

**DETERMINANTS OF LENGTH OF STAY AT
WOODSIDE
JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER**



Vermont Center for Justice Research
Montpelier, Vermont

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. Summary	1
II. Determinants of Length of Stay at Woodside Juvenile Detention Center	2
A. Vermont's Detention Practices	2
B. Data	3
C. Results	5
Determinants of Length of Stay	5
Admissions Characteristics and Length of Stay	12
Juvenile Delinquency Histories	15
Criminal Histories	17
Regression Predicting Woodside Length of Stay	19
D. Policy Issues	24
Appropriate and Inappropriate Uses of Detention	25
Need for Additional Resources	26
E. Summary and Conclusions	27
References	30
Appendix A: 15 Year Comparison of the Detention Program	31
Appendix B	32

I. Summary

This study used both quantitative and qualitative data to examine determinants of length of stay at Woodside Juvenile Detention Center, Vermont's only locked juvenile detention facility. We analyzed Woodside data for the 358 admissions that occurred between April 1, 2002 and March 31, 2003, and conducted a survey of family court judges, Social and Rehabilitation (SRS) caseworkers and Emergency Services Program (ESP) personnel to identify and better understand determinants of length of stay. Key findings include:

- The regression model predicting Woodside length of stay showed that youth admitted for being out of control/at risk to commit illegal acts had significantly longer detention stays than youth admitted for violent behavior. The lengths of stay of youth admitted for other reasons did not differ significantly from those of youth admitted for violent behavior, controlling for other factors.
- Youth characterized as having engaged in inappropriate sexual behavior had significantly longer stays than those not characterized in this way, while youth characterized as substance abusers had significantly shorter stays (these characterizations are distinct from reasons for admission).
- Placement histories showed some effect on length of stay. Youth with more group home placements and fewer foster home placements had longer stays, as did those who ran away more frequently.
- Two measures of family court history affected length of stay—the greater the number of property offenses, the shorter the stay, and the more vs. justice offenses, the longer the stay. Measures of criminal court history did not affect length of stay.
- Females spent significantly less time at Woodside than comparable males.
- Youth from three districts—Hartford, St. Johnsbury, and Newport—had significantly longer stays than youth from Burlington, all else equal.
- Survey respondents indicated that the primary determinant of length of stay at Woodside is lack of alternative placements.
- In general, the current detention system does not appear to meet the needs of caseworkers, and many survey respondents indicated that it likely does not meet the needs of juveniles either.

More systematic research is needed to determine whether additional detention beds are merited, or whether resources should focus solely on expanding alternative placements. It is also important that clear criteria for detention admission and discharge be established and uniformly applied by all participants in the decision-making process.

II. Determinants of Length of Stay at Woodside Juvenile Detention Center

This study examines determinants of length of stay at Woodside Juvenile Detention Center, Vermont's only locked juvenile detention facility. During the past 15 years, the average length of stay at Woodside's detention center, the number of juveniles detained, the number of juveniles detained for more than 30 days, and the percentage utilization have all increased (these indicators are obviously inter-related). We analyzed Woodside admissions data for a recent one-year period, as well as data from a survey of those involved in admissions decision-making, to identify and better understand determinants of length of stay. We first summarize Vermont's current detention practices, then describe the data used for this study, report the findings of the analyses, and provide a summary and conclusions.

A. Vermont's Detention Practices

Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center, located in Colchester, Vermont (near Burlington), is the State's only locked juvenile detention facility. Woodside's stated goals are to reduce the likelihood of aggressive and/or criminal behavior; protect the community while the adolescent receives treatment; and ensure the safety of the adolescent. Woodside has 18 beds in its detention program, and serves both male and female adjudicated or pre-adjudicated delinquent youths between the ages of 10 and 18. Although Woodside's detention program is not a treatment program, it offers some services including crisis counseling/intervention, psychological evaluations, and education. According to Woodside's *Description of Programs*, "the Detention Program is a temporary placement with a maximum stay of 60 days. In some cases there may be special approval for extended stays beyond 60 days by the Commissioner of Social and Rehabilitation Services" (Christensen 2001, p. 5).

Woodside also operates the Vermont Intensive Treatment Program for Aggressive Adolescents, a residential treatment program for up to 12 male adolescents, and designed for a stay of 12 to 18 months. This program uses long-term interventions and strategies to encourage behavioral changes. The treatment program also operates a transition program, which includes transition house and individual mentoring components (Christensen 2001).

In addition to Woodside, three staff-secure juvenile residential treatment facilities operate in Vermont for youth aged 12-18: *Sandhill* (seven beds for girls), *Mountainside* (four beds for boys and girls), and *206 Depot Street* (five beds for boys). All are detention/crisis stabilization facilities for juveniles determined to be a threat to themselves or others, and for whom other options such as foster care or own-home detention are not appropriate. The staff-secure facilities are designed for stays of not more than ten days and are essentially used as emergency facilities given the distance of Woodside Juvenile Detention Center from southern and eastern Vermont.

While staff-secure group homes may be considered detention facilities, this study focused on Woodside because it is the state's primary center capable of stays of more

than ten days, and has a higher level of security than the three staff-secure facilities. It is also the lack of defined time limits associated with Woodside's detention facility that may be more problematic than short-term stays at staff-secure group homes.

In 2003, the number of admissions to Woodside's detention program was 328. While the number of admissions has fluctuated during the past 15 years, it has gradually increased, at times exceeding four hundred (see Appendix A). Consequently, the average daily population has also increased, reaching a high point of 16.3 in 2002. This increase is driven by an increase in the number of juveniles who are detained for more than 30 days. Since 1994, this number has been in the forties and fifties, compared to the twenties and thirties in previous years. An increase in the number of juveniles detained for more than 30 days has also affected the average length of stay. Although this number has fluctuated, it has tended to be higher in recent years than in the past, reaching its highest point—18.7 days—in 2003.

Longer stays increase the percentage utilization of Woodside's detention program because juveniles with longer stays take up space that could be used for those requiring shorter stays. Woodside's utilization rate, which exceeded 90 percent in eight of the past ten years and was nearly 100 percent in two of those years, is often considerably higher than the 85 percent deemed desirable by Steve Coulman, System of Care Manager for the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS), Vermont's juvenile justice agency. Consequently, Woodside frequently cannot accommodate juveniles for whom a short stay might keep problem behaviors from escalating to a point where a longer stay is needed. Short-term stays are obviously more cost effective for the State as well. Whether some juveniles at Woodside could be served by alternative programs but are sent to Woodside or are staying in detention longer than necessary because alternatives are not available, or whether additional detention beds are needed to achieve the desired 85 percent capacity is not clear.

More obvious is that Vermont is detaining more juveniles and detaining them for longer periods than in the past. Increases in the number of juveniles in detention and in lengths of stays may reflect changes in offense patterns over time (number or severity of offenses). They may reflect inadequate community-based alternatives to detention. They may also reflect changes in the use of detention, for example, a reduced tolerance for disruptive behavior. While a study of factors that have contributed to detention trends over the past 15 years would be revealing, the current study uses recent quantitative and qualitative survey data to examine determinants of length of stay at Woodside's detention program. This strategy is more cost-effective than a larger retrospective longitudinal study, and analyses using more recent individual-level data may better inform the State's Agency of Human Services' efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of their current juvenile justice programs.

B. Data

Qualitative. We designed a survey for SRS caseworkers, supervisors, managers, and Emergency Services Program (ESP) personnel, and a survey for Vermont Family

Court judges. The SRS System of Care Manager distributed surveys to the former group at a District Managers' meeting and twice via email. In theory, the survey should have reached 13 SRS district directors, 18 supervisors, 127 caseworkers, and nine ESP workers, totaling 167 individuals statewide. However, the SRS System of Care Manager cautioned, "Certain caseworkers have no experience or contact with Woodside and would accordingly not respond to the survey."

Unfortunately, we did not know how many of the 167 individuals who received the survey viewed it as relevant, so could not calculate a response rate. Only 26 individuals returned 25 surveys (one was completed jointly by two people). Even after taking into account the irrelevancy of the survey for some caseworkers, the response rate is likely to be quite low. Approximately 80 different caseworkers' names are listed in the SRS data set for April 1, 2002-March 31, 2003 Woodside admissions.¹ Using this figure for the number of caseworkers for whom the survey is relevant, the revised total for caseworkers, district directors, supervisors and ESP personnel would be 120. Twenty-six respondents yield a return rate of only 21.7 percent.

The survey for caseworkers (and other SRS workers identified above, hereafter referred to simply as "caseworkers") asked respondents to identify the primary factors that determine how long an individual stays at Woodside; what might account for differences in average length of stay by SRS District; under what circumstances the respondent would recommend that a juvenile be detained at Woodside; whether detention is ever used in inappropriate ways; and where within the juvenile justice system additional resources should be allocated. (See Appendix B for the exact wording of these questions).

The survey for judges asked the same questions about factors that determine length of stay and where additional resources should be placed. In addition, it asked under what circumstances it is appropriate and inappropriate for a judge to order a juvenile to Woodside, what determines the type of detention order s/he issues; and what steps courts might take to assure that juveniles do not remain in detention longer than necessary (see Appendix B). After two mailings, 12 of 19 Family Court judges (63 percent) returned surveys after two mailings.

Quantitative. The data for the quantitative portion of the study include the 358 admissions to Woodside's Detention Program that occurred between April 1, 2002 and March 31, 2003. These admissions represent 251 individuals. We obtained electronic data from SRS for these admissions/individuals. The data include some personal characteristics (sex, date of birth, race), admission and discharge date, type of admission (administrative or court ordered; type of court order), assessment at time of intake with regard to certain behavioral characteristics, reasons for admission, placement history, critical incident history and SRS custody/probation status. We also obtained Family Court records (FY95- FY03) and District Court records (January 1, 1988-June 30, 2003) for these youth.

¹ This number is an approximation because names were not always spelled uniformly, some included only a first name, some a first initial and last name, and some names were missing altogether.

Rather than reporting the results of the qualitative and quantitative components of the study separately, we chose to draw on them where appropriate to a topic or issue.

C. Results

Determinants of Length of Stay

We asked caseworkers and judges to identify determinants of length of stay since both are involved in decisions to admit juveniles to Woodside and, in many cases, to discharge them. The SRS *Social Services Policy Manual* (1992) states that “the Woodside Short-term Program serves delinquent youth and youth alleged to have committed a delinquent act whose risk to commit illegal acts cannot be controlled in a less secure setting.” Not surprisingly, then, many caseworkers (40 percent) referred to the risk associated with the reason youth were placed at Woodside, and the need to keep youth/communities safe, as important determinants of length of stay. Several judges also indicated that length of stay is influenced by whether a juvenile is out of control or a danger to him/herself or others.

However, the most frequently cited determinant of length of stay (identified by all but a few caseworkers and eight of 12 judges) is the inability to locate an appropriate, less-secure placement either because a facility is full or because it is unwilling to accept a youth. This situation is particularly difficult for individuals who come to Woodside because they have been asked to leave another less-secure program for behavioral reasons. “D-wing [detention] is the bottom line for every group home in state and out of state,” one respondent wrote. “If a youth acts up—not even exhibiting a chargeable offense—the youth 99% of the time ends up in D-wing.” Another respondent noted, “When they [alternative placements] have multiple referrals, they can begin to pick and choose who they will accept and will not accept.” One respondent also speculated that caseworkers that have excellent relationships with group home staff could be given preferential treatment in referral acceptance. Thus, options appear to diminish for particularly difficult youth, especially those who have been placed in less-secure settings (e.g., staff-secure group homes) and have not succeeded. Logically, the inability to move to another facility, even when behavior merits it, will increase the amount of time spent at Woodside.

An inability to move youth out of Woodside because alternative placements are unavailable exerts pressure on Woodside. Two respondents pointed to Woodside’s “population management issues” as a determinant of length of stay. One stated: “How long a youth stays at Woodside has nothing to do with the needs of the kids. Rather, it too often is simply a population management issue for Woodside. They decide who to boot out unless a kid is there on an inflexible court order. And this population management approach causes harm to some kids and to some communities.” Another referred to the process as “triage based on who is the most serious delinquent, or is in on an inflexible order.”

Several caseworkers also pointed to the time involved in trying to make a referral. A respondent listed the days associated with each step in the process of trying to transfer a youth from Woodside (packet submission, reviews, interviews, and, if admission is denied, repeating the process). Some facilities have waiting lists, which slows transfers down. Substance abuse programs require that youth be willing participants. Transfers to out-of-state programs are especially long, particularly if the youth's family opposes the proposed placement. One caseworker wrote in apparent frustration, "By the time kids get placed at D-wing the youth has exhausted all community resources, therefore there is a need to make residential referrals which takes time. We need support from Central office and Woodside to be patient, the social worker is working!!"

This caseworker clearly believes that s/he works diligently to move youth out of Woodside, but the process is time-consuming in ways s/he cannot control. However, three respondents suggested that the level of caseworkers' commitment to begin working on the next placement as soon as a youth is admitted to Woodside contributes to variation in length of stay. Several offered that caseworkers vary in their knowledge and experience with other placements, as well as their philosophies about detention. "Some workers view Woodside as a safe place for a kid, so it's not a priority to get them out."

Several judges and caseworkers mentioned aspects of the court system that may lead to longer stays at Woodside, such as contested dispositions or postponements by a public defender. Some judges mentioned things they do, or things they could do, to reduce the amount of time juveniles spend in detention. Most commonly, this was to schedule hearings quickly to assess the situation, and to stay aware of who was sent to Woodside because of their order and request frequent status updates from SRS (written or conference) if a juvenile has not been transferred within a week. In other words, judges exert pressure on SRS caseworkers to find an appropriate alternative to Woodside.

About one-third of caseworkers pointed to the effect of type of court order on length of stay at Woodside. Inflexible orders stipulate the length of stay, so this removes decision-making from caseworkers' hands unless they can convince a judge to change an order. Conditional orders often require some type of evaluation (e.g., psychiatric) for which there is typically a waiting period. Conditional orders may also require a particular type of placement (e.g., treatment program), for which a youth must wait at Woodside until space becomes available. Inflexible orders allow caseworkers discretion in advocating for Woodside admission and discharge. Emergency admissions are issued in response to a crisis situation when a court hearing cannot immediately be scheduled.

Asked what determines the type of order they issue, several judges responded in general terms, such as "situational"; "case by case basis"; "counsel or SRS caseworker's request." A few answered in ways that directly addressed each specific type of order. "Emergency used over phone, before juvenile's attorney actually in case." "Greater the risk of harm to self/others or flight, greater need for inflexible orders." "Conditional orders are pending a specific event, such as completion of evaluation" and "conditional orders are fine when the goal is to keep the child at Woodside only until an opening elsewhere occurs which might happen on a weekend when it is hard to reach the judge."

One judge wrote, “I tend to use flexible orders as SRS ought to be able to prioritize the very limited number of openings” [at Woodside], while another responded, “Flexible—rarely used.” In a particularly candid response, a judge wrote “Most of the orders are inflexible because (I think) of bureaucratic tension between the local SRS offices and the Woodside staff. I would be happy to issue flexible orders, but I am told this will cause big problems. Since no one wants big problems, I have gone along with the inflexible order.”²

We turn now to the quantitative analysis of factors that determine length of stay using data from the 358 Woodside admissions between April 1, 2002 and March 31, 2003. Unfortunately, Woodside data do not contain information about the availability of alternative placements. Nonetheless, we can determine whether other factors mentioned by survey respondents appear to influence length of stay, and whether factors *not* mentioned might also influence length of stay.

Characteristics of Admissions. The 358 admissions for the one-year period represent 251 individuals. Table 1 shows some of the characteristics associated with these admissions. Nearly three-quarters (180 or 71.7 percent) of the 251 individuals were admitted only once during the period. Fifty youth were admitted twice; nine were admitted three times, ten were admitted four times, one individual was admitted five times and one, six times. Note that these figures reflect admissions between April 1, 2002 and March 31, 2003 only. Some individuals may have had additional admissions prior to the start of the period. The average length of stay for the 358 admissions was 13.9 days, with a range of .5 (admitted and discharged on the same day) and 190; a median of four; and a mode of one (21 percent of admissions were for one day).³ Three-quarters of admissions were for eleven days or less; 90 percent were for 46 days or less; and 92.5 percent were for 60 days or less.

Approximately 21 percent of youth admitted were female. Nearly all of those admitted were white (95.3 percent), 2.5 percent were Black, and less than one percent were in each of the following categories: Asian, Hispanic, and some other racial/ethnic group. The average age at time of admission was 15.7 years. Youth were admitted to Woodside from all twelve SRS districts, although admissions were not evenly distributed across districts, due at least in part to differences in the size of district populations. One-fourth of admissions were from Burlington, the most populated district in Vermont. The smallest percentage of admissions came from Middlebury (2.8 percent of admissions).

Types of Admissions. As previously indicated, youth can be admitted to Woodside in one of two ways—administratively by SRS or by court order. An administrative admission occurs when youth are in SRS custody and their caseworker decides that admission to Woodside is appropriate. Typically, a caseworker makes a

² This may reflect a misunderstanding on the part of this judge, since some caseworkers indicated a preference for flexible orders, which allow them to determine whether a juvenile should be admitted to or discharged from Woodside.

³ The median is the “middle” value (number of days), with 50 percent of values below and 50 percent above. The mode is the most frequent value.

request to ESP personnel who determine whether the youth meets admission criteria. Of the 358 admissions in the current study, 56.1 percent were administrative.

Youth may also be admitted to Woodside by court order (a court order may also be obtained with administrative admissions, but typically it is not—26 of 201 administrative admissions had a court order). Of the 358 Woodside admissions, 183 or 51.1 percent had an associated court order. Of these, 32.8 were inflexible, 29 percent were emergency, 21.9 percent were conditional and 16.9 percent were flexible.⁴ Of the 201 administrative admissions, 26 had an associated court order (most likely obtained after the admission), and 175 did not. Thus, admissions were about equally likely to have a court order as not (175 admissions did not have a court order; 183 did). Among court ordered admissions, inflexible and emergency orders were issued most frequently.⁵

Reason for Admission. Approximately fifty different reasons are given in the data set for Woodside admissions during the year under study. We categorized these reasons into eight types—violent (e.g., assault or threatening behavior), property (e.g., theft), drugs or alcohol (e.g., intoxication), vs. justice (e.g., violation of probation), public order (e.g., disorderly conduct), procedural (e.g., psychological evaluation), out of control/at risk (e.g., at risk to commit illegal acts), and other (e.g., running away). (See [Table 1](#), Footnote 1, for the complete categorization of reasons for admission). Note that there is likely some overlap in the “vs. justice” and “other” categories. Vs. justice includes violation of probation and violation of conditions. Although running away may constitute a violation of probation or conditions, it is included in the “other” category because it does not necessarily constitute a vs. justice offense. Most admissions list only one reason for admission, but some list more than one. The percentages in [Table 1](#) are for the most serious reason for admission when multiple reasons are given. We used seriousness ratings developed by Clements (1993) as a guide.

As shown in [Table 1](#), by far the most frequent reason for admission was violence (38.8 percent of admissions). Approximately 12 percent of admissions were for each of the following: out of control/at risk behavior; vs. justice; and “other,” typically running away (30 of 42 admissions in the “other” category were for running away, and another three for being at risk of running away). Approximately nine percent of admissions were for destruction or theft of property, eight percent for public order, and five percent for drug/alcohol violations. Less than two percent of admissions were for procedural reasons.

⁴ Of all admissions, 16.9 percent were by inflexible order, 14.8 percent were by emergency order, 11.2 percent were by conditional order, and 8.4 percent were by flexible order.

⁵ An internal review is required for administrative and flexible court orders when stays at Woodside exceed eight days. The youth and his/her legal representative, caseworker, and SRS placement consultant are notified of the hearing (*SRS Social Services Policy Manual*, Policy 172). An eight-day hearing is not required for other types of admissions.

Table 1. Characteristics of Woodside Admissions, April 1, 2002-March 31, 2003.

	All Admissions	First admission during period
Number of admissions	358	251
Admissions/individual (average)	1.5	1
Admissions during year-N (%)		
one	180 (71.7%)	251 (100%)
two	50 (19.9)	
three	9 (3.6)	
four	10 (4.0)	
five	1 (.4)	
six	1 (.4)	
WS days/admission (average)	13.9	11.7
Female-N (%)	75 (20.9%)	57 (22.7%)
Age (average)	15.7	15.7
Race-N (%):		
Caucasian	341 (95.3%)	238 (94.8%)
Black	9 (2.5)	7 (2.8)
Asian	3 (.8)	1 (.4)
Hispanic	3 (.8)	3 (1.2)
Other	2 (.6)	2 (.8)
District-N (%)		
Burlington	90 (25.1%)	59 (23.5)
St. Albans	50 (14.0)	34 (13.5)
Barre	37 (10.3)	29 (11.6%)
Rutland	31 (8.7)	24 (9.6)
Springfield	26 (7.3)	15 (6.0)
Bennington	21 (5.9)	18 (7.2)
Hartford	21 (5.9)	17 (6.8)
Newport	21 (5.9)	14 (5.6)
St. Johnsbury	20 (5.6)	13 (5.2)
Morrisville	19 (5.3)	13 (5.2)

Brattleboro	12 (3.4)	8 (3.2)
Middlebury	10 (2.8)	7 (2.8)
Administrative Admission-N		
(%):	201 (56.1%)	123 (49.0%)
with court order	26 (7.3)	26 (10.4)
without court order	175 (48.9)	97 (38.6)
Court Order-N (%):		
inflexible	60 (16.8)	50 (20.0)
emergency	53 (14.8)	50 (20.0)
conditional	40 (11.2)	25 (10.0)
flexible	30 (8.4)	29 (11.6)
Reason for Admission-N(%): ¹		
violent	139 (38.8%)	103 (41.0%)
out of control/at risk	45 (12.6)	27 (10.8)
other	42 (11.7)	27 (10.8)
vs. justice	41 (11.5)	32 (12.7)
property	31 (8.7)	21 (8.4)
public order	29 (8.1)	25 (10.0)
drugs/alcohol	19 (5.3)	14 (5.6)
procedural	6 (1.7)	4 (1.6)
missing	2 (.6)	0 (0)
Behavioral Characteristics-N (%): ²		
aggressive	206 (57.5%)	140 (55.8%)
antisocial	173 (48.3)	121 (48.2)
substance abuse	162 (45.3)	117 (46.6)
emotional problems	136 (38.0)	90 (35.9)
runaway	93 (26.0)	61 (24.3)
suicidal	66 (18.4)	49 (19.5)
sexual behavior	38 (10.6)	28 (11.2)
Placement History (average #)		
foster homes	5	3.9
group homes	1.8	1.4
parents	1.5	1.4
Woodside	1.4	0.88
run away	0.53	0.51
intensive rehabilitation	0.45	0.37

relatives	0.2	0.2
institutions	0.04	0.03
independent living	0.04	0.03
Total Placements (average)	11.1	8.8

¹ Most serious reason for admission (Clements1993): violent (assault, sexual assault, domestic assault, robbery, lewd & lascivious, aggression, plans/attempts to kill someone, unlawful restraint, sex offense, at risk to harm others, at risk to commit sexual acts); property (arson, vandalism, car theft, larceny, burglary, trespassing, writing bad checks); drugs (drug use/possession, intoxication, possession of malt beverage, other unspecified substance abuse); vs. justice (violation of probation, violation of conditions, obstruction of justice, resisting arrest, pick up order, violation of abuse order, contempt of court); public order (disorderly conduct, unlawful mischief, weapons possession, reckless endangerment, truancy, false alarm, pornography); procedural (psychological evaluation, drug/alcohol evaluation, hold until transport elsewhere, reached end of treatment, no other placement available); out of control/at risk (at risk to commit illegal acts, excluding sexual; out of control); other (runaway, at risk to run away, suicide attempt/danger to self, R-wing use of D-wing, no safe placement).

² May be multiple issues associated with one admission.

Table 1 also lists behavioral characteristics of youth as conveyed to Woodside’s intake workers by caseworkers, ESP personnel, or the courts. Note that these are behavioral assessments of youth, not necessarily reasons for admission. Youth typically have more than one behavioral characteristic, so numbers and percentages add to more than 358 and 100 percent, respectively. The most common behavioral characteristic is aggression (57.5 percent). This is not surprising since the most frequent reason for admission is violence. Aggression is followed in descending order by: antisocial (48.3 percent), substance abuse (45.3 percent), emotional problems (38.0 percent), runaway (26 percent), suicidal (18.4 percent), and “inappropriate sexual behavior” (10.6 percent).⁶ These intake measures may, of course, be somewhat subjective.

Placement Histories. SRS data also include information about youths’ placement histories. We calculated the number of each type of placement prior to Woodside admission. We then summed these numbers to provide the total number of placements at Woodside, correctional institutions or hospitals, intensive rehabilitation facilities, foster homes, group homes, with relatives, with parents, and living independently. On average, prior to admission to Woodside, youth had five stays in foster care, just under two stays at group homes, had been to Woodside 1.4 times, with parents 1.5 times, and in other

⁶ Of the 38 admissions/individuals characterized in this way, four were admitted for sexual assault, three for lewd & lascivious conduct, one for being at risk of committing sexual acts, one for pornography, and one for an unspecified sex offense. For the remainder, the reference may have been to something in the individual’s past rather than to the admission at hand.

placements or situations less than one time. The total number of placements prior to a Woodside admission averaged 11.⁷

The previous descriptions used admissions rather than individuals as the unit of analysis. Therefore the characteristics of individuals with more admissions were represented in the data more often than those with fewer admissions. Of the 251 individuals admitted to Woodside between April 1, 2002 and March 31, 2003, 180 had only one admission, and the remainder had between two and six admissions. We repeated the descriptive analysis using *only one admission per individual*—the first admission during the time period under study. This is somewhat arbitrary since it does not represent each individual's first *ever* admission to Woodside, but rather their first admission during the one-year period of study. This strategy reduced the number of admissions from 358 to 251—the number of individuals in the sample. Using only one admission per individual did not change the characteristics of admissions and individuals in major ways (see [Table 1](#)). Perhaps the most notable change is that more admissions are court ordered rather than administrative. Because the characteristics of all admissions and first admissions are so similar, we used all admissions for the remainder of the analyses, since this provides the more complete record of admissions and the larger number.

Admissions Characteristics and Length of Stay

Based on survey responses from caseworkers and judges, one would expect that at least some of the admissions characteristics shown in [Table 1](#) would be associated with longer or shorter stays at Woodside. [Table 2](#) shows the average number of days spent at Woodside by selected characteristics. The most serious reason for admission appears to have some effect on length of stay. Youth admitted for being out of control/at risk had the longest average stay—23.2 days, while those admitted for procedural reasons, such as a psychological evaluation or to wait for space at another facility, had the shortest average stay—3.6 days. Juveniles admitted for substance abuse (primarily intoxication) also had fairly short stays (4.9 days, on average). Somewhat surprisingly, those admitted for violent behavior did not have appreciably longer average stays than those admitted for property offenses (15.1 vs. 14.7 days, respectively), or those admitted for other reasons, primarily running away (12.5 days).

Average length of stay also varies by SRS district. The average number of days spent in detention by youth from Springfield was 6.3, while the longest average stay—25.9 days—was of youth from Newport. Note that as the average number of days increase, generally so too does the standard deviation (this is also the case for reason for admission). Larger standard deviations mean greater variance (or more inconsistency) in lengths of stay, suggesting that a small number of individuals with longer stays are affecting the average. A high average with a small standard deviation means that lengths of stay are more similar or consistently high among admitted youth.

⁷ We do not know how complete placement history data are. Some Woodside admissions were not listed, and we suspect other placements may also be missing.

Table 2. Average Number of Days at Woodside by Selected Variables.**A. Average Length of Stay by Reason for Admission^a**

Category	Average # of Days	Standard Deviation ¹	# of Admissions	% of Admissions
Procedural	3.6	5.4	6	1.70%
Drugs/alcohol	4.9	4.2	19	5.3
Public Order	9.6	18.5	29	8.1
Vs. Justice	10.5	15.5	41	11.5
Other	12.5	26.6	42	11.7
Property	14.7	28.4	31	8.7
Violent	15.1	26.9	139	38.8
Out of Control	23.2	38.8	45	12.0

^a Most serious reason for admission (Clements 1993): violent (assault, sexual assault, domestic assault, robbery, lewd & lascivious, aggression, plans/attempts to kill someone, unlawful restraint, sex offense, at risk to harm others, at risk to commit sexual acts); property (arson, vandalism, car theft, larceny, burglary, trespassing, writing bad checks); drugs (drug use/possession, intoxication, possession of malt beverage, other unspecified substance abuse); vs. justice (violation of probation, violation of conditions, obstruction of justice, resisting arrest, pick up order, violation of abuse order, contempt of court); public order (disorderly conduct, unlawful mischief, weapons possession, reckless endangerment, truancy, false alarm, pornography); procedural (psychological evaluation, drug/alcohol evaluation, hold until transport elsewhere, reached end of treatment, no other placement available); out of control/at risk (at risk to commit illegal acts, excluding sexual; out of control); other (runaway, at risk to run away, suicide attempt/danger to self, R-wing use of D-wing, no safe placement).

B. Average Length of Stay by SRS District

District	Average # of Days	Standard Deviation ¹	# of Admissions	% of Admissions
Springfield	6.3	9.3	26	7.30%
Barre	9.6	17.4	37	10.3
Rutland	10.4	19.2	31	8.7
Brattleboro	11.6	27.1	12	3.4
Burlington	11.8	20.9	90	25.1
St. Albans	13.8	27.7	50	14
Bennington	14.9	25	21	5.9
Morrisville	15.3	34.2	19	5.3
Middlebury	15.4	31.9	10	2.8
St. Johnsbury	21.6	30.8	20	5.6
Hartford	24.9	30.7	21	5.9
Newport	25.9	49.1	21	5.9

C. Average Length of Stay by Type of Admission

	Average # of Days	Standard Deviation ¹	# of Admissions	% of Admissions
Administrative No	12.3	21.1	157	43.90%
Yes	15.2	29.7	201	56.1

D. Average Length of Stay by Type of Court Order

Type of Order	Average # of Days	Standard Deviation ¹	# of Admissions	% of Admissions
Flexible	6	9.3	30	8.40%
Emergency	8	19.2	53	14.8
Inflexible	13.6	22.2	60	16.8
Conditional	17.5	21.9	40	11.2

E. Average Length of Stay by Sex

Sex	Average # of Days	Standard Deviation ¹	# of Admissions	% of Admissions
Female	8.5	17.7	75	20.90%
Male	15.4	28	283	79.1

F. Average Length of Stay by Race

Race	Average # of Days	Standard Deviation ¹	# of Admissions	% of Admissions
Minority	8.8	13	17	4.70%
White	14.2	26.7	341	95.3

¹ S.D.=Standard Deviation, a measure of dispersion around the mean. A smaller standard deviation reflects less variance (or greater consistency) in length of stays than a larger one.

Youth admitted administratively stayed at Woodside an average of 15.2 days, while those who were not administratively admitted stayed an average of 12.3 days. Youth admitted by flexible and emergency orders had shorter stays (six and eight days, respectively, on average), while those admitted by inflexible or conditional orders had longer stays (13.6 and 17.5 days, respectively, on average). Sex also affected length of stay. Females stayed an average of 8.5 days at Woodside, while males stayed 15.4 days, on average. Finally, minority youth stayed 8.8 days, and white youth stayed 14.2 days, on average.

These relationships may or may not be statistically significant, and they do not take into account other variables that might explain or be responsible for an apparent relationship. For example, females and minorities may have had shorter stays at Woodside because they were admitted for less-serious offenses than males and whites. Similarly, youth from Newport, Hartford and St. Johnsbury may have engaged in more serious behaviors than youth from other districts. Therefore, we used multiple regression analysis to examine determinants of length of stay, while controlling for the effects of other variables. Before turning to the regression analysis, however, we describe Family and District Court data for the admissions under study, since a juvenile's history with the courts may influence length of stay at Woodside. Consequently, the regression analysis should include some measures of court history.

Juvenile Delinquency Histories

Table 3 shows selected indicators of juvenile delinquency histories from July 1, 1994 to March 31, 2003 (the end date of this study), and for April 1, 2002-March 31, 2003 (the year of study). Reported statistics are for charges, not individuals (i.e., individuals may have more than one charge per arrest). The left-hand column of Table 3 shows that prior to March 31, 2003, a total of 1020 charges were filed against 247 of the 251 juveniles admitted to Woodside during the year of study, yielding an average of approximately four charges per individual.

Of the 1020 final charges, most were property offenses (34.9 percent), followed by violent offenses (21.1 percent), public order (11.7 percent), drug/alcohol (6.4 percent), vs. justice (5.5 percent), DMV (4 percent), and "other," (1 percent) offenses. The type of offense for 15.8 percent of charges is unknown because the charges were not disposed or entered into the court database. Table 3 does show dispositions for other cases. About half of all charges led to a delinquency ruling (47.9 percent; an additional 3.9 percent led to a delinquency ruling because a diversion referral was not completed satisfactorily). About 30 percent of charges were dismissed, 2.5 percent were transferred to District Court, and, for a few, the petition was withdrawn. Individuals were referred to diversion for 11 percent of charges disposed, and granted probation for 39 percent of charges disposed.

Table 3. Juvenile Delinquency Histories of Youth Admitted to Woodside, April 1, 2002-March 31, 2003.

	Charges Filed Prior to 3/31/03	Charges Filed 4/1/02-3/31/03
Number of individuals	251	251
Number of charges	1020	420
Average # charges/individual	4.1	1.7
Number of inds. w/charges	247	166
Average # charges/individual with charges	4.1	2.5
Final Charge Category-N (%)		
Property	356 (34.9%)	130 (30.9%)
Violent	215 (21.1)	93 (22.1)
Public Order	119 (11.7)	53 (12.6)
Drugs/Alcohol	65 (6.4)	21 (5)
Vs. Justice	56 (5.5)	29 (6.9)
DMV	41 (4)	6 (1.4)
Other	7 (1)	2 (.004)
Unknown	161 (15.8)	86 (20.5)
Disposition-N (%)		
Delinquency, prior diversion referral	37 (3.6%)	13 (3.1%)
Delinquency, no prior diversion referral	489 (47.9)	184 (43.8)
Dismissed by State	225 (22.1)	110 (26.2)
Dismissed by court	40 (3.9)	16 (3.8)
Dismissed, satisfactory diversion	28 (2.7)	1 (.2)
Dismissed	9 (1)	0 (0)
Dismissed, no probable cause	3 (.003)	2 (.5)
Transferred	26 (2.5)	8 (1.9)
Petition withdrawn	2 (.002)	0 (0)
No disposition yet	161 (15.8)	86 (20.5)

Referred to Diversion-N (%)	95 (of 859 dispositions; 11.1%)	10 (of 420 dispositions; 2.4%)
Granted Probation-N (%)	336 (of 859 dispositions; 39.1%)	129 (of 420 dispositions; 30.7%)

The data just reported are for the entire juvenile delinquency histories of youth in the sample. Restricting the data to the filing dates within the period of study (April 1, 2002-March 31, 2003) yields similar results. The only notable differences are that the percentages of charges associated with a referral to diversion and with probation are smaller, probably because most recent offenses were not first offenses so a diversion referral was not appropriate and judges were also less inclined to grant probation for repeat offenders.

Criminal Histories

In addition to juvenile delinquency charges filed in Family Court, some youth faced criminal charges in District Court. Between July 1, 1987 and March 31, 2003, 195 criminal charges were filed against 53 of the 251 individuals in this study (see [Table 4](#)). This translates into an average of 1.3 criminal charges for the 251 individuals, or 3.7 charges for the 53 individuals charged. As was the case for charges filed in Family Court, most of the charges were for property crimes (42.1 percent). Twenty-four percent were for “other” offenses, 12.8 percent were for violent offenses, 10.8 percent were for DMV violations, and 10.3 percent were for drug/alcohol offenses. Most charges (81.5 percent) were misdemeanors; the remainder, felonies. Sentencing categories reveal that individuals were not convicted of 40.5 percent of charges. Approximately one-third of the charges resulted in probation. Only five juveniles served time for their offenses (of these, the longest was 183 days).

Table 4. Criminal Histories of Youth Admitted to Woodside, April 1, 2002-March 31, 2003.

	Charges Filed Prior to 3/31/03	Charges Filed 4/1/02-3/31/03
Number of individuals	251	251
Number of charges	195	118
Average # charges/individual	1.3	2.1
Number of inds. w/charges	53	40
Average # charges/individual with charges	3.7	3
Final Charge Category-N (%)		
Property	82 (42.1%)	50 (42.4%)
Violent	25 (12.8)	16 (13.6)
Drugs/alcohol	20 (10.3)	12 (10.2)
DMV	21 (10.8)	10 (8.5)
Other	47 (24.1)	30 (25.4)
Level of Final Charge-N (%)		
Felony	36 (18.5%)	20 (16.9%)
Misdemeanor	159 (81.5)	98 (83.1)
Sentence Category-N (%)		
Not Convicted	79 (40.5)	46 (39)
Probation	68 (34.9)	36 (30.5)
Fine	11 (5.6)	9 (7.6)
Incarceration	7 (3.6%)	6 (5.1%)
Split Sentence	7 (3.6)	5 (4.2)
Missing/unknown	2 (1)	1 (.8)
Average Days to Serve	2.4 (median=0; range=0-183)	3.5 (median=0; range=0-183)

Regression Predicting Woodside Length of Stay

As previously explained, multiple regression is a statistical technique that allows one to identify factors that are associated with a dependent variable (in this case, number of days spent at Woodside), while “holding constant” or controlling for the effects of independent (predictor) variables. For example, regression analysis can determine whether sex, race and SRS district influence length of stay at Woodside, after controlling for the effects of reason for admission and delinquency/criminal history. Table 5 shows the results of the regression analysis predicting length of stay.

Step 1 of Table 5 introduces variables that pertain most directly to an admission—type of court order (compared to no court order), behavioral characteristics (compared to “suicidal”), and reason for admission (compared to violence). Only one coefficient is statistically significant in its effect on length of stay. Being characterized as exhibiting “inappropriate sexual behavior” is associated with longer stays at Woodside than the stays of youth not characterized in this way. The remaining coefficients are not statistically significant, meaning that they do not directly affect length of stay after controlling for the effects of other variables in the regression model.

Table 5. Regression Model Predicting Length of Stay at Woodside in Days (N=358 admissions).

Variable	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error
Type of Court Order¹						
inflexible	-.414	(4.37)	-1.42	(4.67)	1.74	(4.84)
flexible	-7.64	(5.36)	7.00	(5.73)	-4.07	(5.70)
emergency	-6.26	(4.31)	-5.81	(4.75)	-1.60	(4.92)
conditional	2.77	(4.87)	2.27	(5.14)	3.61	(5.15)
Reason for Admission²						
property	2.09	(5.67)	3.63	(5.83)	3.70	(5.79)
drugs/alcohol	-6.40	(6.98)	-7.42	(7.24)	-3.46	(7.31)
vs. justice	-3.65	(5.20)	-5.44	(5.55)	-4.17	(5.58)
public order	-2.96	(5.41)	-4.73	(5.57)	-4.63	(5.58)
procedural	-13.79	(11.27)	-14.77	(11.63)	-14.29	(11.50)
out of control	7.00	(4.62)	7.71	(4.76)	9.70*	(4.77)
other	-1.11	(5.69)	-3.92	(5.96)	-2.49	(5.90)
Behavioral Characteristics						
aggressive	-.195	(3.78)	0.85	(3.96)	0.05	(4.00)

antisocial	2.26	(3.49)	2.47	(3.63)	2.19	(3.59)
emotional problems	-.005	(3.60)	-.731	(3.74)	1.05	(3.75)
runaway	-.50	(3.7)	-2.71	(3.93)	-.80	(4.00)
sexual behavior	13.4**	(4.66)	11.09*	(4.85)	11.99*	(4.85)
substance abuse	-3.82	(2.98)	-5.58+	(3.18)	-5.96+	(3.18)
suicidal	0.25	-3.76	1.28	(4.00)	0.63	(4.04)
Placement History (number of)						
Woodside			-.01	(1.32)	-.04	(1.32)
institutions			-3.62	(7.39)	-5.17	(7.40)
relatives			-2.63	(2.36)	-1.87	(2.35)
parents			0.39	(.482)	0.54	(.486)
foster homes			-.527+	(.313)	-.538+	(.319)
group homes			1.77*	(.84)	3.03**	(.894)
run away			2.74+	(1.44)	3.01*	(1.44)
independent living			5.35	(5.40)	6.38	(5.41)
intensive rehabilitation			0.28	(1.90)	-1.55	(1.93)
JD Charges (number of)						
violent			.381	(1.53)	-.206	(1.55)
property			-.980	(.82)	-1.66*	(.838)
public order			-.155	(2.27)	-.226	(2.31)
drugs/alcohol			-.870	(2.78)	-1.49	(2.81)
vs. justice			3.05	(2.15)	4.64*	(2.19)
DMV			2.06	(2.73)	2.29	(2.75)
unknown			2.07	(1.70)	1.26	(1.73)
Criminal Charges (number of)						
violent			4.53	(6.44)	7.16	(6.63)
property			1.81	(1.68)	1.74	(1.73)
drugs/alcohol			-1.75	(6.37)	.818	(6.31)
DMV			-2.98	(4.50)	-4.10	(4.45)
other			-1.68	(3.84)	-1.90	(3.86)
Sex (1=female)					-9.88*	(3.97)
Race (1=Caucasian)					1.99	(7.18)
Age					-.0009	(.003)

District ³						
Barre					-.659	(5.98)
Bennington					4.69	(6.95)
Brattleboro					.514	(.8.69)
Hartford					14.25*	(6.84)
Middlebury					8.85	(9.16)
Morrisville					2.82	(7.00)
Newport					24.19**	(6.99)
Rutland					2.95	(6.01)
Saint Albans					3.52	(5.19)
Saint Johnsbury					15.03*	(6.84)
Constant	15.02	(4.37)	14.33	(5.14)	11.93	(19.61)
R ² (explained variance)	0.08		0.13		0.21	
¹ Compared to no court order.						
² Most serious reason; compared to violence.						
³ Compared to Burlington.						
Significance levels: + p < .1; * p < .05; ** p < .01						

Step 2 of [Table 5](#) adds measures of delinquency and criminal histories, as well as SRS placement histories. Being categorized as exhibiting inappropriate sexual behavior is still associated with longer stays, all else equal. In addition, the negative effect on length of stay of being characterized as a substance abuser achieves statistical significance. No measures of juvenile or criminal histories are statistically significant in Step 2 of the regression model, but several measures of placement history are. Number of stays at a group home, and number of times a juvenile has run away are both positively related to length of stay, while number of stays at a foster home is negatively related to length of stay. That is, the more placements at a group home and the more times a juvenile has run away, the longer the Woodside stay, but the *fewer* placements at a foster home, the longer the length of stay at Woodside.

The full regression model, shown in Step 3 of [Table 5](#), adds sex, race, age and SRS district to the regression model, variables that one would not expect to exert direct effects on length of stay after controlling for the effects of admissions characteristics, court histories and placement histories. However, the full model shows that being female exerts a strong negative effect on length of stay. On average, females spent almost ten fewer days at Woodside than males, controlling for other factors. Racial differences are not apparent, and age at admission does not affect length of stay. Three SRS districts show significant effects on length of stay compared to Burlington, the reference category.

Hartford, St. Johnsbury, and Newport all have higher average lengths of stay than Burlington, controlling for other factors (14.4, 15.2, and 24.2 more days, respectively).⁸

The sizable sex difference in length of stay after controlling for other factors could reflect a bias toward more lenient treatment of girls, although this is inconsistent with reports that female juveniles are detained longer than males for less-serious offenses (Hsia and Beyer 2000; OJJDP 1998). Shorter stays for females may stem from a desire to move girls out of Woodside quickly to “protect” them from a co-ed environment that is viewed as undesirable or inappropriate for girls, who make up a minority of Woodside admissions and residents. It may also reflect a greater availability of group homes or other placements for females. Without further information about the availability of post-Woodside placements, we cannot determine what this gender difference reflects.

It is also unclear why admissions from three SRS district—Hartford, St. Johnsbury, and Newport—were significantly longer than admissions from Burlington (the reference category). Asked what might account for variation in average length of stay by districts, most caseworkers cited “local resources.” For example, “In some districts with less available [resources], kids may be sent [to Woodside] more often and stay longer until resources can be assembled.” Another caseworker noted: “Woodside is FREE to districts. No charge is made against district budgets. Why would a district want to move a kid if it’s a free ride!” Presumably Woodside is free to all districts, but perhaps caseworkers from districts with fewer community resources are more inclined to leave juveniles at Woodside longer than caseworkers from districts with more resources, all else equal. One respondent suggested that Woodside may be the “placement of choice” for a particular district.

Three caseworkers responded that variation in caseworkers’ workload, as well as variation in commitment and motivation or “office cultures,” may contribute to differences in average length of stay by district. A Woodside employee used the analogy of a library carrel to illustrate differences among caseworkers in attitudes about the appropriate use of Woodside. Some people understand that carrels must be shared among users, and they pack up their books when they’re done for the day. Others “camp out” at carrels for long periods of time, leaving their belongings strewn about, which discourages others from using the carrel. Several other caseworkers mentioned proximity to Woodside as a possible explanation for variation in average length of stay by district, with closer districts being more likely to use Woodside. This would seem to be more of an explanation for number of admissions than length of stay. However, caseworkers in districts closer to Woodside may have an easier time visiting Woodside and staying in contact with juveniles who are detained, and therefore be more likely to work on arranging their next placements. In other words, Woodside and the juveniles detained there may be a more salient part of the daily landscape of caseworkers in districts closer or more accessible to the detention center.

⁸ “Outliers” or extreme scores can, of course, influence these results. Recoding to 100 the seven stays that exceeded 100 days, the coefficients for Hartford, Saint Johnsbury, and Newport are 13.5, 15.3 and 17.5 days, respectively, and all remain highly significant.

Three respondents noted that district judges vary in the likelihood of issuing inflexible orders, which may lead to lengthier stays. As one noted, “Some districts seem to get inflexible orders despite SRS requests not to do this.” Since the significant effect of these three districts on length of stay remains after controlling for type of court order, this explanation can be ruled out. Judges may also vary in the likelihood of sending youth with particular types of offenses to Woodside. One respondent wrote, “Some Family Courts send mentally-challenged sex offenders to Woodside or fire starters. Thus a district would have a higher average length of stay due to one of these children being placed in D-wing [detention] because there is virtually no program able to take them and those few programs have long waiting lists.” While we controlled for the most serious reason for admission by broad category, we could not control for this level of detail. A few caseworkers also mentioned variation in court waiting time between an incident and a delinquency hearing or other legal differences by district.

Several other variables were statistically significant in the full regression model (Table 5, Step 3). Juveniles admitted for being out of control or at risk of committing illegal acts stayed at Woodside nine days longer, on average, than youth admitted for violent behavior, such as assault. Perhaps Woodside was the only safe place for these youth, or staff-secure facilities were unavailable. It is somewhat surprising that no significant difference is apparent between the average length of stay for youth admitted for violent behavior and those admitted for other types of behavior. This means that juveniles admitted for destruction of property or violation of probation stayed at Woodside as long as those admitted for violence.

Two measures of delinquency history also achieved statistical significance in their effects on Woodside length of stay. Number of vs. justice offenses (e.g., violation of probation) is positively associated with length of stay (each additional charge is associated with 4.7 additional days), while number of property charges is negatively associated with length of stay (each additional charge is associated with approximately one-half fewer days). The positive association between vs. justice offenses and length of stay may reflect judges’ exasperation with youth who do not abide by the terms of their probation, thereby directly confronting the court. A history of property crimes may be viewed as fairly inconsequential or low-risk relative to other types of offenses. Number of criminal charges did not affect length of stay at Woodside.⁹

Being characterized as having engaged in inappropriate sexual behavior continues to be associated with longer stays at Woodside (12.5 days). These youth may be viewed as particularly dangerous or predatory, and may also be difficult to place. Being categorized as having engaged in substance abuse continues to be associated with shorter stays relative to the stays of other youth (5.5 days less). Three placement history variables—number of group home placements, number of times ran away, and number of foster home placements—also continue to affect length of stay. Each additional group home in a juvenile’s placement history is associated with three additional days at

⁹ We tried using various other measures of delinquency and criminal history— number of offenses prior to each admission (but since last admission, if applicable), as well as total number of delinquent and total number of criminal offenses—but none were significant in their effect on length of stay.

Woodside, as is each time a juvenile ran away.¹⁰ Each additional stay at a foster home is associated with one-half fewer days at Woodside. Longer stays at Woodside for those with more prior stays at group homes may reflect a lack of alternatives. That is, if group homes have been tried unsuccessfully, fewer alternatives to Woodside may be available, leading to longer stays. Number of group homes may also be a proxy for behavior that is not captured by the measures in the analysis. The longer stays associated with chronic runaways most likely reflect an attempt by caseworkers to keep these youth safe. The negative relationship between number of foster homes and length of stay at Woodside is more difficult to explain, but perhaps the behavior of these youth simply makes foster home placements inappropriate. It may also reflect the weight in the data set of youth from Burlington, a district without available foster homes. A lack of foster homes reduces placement options, which may contribute to longer stays in detention for some youth.¹¹

In general, type of court order, youths' behavior and court histories appear to have less effect on length of stay at Woodside than caseworkers and judges surmised. The lack of clear patterns along expected lines may stem from pressures to keep youth at Woodside until another placement becomes available, as well as pressures to move youth out when more serious delinquents require limited detention space—"triage"—as one survey respondent put it. Decisions cannot always be made systematically or consistently, but must be made based on a constantly changing set of factors—a different set of youth with different needs and characteristics, and a different set of available options or lack of options.

D. Policy Issues

Caseworkers and judges agree that a lack of alternative placements is the primary reason that youth stay at Woodside longer than necessary. Youth may at times go to Woodside, not because they require locked detention, but because a less-secure placement is unavailable—something that is permissible under SRS policy. This raises the question of whether the number of detention beds at Woodside would be adequate if youth who do not require locked detention were placed elsewhere, and, what type of alternative facilities are most needed. To address these issues, we asked caseworkers and judges about the appropriate and inappropriate uses of detention, as well as where additional resources should be placed in the juvenile justice system were they to become available.

¹⁰ Although the analysis contains multiple measures of running away, they are not highly correlated. The correlation between being characterized as having run away and being admitted for "other" reasons (primarily running away) is .437, and the correlation between being characterized as having run away and number of times youth ran away, as recorded in placement histories, is only .277. The latter correlation raises doubts about the accuracy and usefulness of behavioral characterizations.

¹¹ Omitting Burlington from the regression analysis causes number of foster homes to become insignificant.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Uses of Detention

Consistent with SRS policy, most caseworkers and judges indicated that detention is appropriate when a youth is a risk to him/herself or a threat to the community. Others were more specific about the kinds of behaviors that merit detention, such as violence, serious property damage, sex offenses, running/crime sprees, serious VOP (violation of probation), and substance abuse. Other situations cited include when a juvenile runs away or is at risk of running away (six respondents), is out of control and/or refuses to abide by house rules at another placement (two respondents), or has a history of violating terms of probation (two respondents). Ten respondents added that detention is appropriate when other safe, less-secure alternatives are unavailable, also consistent with SRS policy.

Only four respondents—two caseworkers and two judges—endorsed using detention as an “attention-getting” action. One respondent suggested that, if resources permitted, SRS should “expand detention to acting out, running away, substance abusing—very short term. Detain for 4-8 hours up to 48 hours for violations of behaviors when they FIRST are involved in the system. There is little or no deterrence for juveniles if detention is not quick and then they are in a follow-up system that is intense in services delivered to the youth and their family.” Another respondent with a similar viewpoint wrote, “If we provide no consequences for this behavior, they learn that juvenile probation is not really meaningful in their lives (often to discover that adult probation will put them in jail, and they are shocked!”). One judge thought it appropriate to use detention as a “wake up” call for teens 14-15 who are misbehaving in foster care. It is not clear how often “shock detention” is used by judges and caseworkers.

Asked whether, in their experience, detention is ever used in *inappropriate* ways, eight of 26 caseworkers answered “no.” Two individuals added that they are more concerned that detention is not used or available enough. Two others indicated that some youth would more appropriately be dealt with by the adult system, but the Department of Corrections does not have facilities for juvenile offenders so they are detained at Woodside.

Most caseworkers cited the inappropriate use of Woodside as stemming from a lack of available placements at less-restrictive facilities, such as a staff-secure group home, or a specialized treatment facility for mental health issues or drug and alcohol abuse. Detention should not be used for “warehousing rather than pursuing other programs,” one caseworker responded. An ESP worker surmised that detention is used inappropriately “70-85% of the time.” In addition to pointing to situations where a placement is unavailable at a staff-secure group home, this respondent noted that sometimes judges order youth to Woodside inappropriately (e.g., a CHINS—Child in Need of Supervision—without a charge was detained at Woodside for more than a year; youths who test positive for drugs; girls may end up in detention because the State has no residential treatment program for girls; youth who are ejected from an Easter Seals program for misbehavior are admitted to Woodside). Several other caseworkers indicated that detention is inappropriate when used to “teach a lesson or use as a threat”;

when “used by law enforcement, based on their personal relationships with judges, to punish youth”; for youth aged 11 and younger; or to hold an out-of-control youth who is not delinquent.

Six judges indicated that they viewed detention as inappropriate when juveniles are not an imminent threat to themselves or others, or Woodside’s level of supervision is unnecessary (e.g., “Non-violent runaways or a series of minor delinquencies that do not actually cause danger to anyone but may be very frustrating.”) Woodside should be a “placement of last resort,” another judge responded. Consistent with this perspective, several judges think detention should not be used to “get youths’ attention;” to “teach them a lesson;” in response to displays of “attitude;” or as “revenge for victims.” One judge indicated that detention is inappropriate when mental health or substance abuse issues are the primary reasons for incarceration.

Several respondents expressed concern about the use of detention for very young offenders, thinking it inappropriate to mix youth 11-13 years of age with older juveniles. One judge wrote, “I do not think Woodside is an appropriate way to punish a young child—13 and under. I am also very troubled by having to place preadolescent boys as young as 11 at Woodside for out-of-control behavior. I do not think preadolescent children should be mixed in with the adolescent population. Unfortunately, if a child cannot be cared for at home or in a foster care setting because his behavior is so wild, there is no other short-term placement.”

Need for Additional Resources

Related to issues surrounding the appropriate and inappropriate use of Woodside and alternative placements, we asked caseworkers and judges where they would recommend additional resources be placed in the juvenile justice system were resources to become available. Most (16) caseworkers advocated for more staff-secure facilities because existing placements are often full. This may result in youth going to Woodside when a less-secure placement is preferable, or staying at Woodside longer than is necessary. Six other respondents think that more detention beds are needed. Most who favor expanding detention facilities would prefer to see them placed in other parts of the state, particularly in southern Vermont. While one respondent would like to see treatment incorporated into detention, others see increased mental health and substance abuse resources as more appropriate alternatives to detention in many cases. Some noted the need for a separate detention facility for girls instead of Woodside’s co-ed arrangement. One caseworker suggested a separate secure facility for younger delinquents, especially boys. Other responses included: more stabilization beds; more “get attention” beds; more prevention programs; and more SRS street checkers.

A few judges cited a need for “more Woodsides”—that is, one or two facilities in other parts of the state that would function like Woodside. Most, however, either recommended more specialized facilities (secure residential program for girls, for young offenders, for psychiatric care and/or for substance abuse treatment), or facilities/programs that might help prevent the need for detention (beds for “cooling off”

when home situations are unmanageable, programs for youth who are not in school, mentoring programs, more street-based services such as checkers). Six judges cited the need for more substance abuse and mental health treatment facilities for juveniles. Some judges see a need for more group homes/semi-secure options, “especially for younger, violent juvenile offenders—more programs like 206 Depot.” One respondent suggested a statewide system of juvenile or public defenders that would work solely with juveniles since public defenders must often give priority to criminal cases, while another advocated for more resources for courts (e.g., court-order evaluations; resources that would allow more time for juvenile cases for judges and counsel, and assist parents).

E. Summary and Conclusions

The quantitative and qualitative analyses represent a two-pronged approach to identifying determinants of length of stay at Woodside’s Detention Center. The quantitative analysis finds some apparent associations between average length of stay and admissions characteristics, some of which were identified by survey respondents. However, some of these relationships disappear or are not statistically significant after taking into account other factors in the regression analysis. The full regression model found that length of stay at Woodside is directly affected by only one type of reason for admission. Youth admitted for being out of control/at risk to commit illegal acts had significantly longer stays than youth admitted for violent behavior. Other measures of youths’ behavior also had little effect on length of stay. The exception is being characterized as having engaged in inappropriate sexual behavior, which led to significantly longer lengths of stay, and being characterized as a substance abuser, which led to significantly shorter stays.

Placement histories had some effect on lengths of stay. Those with more group home placements and fewer foster home placements had longer stays, as did those who ran away more frequently. Two measure of delinquency history affected length of stay—the greater the number of property offenses, the shorter the stay, and the more vs. justice offenses (e.g., violation of probation), the longer the stay. Females spent significantly less time at Woodside than males, and youth from three districts—Hartford, St. Johnsbury, and Newport—had significantly longer stays at Woodside than youth from Burlington, all else equal.

That more variables did not significantly affect length of stay, particularly reasons for admission, may reflect data limitations (e.g., the inability to include more idiosyncratic measures of youth behavior, or the lack of information on the availability of alternative placements). However, it may also reflect true inconsistencies in the lengths of stay of youth admitted to Woodside. This need not reflect “arbitrariness” on the part of decision-makers, but rather other sorts of pressures that may lead to youth being detained for longer or shorter periods, including available placement options, composition of Woodside’s population and available space, or a caseworkers’ work load.

Of the variables shown to significantly affect length of stay, variation by sex and district are perhaps the two most in need of investigation. This gender difference may

simply reflect a greater range of placement options for girls (although notably, Woodside's residential treatment program is restricted to boys). It may also reflect concerns about placing girls in a co-ed detention facility, or in any detention facility. If the gender difference reflects the former, this would suggest a need for a separate detention wing or facility for girls. If the latter, this would seem to be unfair to boys who are detained longer than girls who have exhibited similar behaviors and have similar histories.

The longer stays associated with three SRS districts, all located in the northeastern part of the state, also merit further attention. Characteristics of youth (or the courts) not captured in this analysis may explain the difference. Other possibilities are that differences reflect the aggregation of individual-level characteristics of caseworkers (e.g., experience, knowledge, "connections", workloads), differences in local resources or office cultures related to the appropriate uses of detention. Distance/difficulty in getting to Woodside may also be a factor, although many other areas of the state are not conveniently located to Woodside either.

With regard to the survey findings, there appears to be considerable consensus between caseworkers and judges about the way the detention system currently functions, and its problematic aspects. Asked to identify determinants of length of stay at Woodside, both caseworkers and judges most frequently cited difficulties in obtaining alternate less-secure placements. Additional research into the uses of Woodside and alternative placements is merited. One could approach this issue by asking caseworkers or the SRS Placement Specialist to retrospectively calculate or document for some future time period when alternatives to Woodside are unavailable and whether a youth goes to Woodside as a result (and for how long), or whether a youth stays at Woodside longer than is merited (and for how much longer). One could then get a more accurate assessment of the need for additional detention beds versus other types of placements. Alternatively, key personnel in the juvenile justice system could try to come to a consensus about the appropriate uses of Woodside (perhaps a ranking system), and determine whether alternative types of placements might better serve specific subgroups of the detention population (e.g., females; the youngest offenders; substance abusers; those with mental health issues). One could then estimate what effect eliminating various groups would have both on Woodside's population, and on the already stressed alternatives to Woodside. An outcome of this process could be the establishment of clear criteria for detention admission and discharge and their uniform application by all participants in the decision-making process.

Survey respondents made very clear that the current detention system is at times not meeting their needs as workers within the juvenile justice system, or the needs of juveniles.¹² The State of Vermont could expand the number of detention beds using the current detention model (minimal interventions/treatment); expand detention facilities, but target specific sub-groups (e.g., girls; young offenders); expand staff-secure alternatives to detention; and/or offer more specific treatment options for certain types of youth (e.g., those with mental health or substance abuse issues). Bolstering delinquency

¹² One must, of course, wonder about the opinions and experiences of non-respondents.

prevention resources is also an important consideration. Expanding current options and establishing developing more objective measures for Woodside admission would both help to alleviate the pressure on Vermont's single locked detention facility, and assure that detention is used consistently and appropriately.

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Appendix A: 15 Year Comparison of the Detention Program

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Total admissions	276	302	224	285	352	392	400	436	395	346	332	323	402	383	328
Average length of stay (days)	12.7	11.9	11.9	16.2	12.1	13	11.8	10.6	14.4	15.6	16.2	15.6	15	13.4	18.7
Average daily population	10.7	11.7	8.7	10.4	12.6	15.4	13.3	14.4	15.6	15.9	15.2	15.1	16.1	16.3	15
Percentage utilization	67%	73%	54%	65%	79%	96%	83%	90%	98%	99%	95%	89%*	91%*	91%*	84%*
Number of youth whose stay exceeded 30 days	29	33	27	29	27	44	40	42	47	54	47	48	58	48	51

* Percentage utilization based on 18 beds in these years; previously based on 16 beds.

Appendix B

Survey for District Mangers, Supervisors, Emergency Services Program Personnel and Caseworkers

1. There is considerable variation in how long juveniles stay at Woodside's Detention Center. Based on your experience, what are the primary factors that determine how long an individual stays at the Detention Center?
2. The average length of stay at Woodside Detention Center differs by SRS district. In your view, what might contribute to these differences?
3. Under what circumstances would you recommend that a juvenile be detained at the Detention Center?
4. Based on your experience, is detention ever used in inappropriate ways? If so, how?
5. If additional resources were available for Vermont's juvenile justice system, where would you recommend these resources be put, and for what purposes?

Survey for Judges

1. There is considerable variation in how long juveniles stay at the Woodside Detention Center. Based on your experience, what are the primary factors that determine how long an individual stays at the Detention Center?
2. Under what circumstances do you think it appropriate for a judge to order a juvenile to the Detention Center?
3. Under what circumstances do you think it inappropriate for a judge to order a juvenile to the Detention Center?
4. What determines which type of detention order you issue (conditional; flexible; inflexible; emergency)?
5. What steps might the courts take to assure that juveniles do not stay in detention any longer than is really necessary?
6. If additional resources were available for Vermont's juvenile justice system, where would you recommend these resources be put, and for what purposes?