staff 911 calls, group home administrators helped to ensure that staff would contact police only when necessary, thereby decreasing the likelihood that the decision to contact police would be based on perceptions influenced by factors such as a youth's race or ethnicity. Similarly, training and education efforts with local police helped to shift police officers' perceptions about the group home residents, primarily youth of color, and increased skill among police to deal with problem behaviors exhibited by youth. Together these efforts resulted in a more comprehensive, informed, and rational approach for managing incidents at the facility and significantly decreased the opportunity for unnecessary arrests to occur.

Dialogue with the group home and local police also served as a catalyst for improved collaboration between Probation and the Department of Children and Family Services to support youth who do become dually involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. As recommended by the *Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corp Guide for Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare System Coordination and Integration*, the two youth-serving systems improved processes and protocols to more quickly identify dual-status youth, to share information appropriately, and to work together to problem-solve, case-manage, reduce lengths of stay in secure detention, and keep youth from languishing in the justice system. The specialized probation docket and information-sharing protocols developed with *Models for Change* support have been maintained to date, with detention stays for dually involved youth of color significantly shorter than when the project began.

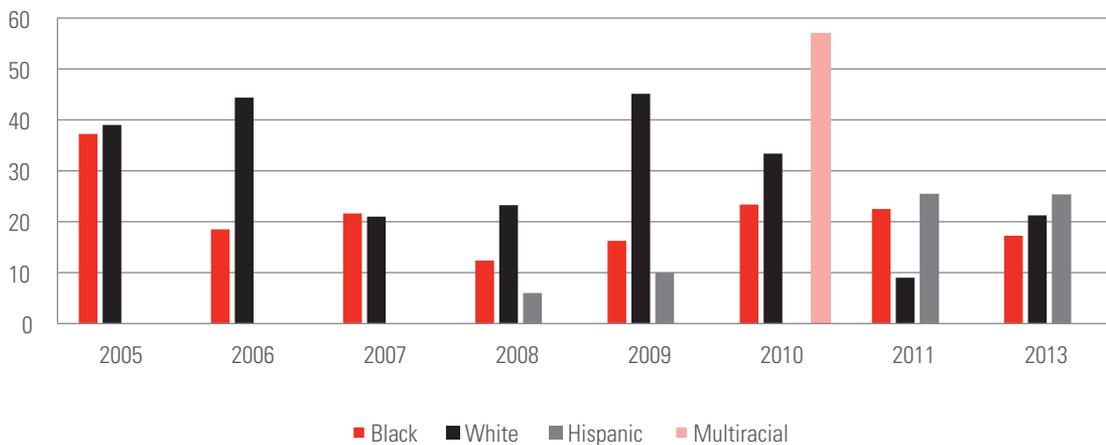
## DuPage County Admissions of Dually Involved Youth to Secure Detention by Race (Calendar Years)

(Data not available for CY12)



## DuPage County Average Length of Stay for Dually Involved Youth Admitted to Secure Detention by Race (Calendar Years)

(Data not available for CY12)



### Results and Lessons

#### All Juvenile Justice Reform Efforts Should Contemplate the Potential Impact on Racial and Ethnic Disparities

When DuPage County officials embarked on collaborative efforts to develop an integrated response for dually involved youth, reducing racial and ethnic disparities was not an articulated goal. However, as officials began to examine practices and collect data, culminating with the UI study,

child welfare system involvement emerged as a clear driver for racial and ethnic disparities and overrepresentation at several different points within the juvenile justice system. Officials seeking to reform any aspect of the juvenile justice system should always consider factors related to race and ethnicity. Officials should also be careful to evaluate the potential impact that planned reforms may have on youth and families of color involved with the system. By applying the lens of race and ethnicity at the early stages of any reform effort, officials may gain additional insights into the

causes and correlates of the target issue and differences that may exist across racial and ethnic groups, allowing them to plan more targeted and effective interventions. Moreover, incorporating racial and ethnic disparity reduction goals into all aspects of juvenile justice reform will support jurisdictions' efforts to comply with the DMC requirement of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, improve efficiency and effectiveness, and increase racial and ethnic fairness within the system.

### **Sophisticated Data Analyses Are Not Required to Begin Reform Efforts**

While sophisticated data analyses are often helpful, reform-minded jurisdictions should be heartened by the fact that DuPage County's early work on the Congregate Care Response Model grew from locally-generated administrative data. These data shed light on the incidence of dual system involvement, the increased risk for arrest for dually involved youth in congregate care, and the disparities for dually involved youth in secure detention admissions and lengths of stay. Based on this knowledge, DuPage County officials took immediate action and targeted their efforts on reducing arrests and detention admissions of youth in congregate care, which proved to be an incredibly low-cost and effective intervention. Officials later built on these reforms when additional information became available through the UI's sophisticated data analyses.

### **A Targeted Practice Change Can Create a Platform for Broader Systems Reform**

By closely examining the practices of a single group home and dedicating a specialized caseload to dually involved youth, Probation found patterns and trends which ultimately guided the workgroup's inquiry and identified key opportunities to improve support for dually involved youth in the juvenile justice system and to reduce the disparate negative impact experienced by youth of color. Anecdotal and administrative data that the dedicated probation staff person collected ultimately enabled officials to build a case for system reform and secure funding to support broader work, which has been sustained to date.

### **Resources**

*Guidebook for Juvenile Justice & Child Welfare System Coordination and Integration: A Framework for Improved Outcomes, 3rd Edition* (December 2013)

<http://www.modelsforchange.net/publications/514>

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#### 1. *Models for Change* Knowledge Brief: Is There a Link between Child Welfare and Disproportionate Minority Contact in Juvenile Justice ( December 2011)

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This brief is one in a series describing new knowledge and innovations emerging from *Models for Change*, a multi-state juvenile justice reform initiative. *Models for Change* is accelerating movement toward a more effective, fair, and developmentally sound juvenile justice system by creating replicable models that protect community safety, use resources wisely, and improve outcomes for youths. The briefs are intended to inform professionals in juvenile justice and related fields, and to contribute to a new national wave of juvenile justice reform.