

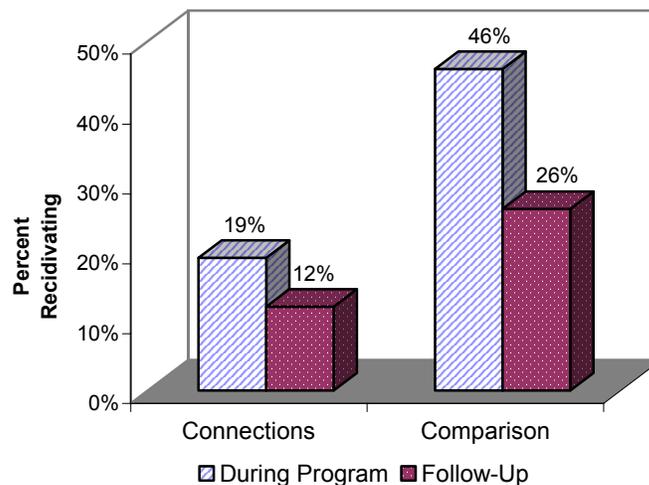
Addressing Mental Health Needs Keeps Local Inmates From Recidivating

Since the 1950s, the number of mentally ill individuals entering the criminal justice system has increased, while the number being cared for in mental hospitals has decreased. This inverse relationship is attributed to several factors including deinstitutionalization, a decrease in involuntary commitments, and lack of available treatment. In San Diego County, approximately 15 to 20 percent of inmates require some type of mental health service.

As part of a special program called *Connections*, the San Diego County Sheriff's Department, in partnership with the Probation Department, attempted to meet the needs of these individuals through the pairing of a mental health worker with a probation officer to provide intensive case management, counseling, and medication support. Implemented in 1999, the goals of *Connections* were to link probationers with services in the community, stop their cycle of recidivating, and improve their quality of life. Many of these clients were unemployed, homeless, unable to meet their basic needs, and dependent on alcohol and other drugs at the time of intake. Three-quarters had a primary diagnosis of schizophrenia or depression.

As the figure below shows, successful *Connections* clients were significantly less likely to be booked into jail during program participation, as well as during follow-up, compared to other probationers with similar mental health needs. In addition, they were also less likely to report using alcohol and other drugs and more likely to be receiving financial assistance and report their basic and emotional needs were met (not shown).

CONNECTIONS WORKS AT REDUCING RECIDIVISM



SOURCE: San Diego County's *Connections* Program Board of Corrections Final Report, June 2004; SANDAG

Unfortunately, despite these positive outcomes, the *Connections* program was dismantled in 2003 due to a lack of continued funding. However, a number of valuable lessons were learned from the process. For more information about the *Connections* program and the evaluation conducted by SANDAG's Criminal Justice Research Division, please access the full report at www.sandag.org/cj.