

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 2003 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

Juvenile detention facilities must balance public safety with the need for treatment and rehabilitation of young offenders.¹ 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.²

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. Black youth are incarcerated at five times the rate of White youth. Increased community placements can help address the large racial disparity among incarcerated youth.³

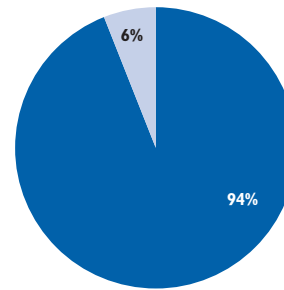
Research indicates that alternatives to incarcerating youth are both more successful in preventing recidivism and are more cost-effective. Successful efforts are comprehensive, community-based and family-focused, with intensive counseling, treatment and transition services for reintegration into the community.^{4,5} 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 than incarceration.^{6,7,8}

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 1,060 youth in the care and custody of the Training School at some point during calendar year 2003. Of these, 18% were female.⁹ As of December 31, 2003, there were 189 youth on the grounds at the Training School. Of these, 38 were unadjudicated (i.e., awaiting trial). An additional 126 youth were within the care and custody of the Training School in temporary home or community placements. Twelve additional youth were classified as runaways.¹⁰

Juveniles* in the Care and Custody of the Rhode Island Training School for Youth, December 31, 2003

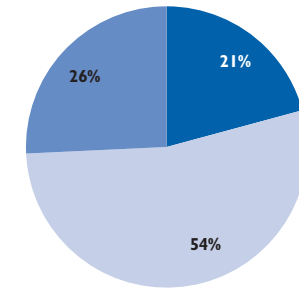
By Gender

94% Male
6% Female



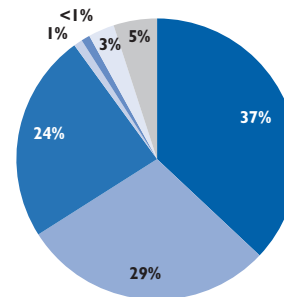
By Age

21% Age 15 or Younger
54% Ages 16-17
26% Ages 18-22



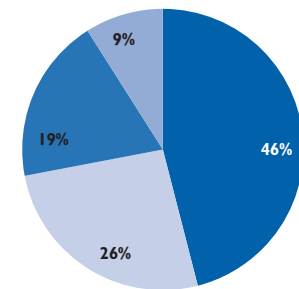
By Race/Ethnicity

37% White, non-Hispanic
29% Hispanic
24% Black, non-Hispanic
1% Asian
<1% Native American
3% Multiracial/Other
5% Unknown



By Length of Time in Custody

46% Less than 6 months
26% 6 to 12 months
19% 12 to 23 months
9% 24 months or more



n = 276

*Data are for adjudicated youth only and include youth in community placements.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), December 31, 2003.



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

School Failure

◆ A survey of educational records of Training School youth confirm significant academic difficulty. Based on a random review of 77 records of adjudicated students on December 1, 2003, 46% (35) had no records available or no records indicative of grades for the past two years. Of the 42 students who had any school records for the previous two years, 19 (45%) had failing grades and 23 (55%) had mixed or passing grades.¹¹

◆ During 2003, the average age of students at the Training School was 16. Their average self-reported grade placement was 9th grade and their average reading and math grade level was 6th grade.¹²

Need for Special Education, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

◆ The cause of delinquent behavior may be directly related to a child's undetected and/or inadequately treated disability, particularly addictive and mental health disorders.^{13,14} At the Rhode Island Training School on December 1, 2003, 46% 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 2003. Most of the Training School students receiving special education services were receiving such services due to behavior disorders (74%) and learning disabilities (18%).^{15,16}

◆ On December 1, 2003, 17% of students at the Training School were receiving psychiatric care and 60% were receiving substance abuse treatment.¹⁷

◆ Appropriate special education and mental health services are critical to both prevent delinquency and assist in rehabilitation. School failure, unexcused absences, chronic disciplinary problems and grade retention may be associated with a disabling condition that has not been detected.¹⁸

History of Child Abuse and Neglect

◆ Forty-two percent (120) of the adjudicated youth within the care and custody of the Training School on December 31, 2003 had at some point in their childhood been victims of documented child abuse or neglect.¹⁹



Prevention of Recidivism Among Delinquent Youth

◆ Of the 1,060 youth who were at the Training School at some point during 2003, 23% had been admitted previously. One-third (33%) of the youth who passed through the Training School during 2003 were from Providence, 10% were from Pawtucket, 6% were from Woonsocket, 4% were from Newport, 4% were from Central Falls, and 3% were from West Warwick.²⁰

◆ 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.²¹

◆ For serious, repeat and violent juvenile offenders, the quality of rehabilitative services is critical, since most will return 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.²²

References

^{1,13,18} Puritz, P. et al. (January 1998). *Beyond the Walls: Improving Conditions of Confinement for Youth in Custody*. Washington, DC: American Bar Association Juvenile Justice Center and U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

² Shaffer, J. et al. (December 2002). *Violent Victimization as a Risk Factor for Violent Offending Among Juveniles*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

^{3,4,7} A Matter of Choice: Forks in the Road for Juvenile Justice. (Spring 2003). *ADVOCASEY*, Vol. 5, No. 1. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

⁵ Mendel, D. (Spring 2003). Small is Beautiful. *ADVOCASEY*, Vol. 5, No. 1. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

^{6, 21, 22} Mendel, R. (2001). *Less Cost, More Safety: Guiding Lights for Reform in Juvenile Justice*. Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum.

⁸ Mendel, D. (Spring 2003). And the Walls Keep Tumbling Down. *ADVOCASEY*, Vol. 5, No. 1. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

^{9,10,19,20} Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), 2002, 2003.

^{11,12,15,17} Rhode Island Training School for Youth, December 2003.

¹⁴ Teplin, L. (January 2001). *Assessing Alcohol, Drug, and Mental Disorders in Juvenile Detainees, OJDP Fact Sheet*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

¹⁶ Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education, 2003.