

## Polk County J-CASP -- Inaugural End of Year Report (2015)

MISSION STATEMENT:        *To examine and improve the juvenile justice system to reduce disproportionality for children of color.*

### Contributors / Members

Romonda D. Belcher - District Associate Judge (co-chairperson)  
Chad Jensen - Juvenile Court Services Chief JCO (co-chairperson)  
Colin Witt - District Associate Judge (co-chairperson)  
Whitney Buchanan - Juvenile Court Services JCO II  
Teresa Burke - Polk County Decategorization Coordinator  
Jerry Foxhoven - Director, Drake Legal Clinic  
John Hawkins - Juvenile Court Services JCO IV  
Corey Harris - Director, DMPS Middle Schools  
Katie Kamienski - Youth Emergency and Shelter Services (YESS) CCO  
Kevin Patrick - Asst. Polk County Attorney  
Tommy Ross - Polk County Community Partnerships Coordinator, ISU  
Chris Scott - DMPD Lieutenant  
Jim Ward\* - Asst. Polk County Attorney, Deputy Chief of Juvenile Division  
Maria Valdez Guerrero - Juvenile Court Services Centralized Intake Officer  
Eddy Vanderkwaak - Polk County Health Services, JCS Restorative Justice Specialist  
Will Walker - Fatherhood Initiative Leader; Therapist  
Breanne Ward - PCCAS Program Specialist  
Scott Weldon - Polk County Juvenile Detention Center IMPACT  
ConGarry Williams - Asst. Juvenile Public Defender

PURPOSE:

In November 2014, the Iowa Supreme Court published and endorsed a 97- page report, Recommendations and Action Plan for Reducing Disproportionate Minority Contacts in Iowa's Juvenile Justice System. It is commonly known as the CASP report. The report contains a lengthy and far reaching set of recommendations with a lot of statistical data from Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning (CJJP). The second recommendation in the CASP report, a call for *local collaboration and training to reduce disproportionate minority contacts (DMC)* established our purpose for convening. Judicial leadership was, in essence, demanded to develop, implement and sustain strategies to reduce DMC.

While there has been work done in this area to address disproportionality over the past 25 years, both at the state level and locally, the call from the report at the end of 2014 requires urgent attention and sustained action. In so doing, we tried to be thoughtful in beginning to collaborate with community stakeholders, working over a sustained period of time to reduce disproportionality for children of color.

Scheduled Meetings

2015 - July 31, 2015  
- September 25, 2015  
- November 20, 2015

Planned Meetings

2016 - January 29, 2016  
- April 29, 2016  
- July 29, 2016  
- October 28, 2016

SMALL WORK GROUPS:

Early on we identified the need to focus our efforts and work in three targeted groups:

- 1- Statistical Questioning and Understanding (led by Judge Witt)
- 2- Transparency and Community Engagement (led by Chief JCO Jensen)
- 3- Community Resources (led by Judge Belcher)

Each contributor serves on a work group so we can grow in relationship and understanding as we work together toward our mission. Each work group met three or four times in late Summer / Fall 2015 and will continue to meet monthly or as needed in 2016.

PROGRESS IN ACTION:

We have reviewed and made available the November 2014 Report, related information and its call to action.

We have learned from similar efforts in Linn County, a predecessor group that benefited from attending the Georgetown University program on Reducing Racial and Ethnic bias in the Delinquency System. We have learned about local diversion programs, DMPD's Second Chance Program and other existing services currently available in Polk County.

We have also taken notice of current efforts and initiatives underway in Polk County to reduce disproportionality within the juvenile justice system. Some of these initiatives include the use of diversion programs in the community to prevent juveniles from entering the formal court process and alternatives to detention such as expedited intake appointments and in-home detention alternative programs. A Restorative Justice Position, funded through JCS funds transferred into Polk County Decat, has been developed and implemented. This position will help coordinate community engagement efforts such as the Courageous Conversations initiative and assist at risk families in accessing community based services. The Restorative Justice Specialist also provides mediation services within the community as an alternative to traditional system involved responses. Polk County JCS has also begun the process of providing cultural competency training to staff and other juvenile justice agencies in the community. Some of the current and future trainings will focus on implicit bias, recruitment/retention of minority staff and the history of African Americans in Iowa. It is also important to note that JCS will be requiring all staff to participate in the Race: The Power of an Illusion, which is a racial equity awareness and learning exchange.

We have had some academic and population understanding and trends brought to us by Professors Michelle Devlin and Mark Grey from the University of Northern Iowa.

CJJP presented information pertaining to delinquency data and demographics from their work. A significant amount of time was spent in 2015 studying matrix data that is in the CASP report and other data produced by CJJP. Our collaborative has been interpreting the data, trying to understand it. We have spent time trying to figure out what we can do locally to make meaningful changes that improve practices to accomplish our mission. We also spent considerable time trying to discern how we can coordinate and gather local data so we can actually understand what is happening here in our Polk County Juvenile Justice System.

Judge Belcher and Chief JCO Jensen participated in the 2015 Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative Inter Site Conference in Phoenix, AZ. A presentation on our “Next Steps” was provided during a statewide phone conference in November.

Equally important, we have spent time listening to and learning from each other and considering issues from perspectives other than our own. We struggled together and we went through several iterations before we arrived at a consensus regarding our mission . . . ***To examine and improve the juvenile justice system to reduce disproportionality for children of color.***

1. We acknowledge that in the last five years Iowa’s white population has decreased slightly while our youth of color population has grown, and is expected to continue to do so. We need to examine and seek to improve our juvenile justice system now and stay committed to it for the long haul, as we arrived at this place over a long period of time.
2. We want to examine and understand the statistical numbers at a local level and come to a deeper understanding regarding the level and amount of disproportionality present in the juvenile justice system in Polk County.
3. We want to be impactful and deliberate in reducing disproportionality. We do not want to advocate for or seek to change the existing systems in ways that are short lived or that do not improve and protect our community.
4. Efforts are underway to design a framework for DHS and JCS to work collaboratively together and combine resources with the goal of reducing the number of disadvantaged youth from entering either the child welfare or delinquency systems. Both agencies have been making efforts to address DMC, but this is the first time both agencies will coordinate their efforts in order to provide better outcomes for all youth with an emphasis on youth of color.

#### LESSONS LEARNED THUS FAR:

The CJJP data and the CASP report highlight the need for action. It shows that children of color are disproportionately involved in the juvenile justice system. However, it does not focus on individual youth or numbers based on youth themselves. It does not show how to reduce disproportionality here and improve our juvenile justice system.

To be most effective, we need to use local data. We need to have the tools in place to actually gather the right data. Only then we can understand the disproportionality and then try to effect changes to reduce it and improve the juvenile justice system.

It is imperative to be careful not to take a wide reaching, non-focused approach. Looking at the CASP report and the various CJJP matrices can be overwhelming. The juvenile justice system has multiple decision points, involves numerous entities, and can be quite complex to navigate. Our focus must to be narrow to try and improve our understanding and shed light on what we can do to improve juvenile justice and reduce disproportionality.

#### 2016 FOCAL POINT:

Detention is going to be our focus for 2016. The attached illustrative bar graph is an example of an initial effort to collect and disseminate straightforward, current, understandable and explainable local data. We include it as an example of the type of work we are doing and will continue to spotlight, highlight, and dissect together. We are going to continue to do better in these types of efforts to show what is happening with statistics and understandable information around detention. Our focus will be examining the data at this important decision point in order to explain what is happening around detention, and in particular around children of color and why we have disproportionality. We will view detention as a local continuum of service and help make sure it is more than just a secure setting for each child. We need to be aware of and understand detention alternatives and whether there are things we can do differently to reduce disproportionality with culturally competent alternatives.

#### 2016 COMMITMENT:

1. Helping Juvenile Court Services (JCS) engage in, learn from and act upon Courageous Conversations in the Community and other engagement and outreach.
2. Helping JCS form a Case Review Team for youth of color as an outgrowth of the Courageous Conversations, building off what has been developed in Child Welfare here in Polk County 2014 and 2015, the African American Case Review Team (AACRT).
3. Getting a deeper understanding of what is happening at this specific decision point, detention, and why we have disproportionality. We hope this focus will help us learn how we can also reduce disproportionality at other decision points as well, both earlier in the spectrum and later in the spectrum of juvenile justice.

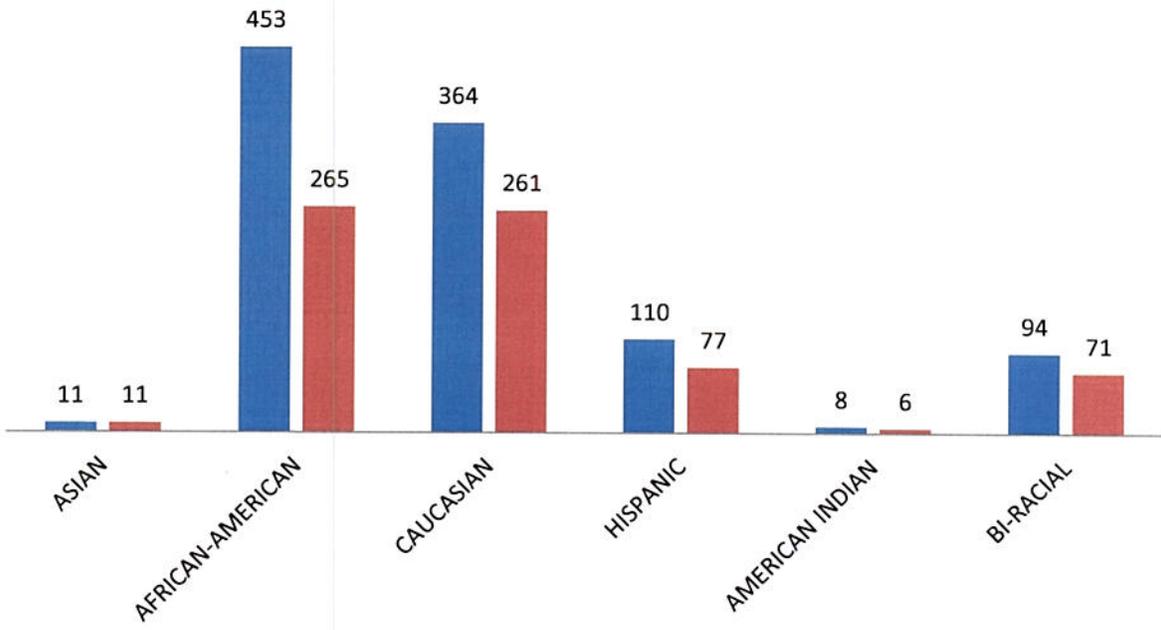
4. Monitoring locally collected data by both JCS and the Polk County Juvenile Detention Center focused on racial identification, data collection methodology, and analyzing that data on a quarterly or more frequent basis to stay informed of current trends.
5. Following JCS and other participants use of the Detention Screening Tool (DST) and its effect.
6. Learning more about Detention Alternatives and seeing how, or if, they can help us improve the juvenile justice system and reduce disproportionality for children of color.
7. Inquiring into and staying apprised of local JCS and DHS and the overall Juvenile Court System's efforts to investigate ways to reduce disproportionality by supporting delinquency prevention (assessment, identification, responsive programming) in the child welfare system.
8. Considering JCS's Uniform Delinquency Assessment Tool, both the short form and the long form, to evaluate it for cultural competencies and unintentional biases.
9. Learning about and investigating the potential of a dispositional matrix (November 2014 CASP report indicates it is being developed and piloted in three other judicial districts).
10. Learning about and assisting JCS in their efforts to expand evidenced based practices such as Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) and the Standardized Program Evaluation Program (SPEP), which is a process to help community programs.

---

\*Jim Ward is new to our group and effort as of January 2016 and we are looking forward to his presence and active contributions. Frank Severino, former Juvenile Division Bureau Chief with the Polk County Attorney's Office, was a valued and active member of our group in Summer and Fall 2015. We are grateful to Mr. Severino for his conscientious contributions to our work.

## Polk County November 1, 2014-October 31, 2015

■ TOTAL CENTRAL INTAKE ADMITS     
 ■ TOTAL JUVENILES ADMITTED



## Polk County November 1, 2014-October 31, 2015

■ TOTAL DETENTION ADMITS     
 ■ TOTAL JUVENILES ADMITTED

