

## DMC Action Network eNews

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### Leading the Way: How Berks County, PA Is Pioneering an Alternative to Detention as a Model for Statewide Reform

*The DMC Action Network promotes the data-driven development and expansion of community-based alternatives to secure detention as a way of reducing unnecessary incarceration of youth of color while maintaining public safety. Berks County, PA, a DMC Action Network core site, embraced that strategy and opened the doors to Pennsylvania's first pre-adjudication evening reporting center in late 2008. A little more than one year later, over 90 percent of the youth served by that program have been youth of color, and Berks is supporting expansion of the model to counties throughout the Commonwealth.*

When juvenile justice stakeholders in Berks County, Pennsylvania, opened an evening reporting center (ERC) that kept probation violators and pre-adjudicated youth in the community and maintained public safety at the same time, they considered it a success story for their jurisdiction. But when those same stakeholders started to see youth voluntarily coming back to visit long after they had finished their formal involvement with the program, they knew that they had something that others in Pennsylvania would want to hear about.

As a DMC Action Network site, Berks committed to establishing alternatives to secure detention that would serve youth of color. After researching options, stakeholders settled on a plan for an ERC located in Reading, the county's largest city and the area with the greatest concentration of Latino and African-American youth. The program focuses on serving chronic probation violators and youth awaiting hearings on charges that would have landed them in detention before this program existed.

According to Jeff Gregro, Deputy Chief Probation Officer, that decision came after visiting ERCs in Baltimore and Chicago and thinking carefully about how the program would fit into the County's continuum of services. "What really helped was visiting other ERCs and talking to providers about how to adapt the model to meet our needs," says Mr. Gregro. "The DMC Action Network was a great resource and allowed us to seek advice and guidance from people throughout the country."

The [Berks ERC, operated by the Children's Home of Reading](#), serves between 8 and 13 youth for an average of 30 days. Staff pick up youth every weekday at 3 p.m. and return them to their homes at 9 p.m., using those six hours to provide a mix of life skills development, educational assistance, group counseling, recreational activities, and meals. In addition, ERC staff have forged partnerships with surrounding organizations, including a local college, which bring community members to the ERC and provide youth with opportunities to reach out to the community. "This isn't babysitting," says Joe Guillama, the County's DMC Site Coordinator and an attorney who represents youth in juvenile court. "This is about developing relationships and trying to make youth feel good about themselves."

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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.

### Core States

**Pennsylvania**  
Berks County  
Allegheny 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



*Photo credit: Berks County Juvenile Probation Office*

Since its inception, the ERC has earned some impressive achievements. The program has served 85 youth, 91% of whom were youth of color. Not a single one of those 85 youth missed a scheduled court hearing and only three picked up new charges while in the program. Mr. Guillama, who recently received the Violence Prevention Roundtable of Berks County Distinguished Leadership Award for his work with youth of color in the juvenile justice system, attributes those results to the skill of the professionals at the ERC. "As staff showed juvenile probation officers and the court their true colors, they quickly gained an enormous amount of credibility. Now all stakeholders - the defense attorneys, the prosecutors, the probation officers, and the court - are recommending the ERC for youth who would otherwise be looking at secure detention."

Startup funding from the MacArthur Foundation allowed the County to open the ERC in December 2008, until it became a part of the County's and Commonwealth's budget in July 2009. Pennsylvania encourages jurisdictions to adopt community alternatives such as the ERC, reimbursing counties for the costs of those programs at a rate of 90%. By contrast, Pennsylvania only reimburses 50% of the cost of a secure detention bed, which is more than three times as expensive as a day at the ERC. The new ERC, along with other changes such as increased frontloading of services like multisystemic therapy, helped the County save over \$2 million in its budget for out-of-home placements in 2009.

After seeing these results, counties throughout Pennsylvania are visiting Berks to learn about the ERC. According to Mr. Gregro, it is particularly valuable to have the word spread by local officials, such as Senior Judge Arthur Grim, who serves as the chairman of the Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, and Chief Juvenile Probation Officer Robert Williams, who serves on the Executive Committee of the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers. As a result, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency decided to use some federal stimulus funding to allow other counties to develop their own ERCs. In fact, Mr. Gregro served as a reviewer for the first round of proposals from jurisdictions looking to introduce ERCs.

That enthusiasm is encouraging, but Mr. Gregro and Mr. Guillama both note the importance of pursuing alternatives to detention in a data-driven way, taking care not to widen the net beyond those kids a program was meant to serve. For Mr. Guillama, that means "not having more kids there than necessary, despite a hunch that the program could help them." Mr. Gregro also notes that the choice of provider must reflect the needs of the community and youth. Stakeholders in Berks continue to monitor data from the ERC to improve services for juveniles, including contracting with the Children's Home of Reading to provide in-home counseling after youth leave the program.

As youth continue to drop by the ERC after their formal involvement with the

Wisconsin  
Rock County  
Outagamie County  
Kenosha County

Kansas  
Sedgwick County  
Seward County  
Lyon-Chase County

North Carolina  
Union County  
Carrabus County

program ends, staff receive constant reminders that their work is having a real impact on the community. And, as Mr. Gregro highlights, “the fact that the ERC program is tentacling out throughout the state means not just good things for kids in our county, but also kids throughout the state.”

For Mr. Guillama, though, seeing youth return is also bittersweet. “When kids come by and ring the doorbell at the ERC, it shows you that they are looking for what any other human being wants: to be loved and accepted. What is heartbreaking is when a kid buys in to the rehabilitative aspect of the juvenile justice system and we don’t have the resources to provide that service for longer than we do.” Berks County is beginning to explore developing a post-adjudication ERC with a treatment component as another alternative to long-term placement. Stay tuned.

Tell us how your jurisdiction has spread the word about effective alternatives to detention: email [jszanyi@cclp.org](mailto:jszanyi@cclp.org).

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## When the Going Gets Tough: Framing the Dialogue on Reform

*Tough economic times mean tough choices for agencies that work with children. When officials in Rock County, WI, a DMC Action Network partner site, explored the possibility of reorganizing secure detention as one way of streamlining services, they sparked a debate that underscored the delicate nature of juvenile justice reform. Jason Witt, Deputy Director of the Rock County Human Services Department and Acting Manager of the Juvenile Justice Division, shares what officials learned from that experience - and how they are using that knowledge to continue improving services for the County’s youth.*



Rock County, Wisconsin, is no stranger to DMC reduction. The County joined the DMC Action Network in 2007 with a grant to build data capacity to help officials develop targeted, data-driven interventions to reduce the overrepresentation of youth of color. However, stakeholders there had committed to tackling racial and ethnic disparities in their juvenile justice system as early as 2002, receiving support from the State’s Office of Justice Assistance for diversion programs and other reforms.

That long-running commitment to DMC reduction is paying off. 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, has helped lower the number of youth who are locked up from an average of 20 youth a day in 2002 to an average of 14 per day in 2009.

When it came time to prepare the 2010 budget, the County’s Human Services Department considered all possible options to make ends meet in the face of a \$2.5 million shortfall. Given the low detention numbers and the high cost of maintaining the facility, the County explored the idea of switching to a regional detention system - a plan that would have involved closing the County’s 35-bed facility and contracting with other local detention centers to house youth who were deemed to be a danger to themselves or the community.

The idea represented nothing more than the County’s attempt to work through possible alternatives in an economic worst-case scenario. However, according to Jason Witt, Deputy Director of the Rock County Human Services Department, “simply having the option out there generated an incredibly strong backlash.”

Some individuals accused the Department's management of plotting to close the detention facility and putting the community at risk. Others alleged that managers had directed probation officers to manipulate information in court in order to keep detention numbers down.

The Department's Board recognized the need to clear the air and ordered an independent evaluation of the system, conducted by the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF). That evaluation, released in December 2009, found no written evidence to support the allegations that managers were jeopardizing public safety in order to drive down the number of detained youth. By contrast, the report highlighted that some aspects of the system, such as an overreliance on secure detention as a sanction for probation violations and the lack of a standardized detention screening instrument, had the potential to generate unfair outcomes for kids.

The evaluation also indicated that some youth charged with low-level offenses were being held in detention, even though they did not meet the necessary criteria for detention under the relevant statute. Mr. Witt noted that the evaluation "reinforced the need for the tools that the DMC Action Network was helping the County to implement, and confirmed the existence of the system issues they were intended to address."

The report was also critical of management's approach to organizational change, highlighting the need for a better dialogue between management and line staff. For Mr. Witt, part of that recommendation means working harder to explain the rationale behind changes to the system. "We have a core group of experienced and committed staff who want what's best for kids. We've got to do better getting their input and buy in on these important changes." When asked about the advice he would give to other jurisdictions engaged in reform efforts, he emphasized the need to adequately prepare for and understand the process of organizational culture change, the value in keeping the community informed, and the importance of keeping stakeholders at the table. For example, Mr. Witt described how Rock County had a broad collaboration in 2002 when DMC reduction efforts began; however, as some of those original stakeholders changed over time, the Department did not do as much as it could have to keep people at the table.

Elected officials and County managers have taken the report's recommendations to heart. Just this month, the Department's Board approved an ongoing consultation contract with WCCF, part of which involves looking at implementing a more strength-based program for youth in the County's detention facility. Mr. Witt, as Acting Manager of the Juvenile Justice Services Division, is working to build channels for communication through workgroups and other venues.

According to Mr. Witt, the report's findings, as well as the connections to the DMC Action Network and a credible state-based organization like WCCF, are helping officials keep reforms on track: "Right now, we're in the best place we have ever been in terms of system reform - and making that reform last."

*Tell us how you're framing the dialogue on DMC in your jurisdiction: email [jszanyi@cclp.org](mailto:jszanyi@cclp.org).*

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## The Newest DMC & Juvenile Justice Resources

- The W. Haywood Burns Institute (BI) has just released [an interactive map](#) that captures racial and ethnic disparities in juvenile justice by state and by county. The new resource includes one-day count incarceration data, annual data by decision-making point in the juvenile justice system, and

a host of other information.

- The National Council of La Raza, the largest Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States, released [a new fact sheet](#) on the overrepresentation of Latino youth in the juvenile justice system. The publication captures a number of statistics on DMC, including disproportionate detention and incarceration rates.
- The Sentencing Project has launched a [Race and Justice Clearinghouse](#), a database of annotated citations for more than 450 research articles, studies, reports, and books that explore the intersection of race and ethnicity with the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems. The clearinghouse, which is updated monthly, contains information and tools for policymakers, practitioners, and advocates to understand racial and ethnic disparities, to aid in policy reform, and to make the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems more fair and effective.
- A recent study by the Campbell Corporation finds that youth who are subject to formal processing in the juvenile justice system are significantly more likely to engage in delinquent behavior than peers who are diverted from the system. The research report, *Formal System Processing of Juveniles: Effects on Delinquency*, draws that conclusion based on an analysis of 29 randomized, controlled experiments over a 35-year period.
- CNN is running a multi-part series on youth who are tried and convicted as adults in the United States. The report, entitled [Growing Up Behind Bars](#), captures the debate surrounding the Supreme Court's consideration of the constitutionality of sentencing youth who commit crimes that are not homicides to life without parole.
- According to a new Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) report, the number of juvenile offenders in residential placement in publicly and privately operated juvenile facilities is continuing a decline from 2000. The fact sheet, entitled [Juveniles in Residential Placement, 1997-2008](#), bases that finding on 1-day counts from the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement and the Juvenile Residential Facility Census. OJJDP also [released a list of funding opportunities for FY 2010 related to family drug court programs and mentoring](#).
- The American Bar Association's Center on Children and the Law has released a new report that focuses on status offenders. The guide, entitled [Representing Juvenile Status Offenders](#), includes chapters from several juvenile justice experts, as well as practical and legal advice for attorneys.

The *DMC eNews* reports on efforts to reduce disproportionate minority contact in juvenile justice systems in the [DMC Action Network](#). The [Center for Children's Law and Policy](#) manages the network and publishes this newsletter. Contact us at [jszanyi@cclp.org](mailto:jszanyi@cclp.org) or 202-637-0377 x108. For a PDF version of this newsletter, [click here](#).