

# Juveniles at the Training School

## DEFINITION

*Juveniles at the Training School* is the number of juveniles up to age 21 who were in the care and custody of the Rhode Island Training School at any time during the 2004 calendar year. The total includes youth who spent time at the Training School and/or in other community placements while in the care and custody of the Training School.

## SIGNIFICANCE

The juvenile justice system has three primary obligations: to respond to the needs of the young people in its care; to protect youth from legal jeopardy; and to keep the public safe from youth who will harm others.<sup>1</sup> A combination of persistent school problems, family issues, drug use and/or unmet mental health and special education needs are associated with risk for involvement with the juvenile justice system. Youth who have been violently victimized are more likely to become violent offenders.<sup>2</sup>

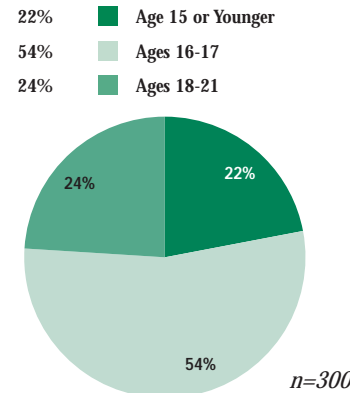
Nationwide only a fraction of incarcerated youth are violent and dangerous. Most are incarcerated for drug and property offenses that could be addressed through diversion programs. For all crimes, Black juveniles are arrested one and a half times more often than white juveniles and are incarcerated five times more often.<sup>3,4</sup>

Research indicates that alternatives to incarcerating youth are more successful in preventing recidivism, more cost-effective, and can lessen the disproportionate confinement of youth of color. Successful efforts are comprehensive, community-based and family-focused, with intensive counseling, treatment and transition services for reintegration into the community.<sup>5,6</sup> For some delinquent youth, community-based alternatives such as community service, restitution or diversion to drug court or substance abuse treatment are more effective at reducing re-offending rates than incarceration.<sup>7,8,9</sup>

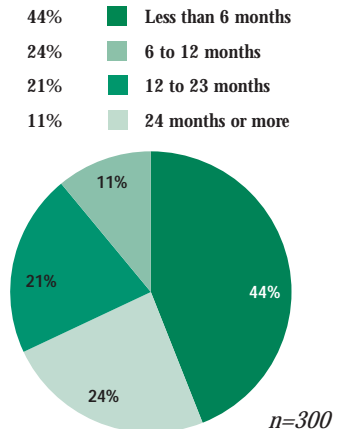
The Department of Children, Youth and Families operates the Rhode Island Training School for Youth, the state's residential detention facility for adjudicated youth and youth awaiting trial. There were a total of 1,069 youth in the care and custody of the Training School at some point during calendar year 2004. Of these, 16% were female.<sup>10</sup> As of December 31, 2004, there were 184 youth on the grounds at the Training School. Of these, 27 were unadjudicated (i.e., awaiting trial). An additional 147 youth were within the care and custody of the Training School in temporary home or community placements. Twelve additional youth were classified as runaways.<sup>11</sup>

## Juveniles in the Care and Custody of the Rhode Island Training School for Youth, 2004

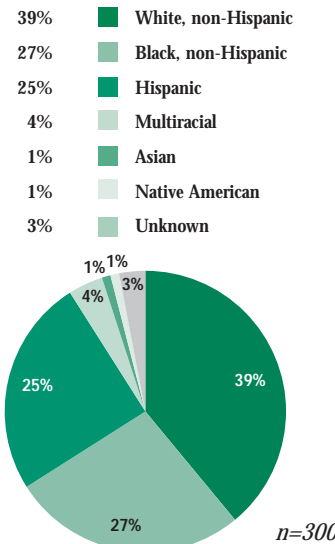
By Age



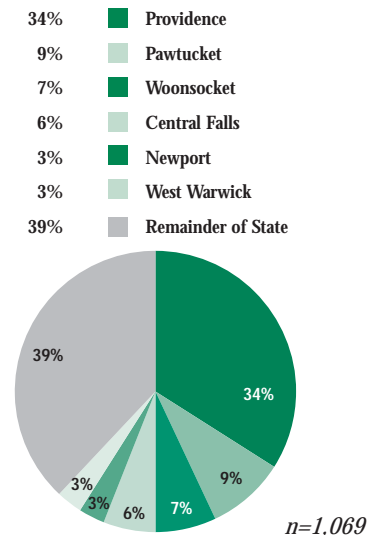
By Length of Time in Custody



By Race/Ethnicity



By Residence\*



\* Data by residence include all youth who passed through during calendar year 2004 and include those who were at the RITS more than once.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), December 31, 2004. Data are for 300 adjudicated residents except as noted.



## Rhode Island Youth at the Training School: A History of Risk Factors

### School Failure

◆ A survey of educational records of adjudicated youth confirms significant academic difficulty prior to entry at the Training School. Based on a random review of 76 records of adjudicated students on December 1, 2004, 17 (22%) had passed all classes, 12 (16%) had failed all classes, and 21 (28%) had mixed grades (passing some, while failing others). One third of students (25) had no records available or no records indicative of grades for the past two years. One student entered with a GED.<sup>12</sup>

◆ During 2004, the average age of students at the Training School was 16. Their average self-reported grade placement was 9th grade, their average reading grade level as tested was 6th grade, and their average math grade level as tested was 7th grade.<sup>13</sup>

### Need for Special Education, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

◆ Delinquent behavior may be directly related to a child's undetected and/or inadequately treated learning disabilities, substance abuse, and/or mental health disorders.<sup>14</sup> At the Rhode Island Training School on December 1, 2004, 53% of adjudicated students were receiving special education services, more than twice the rate of students receiving special education services in Rhode Island public schools in 2004.<sup>15,16</sup> Most of the Training School students receiving special education services were receiving such services due to behavior disorders (64%) and learning disabilities (26%).<sup>17</sup>

◆ On December 1, 2004, 21% of students were receiving psychiatric care and 18% were in the Residential Substance Abuse Treatment Program at the Training School.<sup>18</sup>

### History of Child Abuse and Neglect

◆ Forty-four percent (132) of the adjudicated youth within the care and custody of the Training School on December 31, 2004 had at some point in their childhood been victims of documented child abuse or neglect.<sup>19</sup>



## Prevention of Recidivism Among Delinquent Youth

◆ Of the 1,069 youth who were at the Training School at some point during 2004, 24% had been admitted previously.<sup>20</sup>

◆ Research indicates that early identification and treatment of youth at risk for chronic delinquency, and immediate, intensive intervention involving the youth and his or her family in counseling, all-day academic programming and substance abuse treatment or counseling are effective in reducing chronic delinquency.<sup>21</sup>

◆ For serious, repeat and violent juvenile offenders, the quality of rehabilitative services is critical, since most will be returned to the community. A successful model of rehabilitation for serious and violent juveniles includes intensive academic and physical work, earning credit through behavior to hasten release, trained staff and small staff/inmate ratios and groups, and a heavy focus on transition planning and aftercare services.<sup>22</sup>

### References

<sup>1</sup> Crisso, T. (2004). *Double jeopardy: Adolescent offenders with mental disorders*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>2</sup> Shaffer, J. & Ruback, R.B. (2002). *Violent victimization as a risk factor for violent offending among juveniles*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Retrieved January 29, 2003 from <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/about/03juvjust/030117a.html>.

<sup>3,5,8</sup> A matter of choice: Forks in the road for juvenile justice, an ADVOCASEY briefing. (2003, Spring). *ADVOCASEY*, 5(1), 4-17.

<sup>4,13</sup> *Criminal neglect: Substance abuse, juvenile justice and the children left behind*. (2004). New York: National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse.

<sup>6,9</sup> Mendel, D. (2003, Spring). And the walls keep tumbling down. *ADVOCASEY*, 5(1), 18-27.

<sup>7,21,22</sup> Mendel, R.A. (2001). *Less cost, more safety: Guiding lights for reform in juvenile justice*. Washington, DC: The American Youth Policy Forum.

<sup>10,11,19,20</sup> Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), January 2005.

<sup>12,15,17,18</sup> Rhode Island Training School for Youth, February 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education, 2004.