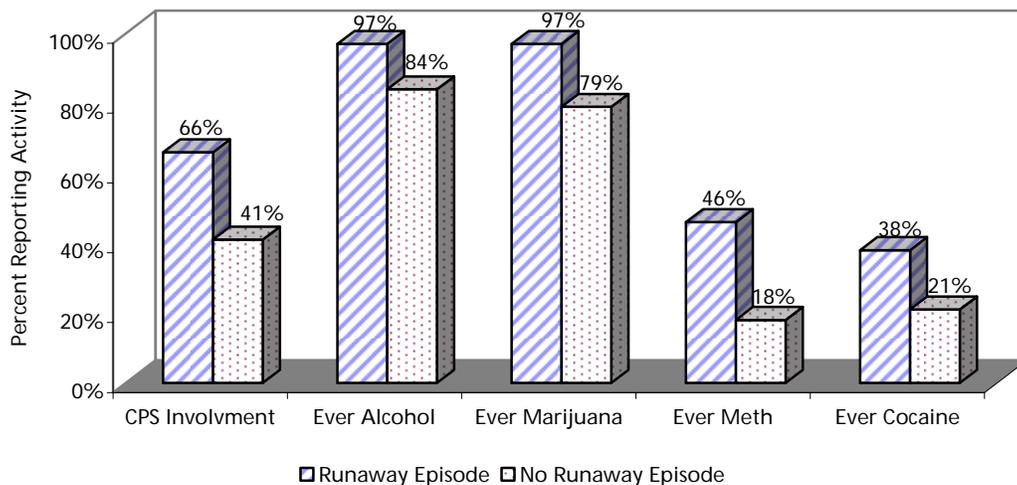


Runaway/Throwaway Children Vulnerable to Substance Use and Victimization

The number of youth throughout the country who run away or are thrown away (those youth forced out or not allowed to return home) is alarming. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) estimates that there are nearly 1.7 million runaway/throwaway youth nationwide, nearly three-quarters (71%) of whom have experienced trauma or been exposed to harmful activities as a result of, or due to, their runaway/throwaway episodes. The most common of these activities are physical or sexual abuse at home and the use of or exposure to drugs¹.

Interviews conducted with youth booked into San Diego County Juvenile Hall as part of SANDAG's Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program, highlight the issue at the local level, with nearly half (49%) of the sample reporting having run away from home in the past. Consistent with the research, substance use, as well as involvement with Child Protective Services (CPS), were more prevalent among these youths compared to those who had not runaway. This was especially true for "hard drugs" (e.g. cocaine, methamphetamine), with nearly three times more reporting having used meth and almost twice as many reporting ever using cocaine. In addition, over two-thirds of these youth revealed CPS involvement in the past, indicating some type of abuse or neglect (Figure 1).

Figure 1
RUNAWAYS SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO EVER HAVE USED ALCOHOL OR DRUGS AND BEEN INVOLVED WITH CPS



SOURCE: SANDAG SAM program, 2006

This local research and the OJJDP study draw attention to the fact that a youth's return home exposes them to the potential risk of continued maltreatment and the need for comprehensive support services when intervening in their lives. The 2007 SAM report, detailing the characteristics of youth booked into Juvenile Hall will be released early in July and available on SANDAG's Web site at www.sandag.org/cjc.

¹ Hammer, H., Finkelhor, D. and Sedlak, A. (2002). *Runaway/Throwaway children: National estimates and characteristics*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.