

Ramsey JDAI: Pursuing equity and better outcomes for kids and community

In neighborhood centers and conference rooms throughout Ramsey County, community members and public officials are working together on reforms to reduce the number of juveniles placed in detention and eliminate racial disparities in the juvenile justice system.

Called the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, or JDAI, the broad-based effort seeks to create more effective, community-based alternatives to juvenile detention for kids who do not pose a significant risk to public safety.

Ramsey County JDAI has the commitment and involvement of leaders in local government, the justice system and law enforcement, along with front-line staff and many community organizations and individual citizens.

The initiative is part of a growing national movement driven by research showing that, controlling for all other factors, children who are placed in detention tend to have worse outcomes than those who aren't – in terms of school performance, criminal activity and mental and physical health. (The focus is on the detention that occurs while a youth is awaiting court hearings, not the confinement ordered after a youth is adjudicated delinquent.)

In 20 states and more than 80 jurisdictions, including Ramsey, Hennepin and Dakota counties in Minnesota, new policies are pushing against age-old ideas about which youths should be detained. These initiatives all have a common goal: implementing fair, effective juvenile detention practices that ensure the right kids are detained and the public safety is protected.

"Nobody is saying that youths who commit crimes should not be held accountable," says St. Paul Police Chief John Harrington. "What we're saying is that unnecessary detention can do more harm than good – at great expense to taxpayers and public safety."

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Addressing racial disparities in juvenile detention is a driving force behind the initiative. Minority youth are consistently over-represented in detention facilities – across the country and here in Minnesota

Justice Off Color

Youth of color, especially African-American youth get different, and harsher treatment than white youth charged with similar offenses.

That is the central finding of a 2007 report by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD).

"And Justice for Some: Differential Treatment of Youth of Color in the Justice System" offers the latest data available on the overrepresentation of youth of color throughout the juvenile justice system.

Despite declining crime rates for more than 10 years and the fact that the overall number of youth in confinement has also declined, the problem of disproportionate minority confinement has not improved.

Processing decisions to make the initial arrest, to hold a youth in detention pending investigation; to waive a case to adult court, to petition a case by prosecutors, and ultimately, to establish a judicial decision and subsequent sanction are all factors that lead to overrepresentation.

The NCCD report shows how processing decisions are not racially neutral. Youth of color are more likely than white youth to become involved in the system, and their overrepresentation increases at each stage of the process. The authors conclude that a nationwide effort is required to identify the causes of this differential treatment of youths of color.

although national and local studies show their crimes are no more severe. In Ramsey County, non-white juveniles account for about 40 percent of the juvenile population, but approximately 70 percent of juveniles detained, according to an assessment conducted in 2006 by the W. Haywood Burns Institute.

The disparity is even greater among African American youths, who

comprise 14 percent of the county's youth population, but approximately 50 percent of juveniles in detention.

"DMC (Disproportionate Minority Confinement) is a key concern," says Ramsey County Commissioner Toni Carter. "To protect public safety and achieve better outcomes for all our youth, we must work to resolve this disproportionality."

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JDAI Draws on Energy, Expertise of Many People

What does it take to bring together the superintendent of schools, the county attorney, several District Court judges, county commissioners and a variety of law enforcement and corrections leaders – not to mention a group of dedicated people from the community? All it takes is an initiative that promises to improve the juvenile justice system – to the benefit of kids and the general public.

Ramsey County JDAI brings that promise. As a result, it has gained the support and involvement of top officials – and the energy of many front-line staff, community organizations, and individual citizens. These JDAI participants are channeling their time and commitment through an organizational structure designed to maintain momentum and keep the multi-faceted initiative “on point.”

A top leadership stakeholder committee, a “hands-on” steering committee and eight subcommittees form the organizational structure for Ramsey County JDAI. Work groups are constructed to focus expertise in critical areas to follow the JDAI mission and purpose. Members within committees are recruited and nominated based on their interest, expertise and constituency. The goal of all committees is to have a variety of voices represented at the table and to get work done in a timely way.

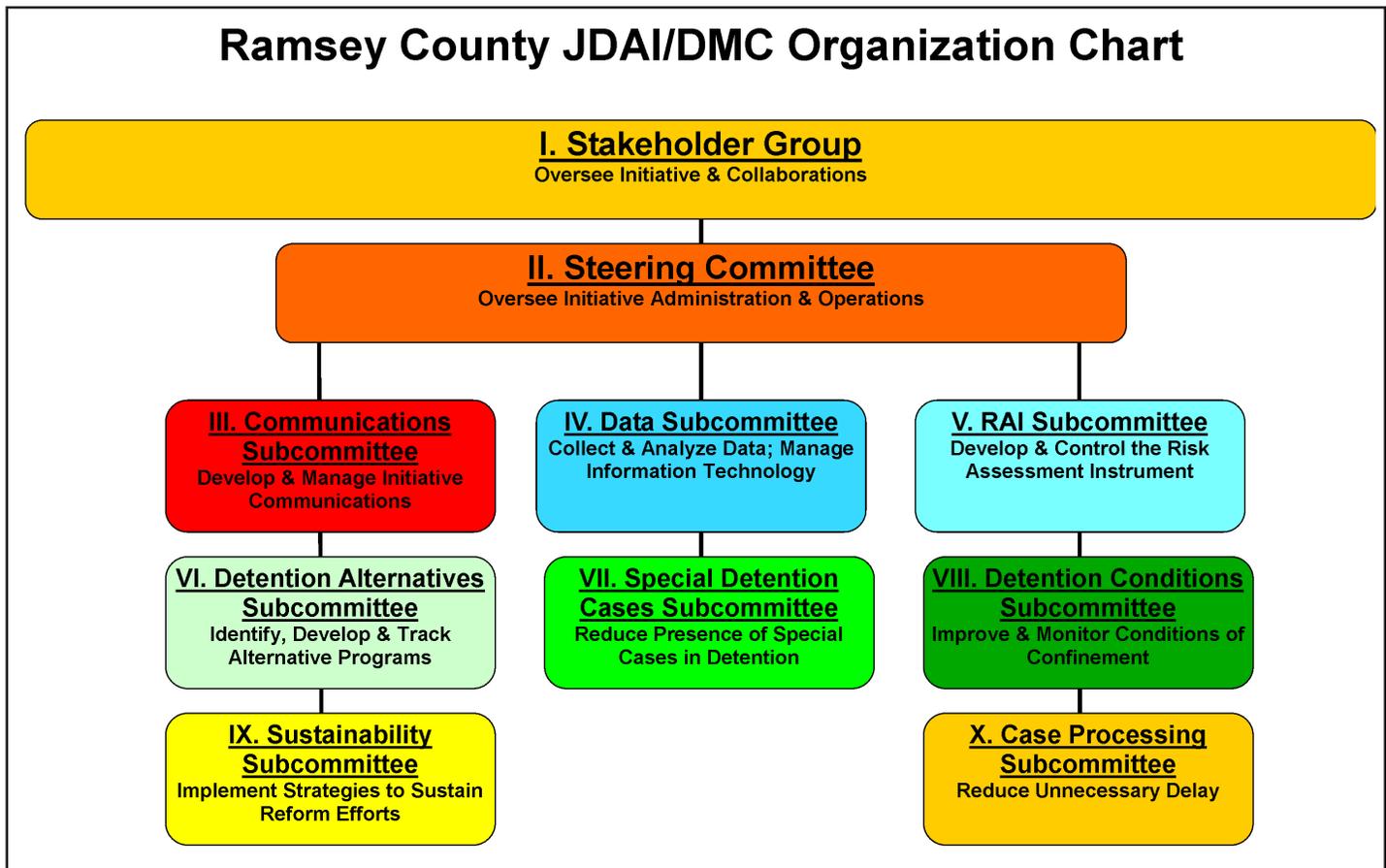
The Stakeholder Group is the principal policy-making body for the initiative and provides a forum for resolving JDAI issues. The group represents the initiative’s diverse constituencies, with representatives from governmental agencies, courts, schools, foundations, the faith community, and cultural, ethnic, civic

and social community organizations, among others. The group meets quarterly. Co-chairs are Ramsey County Commissioner Toni Carter and Ramsey County District Court Judge Gary W. Bastian.

The Steering Committee is composed of leadership-level agency staff members and community members who manage JDAI operations and provide guidance to the Stakeholder Group on overall strategic direction for the initiative. The group meets monthly. The chair is Frank Hosch of the Ramsey County Community Corrections Department. Subcommittees report to the Steering Committee, the approval body for specific work completed. The designated subcommittees, chairs and contact numbers are:

- **Communications:**
Chris Crutchfield, 651-266-2558
- **Data:**
Connie Nowacki, 651-266-2388
- **Risk Assessment Instrument:**
Steve Poynter, 651-266-5230
- **Detention Alternatives:**
Melvin Carter Jr., 651-335-0734, and Laura LeBlanc, 651-263-0739
- **Special Detention Cases:**
Roy Adams, 651-266-4859, and Horace Munoz, 651-298-5702
- **Detention Conditions:**
Brian Portzen, 651-266-5206
- **Sustainability:** To be appointed
- **Case Processing:**
Not yet initiated

Individuals interested in being nominated to a committee should contact the committee chair or Lisa Tabor, JDAI Coordinator, at lisa@culturebrokers.com or 651-989-5215



False Assumptions

Locking up kids in detention centers across the country can contribute to future delinquent behavior and harm their education, employment and health, according to a report from the Justice Policy Institute. ***The Dangers of Detention: The Impact of Incarcerating Youth in Detention and Other Secure Facilities*** shows that rather than promoting public safety, detention — the pretrial “jailing” of youth not yet found delinquent — may contribute to future offenses. Studies from around the country show that incarcerated youth have higher recidivism rates than youth supervised in other kinds of settings.

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A study conducted by the Wisconsin legislature found that “placement in secure detention...does not deter most juveniles,” and that in the four counties studied, 70 percent of the youth held in secure detention were arrested or returned to detention within one year of release.

Detention is widely misapplied, according to the report. Although detention facilities are meant to temporarily house those youth who are likely to re-offend before their trial or who are unlikely to appear for their court date, many of the youth in this country’s 769 detention centers do not meet these criteria. Seventy percent of youth in detention are held for nonviolent charges. More than two-thirds are charged with property offenses, public order offenses, technical probation violations, or status offenses (like running away or breaking curfew). Youth of color are impacted

disproportionately by the overuse of detention. In 2003, African-American youth were detained at a rate 4.5 times higher than whites; and Latino youth were detained at twice the rate of whites.

“Not only does inappropriately detaining youth cost taxpayers millions of dollars a year, but the overuse of detention generally does not make our communities any safer,” said Bart Lubow, head of JDAI (Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative), a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation that works to build better futures for disadvantaged children and their families. “Across the country, jurisdictions are looking for more effective policies and practices to promote community safety and better outcomes for youth. JDAI sites have reduced adolescent detention, strengthened juvenile justice systems and saved money -- all without compromising public safety. Detention reform is a catalyst for system-wide change that is working to build better futures for communities and youth.”

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Voices...speaking out

In each newsletter we will feature a voice that intersects with juvenile justice and detention. Voices will include police officers, detention counselors, probation offices, victims and juveniles. These are the voices of those on the frontline.

This voice represents a juvenile who has participated in poetry lab at Boys Totem Town.

Assume

Because I fu** up people think I'm a
f*** up
I've had enough of this jail life, scratch
that call it hell life.
Nothing left to do but look up at the
moon,
Even though I'm cripin it's wrong to
assume
That I'm doomed
No matter how many tears I shed ready
to go home
In the judge's eyes there's no mercy to
be shone
So now I'm in the courtroom with a
straight face making no sound
And I still get staffed for a month cuzz of
my background
Even though I'm mixed I still get called
n***** by the cops
Cuzz I'm black everyone assumes
That I'm pickin' locks, slangin' rocks,
maybe I'm doomed
But like I said before
It's wrong to assume
Just because I'm smokin' trees
It's wrong to think I can't get a college
degree
No matter what, I rise for this ghetto
debris
But nobody cares to help me or my
family
So all this sh** I am tellin' you is no lie
So think twice before you assume
And take a look through a young black
man's eyes.**



Community Stakeholders meet to begin the work of addressing disproportionate minority confinement in Ramsey County

Ramsey JDAI continued from p. 1

The concept of creating alternatives to detention stems from a 1992 initiative launched by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The project sought to remedy the national crisis of overcrowding in secure detention facilities and the negative impact to youth held in secure detention. Despite increased use of these facilities, crime continued to rise. The high cost of detention and an opportunity to improve the juvenile justice system as a whole also motivated this initiative.

“To find effective alternatives to detention we have no choice but to solve the problem of disproportionate minority confinement.”

Originally, five sites were identified as test centers. Sites were encouraged to replicate innovations developed in places like Broward County, Florida, or to create solutions that better served their jurisdictions. Charged with establishing system-wide reforms, these sites pushed for changes that proved controversial, difficult to execute and hard to sustain politically, according to a report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Participants at these sites also discovered that changing detention practices is an extremely ambitious and delicate undertaking. It required

a comprehensive approach, the collaboration of a host of different local agencies, and a switch to decision making based on data rather than instinct or anecdote.

When the experiment concluded in 1998, three sites were left – Sacramento, California; Cook County, Illinois; and Multnomah County, Oregon. These jurisdictions managed to overcome the challenges and make significant reforms in their juvenile justice systems.

In 2005, Ramsey County began working with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to establish its own JDAI site. Hennepin and Dakota counties also were forming plans. A coordinated effort developed to address juvenile detention in the three largest counties in the Twin Cities area.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation awarded a \$150,000 grant to cover staffing and site visit costs for JDAI in the three counties.

By Spring 2006, members from Ramsey County’s JDAI Steering Committee were making plans to visit Multnomah County, Oregon, and other model sites. At these locations officials would see initiatives in practice – and hear first-hand accounts of what worked well and what didn’t. What they observed sparked even greater enthusiasm for the changes that could be made in Ramsey County.

Ramsey County JDAI is now poised to test a risk assessment instrument (RAI) that has been designed to use unbiased factors to determine which juveniles will be detained at the Juvenile Detention Center and which should be released either to home or to an alternative placement pending trial. (Our next JDAI News will take a closer look at the RAI.)

The development of community-based alternatives to detention is a key component of the initiative.

“We need to make sure we are directing public resources to the most effective strategies for getting juvenile offenders back on the right track,” says Ramsey County District Court Judge Gary W. Bastian.

Finding effective alternatives to detention actually can have a positive impact on public safety, the Annie E. Casey Foundation emphasizes. The oft-repeated finding is that greater attention is given to children who receive alternative intervention through community-based services than what they would get in secure detention. A March 2004 report on model sites in Cook and Multnomah counties found that average daily populations in secure detention

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decreased dramatically, while key public safety indicators, including re-arrest rates, generally improved.

Ramsey County JDAI leaders are working to achieve similar success.

“Each year, about 3,000 youths are admitted to detention in Ramsey County,” says Ramsey County Attorney Susan Gaertner. “If we can provide some of those juveniles with services in a better way and protect the public safety at the same time, that is certainly something we should be doing.”

Ramsey County JDAI Receives Grants

This summer JDAI was awarded \$100,000 from the Juvenile Justice Advisory Council (JJAC) and \$162,000 over a 3 year period from Otto Bremer Foundation. Grants were requested to support JDAI / DMC efforts by Ramsey County. These funds will ensure, among other things, that appropriate detention alternatives will be in place with the implementation of the risk assessment instrument (RAI). Ramsey County thanks JJAC and Otto Bremer Foundation for their support.