

# LEADING WITH RACE

TO REIMAGINE YOUTH JUSTICE

*JDAI's Deep-End Initiative*



THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The Foundation acknowledges the many staff members who have contributed to this report, including Danielle Lipow, the lead content expert, Carol Abrams, Nate Balis, Stephen Bishop and Tom Woods. The Foundation thanks Michael Belton, Alex Frank, Rachel Gassert, Lisa Macaluso, Scott MacDonald, Erin Manske, Yumari Martinez, Jim Payne, Earl Ross, Jesse Russell, Annie Salsich, Chris Scharenbroch and individuals in deep-end sites across the country who have contributed to the evolution of the initiative.

## **ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private philanthropy that creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).

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## INTRODUCTION

Young people are most likely to thrive at home or in home-like settings in their own communities, with stable connections to positive adults and activities. Research shows that young people who have violated the law — even in serious and harmful ways — can become productive adults if they have guidance and a support network that connects them to education and job skills, along with the chance to repair the harm they have caused to others.

Yet, in the United States, the odds remain high that a young person charged with a crime will be locked up, especially African American, American Indian or Latino males. Incarceration separates young people from the guidance, support and connections they need and significantly impedes future success.<sup>1</sup>

While the past decade has seen an impressive decline in youth incarceration rates — down 54% in the period from 2005 to 2017<sup>2</sup> — the large reduction in the overall number of young people behind bars obscures a sobering reality: National data show that African American youth remain more than four times as likely to be in custody as their white peers.<sup>3</sup> In many communities, the data reveal even more extreme disparities.<sup>4</sup>

For decades, youth justice practitioners and reformers have struggled to make progress in reducing disparities for young people of color, who are consistently overrepresented in the nation's courtrooms and detention centers, youth prisons and other residential institutions.<sup>5</sup> Racial and ethnic disparities begin at arrest and persist throughout the system, intensifying as responses become more restrictive and punitive.<sup>6</sup> The overrepresentation of youth of color is most extreme for youth in court-ordered institutions — often called the “deep end” of the system — and for youth transferred from juvenile to adult criminal courts.<sup>7</sup>

Removing a young person from home is a grave decision. Denying young people their freedom puts a formidable barrier between a young person and a healthy life of opportunity because it disrupts family, work and community ties and stymies normal adolescent development. Young people in institutions lose the opportunity to participate in many important rites of passage associated with adolescence, such as attending high school, participating in after-school and community activities, learning to drive, getting a first job and developing the autonomy to think, feel, make decisions and act on their own. Further, well-designed community-based programs are more likely than institutional confinement to facilitate healthy development and reduce recidivism.<sup>8</sup>

## The Hypothesis

Eight years ago, the Annie E. Casey Foundation sought to demonstrate that with deliberate efforts, public systems could safely and significantly reduce confinement, especially for youth of color — an audacious undertaking in 2012 because confinement rates were already at a 20-year record low, and many thought disparities in the justice system were intractable. While many state and local jurisdictions had successfully reduced their reliance on large, state-run facilities — youth prisons — the Foundation challenged itself and its public system partners to reduce all forms of out-of-home placement. Too narrow a focus on state custody would have ignored most of the country’s juvenile justice institutions, such as residential treatment centers.<sup>9</sup>

## Testing the Hypothesis

Casey’s deep-end body of work, named for the deep end of the juvenile justice system, is an effort to safely and significantly reduce confinement, especially for youth of color, in all forms of out-of-home placement. It builds on Casey’s flagship juvenile justice reform movement, the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative® (JDAI®), which has focused on the front end of the system. Twelve communities across the country serve as demonstration sites for Casey’s approach to deep-end reform.

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**WHAT IS DEEP END?** While the phrase *deep end* may seem strange to nonpractitioners, it is familiar to juvenile justice professionals. In fact, few terms in justice reform carry as much weight and symbolism. Deep end describes the range of residential institutions to which young people are sentenced (or, in juvenile court terms, “disposed”) as a consequence of delinquency, status offenses or technical violations of probation. The term also evokes the unfortunate reality that youth who are plunged into the deep end of the system often find it difficult to get out.

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## Making the Case for a Promising Approach

While the sites’ work is ongoing, **they have produced early evidence that jurisdictions can safely reduce their reliance on out-of-home placement at the deep end of the juvenile justice system.** Collectively, the deep-end sites confined at least 50% fewer young people in 2018 than in their baseline years<sup>10</sup> without compromising public safety.

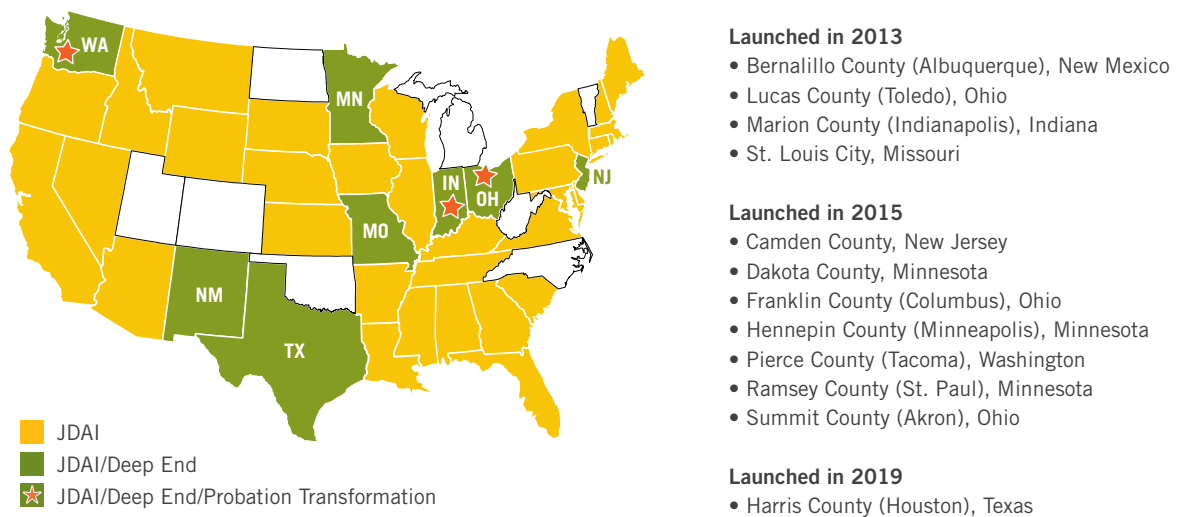
Several participating jurisdictions have shown that youth justice systems can achieve more equitable results when they examine their data through a racial lens and address disparities with targeted strategies. For example:

- **Summit County, Ohio**, significantly narrowed the gap between the experiences of African American and white youth in the juvenile justice system by virtually eliminating dispositions to detention for 90 days of treatment — a practice that was primarily applied to black youth.
- When the initial system assessment in **Pierce County, Washington**, revealed that African American youth were less likely to receive opportunities in the community and three times more likely to be ordered to state custody than white youth, system leaders launched Pathways to Success, designed for African American boys ages 15 and under. With the addition of Pathways and a host of other programs, Pierce has reduced the placement rate for African American youth by 46%, compared to 40% for white youth.

This overview documents the quantitative gains made in the demonstration sites so far and explains the three most significant strategies they are using to keep more young people — especially youth of color — safely at home and connected to positive activities and caring adults.

The Foundation hopes this overview is useful to other jurisdictions interested in taking on similar work — and to funders interested in equity in the justice system.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Deep-End Sites Grouped by Year Their Participation Began**



# CASEY'S DEEP-END WORK CONTRIBUTES TO THE BROADER STRATEGY OF ENDING THE USE OF THE YOUTH PRISON MODEL.

The deep-end work aims to keep young people safely in their communities and to support their growth, even when they have been adjudicated for committing serious offenses or have significant needs. It's part of a broader strategy to move juvenile justice systems from a culture of punishment and confinement to one that promotes creative and data-driven responses that lead to young people's long-term success. In a sequence of action steps often referred to as REDUCE-REFORM-REPLACE-REINVEST<sup>11</sup> — reducing the pipeline, reforming systems of intervention, replacing youth prisons and creating opportunities for reinvestment into more effective, home-based approaches — the deep-end work is safely shrinking the number of young people sent to institutional placements.

## LEADING WITH RACE

Casey began by identifying jurisdictions to pilot an approach to safely and significantly reduce juvenile confinement, especially for youth of color. The Foundation sought sites that varied in size, culture and demographics, but whose leaders agreed that young people were more likely to lead healthy and productive lives when they were supported in their communities, rather than detained or incarcerated.

By piloting the work in an array of communities, the Foundation could demonstrate that deep-end reforms have the potential for success in a wide variety of jurisdictions. Casey invited jurisdictions to apply and selected localities willing to pursue changes and focus on equity in policy, practice, programs and partnerships to reduce the likelihood of out-of-home placement. Figure 1 lists the deep-end sites.<sup>12</sup>

Historically, reform efforts have shied away from strategies that lead with race, operating under the belief that a rising tide lifts all boats — that all youth benefit from race-neutral approaches working to improve practice across the board. In contrast, the deep-end work asks sites to begin with the most overrepresented populations and those who have experienced the steepest barriers.

The pilot sites are committed to recognizing and offsetting the structural, institutional and systemic racial and ethnic inequities in their own systems. Disparities in juvenile justice system involvement are endemic throughout the country and highest at the deep end.<sup>13</sup> Youth justice systems in all sites have committed to using data that are explicit about the race and ethnicity of the young people who come in contact with law enforcement, probation, the court system and any form of out-of-home placement. The deep-end effort also requires that communities closely examine how decisions are made throughout the system to improve the trajectory for all young people, especially the ones facing the most systemic barriers to a positive adulthood.

### **JDAI: The First Step Toward Systemwide Change**

Casey's work in the deep end of the system is rooted in JDAI, which has become the standard of practice for how local justice systems nationwide handle the critical front end of the juvenile court process. Using a data-driven, problem-solving approach and a series of tools rooted in eight core strategies,<sup>14</sup> JDAI has helped change the country's norms for determining how and when to use secure detention for young people who have been arrested. It has done this by demonstrating that jurisdictions could safely keep more youth in their communities awaiting trial, a sharp difference from the widespread and growing overreliance on detention nationwide when the Foundation launched JDAI in 1992.

JDAI now operates in jurisdictions populated by nearly one-third of all young people in the United States.<sup>15</sup> It has expanded from five sites in the mid-1990s to more than 300 jurisdictions in 40 states and the District of Columbia in 2020. Across the initiative, JDAI sites have reduced admissions to secure detention by 57% and the average daily population in detention facilities by 50% since launching their JDAI efforts, and they have done so without sacrificing public safety.

### **Deep-End Reform: Applying JDAI Core Strategies Beyond Detention**

JDAI's success has been a catalyst for sites to apply JDAI's core strategies and values beyond detention. The reductions in detention have laid the foundation for state and local jurisdictions to shrink and strengthen their juvenile justice systems further, from the front end to the deep end.

Casey invited JDAI jurisdictions with a demonstrated capacity to achieve results to apply to be pilot deep-end sites. The first five sites started deep-end work in 2013 with strong JDAI tailwinds, having already reduced their detention populations by up to 60%.<sup>16</sup> Four of the five had also reduced reliance on youth prisons by up to 26%.<sup>17</sup> In most sites, however, those gains were not as strong for youth of color. The pilot sites were representative of JDAI sites at large because they had significantly reduced their reliance on detention and youth prisons, and because they had made more progress for white youth than for youth of color.



**WHY FOCUS ON YOUTH OF COLOR?** All young people — no matter their race, ethnicity or ZIP code — deserve the opportunity to realize their potential, even when they make mistakes or commit serious harm. But the data and the Foundation’s experiences make clear that our nation has a long way to go before achieving that vision. For far too many young people, particularly those of color, the road to adulthood is riddled with obstacles. To achieve our mission of building a brighter future for all of America’s young people, we must address the challenges they face.

A complex system of racial bias and inequity is deeply rooted in our country’s history, culture and institutions.<sup>18</sup> Generations of structural racism have routinely conferred advantage and disadvantage based on skin color and deprived communities of color of important resources.

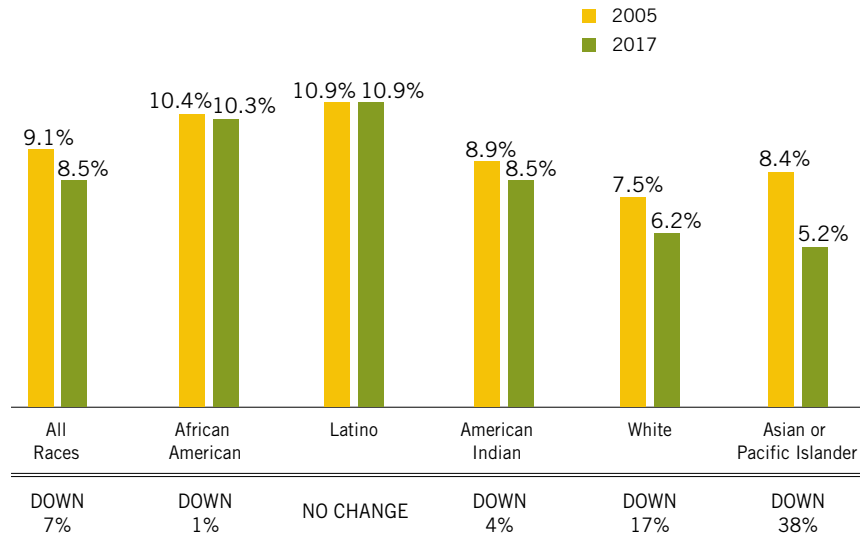
Although youth justice practitioners and reformers have made strong gains for white youth, for decades they have struggled to make as much progress for youth of color, who are consistently overrepresented in our nation’s public systems and even more so in our detention centers, jails and prisons. Even in systems with leaders and staff committed to equity, the systemic and structural barriers for people of color have stood strong against a series of reform initiatives.

**Crime has plummeted nationally, but the likelihood of confinement remains too high**

In 2017, the last year for which national data are available, nearly 70,000 young people were removed from their homes and placed in juvenile facilities.<sup>19</sup> While this number is a significant drop from a decade ago, the decline has been driven more by decreased juvenile crime<sup>20</sup> than by fundamental reform of how juvenile justice systems respond to youth charged with crimes, especially youth of color.<sup>21</sup> Confinement was almost as likely in 2017 as it was in 2005 for a young person found to have committed a crime (see Figure 2); in the aggregate, the likelihood of placement in a facility dropped by just 7%. The reductions were largest for Asian and white youth. Latino youth, by contrast, saw no change. American Indian and black youth were slightly less likely to be confined, with reductions of 4% and 1%, respectively.

FIGURE 2

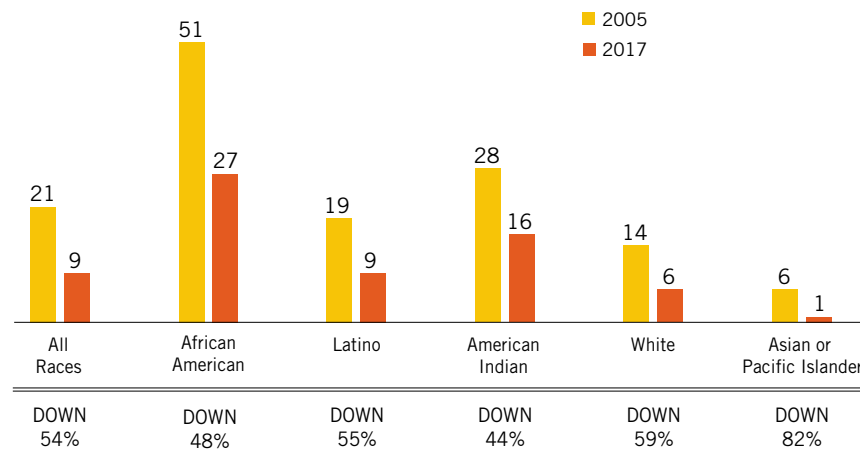
Disparities in Placement Nationally Shown as Percentage of Dispositions to Placement by Race and Ethnicity



Despite a variety of attempts to reduce racial and ethnic disparities, national data show that youth of color remain at higher risk of confinement in state correctional facilities and other residential institutions. See Figures 2 and 3, which offer two different ways to examine national data on juvenile confinement in 2005 and 2017. Figure 2 shows confinement rates relative to juvenile dispositions, while Figure 3 shows confinement rates relative to the overall population under 18.<sup>22</sup>

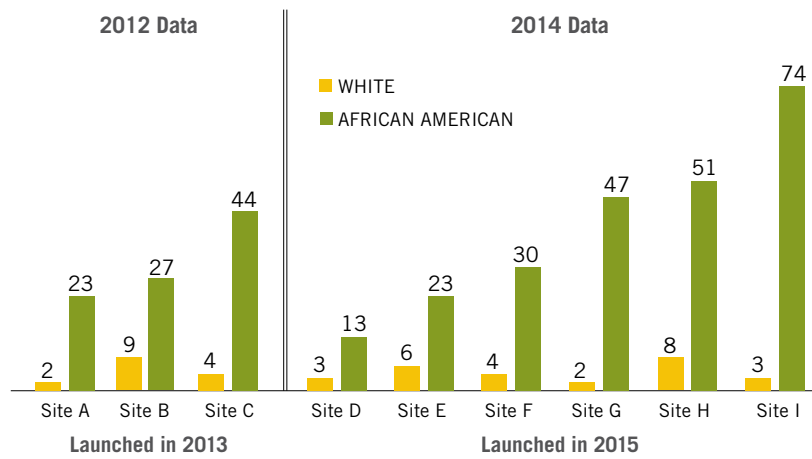
FIGURE 3

Disparities in Placement Nationally Shown as Confinement Rates per 10,000 Young People Under 18



National trends also were reflected in the deep-end sites. Figure 4 looks specifically at disparities in placement in several of the deep-end sites. In the year before starting the deep-end work, African American youth were at least three times more likely to be ordered by courts to out-of-home placements than white youth. In one site, African American youth were almost 25 times more likely to be placed out of home than white youth.

**FIGURE 4**  
**Baseline Data for Sites by Year Launched: Placements per 10,000 Young People Under 18 in County/City Population**



Given the persistence of these trends, Casey’s approach is explicit about race. It is a structured approach — with room for local adaptation — that equips and empowers jurisdictions to make more equitable decisions about youth who engage in delinquent behavior. At each decision point, deep-end sites focus on the young people who face the most barriers between childhood and opportunity. In youth justice systems, those young people are youth of color.

**THE DEEP-END INITIATIVE FOCUSES DIRECTLY ON ALL FORMS OF JUVENILE CONFINEMENT, ESPECIALLY ITS DISPARATE USE FOR YOUTH OF COLOR.**

The focus on race means that communities of color are at the heart of the approach. Deep-end sites engage community-based organizations and community members to work collaboratively with systems on a shared goal: to expand effective, culturally grounded community responses that resonate with young people of color, build on their innate resilience<sup>23</sup> and connect them to positive opportunities.

## **INITIAL RESULTS: DEEP-END SITES ARE DEMONSTRATING PROGRESS AND OUTPACING NATIONAL TRENDS**

The deep-end jurisdictions have outpaced reductions in confinement at the national level, providing early evidence that focused attention on creating new opportunities, strengthening existing opportunities and removing barriers for youth of color can fuel transformational change in youth justice.

While the work is ongoing, the deep-end sites have achieved impressive early results. Deep-end sites have demonstrated that communities can preserve community safety and hold youth accountable — while helping to ensure that young people, especially youth of color, can recover from their mistakes and make a healthy transition into adulthood.

### **Deep-End Sites Have Made Significant Gains in Equity**

Disparities are deeply rooted in public systems across the United States, and the youth justice system is no exception. These disparities have historically proven difficult to eliminate, but the deep-end sites' intentional, data-driven strategies are helping to move systems toward equity.

As of 2017, the most recent year for which comparable data are available nationally, the deep-end sites had substantially outpaced the national average in reducing placements for African American youth. Taken as a group, the sites that launched their deep-end reform work in 2013 had reduced out-of-home

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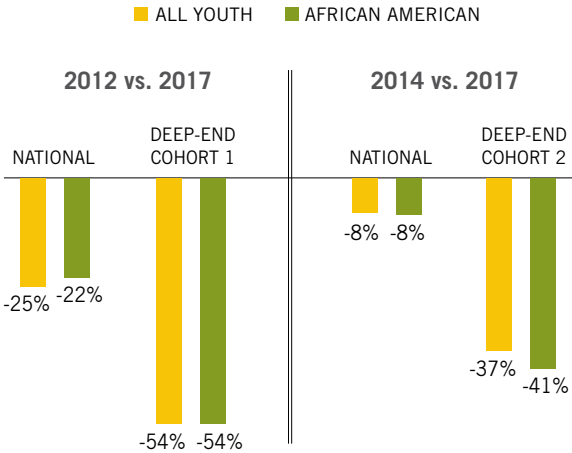
**CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES, STRENGTHENING EXISTING OPPORTUNITIES AND REMOVING BARRIERS  
FOR YOUTH OF COLOR CAN FUEL TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE IN YOUTH JUSTICE.**

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placements for black youth by 54% from 2012 to 2017, compared to the national average of 22% for the same time period. In the aggregate, the sites that launched their work in 2015 had reduced out-of-home placements for African American youth by 41% from 2014 to 2017, compared to an 8% reduction nationally (see Figure 5).

Although national data are unavailable for 2018, the deep-end sites have reported their results. Both cohorts, taken together, reduced deep-end (out-of-home) placements for African American youth by 51% and for all youth by 50% from their baseline years to 2018.<sup>24</sup>

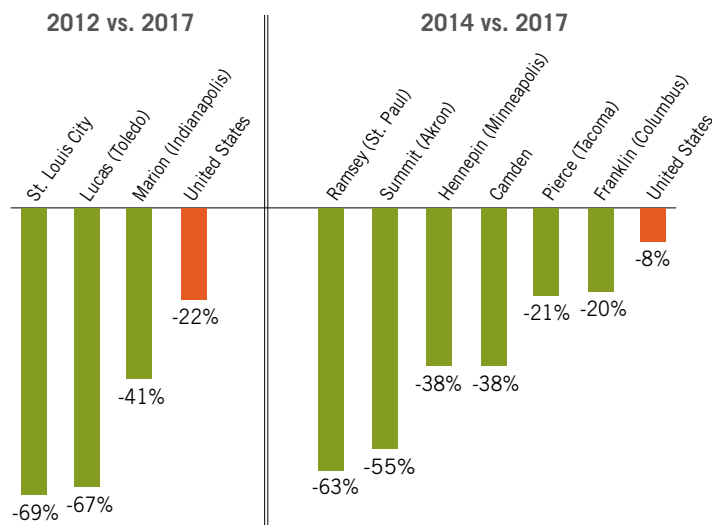
**FIGURE 5**  
**Reductions in Out-of-Home Placement Nationally and in Deep-End Sites:**  
**All Youth vs. African American Youth**



**Progress at the Site Level**

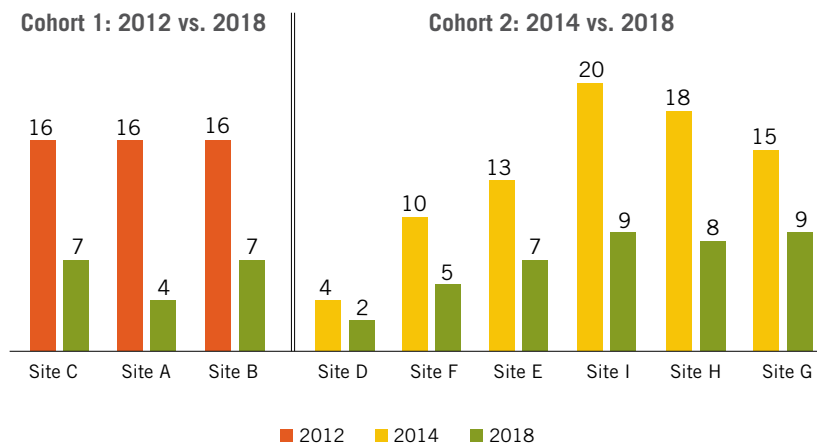
Individually, the deep-end sites have substantially outpaced the national average in reducing placements for African American youth (see Figure 6). The figure shows data through 2017, so that the site-level results can be compared to national averages.

**FIGURE 6**  
**Change in Out-of-Home Placements for African American Youth<sup>25</sup>**



By focusing on youth of color — the young people who systems are most likely to place — deep-end sites have made significant dents in their confinement rates. Out-of-home placement rates have fallen in all sites that have reliable baseline and 2018 data (see Figure 7).<sup>26</sup> Figure 7 shows reductions in the overall placement rates in the nine jurisdictions that have reported baseline data for all forms of out-of-home placement. To allow comparisons across large and small sites, placements are graphed relative to the jurisdiction’s population under 18 years of age.

**FIGURE 7**  
**Reductions in Youth Placement Rates in Deep-End Sites: Placements per 10,000 Young People Under 18**



Several communities have achieved substantial reductions in confinement for youth of color:

- The **City of St. Louis** confined 79% fewer youth in 2018 than it had in 2012, with youth of color accounting for 95% of the change. The court in St. Louis has built exceptionally strong partnerships with system and nonsystem partners, including one with Better Family Life, a grassroots community-based organization that works closely with young people on probation for serious offenses.
- **Ramsey County, Minnesota**, home to St. Paul, reduced its deep-end placements by nearly 60% since 2014. African American youth accounted for 91% of the change. While Ramsey County began deep-end work in 2015 with plans to build a large new residential facility, the county withdrew from that planning process in 2017 and began appropriating \$500,000 per year for alternatives to incarceration for young people. In 2019, Ramsey County announced plans to permanently close a local residential facility. Ramsey has been a JDAI leader in community engagement for many years, and its community partnerships have strengthened over time. Community members in St. Paul are vocal advocates for ongoing reform and play leading roles in important collaborative bodies, including the JDAI leadership group and the committee responsible for recommending programmatic alternatives to incarceration.
- **Pierce County, Washington**, home to Tacoma, began its deep-end work in 2015 with the lowest placement rate by far of any of the pilot sites. In 2014, it made only four placements annually for every 10,000 young people under 18 years old in the county. Even so, with strong system leaders and an array of community partners, Pierce County has reduced its overall placement rate by 39% and the placement rate for African American youth by 46% since becoming a deep-end demonstration site. To set this achievement in context, no other deep-end site — even after practicing deep-end reform for four or more years — has attained as low a placement rate as Pierce County’s starting point in 2014.

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“THE COMMUNITY AND COUNTY GOVERNMENT HOLD A SHARED VISION THAT WAS PREVIOUSLY UNIMAGINABLE. WE FORGE AHEAD TOGETHER, DETERMINED TO SUSTAIN PROGRESS ON RACIAL EQUITY AND JUSTICE.” – Ryan T. O’Connor, county manager, Ramsey County

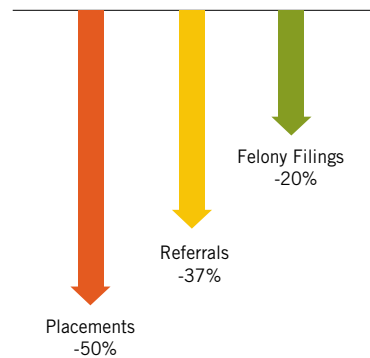
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### Community Safety in the Deep-End Sites

The deep-end sites reported lower juvenile crime during the time period that they achieved a 50% reduction in confinement. As the deep-end sites changed policy, practice, programs and partnerships to sharply reduce their reliance on confinement, especially for youth of color, the number of cases being referred to court<sup>27</sup> in their jurisdictions declined by 37% and the number of felony filings dropped by 20%<sup>28</sup> from the baseline to 2018 (see Figure 8).

FIGURE 8  
Reductions in Out-of-Home Placements,  
Court Referrals and Felony Filings

#### Deep-End Sites: Baseline vs. 2018



**THE DEEP-END THEORY OF CHANGE** The deep-end work is anchored in the Casey Foundation's belief that local public officials have the will, the capacity and the opportunity to safely and significantly reduce the likelihood of youth confinement, especially for youth of color. By supporting that will, amplifying that capacity and expanding that opportunity — while also advocating for public systems to work in genuine partnership with communities, families and young people — the Foundation can accelerate a fairer and more equitable justice system at the deep end.

#### WILL

Leaders, managers and frontline staff of local juvenile justice systems want to do what is best for all young people they encounter.

#### CAPACITY

With the right strategies, people working within local systems have the power to develop creative, community-based responses that lead to positive connections and opportunities for system-involved young people, protecting them from the disruptive effects of placement in secure facilities and other out-of-home settings.

#### OPPORTUNITY

By focusing explicitly on race, local public officials create an opportunity for themselves to act as a counterforce to disparities that are deeply rooted in structural racism stemming from our nation's history of slavery, intimidation, inequitable opportunity and discrimination.



## DEEP-END STRATEGIES: WHAT SITES DO

All sites use three primary strategies to move toward the goal of safely and significantly reducing out-of-home placements and improving youth well-being, especially for youth of color: (1) race-conscious system mapping, (2) comprehensive and disaggregated data tracking and analysis and (3) targeted reforms to change policy, practice, programs and partnerships. These strategies are designed to guide sites toward data-driven, meaningful reforms that are explicit about race.

### 1. Race-conscious system mapping

Sites begin by identifying the decision points where practitioners and other adults have the ability to steer young people away from the formal justice system and back into communities, with a focus on creating equitable opportunities for all youth.

### 2. Comprehensive and disaggregated data tracking and analysis

Data gathering and analysis allow sites to identify which decision points contribute to inequity in placement so they can develop targeted reforms and measure progress toward the deep-end goal. For many sites, the first step in this journey was to develop a baseline understanding of how many young people were being removed from their homes each year, disaggregated by race.

### 3. Targeted reforms to change policy, practice, programs and partnerships

Sites work on changing policy, practice, programs and partnerships, with special attention to five key areas: **disposition decisions, diversion, probation practice, family engagement and community engagement.**

## Strategy I: Race-Conscious System Mapping

### Use the “Deep-End Highway” to Create a Race-Conscious Picture of the Decisions That Drive Young People to Confinement

Despite increasing knowledge of the benefits of supporting youth in the community and the harms of out-of-home placement,<sup>29</sup> juvenile justice systems can sometimes operate like highways with express lanes that lead youth more deeply into the system, offering too few exits into communities.

### What Is the “Deep-End Highway”?

The deep-end highway is a tool that practitioners and communities can use to visually map the system, identifying when and how young people get opportunities to recover from their mistakes. By adding data to the tool, systems can then see which young people are afforded these opportunities and which are not.

Imagine the justice system as a highway that begins with delinquent behavior and leads directly to confinement (see Figure 9).

In reality, no system is that simple. As with any highway, there are multiple exit ramps along the way, each of which could create a path away from confinement and toward community-based opportunities for positive behavior change, personal growth and connection. Data from systems all over the country demonstrate that white youth have more access to exit ramps than youth of color. So as the remaining “traffic” flows to the end of the road, increasingly it is youth of color who are making the trip.

FIGURE 9

### DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR

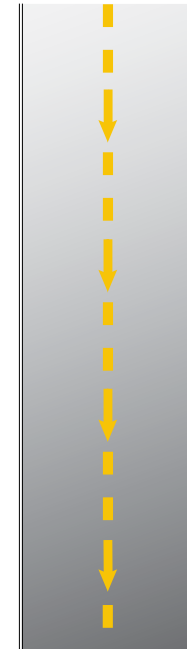


FIGURE 10

### DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR



Delinquent behavior is not criminalized, e.g., a young person attends a school or lives in a neighborhood that is not heavily policed, etc.

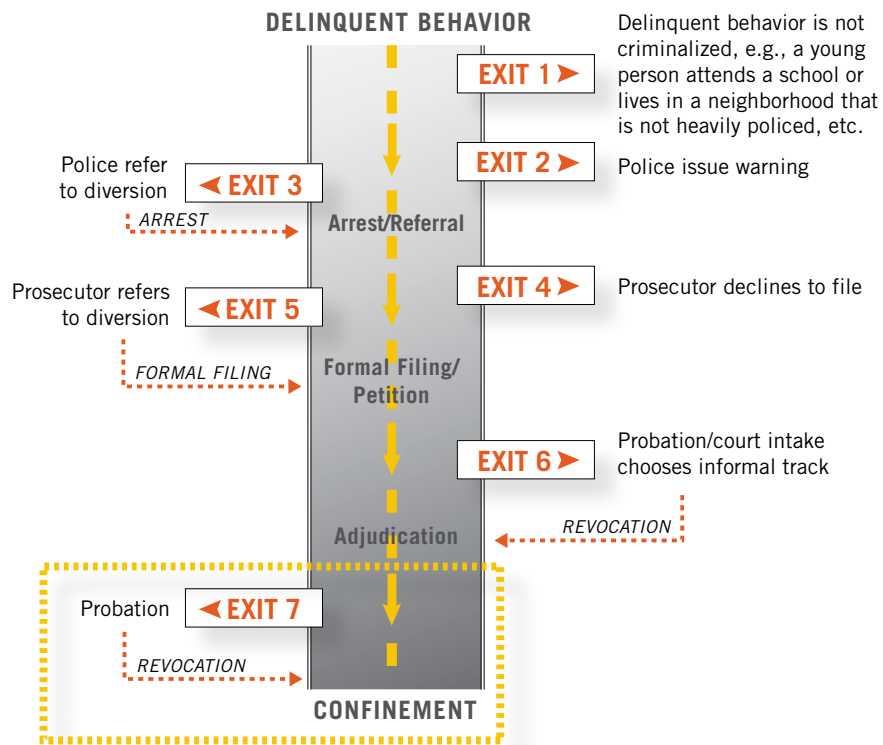
It is important to note that the highway begins with delinquent behavior, not arrest. It is developmentally normal for teenagers of all races and ethnicities to be involved in minor acts of delinquency.<sup>30</sup> These acts occur in every neighborhood, but consequences vary. In neighborhoods and schools with very little police presence, delinquency may be unseen by law enforcement. Or it may be quickly dismissed, such as when a police officer breaks up a party without making any arrests, or when a teacher handles disorderly conduct or in-school fights without involving the justice system. Because these responses to developmentally normal delinquent behavior create pathways away from the system, they should be mapped as the first exit from the highway (Figure 10).

Youth of color are more likely to have their delinquent behavior criminalized. For instance, black students are more likely than white students to attend a school being patrolled by law enforcement officers.<sup>31</sup> Thus, a fight at school that in some places might be handled by school administrators and families could be criminalized in others.

Not all exits are permanent ones. As any driver knows, most highway exits have an on-ramp nearby that leads right back to the highway. For example, probation is itself an exit ramp, but because of how easy it is to violate probation with small missteps, such as skipping school, missing a curfew or failing a drug test, young people on probation can be locked up for breaking rules, not breaking the law (see Figure 11). In fact, national data suggest that 15% of all young people in placement are there due to technical violations of probation.<sup>32</sup>

Youth of color are less likely to get off the highway at an exit and more likely to circle back via an on-ramp. Of the young people confined for technical violations, for example, 65% are youth of color — far above their share of the nation’s youth population.<sup>33</sup>

FIGURE 11



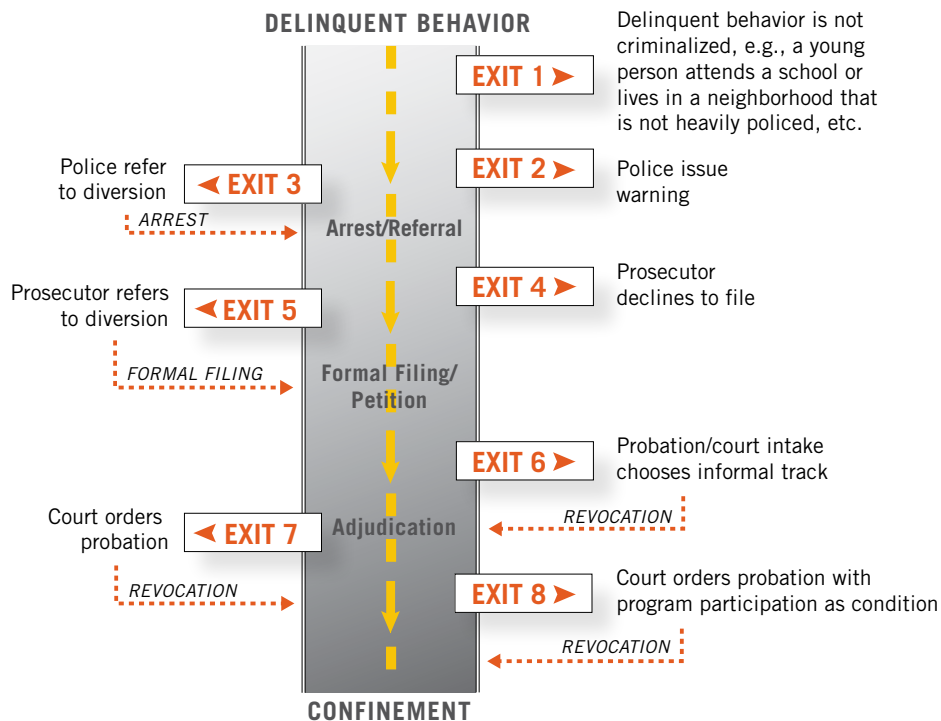
“WHEN YOU ENGAGE STAFF, CREATE SPACE FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS WELL AS CREATE MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS WITH PASSIONATE PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY, YOU ACCELERATE YOUR REFORM EFFORTS.” – TJ Bohl, administrator, Pierce County Juvenile Court

When deep-end sites use the highway tool, they analyze decisions from one end to the other, looking for opportunities for equitable reform that do one or more of the following:

- Create new exits — for example, Pierce County is in the midst of a two-year project that would add several new diversion exits and embed diversion in the community.
- Expand access to existing exits — for example, Marion County, Indiana, expanded eligibility for a neighborhood-based mentoring program as an alternative to placement for serious offenses.
- Close on-ramps — for example, New Mexico streamlined the court order that sets standard terms and conditions for probation, removing unreasonable conditions and eliminating a number of on-ramps that were leading from probation to placement.

Figure 12 offers an overview of the deep-end highway. A customizable version of the deep-end highway is part of the Foundation’s deep-end resources.<sup>34</sup> Each site has customized this tool to map the specifics of its own system. Sites are also beginning to attach data to their highways, allowing them to focus on decision points that offer them the greatest opportunities to counter disparities and track their progress.

**FIGURE 12**  
**Overview of the Deep-End Highway**



### Diversion Is a Powerful and Often Overlooked Means to Promote Racial Equity

In the deep-end work, *diversion* refers to any process by which an accusation of delinquency is handled informally. Diversion could involve participation in a program, such as a restorative justice conference with the person harmed, but it could also include procedural options like “counsel and close,” in which someone admonishes the young person and then closes the case. Diversion can occur at multiple points along the highway, as an alternative to arrest, to formal prosecution or to adjudication.

Diversion exits offer the greatest potential to support large numbers of young people without legal sanctions or court oversight — as well as a powerful opportunity for prosecutors, probation departments and courts to improve equity by consciously countering the significant disparities that arise from earlier decision points. Youth of color are diverted from juvenile court far less frequently than their white peers,<sup>35</sup> despite research showing that diversion typically improves youth outcomes.<sup>36</sup>

By focusing attention on diversion as part of deep-end reform, systems can forge and strengthen partnerships with neighborhood-based organizations in communities of color. Organizations that provide culturally grounded diversion options are best positioned to keep young people out of trouble and build connections to positive adults and activities. Overall, an emerging body of research is establishing a clear link between reduced violence and the number of local organizations focused on violence reduction and community building.<sup>37</sup>

Diversion practices vary quite a bit from place to place, with variations related to:

- when diversion occurs, such as pre-arrest, pre-prosecution or pre-adjudication;
- who makes the diversion decision (for example, police, prosecution, probation or the court);
- the eligibility and exclusion criteria, both written and unwritten;
- whether services are attached and, if so, whether they are voluntary and provided in a culturally relevant context;
- whether fees are required;
- whether the young person must admit to the accusation; and
- whether sanctions could be imposed if the young person does not meet the system’s expectations.

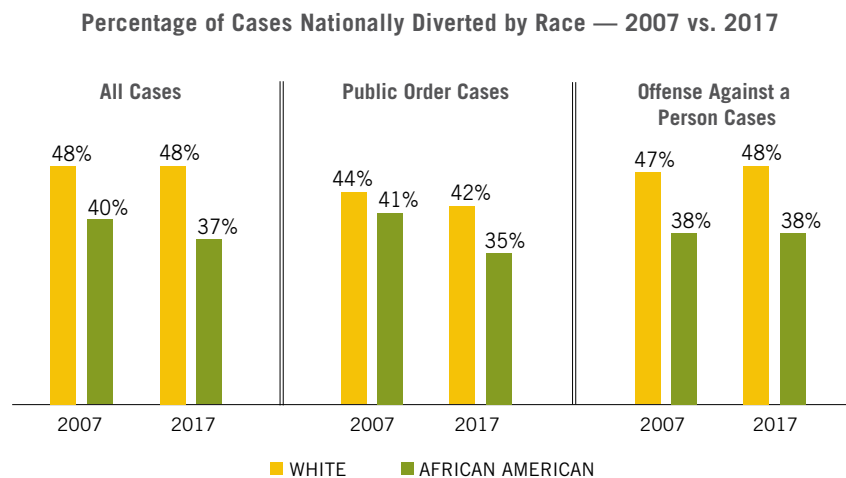
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RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN YOUTH JUSTICE HAVE HISTORICALLY PROVEN DIFFICULT TO ELIMINATE, BUT THE DEEP-END SITES’ INTENTIONAL, DATA-DRIVEN STRATEGIES ARE HELPING TO MOVE SYSTEMS TOWARD EQUITY.

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Despite having policies that were meant to be equitable, every deep-end site has found that system decision makers are more likely to divert white youth from formal prosecution — and to deem them successfully diverted — than their peers of color. The best national data available reflect the same phenomenon, showing that 48% of cases against white youth are handled informally, compared to only 37% of cases against black youth (see Figure 13).<sup>38</sup> In fact, a white youth involved in an offense against a person, such as aggravated assault, is more likely to be diverted than an African American youth involved in an offense against public order, such as trespassing or graffiti.

**FIGURE 13**  
**Disparities in Diversion Persist Across Time and Offense Types**



## Strategy 2: Comprehensive and Disaggregated Data Tracking and Analysis

### Apply an Inclusive Definition of Out-of-Home Placement

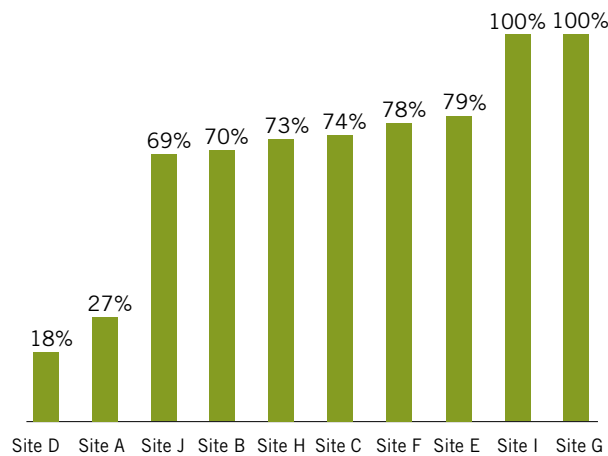
The second building block of the deep-end work is to establish a comprehensive baseline, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, from which sites can measure their progress.

This requires that sites count all forms of out-of-home placement, not just state institutions. As momentum builds in states to end the use of the youth prison model,<sup>39</sup> many jurisdictions are relying less on state institutions and more on residential treatment facilities, group homes, ranches, boot camps and the like. Simply moving young people from one type of placement to another does not get at the root of the problems associated with confinement, which is why the deep-end approach considers all

types of court-ordered confinement in sites' baselines and targets (see Figure 14). An exclusive focus on reducing commitments to youth prisons would miss at least 70% of all confinement events in most deep-end demonstration sites and would overlook every instance of institutionalization in some sites.

FIGURE 14

Percentage of Overall Out-of-Home Placements That Are Not Commitment to State Correctional Facilities – 2018



To establish an accurate baseline against which sites can measure their progress, systems must begin by counting all deprivations of liberty, and by getting in the habit of examining those deprivations through a race equity lens. This has not been an easy task.

**YOUNG PEOPLE BELONG IN FAMILIES, NOT INSTITUTIONS.** Institutional settings — even humane and safe institutions that embrace best practices in treatment and youth development — disrupt the ties young people have with their families. The disruption makes it harder for families to provide the guidance, support and structure that help their children get back on track and stay on track. While all of the deep-end sites continue to rely on out-of-home placements for some youth, stakeholders in these communities are increasingly sensitive to the fact that institutionalization comes at a steep price — not only for the taxpayers who shoulder the fiscal costs but also for the young people who are cut off from their families and communities.

### Strategy 3: Targeted Reforms to Change Policy, Practice, Programs and Partnerships



All sites work simultaneously on changing policy, practice, programs and partnerships, with special attention to five key areas:

**Disposition decisions.** Changes that can produce better outcomes for young people at sentencing include implementing collaborative and data-driven tools that help inform decisions about liberty and illuminate disparities and streamlining court orders to remove unreasonable conditions that often serve as traps for young people. Among other options are designing service-oriented alternatives to probation for youth charged with misdemeanor offenses and strengthening defense advocacy to promote creative, individualized, home-based options for judges to consider in serious cases where out-of-home placement was once considered inevitable.

The St. Louis City Family Court, for example, used a collaborative and data-driven process to revise its dispositional matrix, a tool that uses a combination of offense severity and assessed-risk level to guide decisions about who is diverted away from formal supervision, who ends up on probation and who is confined. The revised tool has helped to reduce placements by more than 70% and provided a framework for St. Louis to routinely examine decisions by race, ethnicity and gender and quickly identify disparities.

**Diversion.** Diversion from formal system involvement is a critical part of any youth justice effort to prioritize better outcomes for young people, racial and ethnic equity and community safety.<sup>40</sup> Deep-end sites pursue diversion through a range of programs, policies, practices and partnerships that steer young people away from formal justice responses. Approaches include police-sponsored programs that connect young people with mentors and activities that could help them thrive, agreements between schools and courts to reduce school-based arrests<sup>41</sup> and law enforcement policies that use informal alternatives to arrest and prosecution for low-level offenses.<sup>42</sup>



Lucas and Summit counties, both in Ohio, have replaced formal prosecution as the default response to misdemeanor charges with resource centers. Harris County has expanded prosecutorial diversion programs to include felonies. In Pierce County, the juvenile court is collaborating with a consortium of community-based organizations to design ways for neighborhood-based providers to respond when a young person is accused of delinquent behavior.

**Probation practice.** Probation is the most common disposition of a juvenile case, but it often becomes a pathway to out-of-home placement, especially for youth of color.<sup>43</sup> Deep-end sites work to avoid that negative pathway by developing individualized case plans with probation officers in a coaching role and working with families as partners, shifting from sanction-based to incentive-based approaches to behavior change and adopting nontraditional hours so probation officers can meet with families without forcing them to miss work. Achieving these and other fundamental changes that transform probation into a focused and effective intervention requires probation caseloads small enough to allow officers to build strong relationships and provide meaningful support.

The juvenile court in Pierce County has introduced a number of innovative probation practices,<sup>44</sup> including Opportunity-Based Probation, which was codesigned by researchers, probation staff and young people.<sup>45</sup> Opportunity-Based Probation flips the traditional, compliance-oriented approach to probation, relying instead on incentives, relationships and positive youth development activities to motivate lasting behavioral change and promote youth well-being. In Franklin County, Ohio, the court is in the process of transforming the juvenile probation department so that policy and practice are anchored in positive youth development, race equity and family engagement.<sup>46</sup>

**Family engagement.** Parents and other family members and supportive adults are the most important people in their children's lives, and they will remain so long after a young person is involved with the juvenile justice system. Adolescent development research finds that parents and other family members exert a substantial influence on the behavior of their adolescent children. Deep-end sites have employed a variety of approaches to strengthen family engagement, such as adopting a broad definition of family that includes the people a young person considers to be their family, whether or not they are biologically related; dramatically expanding visiting opportunities for families with young people in confinement;

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“THE DATA PROVE THAT CONFINING KIDS WHOLESALÉ DOESN’T WORK. SO, THE COUNTY IS FOCUSING LESS ON COOKIE-CUTTER PROBATION RULES AND RIGID COMPLIANCE AND MORE ON CUSTOMIZED SUPERVISION AND FAMILY SUPPORT.” – Kim Browne, administrative judge of Ohio’s Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, Domestic Relations and Juvenile Division

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meaningfully including family members in decisions that are often tightly controlled by system workers; contracting with community-based organizations that work directly with families; and creating full-time positions for new staff to build family support networks and act as advocates for families.

The juvenile court in Lucas County, Ohio, has forged a partnership with a community-based organization called Center of Hope Family Services to help families navigate often-complex and stressful court processes. Center of Hope trains community members who have experienced the system themselves to provide peer support to families whose young people are facing charges.

**Community engagement.** The ties that exist between young people and their families and communities, even when damaged or strained, are essential for healthy development. Virtually all youth who are placed out of the home will ultimately return to their families and communities when their sentences end, because these are the people and places to which they are most strongly connected. While public systems can play a helpful role in building healthy futures for disconnected young people, the most powerful and lasting resources exist in communities. Deep-end sites have strengthened connections between systems and the communities they serve in a variety of ways, including by developing community-based alternatives to placement that are designed and led by people who live in the neighborhoods most affected by the system, investing in community-led, culturally responsive organizations and implementing restorative justice practices.

In Camden County, New Jersey, young people and members of three community-based organizations — Hopeworks, Commitment Community Church and Hope Chapel — are leading a process to identify and highlight the wealth of knowledge and resources that exists within the ZIP codes of neighborhoods adversely affected by structural racism.

## A CLOSER LOOK AT DEEP-END SITES

Sites represent a diverse array of communities, demonstrating that reforms to out-of-home placement practices, when done strategically, have the potential for success in a wide variety of jurisdictions (see Table 1).

### Site Snapshot: A Range of Communities

Sites include large and small, urban and suburban areas. They also vary economically, with the percentage of the youth population living in poverty ranging from 9% to 39% and median household income ranging from \$43,889 to \$86,302 in 2018. African American youth represent up to 61% of young people in the sites; Latino youth represent up to 64% of young people.

TABLE I

Demographic Data of Deep-End Sites<sup>47</sup>

Site	Deep-End Quick Reference		Overall Population		Population Under 18					
	Launch Year	Relationship of Probation to Judiciary	County/City Population	Median Household Income	Youth (Ages 0-17) Living in Poverty	White (Not Hispanic)	African American (Not Hispanic)	American Indian (Not Hispanic)	Asian or Pacific Islander (Not Hispanic)	Latino
Bernalillo, New Mexico (Albuquerque)	2013	Independent	678,701	\$51,208	24.8%	25.9%	3.3%	4.8%	2.4%	63.7%
Camden, New Jersey	2015	Probation part of judiciary	507,078	\$67,523	18.0%	46.4%	21.4%	0.2%	6.1%	25.9%
Dakota, Minnesota	2015	Independent	425,423	\$86,302	8.6%	70.1%	11.7%	0.6%	6.3%	11.4%
Franklin, Ohio (Columbus)	2015	Probation part of judiciary	1,310,300	\$60,373	23.5%	52.6%	31.8%	0.2%	5.8%	9.6%
Harris, Texas (Houston)	2019	Hybrid	4,698,619	\$60,232	24.2%	22.0%	18.8%	0.2%	5.8%	53.3%
Hennepin, Minnesota (Minneapolis)	2015	Independent	1,259,428	\$76,052	14.3%	55.1%	22.9%	1.1%	9.2%	11.7%
Lucas, Ohio (Toledo)	2013	Probation part of judiciary	429,899	\$47,360	27.1%	58.5%	27.7%	0.3%	2.0%	11.6%
Marion, Indiana (Indianapolis)	2013	Probation part of judiciary	954,670	\$47,780	28.5%	42.4%	35.3%	0.2%	4.2%	17.9%
Pierce, Washington (Tacoma)	2015	Probation part of judiciary	891,299	\$75,407	14.5%	60.3%	11.6%	1.5%	9.2%	17.5%
Ramsey, Minnesota (St. Paul)	2015	Independent	550,210	\$62,919	22.0%	44.9%	20.2%	0.9%	22.2%	11.8%
St. Louis City, Missouri	2013	Probation part of judiciary	302,838	\$43,889	38.9%	28.3%	61.4%	0.4%	3.0%	6.9%
Summit, Ohio (Akron)	2015	Probation part of judiciary	541,918	\$58,876	18.7%	69.5%	21.7%	0.2%	5.0%	3.5%

NOTE: Totals for the racial/ethnic breakdown may add up to over 100% in some cases due to bi- or multiracial reporting.

## CONCLUSION: PROOF OF CONCEPT

The deep-end demonstration sites provide examples of what can be achieved with strategic, intentional, data-driven reform. They have piloted the work with courage and ingenuity and have shown that change is possible.

These sites have made a commitment to systemwide, race-conscious reform to increase youth well-being and equity. While the deep-end work has been operating for fewer years than many traditional JDAI detention reform sites, the experiences of the first deep-end sites are encouraging. By focusing on youth of color — the young people most likely to be removed from their homes — deep-end sites have made significant dents in their overall placement rates while maintaining public safety.

The deep-end initiative's emphasis on equity includes elevating the role of community-based organizations and community members to increase opportunities for young people of color in their own neighborhoods. This approach recognizes that communities, with respect and resources from public systems, are best positioned to create the environments and support networks that all young people need for healthy development, including effective community-based responses to delinquency.

The three strategies described in the report — race-conscious system mapping; comprehensive and disaggregated data tracking and analysis; and targeted reforms to change policy, practice, programs and partnerships — continue to be field tested and honed. Any state, county or city that is on its own path to dramatically reducing confinement and building stronger, more equitable community-centered responses can use the deep-end approach to help accelerate progress and do better by young people.

# RESOURCES TO GET YOU STARTED

*Interested in deep-end reform?*

The Casey Foundation maintains an **online tool kit**

([www.aecf.org/work/juvenile-justice/reducing-youth-incarceration/deep-end-tool-kit](http://www.aecf.org/work/juvenile-justice/reducing-youth-incarceration/deep-end-tool-kit))

and a **resource guide**

([www.aecf.org/work/juvenile-justice/reducing-youth-incarceration/deep-end-resource-guide](http://www.aecf.org/work/juvenile-justice/reducing-youth-incarceration/deep-end-resource-guide)), **including:**

- ▶ **A CUSTOMIZABLE** version of the deep-end highway;
- ▶ **A SAMPLE** agenda for a system-mapping meeting;
- ▶ **A STANDARD** tracking sheet for performance measures to help establish a baseline and measure progress;
- ▶ **GUIDANCE** for data analysts to anticipate and overcome challenges;
- ▶ **FACT-FINDING** questions to help gather and organize information about how the system works;
- ▶ **A GUIDE** for conducting focus groups with young people and families affected by the system; and
- ▶ **THE FOUNDATION'S** Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide.

JDAIconnect ([jdaiconnect.org](http://jdaiconnect.org)), the free online community for JDAI<sup>®</sup> practitioners and anyone interested in youth justice, brings together people and places committed to reform to compare notes and explore new approaches. The online community hosts discussions among users, blog posts, training-on-demand courses and a resource library that includes videos and recorded webinars.

## ENDNOTES

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3 Puzzanchera, C., Sladky, A., & Kang, W. (2019). And, Sickmund, M., Sladky, A., & Kang, W. (2019). And, Sickmund, M., Sladky, T. J., Kang, W., & Puzzanchera, C. (2019).

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8 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2019, p. 126).

9 In 2013, fewer than 40% of committed youth were in state-operated facilities. Sickmund, M., Sladky, T. J., Kang, W., & Puzzanchera, C. (2019).

10 The 2018 reduction from 2,079 youth to 1,031 is based on self-reported data from nine of the 11 sites that began deep-end reform before 2018. Dakota and Bernalillo are excluded from the aggregate because, due to a variety of data challenges that have since been overcome, neither site can produce accurate counts for their baseline years. All subsequent references to site data are based on this self-reported data.

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12 Simultaneous with the evolution of the deep-end work, the Urban Institute and Mathematica conducted a multiyear developmental evaluation of the initiative, with data collection beginning in 2014 and wrapping up in 2018. When researchers began collecting data, there were six deep-end sites, all of which began their work in 2013: Lucas County (Ohio), St. Louis City (Missouri), Marion County (Indiana), Bernalillo County (New Mexico), Jefferson Parish (Louisiana) and Washoe County (Nevada). Over the course of the evaluation, two of the original six sites withdrew: Washoe in 2014 (before data collection began) and Jefferson in 2017. Seven new sites joined in 2015: Franklin and Summit counties (Ohio); Ramsey, Hennepin and Dakota counties (Minnesota); Camden County (New Jersey); and Pierce County (Washington). All seven of those sites remain part of the deep-end network, but Hennepin and Dakota elected to proceed without technical assistance from the Casey Foundation. Casey launched a twelfth site — Harris County (Texas) — in 2019. Due to these shifts over time, readers may note that publications arising out of the evaluation sometimes refer to nine, 11 or 12 sites, depending on the context. As of this brief, there are 12 deep-end sites, which are included in the map in Figure 1 and listed in Table 1.

13 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2019, April 23). *Ratio of rates between minority youth and white youth by decision point and offense, 2017*. Statistical briefing book. Retrieved from [ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/special\\_topics/qa11603.asp?qaDate=2017](http://ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/special_topics/qa11603.asp?qaDate=2017)

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