

A Juvenile Justice System Focused On Improving Public Safety

“For the third consecutive year, violent crime has declined in the United States, including a 7.2 percent reduction in homicides, preliminary FBI figures for 2009 released Monday show. The trend extended to the District, where violent crime was down 7.2 percent, from 8,135 incidents to 7,586, and the number of homicides fell from 186 to 143, according to data from the FBI’s Preliminary Uniform Crime Report.” —From The Washington Post, Tuesday, May 23, 2010.

Falling crime, but public safety challenges remain

In the early and mid-1990s, both adult and juvenile crime in the District of Columbia surged to high levels, and the city was given the dubious title of “murder capital” when 474 people were killed in 1994. Data from the FBI showed that, in 1994, 26 young people were arrested for homicide in the District.

Last year, the District experienced the lowest number of homicides in 43 years, and as of May 2010, there were fewer homicide arrests compared to this time last year. In the last five years, the number of juveniles arrested for violent crime has declined by 5 percent. The latest data show that juvenile arrests in the city have fallen.¹ Reducing the juvenile and adult crime rate to its lowest levels in decades has been a critical ingredient to improving the quality of life in the District.

Despite having the lowest crime rate in decades, many neighborhoods still face unacceptable levels of crime. This is particularly true for parts of the city that still face the biggest challenges in improving schools, reducing unemployment, and expanding business opportunities – these are solutions to reduce high levels of crime within our communities. Together with our juvenile justice partners—police, prosecutors, the courts, probation and community based programs and neighborhood groups—the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) has helped focus the system on the most effective ways to improve public safety across the city.



Metropolitan Police Department officers working with DYRS staff

How the juvenile justice system is improving public safety

More young people are held in custody, longer

Five years ago, young people who posed the biggest public safety risk cycled in and out of the system. Thanks to an improved ability to determine which youth need to be in custody, and which can be managed in the community, *DYRS is holding those young people charged with the most serious offenses longer than before, an average increase from 70 days to 7 to 12 months, and longer for youth convicted of the most serious offenses.*



DYRS staff counsels youth

More young people held accountable with detention alternatives

The system has expanded the use of evening reporting centers--places where young people can receive educational and vocational support, mentoring, counseling, and are *supervised* to ensure that these young people meet their court obligations. More than 90 percent of young people in our evening reporting and third-party mentoring programs meet all of their court dates, and are not re-arrested, a success rate that exceeds national standards.

More planning for young people's return home

Nearly all the young people arrested in D.C. will eventually return home. In the past five years, DYRS has vastly improved how release decisions are made, relying on scientific tools—similar to those used by the adult system, and considered a best practice nationally—that help identify which young people are suitable for release, and what they need to stay out of trouble. These tools and policies were developed with the feedback of the city's prosecutors, the police, and the courts, and take into account the young person's offense, their likelihood to re-offend, and the needs of the young person, his or her family, and the community.

More adults supervising young people

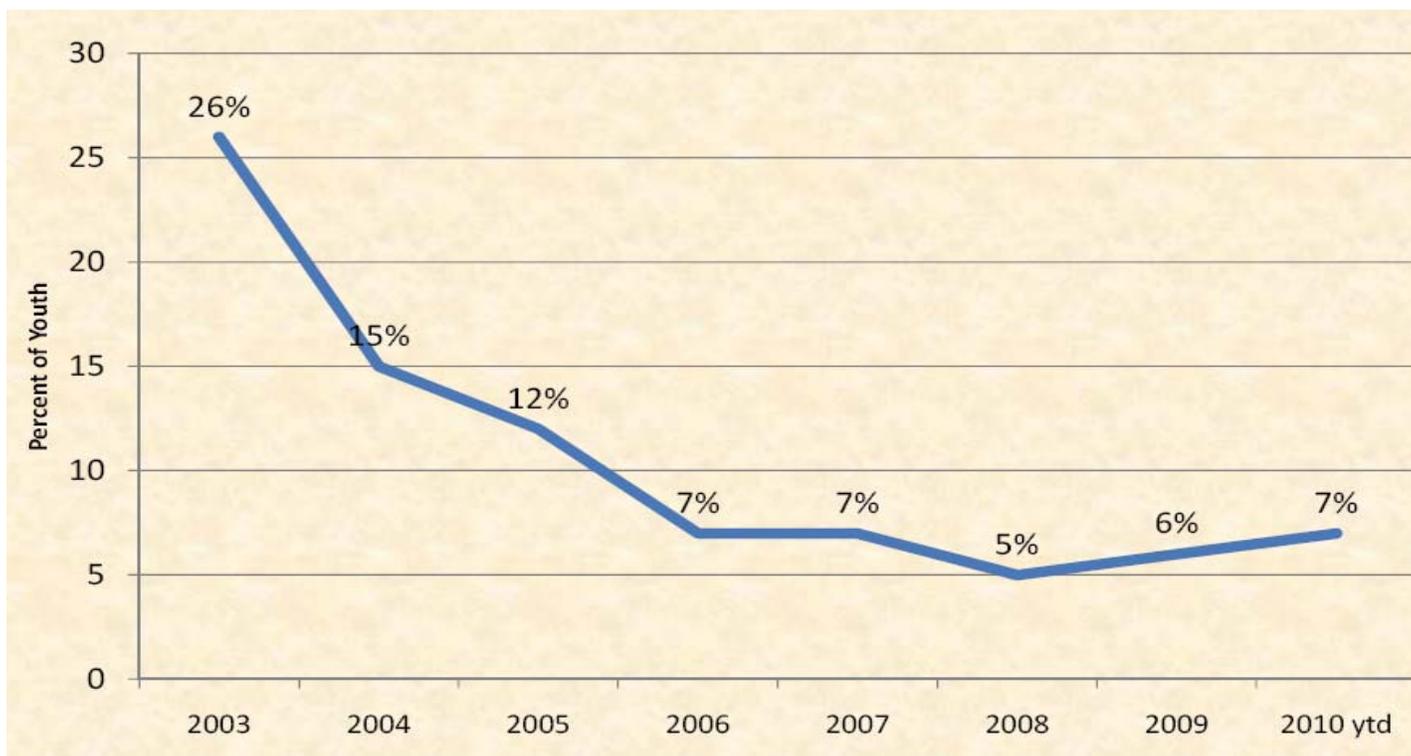
In addition to improving how the system plans for a young person to return to the community, the system has expanded the number of people supervising a youth when he or she returns home. Family team meetings now involve all the stakeholders in a young person's life, and can include DYRS staff, the police, prosecutors, the courts, and community providers. With the development of new coalitions of service providers serving these young people in the community, there will be even more people watching our youth, helping them succeed, and stay out of trouble.

More proven programs to help reduce re-offending

DYRS is using evidence-based programs that are proven to reduce the likelihood that a youth will re-offend, such as Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) – an intervention that has been shown to save taxpayers an average of \$18,000 in crime and incarceration costs per youth treated,² and Functional Family Therapy (FFT), which has been shown to reduce adolescent re-arrests by 20 to 60 percent, in contrast to young people who received no treatment, or received other family interventions or traditional probation supervision.³

Zero escapes, and fewer young people absconding

In a one-year period from 1988 to 1989, 319 young people escaped from Oak Hill and Cedar Knoll. In the past, escapes were so frequent that MPD kept a squad car stationed outside of the facility to catch escapees. *This year, there have been zero escapes from DYRS' locked facilities.* Strong partnerships with the police and focused efforts by DYRS have meant that most young people who are sent home, or to community-based programs are where they are supposed to be. In the last seven years, the abscondence rate was cut by two-thirds—dropping from 26 percent in 2003 to about 7 percent today. Today, *9 out of 10 young people under DYRS supervision do not abscond*, and DYRS youth account for less than one half of one percent of the almost 13,000 outstanding warrants in the District.



The number of young people on abscondence has declined by 69 percent

Reducing juvenile re-offending

Six months after they have been released from DYRS, most young people (75 percent) are not re-arrested. This compares favorably with other jurisdictions, and the system is working hard to further reduce the recidivism rate.

Working jointly with MPD

DYRS has partnered with MPD to develop various initiatives aimed at increasing the level of supervision of youth in the community and protecting the public. The **Partnership for Success Program** is a joint effort between DYRS, MPD, and other agencies that provides increased supervision and wraparound services for 35 youth in the community. Services provided through the program include: mentoring by MPD Officers, school engagement, job readiness and training, counseling for behavioral health needs, treatment for substance abuse, and home visits and parental engagement. DYRS and MPD also run the **Community Partnership for Public Safety**, a group that shares information about community factors affecting DYRS youth prior to their release from custody. With input from community groups such as the East of the River Clergy Police Community Partnership and the Columbia Heights/Shaw Collaborative, DYRS and MPD work jointly to prepare for a young person's return to the community. DYRS and MPD also operate the **"Top 60" program**, which identifies the 60 most at-risk youth in the community and ensures that the youth receive a heightened level of supervision, mentoring and services. Finally, DYRS and MPD run the **Top 10 High Priority Abscondence Program**, a joint effort between the DYRS Absconders' Unit, DYRS' liaison to MPD, and MPD Officers to apprehend the highest priority absconding youth, which has resulted in high risk youth being brought back into custody more quickly than ever before.

More young people engaged in activities that impact and improve public safety

The system's new focus on helping young people get an education, a job, mentoring and counseling are all shown to be critical factors in helping reduce reoffending by teens, and helping young people successfully transition to adulthood. Essentially, DYRS is devoting its resources to providing young people with the supervision and supports that parents know are most effective for their own children.



*Clockwise from top left to bottom:
DYRS youth in class at the Maya Angelou Academy at New Beginnings Youth Development Center; DYRS youth learn construction work from DYRS staff at Gallaudet University; DYRS youth honored at high school and GED graduation ceremony*



What more can the juvenile justice system do to improve public safety?

While there have been important improvements in public safety, *no one is satisfied when juvenile crime happens in any part of our community*. Police, prosecutors, probation, the courts and DYRS will continue to work hard to ensure that D.C.'s juvenile justice system is doing everything it can to promote safe communities—but as a system—we will have to address some of the challenges in front of us.

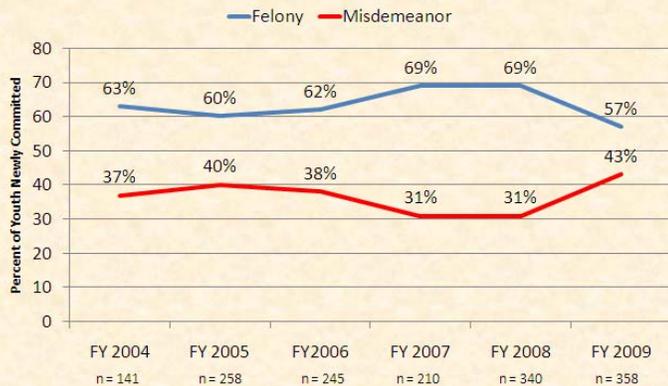
How do we provide more safety with less money?

In tough economic times, the entire system will need to make smart choices on where to invest our public safety dollars to get the biggest bang for our buck. The juvenile justice system will need to focus on the most effective, least costly ways to change young people's behavior.

How will the city manage the demands being placed on the juvenile justice system?

While serious juvenile crime has fallen, *the number of young people committed to DYRS who have some rehabilitative needs, but pose less risk to public safety has dramatically increased*. This means the system has to manage and sort more young people than ever before. All the system partners are coming together to balance the needs of the system to ensure that we can focus on the young people who need our help, and meet their needs in the right place.

**Offense Severity Levels for Youth Newly Committed to DYRS
FY2004 through FY 2009**



Data Source: DYRS Research & Quality Assurance Division

**Juvenile Arrest Trends for Part I Serious Offenses
CY 2004 through 2009**



Data Source: MPD

Part I arrest types include Aggravated Assault, Arson, Burglary, Homicide/Manslaughter, Larceny/Theft, Rape/Sexual Abuse, Robbery/Carjacking and Unauthorized Use of a Vehicle (UUV).

More and more misdemeanor kids are coming into the system

How do we balance the portrayals of young people and crime in the media?

When a young person engages in a serious crime, the whole city rightly pays attention. However, research⁴ has shown that news media tends to focus more of their coverage on youth in association with crime and violence—even though most young people never come to the attention of law enforcement, and juvenile crime has declined. By covering all of young people’s behavior—including when young people are behaving, doing what they are supposed to be doing, and realizing their potential to change—the city will have a better sense of how our young people are doing and the most effective solutions to our biggest public safety challenges.



DYRS youth receives the Youth Spirit Award from the national Coalition for Juvenile Justice



DYRS staff and youth participate in DYRS’ Summer Lawn Care program which helps the District’s elderly residents

Mission: The mission of DYRS is to improve public safety and give court-involved youth the opportunity to become more productive citizens by building on the strengths of youth and their families in the least restrictive, most homelike environment consistent with public safety.

- [1] While arrest rates will fluctuate, as of June 5, 2010, juvenile arrests were lower than they were during the first six months of 2009.
- [2] A calculation by the law enforcement organization Fight Crime: Invest in Kids: (<http://www.fightcrime.org/page/title-ii-state-formula-grants>).
- [3] Sexton, Thomas L. and Alexander, James F. Functional Family Therapy. Juvenile Justice Bulletin (2000). Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.
- [4] Wallach, Lawrence and Dorfman, Lori. *Moving from Them to Us: Challenges in Reframing Violence Among Youth* (2009). Berkeley, California: The Berkeley Media Studies Group.