MEET OUR NEWEST COORDINATOR

Dr. Ira Thomas recently relocated to South Florida from the Washington D.C. metro area. Dr. Thomas holds a Bachelor of Arts in sociology from Morgan State University and a master’s degree in clinical social work from the University of Maryland School of Social Work.

In 1991, Ira earned a doctorate in administration, planning, and social policy from Harvard University Graduate School of Education. Ira then embarked on a career as a high school administrator in alternative education. In the role of director of alternative education in Washington D.C., Ira oversaw the department of education at the district’s juvenile detention center (Oakhill Center) and also served as a board member on the Montgomery County Juvenile Justice Commission. When you have an opportunity, please extend a warm welcome to Dr. Thomas, who will join Randi Taylor as the other South Region Justice Reform Coordinator based in Broward County.

MIAMI'S REDUCTION OF FAILURES TO APPEAR

After reviewing quarterly detention admissions data, Miami-Dade’s Racial and Ethnic Disparity (RED) committee highlighted the use of secure detention to detain a significant number of youth for failing to appear (FTA) for court. The committee set a goal of understanding why this issue impacted youth of color, specifically black youth at much higher rates than other groups. The first task accomplished was to ensure objective and consistent responses to FTAs in the courtroom. In May of 2018, Circuit 11’s administrative juvenile judge issued a memo mandating 48-hour court resets for youth who FTA on initial court appearances. The results are a prominent reduction in detention admissions overall (nearly half the number of FTA admissions from previous quarters). Ongoing data analysis will continue towards reducing the disproportionality at this decision point. The two graphs below show info from DJJ’s information system (JJIS) for youth detained for FTAs:

For more information about reducing FTAs, please contact Randi Taylor.
The reduction of Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) is a very challenging, yet rewarding initiative. It is impossible to address it without adequate data, collaboration and an open mind. Independent analysis of Florida shows our largest disproportionality occurs in school-based arrests. Deeper review of Florida’s data highlights both 7th and 9th grade as specific times at which those school-based arrests increase significantly. In response to this information, the Department partnered with the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) to identify ways to address this issue.

A pilot of the NOBLE Project was initiated in Circuit 2, with partnerships from the Leon County School District and local law enforcement agencies. Focusing on 7th grade civics classes at the four schools with the highest number of school-based arrest over the past three years, NOBLE officers conducted a 45-minute hands-on, interactive presentation designed to improve student communication and relationships with law enforcement officers. The course also strived to enhance the students’ understanding of federal, state and local laws. The videos and role-playing illustrations created a neutral ground for informed and thoughtful discussions between students and law enforcement officers.

What might this accomplish, some may ask?

The students who have participated in this interactive course shared testimonies of “dislike” or “fear” of law enforcement officers prior to taking the course. Pre- and post -test show a significant increase in knowledge retained and openness to law enforcement. Principals have submitted reports of students’ fear turned into hugs of gratitude. Students leave the course equipped with knowledge, clearer understanding of the role of law enforcement and palm cards of helpful tips for positive law enforcement encounters.

The goals of this project are the reduction of overall suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests as well as the reduction in disproportionality in these data points. Circuit 2 is now beginning phase II which includes parent awareness nights and mentoring. This pilot program is looking to expand into at least two additional circuits in the upcoming school year. Stay tuned . . .

To learn more about the NOBLE Project, please contact LaMone Gibson.
904WARD RACE CARDS

Northeast Regional JDAI/DMC Coordinator Amy Read met with local representatives from the Equal Justice Initiative (EQI), Melanie Patz and Lynn Sherman. EQI has partnered with 904WARD to lead the work in the Jacksonville Community Remembrance Project. This project seeks to document and understand the legacy of the racial terror lynching that occurred in Jacksonville and equip the community to reduce barriers to opportunity.

Along with the Jacksonville Community Remembrance Project, 904WARD has created the Race Cards, which are used to facilitate discussions about race in a meaningful and authentic manner. The 52-card deck includes questions relating to personal experiences, the current justice system, race relations within the community, and ideas surrounding racial equity and privilege. Some of the questions you can find are, “What do the hashtags #blacklivesmatter and #alllivesmatter mean to you?” and “Do you think racism is a learned behavior?”

Circuit 4’s DMC/RED Committee has reviewed the deck of cards and decided to facilitate their own Race Cards discussion among committee and community members. The committee hopes to strengthen relationships and deepen their knowledge surrounding DMC/RED issues. We look forward to reporting on the growth opportunities experience as a result of the conversation. To find out more information about the Jacksonville Community Remembrance Project or the Race Cards, please visit their website at https://www.904ward.com/ or contact Amy Read.

Beyond Diversity: An Introduction to Courageous Conversation

Members of the Pinellas County RED/DMC committee attended Beyond Diversity: An Introduction to Courageous Conversation, hosted by the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg. Beyond Diversity is a powerful, personally transforming, two-day seminar that helps leaders, employees, and organizations understand the impact of race on their lives, their work, and their overall growth and development. Have you ever wondered if there might be a fundamental difference in child rearing or social learning that can be directly impacted by race? This course will definitely open your mind. This exceptional experience provided training and hands-on experience on how to talk about race in ways that are authentic, constructive and affirming. Consultants from Pacific Education Group, the creators of the program, have trained nearly three hundred people in Pinellas County so far, and that number will reach 1,000 by the end of this year. We are hopeful that all our RED/DMC committee members are able to attend a session throughout the year as we continue to combat issues of disproportionate minority contact and racial and ethnic disparity in Pinellas County. To learn more about this event or efforts in Pinellas County, please feel free to contact our Central Region Coordinator Karin Popkowski.

G.A.A.P. (Gaining Appreciation by Adjusting Perspectives)

Did you know the G.A.A.P. discussions hosted by the DJJ Office of Prevention Services are a part of the Department’s effort to combat DMC? They were initiated in 2012 to promote positive relationships between minority youth and law enforcement. The conversation allows for continued examination of the attitudes and perceptions of youth and law enforcement and assists in identifying new ways to break down barriers to outstanding relationships. Over 4500 attendees in 19 circuits have participated in these discussions to date.

We salute Prevention Services for their continued efforts and partnership in this work. For more information about G.A.A.P. discussions, please contact Ms. Yvonne Woodard.
Dear reader,

As 2018 has come to an end, we reflect on what has transpired most recently along the gamut of systems and society. While our tasks and projects at hand are ever-evolving and transforming, our mission keeps us focused on the work that is critically representative of improving outcomes for all youth. The topic of racial equity is not new, yet the implementation of sustainable reformative efforts has not been realized.

Disproportionate minority contact (DMC) is a nationally recognized issue that is pervasive throughout jurisdictions across our entire country. The disproportionality has persisted and can be seen at all critical contact points within the juvenile justice system. In Florida, our youth population is diverse and the composition of its make-up differs across circuits and regions of the state. In a few jurisdictions, our Hispanic/Latino populations are the majority, but predominantly the white population comprises a large part of our racial demographics. Although this is the case, we see black youth, who make up a smaller portion of the population, being arrested, placed in secure detention, and committed to residential services at rates that are double, triple, and in some areas, nearly 10 times the rate of their white counterparts. Why does this astounding disproportionality exist? Are societal and social factors affecting this? How can we fix this? These are all questions asked every day. These questions, along with our dedication to improving equitable outcomes for youth, fuel us to unify our approach to addressing this topic.

In December 2016, DJJ co-hosted a conference that unified internal and external stakeholders from every circuit throughout Florida. National experts discussed the need to address the disproportionality and the impact of racial and ethnic disparities occurring throughout the juvenile justice process. At the culmination of this conference, every circuit was challenged to form a multi-disciplinary team that will outline a plan focused on furthering systemic reform through a race equity framework. Although every circuit has outlined some initial steps to beginning this work, there’s more work ahead.

The JDAI/DMC team is committed to using research and data to assist local committee stay focused on furthering systematic reform through a race equity lens. Our recent visit to Birmingham, Alabama’s National Memorial for Peace and Justice and Bryan Stevenson’s Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration reinvigorated our passion for this work. The impact of this trip highlighted how far we have come and the work that remains.

It is our goal to make DMC and racial and ethnic disparity (RED) reform efforts sustainable and to maintain a passion for ensuring equity across policies, practices and procedures. We hope this quarter’s newsletter shines a light on the efforts our team is promoting throughout the state, and pushes to impassion you all to continue your intentional efforts to continuously review, improve, and replicate effective and equitable outcomes for all of our youth. We challenge the collaborative to push the boundaries even further and use the data/research to enhance your respective action plans over the course of the next year.

“Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. . . Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exer tions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.”

Martin Luther King Jr.

—A JDAI Coordinator