

Alternatives to Detention Making *Headway*

JDAI has two overarching goals—to keep young people out of detention AND to protect public safety.

A key to both those goals is creating positive alternatives to detention. In JDAI-talk, “alternatives,” mean that authorities have positive options for young people as they await court—options that increase successful results, are cost effective, and protect public safety.

When Ramsey County JDAI formed, it commissioned an Alternatives Committee. That committee is co-chaired by Laura LaBlanc (executive director and founder of FullThought, a consulting firm, and former department director at Hmong American Partnership) and Melvin Carter (founder of Save Our Sons, a program for African American young men, and a former sergeant with the Saint Paul Police). The committee

also includes representatives from various other community-based services as well as the juvenile justice system.

The committee was formed with a mission to facilitate the use of alternatives to detention. Prior to JDAI, work on issues of juvenile justice was handled “in the system”—that is, most of the ideas and changes were developed without major

input from the community. But from the start, the alternatives committee has worked to discern what everyone involved in the system feels will provide the best alternatives for youth and still protect the community.

Early on, the committee pulled together numerous focus groups to figure out what was best for kids and the community. They talked

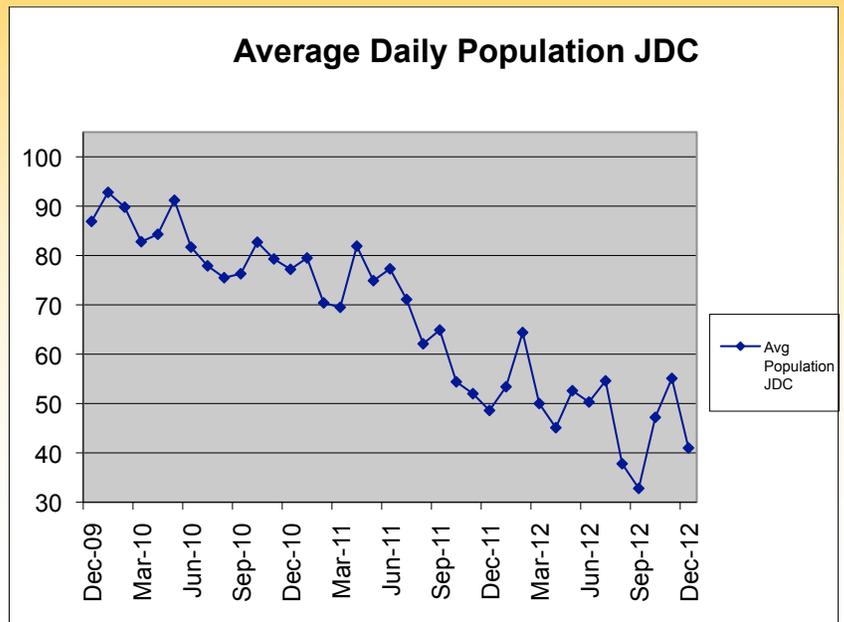
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No, It's Not the Stock Market!

JDAI Brings 50% Decline in Juvenile Detention

This chart shows a general, steady decline in the average number of youth in detention in Ramsey County since the inception of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Program (JDAI).

Average population is now half of what it was before JDAI. The decline is similar to that seen by other sites across the country that have instituted the JDAI program. Clearly, JDAI is working!



Deputy Director Hosch Retires



Frank Hosch has learned many things about juvenile corrections in his long career. But one of the most important, he says, is that, “If we see these kids as individuals, figure out what they need, and hook them up to community resources, we have a much better chance of seeing success.”

Hosch should know. He has spent the past 35 years working to make life better for Ramsey County youth. In one way or another, Hosch has been part of Ramsey County’s juvenile justice system since 1974.

He grew up in a large family and has had a passion for working with troubled kids since graduating from St. Thomas University with a major in social work. His career at Ramsey County includes service in juvenile detention and probation, work with Boys Totem Town (the County’s juvenile residential correction facility), and, for the past six years, the position of deputy director, Juvenile Division, Ramsey County Community Corrections.

And now, he’s retiring, effective February 20, 2009.

Hosch has seen some major changes since the 1970s. “There’s been a big increase in single parent homes and deeply stressed families, where one parent manages the household while working two jobs. We’ve seen increases in poverty, chemical dependency, abuse, divorce, and entire families that are homeless. At the same time, we’ve had to handle these problems with deep reductions in resources.”

Yet through all that, one thing hasn’t changed: kids.

Looking back, Hosch says, “In the 1970s and ‘80s, we saw the same serious problems with kids that we still see today. We saw kids that if you put them in a jar and put them on the shelf—away from negative influences—they’d do fine. And we saw some repeat customers, the ones who need different strategies to keep them from coming back. But then, as now, the bulk of the kids are ones that if you help them, they’ll do just fine. In fact, most of the juveniles we work with don’t return to the system.”

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JDAI Elsewhere...Rapid Success at New Marion

In Marion County, home of Indianapolis, a \$150,000 federal grant from the Indiana Criminal Justice Institute was used to pilot a local reception center. The program has been in operation for more than a year.

Modeled on a successful Multnomah County, Oregon, JDAI program, the Marion County Reception Center provides police officers an alternative to detaining youth who have committed misdemeanors or status offenses. (A status offense is an offense for actions that would not be considered a crime if the person were of adult age.)

After youth are arrested and officers determine that they pose no threat to public safety, they are taken to the Reception Center. There, a counselor conducts a needs assessment and provides case management services and nonresidential resources for youth in the midst of family difficulties or in need of crisis intervention. The parties work together to determine what community services

might best reduce the likelihood of another offense.

In its first year, Indianapolis diverted 12 percent of youth who would have otherwise been referred to juvenile court and saw a 27 percent decrease in misdemeanors filed with the court. In 2008:

- The program served 1,000 youth;
- 70 percent of those served did not recidivate; and
- Two out of three youth were engaged in a family intervention session and left the center with a plan to prevent future arrests.

Supporters such as public defender Susan E. Boatright note that the reception center helps “avoid having a case before the court and its lifelong consequences.” The reception center also reduces court cases and the need for police officers to show up in court, saving community resources, law enforcement time, and tax dollars.

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with youth who had been on probation. They interviewed parents. They talked with community groups involved in the system. The group came up with two basic categories of needed alternatives, short-term and long-term.

Short-term alternatives

Short-term alternatives will serve youth who would have a court date within 48 hours of arrest. Some of these alternatives would include placement in:

- House arrest, which includes monitoring by the county's intensive supervision staff;
- Electronic home monitoring, which includes use of a global positioning system (GPS) unit or an ankle bracelet; or
- A short-term shelter, which would be needed in the case of a domestic incident, when the youth should not be at his or her home or when the parent is unable or unwilling to pick the youth up from detention.

Long-term alternatives

Long-term alternatives will serve youth who will await

trial or dispositional hearing for 48 hours or more. Some of these alternatives would include:

- Evening and weekend reporting centers (also called a Learning Center), which have proved successful in other JDAI sites across the country.

At a Learning Center, a young person can attend after school, evenings, and weekends and participate in programming such as conflict resolution skills, anger management, job-seeking, school tutoring, and other programs that have proven successful.

- Community coaches, who would be responsible for ensuring that the young person does not re-offend and shows up for court. The coaches would also find interventions that might help the child be positively engaged while awaiting trial. Potential coaches have been identified, but are not being used yet due to funding constraints.

A receiving assessment center with shelter beds and detox, open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The committee also set about uncovering and assessing available service providers in

the neighborhoods with the highest prevalence of youth arrests. These providers can offer a variety of services, such as gender or culturally-specific programs, but contracts have not yet been created for their work.

Alternatives are a work in process

It has been ten months since the committee finished its work of identifying and suggesting alternatives. While some people are frustrated with the pace of progress installing new alternatives, work is continuing. Funding and contractual issues have slowed the development of longer term alternatives.

Currently, Ramsey County is offering some of the recommended short-term alternatives, including short-term shelter and house arrest. Headway is being made with electronic home monitoring, though the need for land phone lines has made it a technological challenge.

According to Alternatives Committee member and juvenile probation supervisor Mary Pat Dunlap, the house arrest alternative has gone very well. Once a young person is placed on house

arrest, the County's intensive supervision staff typically bring the young person to his or her family home and the parents then bring their child to court. If the home isn't an option, the child is brought to a shelter. Intensive supervision staff also bring the child to court the following work day. There are several shelter providers in Ramsey County.

While short-term alternatives to detention are going well, there has been some frustration with the progress toward longer-term alternatives. "We've been using the Risk Assessment Inventory for quite a while now," says Dunlap. "We're winnowing kids out of detention, just as JDAI planned, but we need to get true alternatives in place."

Dunlap, who as been doing probation work for 17 years and has been a supervisor for the past 7, notes that JDAI "has brought together all the players that relate to the juvenile justice system with the community. This can make the work time consuming and that can be frustrating. But it is a more holistic look at what's best for our kids."

And that, of course, is what JDAI is all about.

Get Involved! If you would like to Volunteer on a JDAI Subcommittee contact:

Communications Subcommittee:
Chris Crutchfield, Chair, 651-266-2558

RAI Subcommittee:
Steve Poynter, Chair, 651-266-5230

Special Detention Cases Subcommittee:
Roy Adams, Co-Chair, 651-266-4859
Horace Muñoz, Co-Chair, 651-298-5702

Data Subcommittee:
Connie Nowacki, Chair, 651-266-2388

Detention Alternatives Subcommittee:
Melvin Carter Jr., Co-Chair, 651-335-0734
Laura LaBlanc, Co-Chair, 651-495-1505

Detention Conditions Subcommittee:
Brian Portzen, Chair, 651-266-5206

Voices...from the community

by Laura LaBlanc, Co-chair, JDAI Alternatives Committee

The alternatives committee finished the recommendations stage of our work more than a year ago. We listened to youth, families, providers, and system stakeholders. These voices expressed significant areas of shared vision for additional alternatives to detention. Specifically several ideas surfaced as high priority for development:

- The creation of a 24/7 Receiving/Assessment Center with Family Crisis Counseling, Mental Health, detox, and shelter beds.
- Day reporting with strong community partners.
- Evening reporting with strong community partners.
- Family conferences to identify additional resources within the family and extended family to engage in monitoring youth and ensuring cooperation.
- Development of a “community coach” model for supervision prior to initial hearing.

We are now three years into a reform that revolves around alternatives to detention. Exciting as the alternatives are, we are moving too slowly through the muddy waters of business as usual: House arrest, electronic monitoring and shelter are still our only



Laura LaBlanc

alternatives to detention in Ramsey County. But the ground work within the system is progressing. We have the cornerstones of an objective tool for admission to detention. We have

system collaboration in the works. We have established systems to collect and analyze data. These are significant accomplishments. They are, however, not a paradigm shift until we take the leap, build, and have faith in community-based alternatives to detention.

Maya Angelou wrote, “By love, I mean that condition in the human spirit so profound that it encourages us to develop courage; and then to build bridges; and then to trust those bridges in attempts to reach human beings.”

This is the kind of love we seek to develop, as a community, for our youth. We are part way there, but we have a tough row to clearer waters. These are difficult times for new spending and innovation. However, we are spending a great deal of money on these children, money that can be better spent when we let go of an old paradigm that is not rooted in any proven outcomes. We can embrace a new way of doing things. What we need is the courage and determination born of love.



The JDAI Volunteers Appreciation Gathering was held February 11, 2009 at the Hallie Q. Brown Center in Saint Paul.

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In his long career, Hosch has helped Ramsey County's approach to juveniles become more effective and cost efficient. He recalls many changes at Boys Totem Town (BTT), for example. When he first arrived there, juveniles at BTT were largely isolated from their home communities. Hosch and others realized that if they linked community resources and residents, kids would be more likely to stay on the right path once they returned home. Over time, Hosch helped blur the

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boundaries between BTT and the community. The facility began to bring organizations from the community in to provide services. At the same time, youth were directed to services that they could use when they reentered the community.

For example, Fairview Hospital offered chemical dependency treatment at Boys Totem Town. Save Our Sons, a culturally-based African American mentoring program, began offering services. Similarly, Hmong American Partnership has offered services both at Boys Totem Town and back in the community. Other involved groups include Urban Boat Builders and Boys and Girls Club, to name a few.

Hosch says, "This involvement tells kids we want you back—we want you to be in the community." Youth who falter and are supported by the community stand a better chance of growing up and returning the kindness by supporting others in the community.

There are many concrete improvements as a result of these changes. Runaways from Totem Town have dropped from 200 a year to 30 a year. Recidivism has dropped from 45 percent to 28 percent. "These changes have been good for kids, good for their families, good for the community, good for the taxpayer, and good for law enforcement," says Hosch.

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Hosch also credits the initiation of community policing by the St. Paul Police early in the '90s for this changed approach to the relationship between neighborhoods and troubled youth.

The model, he says, keeps the community together, and helps kids reintegrate when they leave Boys Totem Town.

Another significant change, says Hosch, has been to bring in evidence-based practices. These are programs that have been shown, through research and testing, to make significant differences in the lives of juveniles who have entered the justice system. For example, to deal with some of the difficult family and emotional problems faced by troubled youth, Ramsey County has brought in Functional Family Therapy, Aggression Replacement Training, and other programs.

Of all the changes he's seen, Hosch feels JDAI may be the most significant. "Ramsey County has always had hard-working staff that talked to each other about how to best help kids," says Hosch. "But JDAI has raised the level of communication and helped us improve the ways we work with kids. We have committed stakeholders throughout the area of juvenile criminal justice moving the entire system to use proven practices to help our kids and protect our communities."

The initiation of JDAI three years ago has changed the way Hosch works. "I have had to learn to listen more to what the community wants. I've had to learn to be in a dialog about what's really needed, to learn how to let go of the control, listen, talk, and make changes that reflect what the community

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tells us. The benefit has been more clarity—for everyone involved—about what the criminal justice system can and can't do, how our system should help kids, how to do more with less, and how to rely on the community and community volunteers to help solve the problems that we all face together."

"JDAI is like a wave, and its only direction is forward. We need to keep institutionalizing these changes we make and keep things moving in the right direction. Because of JDAI, the future for our kids and for the community looks very good."

Though excited about his retirement, which includes plans to travel and camp across the Southwest, Hosch is going to miss his life with Ramsey County. "I'll miss the staff, who are so extremely talented, and I'll miss the people in the community."

Most of all, he says, he already misses the direct contact with kids—something he hopes to get back to one day.