

CCLP Building Blocks for Youth

Building Blocks for Youth was a multi-strategy, multi-site initiative that featured an alliance of children and youth advocates, researchers, community organizers, and law enforcement professionals working to address Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) by:

Reducing the overrepresentation and racial and ethnic disparities affecting youth of color in the juvenile system and Promoting fair, rational, and effective juvenile justice policies.

The partners in Building Blocks for Youth were the Youth Law Center, American Bar Association Juvenile Justice Center (now National Juvenile Defender Center), W. Haywood Burns Institute, Juvenile Law Center, Justice Policy Institute, Minorities in Law Enforcement, National Council on Crime and Delinquency, and Pretrial Services Resource Center. Mark Soler, now the Executive Director of CCLP, was the overall coordinator of the initiative.

Building Blocks pursued five major strategies:

Supporting new research on various aspects of DMC;

Conducting site-based work to reduce DMC;

Engaging in direct advocacy on behalf of youth of color in juvenile facilities;

Building a broad constituency for change on DMC policies among national, state, and local organizations and agencies; and

Developing new communications capacities

The initiative operated from 1998 to 2005. Descriptions of its site-based work can be found in its final report, [No Turning Back: Promising Approaches to Reducing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Justice System](#). In all, including No Turning Back, Building Blocks released many reports on a variety of aspects of DMC, including over-incarceration and disparate treatment affecting youth of color; transfer to adult court; criminalization of youth in public opinion and the media; Hispanic/Latino youth in the juvenile justice system; the effect of "zero tolerance" policies in schools; and an advocate's guide to public opinion on youth, race, and crime. Those publications are listed below, along with links to electronic copies of the reports.

[And Justice For Some: Differential Treatment of Minority Youth in the Justice System](#)

Eileen Poe-Yamagata and Michael A. Jones

And Justice For Some: Differential Treatment of Minority Youth in the Justice System, prepared by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), is the most complete and up-to-date collection of state and federal data on arrest, referral, detention, case processing, waiver to adult court, and incarceration, building a comprehensive view of the treatment of youth of color in the justice system. Among the key findings, the report showed that youth of

color are overrepresented and receive disparate treatment at every stage of the juvenile justice system.

[A Tale of Two Jurisdictions: Youth Crime and Detention Rates in Maryland & D.C.](#)

by Lisa Feldman, Michael Males, and Vincent Schiraldi

A Tale of Two Jurisdictions: Youth Crime and Detention Rates in Maryland and the District of Columbia finds that the District of Columbia had a much sharper drop in violent youth crime rates than the state of Maryland in the 1990's, even though Maryland's use of pretrial juvenile detention increased and the District's use of detention dropped substantially. The comparison of the District and Maryland suggests that cities and states can reduce locked detention without jeopardizing public safety. During the 1990's, the District sharply reduced its juvenile detention rate by 71 percent, while Maryland's detention rate rose 3 percent. During that same time, D.C.'s violent juvenile crime rate declined by 55 percent, more than three times Maryland's 15 percent decline in violent juvenile crime.

[The Color of Justice: An Analysis of Juvenile Adult Court Transfers in California](#)

By Mike Males, PhD and Dan Macallair, MPA, from the Justice Policy Institute

The Color of Justice: An Analysis of Juvenile Adult Court Transfers in California, prepared by the Justice Policy Institute, is the first analysis of racial and ethnic disparity in the transfer of youths to adult court and sentencing to California Youth Authority facilities in California. This study reveals that youth of color are 8.3 times more likely than white youth to be sentenced by an adult court to imprisonment in a California Youth Authority facility.

[Youth Crime/Adult Time: Is Justice Served?](#)

By Jolanta Juszkiwicz, from the Pretrial Services Resource Center

Youth Crime/Adult Time: Is Justice Served? reveals disturbing aspects in the transfer of youth, especially youth of color, to the adult criminal court. Prepared by the Pretrial Services Resource Center, the findings show over-representation and disparate treatment of youth of color, and raise serious questions about the fairness and appropriateness of prosecuting youth in the adult criminal system.

[Drugs and Disparity: The Racial Impact of Illinois' Practice of Transferring Young Drug Offenders to Adult Court](#)

By Jason Ziedenberg, from the Justice Policy Institute

Drugs and Disparity, a report prepared by the Justice Policy Institute for the Building Blocks for Youth initiative, finds that of the 393 youth automatically transferred to adult court in Cook County, IL during 1999-2000, over 99% were African-American or Latino, and 99% of the youth imprisoned for a drug crime from Cook County were youth of color.

[¿Dónde Está la Justicia? A Call to Action on behalf of Latino and Latina Youth in the U.S. Justice System](#)

By Francisco Villarruel and Nancy Walker.

¿Dónde Está la Justicia? A Call to Action on Behalf of Latino and Latina Youth in the U.S Justice System is a comprehensive new report reveals that Latino and Latina youth are over-represented in the U.S. justice system, and receive harsher treatment than White youth for the same types of offenses, while the lack of adequate data nationwide masks the severity of the problem. The report was commissioned by the Building Blocks for Youth initiative, a national campaign to reduce racial disparities in the justice system and promote fair and effective justice policies, and prepared by Francisco Villarruel and Nancy Walker of Michigan State University's Institute for Children, Youth, and Families.

[Off Balance: Youth, Race & Crime in the News](#)

By Lori Dorfman, from the Berkeley Media Studies Group and Vincent Schiraldi, from the Justice Policy Institute

Off Balance: Youth, Race, and Crime in the News finds that news media unduly connects youth to crime and violence and that youth of color are overrepresented as perpetrators and underrepresented as victims of crime. Prepared by the Justice Policy Institute and the Berkeley Media Studies Group for the Building Blocks for Youth initiative, the study is an examination of over 70 content analyses of newspaper and television crime coverage.

[Northern Lights: Success in Student Achievement and School Discipline at Northern Elementary School](#)

By David Richart

Northern Lights: Success in Student Achievement and School Discipline at Northern Elementary School highlights that school achievement can be increased dramatically without resorting to out-of-school suspensions. Both of these accomplishments occur in an elementary school where fair and reasonable discipline is maintained in an environment where all children can learn. The case study focuses on Northern Elementary School in Lexington, where 70% of the school population is low-income students.

[Unintended Consequences: The Impact of "Zero Tolerance" and Other Exclusionary Policies on Kentucky Students](#)

By David Richart, Kim Brooks, and Mark Soler

Unintended Consequences: The Impact of Zero Tolerance and other Exclusionary Policies on Kentucky Students found that African American youth are suspended two to seven times as frequently as white students for "board violations" such as "defiance of authority" or other class disturbances. The report found that there were 68,000 suspensions for school board violations in the 2000/01 school year alone. African- American students were also suspended

two to 17 times as frequently as white students, depending on the school district, for "law violations" such as possession of drugs.

[Public Opinion On Youth, Crime, And Race: A Guide For Advocates](#)

By Mark Soler

Public Opinion On Youth, Crime, And Race: A Guide For Advocates summarizes the public opinion research on youth and juvenile justice issues from the Building Blocks focus groups and national poll, as well as other polls. Unless otherwise noted, detailed findings discussed below are from the Building Blocks poll. After summarizing the public opinion research, this advocacy guide makes recommendations about how advocates can frame the issues in their work (focusing on effective messages and messengers), and how they can use this information in their organizing and advocacy efforts.

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CCLP Building Blocks for Youth

Why are “under-represented” children over-represented in the juvenile justice system?

It’s called “Disproportionate Minority Contact” (DMC), and it means that minorities, the “under-represented” in our culture, get more attention than others for offenses that result in detention and commitment.

Building Blocks for Youth was a multi-strategy, multi-site initiative of an alliance of children and youth advocates, researchers, community organizers, and law enforcement professionals working to address Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC).

The objective was to reduce the overrepresentation and racial and ethnic disparities affecting youth of color in the juvenile system and promoting fair, rational, and effective juvenile justice policies.

Led by Mark Soler, now the Executive Director of CCLP, partners in Building Blocks for Youth included:

- The Youth Law Center
- American Bar Association Juvenile Justice Center (now National Juvenile Defender Center)
- W. Haywood Burns Institute
- Juvenile Law Center
- Justice Policy Institute
- Minorities in Law Enforcement
- National Council on Crime and Delinquency
- Pretrial Services Resource Center

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- Supporting new research on various aspects of DMC;
- Conducting site-based work to reduce DMC;
- Engaging in direct advocacy on behalf of youth of color in juvenile facilities;
- Building a broad constituency for change on DMC policies among national, state, and local organizations and agencies; and
- Developing new communications capacities.

From its opening in 1998 to its conclusion in 2005, Building Blocks for Youth produced several reports addressing policy issues that still trouble us today. These include:

[No Turning Back: Promising Approaches to Reducing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Justice System.](#)

- No Turning Back, Build Block's final report, included descriptions of the program's site-based work. In all, including No Turning Back, Building Blocks released many reports on a variety of aspects of DMC, including over-incarceration and disparate treatment affecting youth of color; transfer to adult court; criminalization of youth in public opinion and the media; Hispanic/Latino youth in the juvenile justice system; the effect of "zero tolerance" policies in schools; and an advocate's guide to public opinion on youth, race, and crime.

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