

**Senate Judiciary Services Testimony**  
**DCF Commissioner Ken Schatz & Deputy Commissioner Christine Johnson**  
**April 7, 2020**

**Woodside and Short-Term Residential Care Options**

As you may be aware, Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center is being used as an emergent setting for COVID-19 positive adult psychiatric patients. This was due to Woodside’s underutilization for the last several months. We moved the youth that were at Woodside to a temporary location in St. Albans called Suite 12 on March 24<sup>th</sup>. We were unable to fit the space with the desired security measures and have since moved these youth to the Middlesex Therapeutic Community Residence which was formerly a temporary adult psychiatric setting run by the Department of Mental Health.

Please see the attached press release and stakeholder memo detailing this move.

**Residential System of Care Update:** Data as of March 31, 2020

We are aware that as discussed below the COVID-19 has caused challenges to our residential system of care. AHS has had conversations on how to support and stabilize these programs. Please see the attached letter that provides a stable source funding and an opportunity to apply for extraordinary relief for these residential programs.

COVID-19 is causing many residential programs in Vermont to reduce their capacity due to staffing shortages.

<b>Program</b>	<b>Normal Capacity</b>	<b>COVID Capacity</b>	<b>Beds Available</b>
Allenbrook	8	3	Full
Brookhaven	8	5	Full
Community House	8	4	Full
Linden	8	2	Full
Abigail Rockwell	8	3	Full
Laraway Footebrook	4	0	Closed
NFI Group Home	6	2	Full
NFI Shelburne House	3	2	Full
Onion River	8	5	Full
Park Street	9	9	Full
T House	4	1	Full
VACN at Newbury	8	5	Full
VY School for Girls	25	17	Full
WCMH Programs	14	6	Full
Depot Program Bed	18	12	1 bed
Suite 12	5	5	5 beds after 3/27
Woodside	30	0	Closed

Most of our out-of-state residential treatment providers are no longer accepting new referrals. Many have committed to sheltering in place in the event of COVID positive youth in their program. In the event that youth become COVID positive and need a place to stay for a variety of reasons, we expect youth to be served in the AHS Welcome & Recovery Center in Plainfield, VT.

On March 16, 2020, there were 104 children and youth placed at in-state residential programs. As of March 25, there were 80 children and youth placed at in-state residential programs. The Districts and the SSU have facilitated over 21 unplanned moves for youth in group settings to home or foster care. There were several planned moves that were expedited to make sure the residential programs could adequately staff the youth remaining in their programs. The emergency discharge efforts included conference calls, treatment team meetings, education planning, and transportation efforts of our FSD staff were beyond extraordinary.

### **Foster Care System and COVID**

Data on calls to the child abuse hotline and intakes:

We have seen a 60% **decrease** in the number of calls to the hotline to report child abuse and neglect compared to March of 2019. We have also seen 60-70% of those calls being accepted as intakes which is an increase to the comparable historical average of 30% of accepted intakes.

Guidance for reunification of families:

- Guidance was provided to our staff to work to reunify children and youth with their families on an accelerated basis consistent with where we had reunification efforts already underway. This was done in an emergency response to COVID.
- Respite for foster parents is an area we are paying close attention to because our foster parents are in need of it in certain circumstances and also because we also want to ensure as few potential exposures as possible.
- We are working to determine if we can support foster parents financially with a stipend to care for a child with COVID.

### **Older Youth Formerly in Foster Care**

The Youth Development Program (YDP) is providing case management and using their extended care options (extended foster care and youth investment funds) to help meet the needs of youth formerly in foster care. They are experiencing an increase in requests for financial support for housing and basic needs. They have received inquiries from volunteers offering housing and YDP is determining a process for vetting these potential "room for rent" opportunities.

This was an effort done in response to both colleges and universities closing their campuses and other needs of older youth in and formerly in foster care.