

Testimony of:  
Alex Hodgetts  
Clinical Care Coordinator  
Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center  
Colchester, VT.

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When I started at Woodside in 2006, it was structured much differently and focused more on trying to get a youth to “Fit into” our program. With our current program we tailor the programming to meet the needs of each individual youth.

I believe that Woodside has been mis-represented and misunderstood, at least for the duration of my 13 years there. It has always been a place where youth can feel safe and receive mentoring from positive adult role-models. Woodside has made continuous adjustments in staffing, policy and programming to meet the ever-changing population we serve with a “best-practice” model. We have added lead clinicians and several therapeutic resources to an already strong team. However, you can still hear it referred to as “Juvy” or “Kid Jail” in the community and even within DCF circles. I have heard a FSW say “I would never send one of my youth there”, based on information they had heard from youth and even the public defender’s office. This worker eventually had a youth placed at Woodside by a judge, and upon coming into the facility for a tour and observing the facility in action stated, “I had no idea that the kids have access to everything they have here, I am very impressed”. This is a continuous battle, as we repeatedly dispel rumors and myths about the programming here. The rumor mill is fueled by one-sided news articles or mis-information pushed as “facts” by a juvenile defender, or simply reckless speculation. We have open access available to DCF FSW’s, community partners, judges, legislators and other linked professionals to tour our program and see the work being done. Not only do we have nothing to hide, but we are proud of the work that we do with the youth.

As currently constructed, Woodside serves the State of Vermont as the most secure placement available for delinquent youth up to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

When placing a youth in a treatment program, whether short-term or long-term, one of the criteria that DCF must consider is; Is there a less restrictive placement available to this youth? Several factors determine this; availability (open bed) at a less restrictive placement, youth being accepted by the community-based program, the youth’s willingness to go to the identified program, among other criteria. DCF considers in-state and out of state programs when determining the “Least restrictive” placement available for a youth.

Woodside as you know is a locked facility, with locked doors, and fencing to maintain physical security. We are the most secure facility in VT but I would challenge the notion that we are the “most restrictive”. We encourage and support family contact and communication, with no set “Visiting Hours” by working around the families’ availabilities. We provide clinically supervised visitation, when needed, to support appropriate dialogue and growth within the often-times damaged family unit. We engage the youth in completing restorative work within the community that they are from and have often damaged relationships in. We establish links and transport youth to community-based supports like; AA and other D&A supports, Trauma Therapists, Economic Services, etc... in the communities that they will be returning to. Establishing these connections prior to the youth arriving back in the community relieves a tremendous amount of anxiety that the youth will experience and increases the likelihood that they will utilize the supports.

In-state programs are great and valuable resources for youth. Many of our community based privatized partners do fantastic work with youth. Many also have limitations. Youth will run, damage property, assault others, etc. in order to be relocated. There are often "wait lists" for the less secure privatized programs. Youth in custody can have lengthy breaks in their formal education while placed at a program outside of their districts. It can be difficult to link with community resources such as; individual /family therapists, trauma therapists, D&A therapists, DV specialists and social skills specialists among others. If these resources are even available in the youths' communities, they can have extensive wait lists.

Out of state placements, especially states not even in the North East region, cannot possibly provide the same level of connection and community support. Periodic, state funded, family visitation would not support in-depth family therapy and parental support (if the youth even have contact with their families". The youth is hundreds of miles away in an environment they know nothing about with people they have never met. Though the programs might not be secured with locks and fences, what real option does a youth have to leave? They don't. So, they are now isolated from their community with monthly visitation from "a" FSW, not necessarily their FSW and they can have phone and skype contact with family members.

With both in-state and out of state programs, the reality is that they are not obligated to accept any youth, even if they have availability. Many of our community partners; treatment programs and psychiatric hospitals have refused to accept youth into their programs due to safety concerns or history of working with the specific youth.

Woodside accepts all the kids that no other placements will and keeps them when all other placements would send them away. No matter the history or behaviors displayed, or the damage caused. We customize their treatment and we stabilize them to a level where other community partners would be willing to accept them.

If funding for a new facility was approved, the design of the new facility and re-writing policy regarding different programming criteria based on the level of care needed, Woodside could serve as both; the most secure placement available and as a less secure or "less restrictive" placement (step-down) option. This would allow for a continuity of clinical services, continuity of education and a continuity of care leading to better outcomes for the youth we serve.

The State of Vermont to focus on taking advantage of the level of programming and resources available at Woodside instead of trying to figure out resize and restructure it to fit a smaller demographic.

Woodside has countless documented cases of successful outcomes with the population we serve. These successes are in-spite of the dated facility and limitations that the physical environment at Woodside presents. This is due to the amazing team of employees, partners and managers that have been assembled at Woodside.

Breaking up this team of experienced, educated, caring and compassionate workers and repurposing a new program to house a "Short-term" detention population, or building a smaller new facility for "Short-term" detention would be a very near-sighted decision. Essentially you would be limiting opportunities for youth to access treatment, family/community reintegration, and stability. All key contributing factors to long-term success.

Given the increase in DCF placements stemming from the opiate crisis that has so greatly affected our state, how long until the number of delinquent-youth rises? Youth that are exposed to substance abuse, and the other abuse and neglect that often presents in families with substance abuse problems, are much more likely to present with delinquent behaviors.

Some say, "Woodside is built for 30 and only housing 10-12, let's reduce programming, resize and restructure to serve 10-12 kids and it will be cheaper".

I would say, "Woodside is built to serve 30 and is only housing 10-12, how can we utilize this great resource to serve more youth and make it more cost effective".

It is our job to serve the community EFFECTIVELY not simply CHEAPLY. With a cost analysis you will find that there isn't tremendous savings by simply trying to scale down the program.