

California Youth Authority Ventura School

VISITATIONS

The 1995/96 Ventura County Grand Jury visited the California Youth Authority (CYA) several times during the year to observe the facilities, the At Risk Kids Program, and the Victims Awareness Program. The Grand Jury met with the School Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Probation Supervisor, and wards of CYA/Ventura School.

BACKGROUND

The Ventura School is one of 15 institutions and camps for youthful offenders under the jurisdiction of the California Youth Authority. This facility, which originally housed only females, is now co-educational and was named the Ventura School in 1970.

Youthful offenders are sentenced to the CYA by the courts. Currently, there are approximately 578 males and 354 females at Ventura School. Wards are housed in 12 separate living units. In addition, there are 85 male wards assigned to the on-site public service and fire camp. The ages for males range from 17 through 24 with a median age of 21. The ages for females range from 13 through 24 with a median age of 18.

The length of stay is determined by the Youthful Offender Parole Board and is based on the seriousness of the offense and the ward's progress in the program. Lengths of stay can vary from several months to several years; the average length of stay is approximately 22 months.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

CYA/Ventura School is a fully accredited school which offers the same education as other California public schools.

The college program is operated in cooperation with a local community college. There are approximately 100 to 130 young men and women enrolled in the college program each semester.

VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS

The vocational programs are designed to help wards develop work skills to ensure a successful parole. Courses offered include business education, general shop, culinary arts, janitorial services, vending machine repair, small animal care/grooming, and audio/visual arts.

WORK EXPERIENCE

The work experience programs are designed to develop work ethics and job skills. Wards participate in the maintenance of the facility.

Trans World Airlines (TWA) has a program that trains and employs wards at the facility taking airline reservations. The wards are paid by TWA and deductions are made by CYA for income taxes, 25% for room and board, 15% for victim restitution, and 40% to a mandatory savings account, which they receive upon release, and the remainder for personal use.

There is also an animal grooming training program in which active military and senior citizens may

bring their pets to be groomed at a minimal cost.

Gold Coast RV has a manufacturing plant on the CYA grounds. Gold Coast RV trains and employs wards to make RV covers and other items.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

CYA/Ventura School conducts a program for "at risk kids". CYA is currently working with local high schools to bring students to CYA that are at risk in their behavior. The visiting students listen to inmates explain what circumstances brought them to CYA. They have an opportunity to ask questions directly of the wards and are taken through a housing unit to see what a cell looks like. The program is an effective way of showing the reality of "life locked up".

CYA hosts a Victims Awareness Program at its facility every year during Victims Awareness Week. A family who has been victimized is invited to speak to the wards. Some of the wards also speak to express their feelings. During the year the wards conduct fundraising events to raise money to donate to programs in the county that have helped victims (i.e. Victim Services, C.A.A.N. and Interface).

COMMENDATIONS

The 1995/96 Ventura County Grand Jury commend the California Youth Authority Ventura School for their excellent "at risk" program and would like to encourage CYA and intermediate schools in the county to work together establishing this program for their schools.

The Grand Jury would also like to commend the California Youth Authority, Victim Services, and other agencies, who have worked together to recognize the need to help the families of victims through their personal tragedies.