

RECOMMENDATION 15: That the Alameda County Juvenile Courts continue to refer wards to Vision Quest.

The Criminal Justice Committee conducted a lengthy investigation that included interviews with representatives of the Probation-Juvenile Institutions Employees Association, parole officers, judges, representatives of Vision Quest, participating youths, and their families.

After nine months of investigation, the Grand Jury concluded that the benefits of the VQ program outweighed its negative aspects.

VQ is an outdoor program stressing physical fitness, confrontation, and the challenges of nature. Conquering these challenges is believed to increase the self-confidence and sense of accomplishment of the young people. Educational programs are designed to provide high school fundamentals and vocational skills.

VQ conducts family counseling programs where counselors work with both the parents and the youngster in an attempt to resolve the many family conflicts that often contribute to behavioral problems. Members of the Grand Jury attended one of the sessions. Conversation with many family members revealed that relationships with their children had markedly improved. The children in the program believed strongly that VQ had helped them.

The VQ program is relatively new in Alameda County. Therefore, it is not possible to assess its effect upon recidivism. However, it may be assumed that this will not suffer in comparison with California Youth Authority or other Alameda County alternatives.

RECOMMENDATION 16: That the Board of Supervisors encourage legislation to allow programs based on the VQ model to operate in the State of California under realistic licensing provisions.

Despite its shortcomings, VQ gives its participants a sense of accomplishment and self-esteem. Alameda County and the State of California offer no suitable alternatives.