

## TIP THE SCALE: AN EXAMPLE OF INNOVATIVE COLLABORATION OFFERING RECOVERY AND REHABILITATION

**Tip the Scale** is an innovative partnership between the San Diego County Sheriff's Department, Probation Department, and the Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) in which supervised individuals with drug abuse and criminal justice issues are contacted to check on court-ordered compliance and if non-compliant, participate in a brief treatment conversation with a substance abuse professional and are offered the opportunity of immediate treatment in an attempt to change their trajectory in the criminal justice system. As an update to two previous case studies (2006 and 2011) that quantified the cost of one meth user to the system, an individual who turned his life around after being contacted through Tip the Scale and engaging in treatment was selected as a non-random example of how a meth-addicted individual can revolve through the system, what the cost of this contact is, and the importance of having treatment options available that acknowledge underlying issues and recognize that relapse is often part of recovery. Let's meet "Michael."

**"Michael"** is an African-American male, the fourth of eight siblings, and a father to three children himself. In 2015, "Michael" turned 50 and had been involved with the criminal justice system for over 30 years, with both his meth use and first adult arrest starting in 1983 when he was 18. According to "Michael," he first started using meth to stay awake so he could "party more." However, over time, he felt his meth use contributed to him losing jobs, hurting his relationships, and his ongoing contact with the criminal justice system. Between 1983 and 2015, "Michael" entered treatment at least six times, was arrested nine times, and was sentenced to prison once. In addition, while not directly linked to his meth use (and therefore not included in the costs here), "Michael" did have a Child Welfare Services (CWS) case opened against him when one of his children was unrestrained in a vehicle and fell out while it was in motion, and at one point all three of his children were removed and temporarily placed in foster care.

### "Michael's" Timeline...

1983: Meth use starts; first arrest

1991: Second arrest and first time on formal probation

1996: Third arrest

1998: Sentenced to prison and placed on parole

2001, 2002, 2008, 2009, and 2011: Subsequent arrests

February 2014: Contacted through Tip the Scale

November 2014: Entered treatment as result of Tip the Scale

April 2015: Successfully completed treatment

September 2015: Successfully completed Probation

### Why Do You Think It Worked This Time?

"We need more programs like Casa Raphael that hold you accountable to save money while you're in treatment and are connected to companies willing to hire you after you get out. The drug treatment education is good, but not having an income or prospects when you get out just sets us up for failure."

– "Michael"

**\$201,877:** Estimate of how much "Michael's" contact with different systems during the period of his drug use cost the system. This includes \$141,350 for jail/prison, \$32,258 for community supervision, \$18,349 for treatment, and \$9,920 for arrest/prosecution.

## What Does Research Show About the Effectiveness of Court-Ordered Treatment?

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), a large percentage of individuals admitted to drug abuse treatment cite legal pressure as a primary reason for seeking treatment, and research suggests that outcomes for these individuals are as good, or better than, those who seek treatment without this pressure. What is clear is that relapse is part of recovery, that both internal and external motivations matter, and that fidelity to evidence-based models is critical to the journey to recovery.

### “Michael’s” Criminal History at a Glance

- 9:** Arrests between 1983 and 2011
- 6:** Jail sentences
- 6:** Probation revocations
- 5:** Agencies that arrested “Michael” locally
- 5:** Arrests for violent-related crime
- 3:** Arrests for property-related crime
- 1:** Prison sentence
- 0:** Arrests for drug-related crime

### Tip the Scale By the Numbers:

Between FY 10/11 and FY 14/15:

- 891 resource packets distributed
- 614 arrests made
- 289 treatment conversations
- 10 individuals who went directly to treatment

### What Do We Know from Arrestees in San Diego About Drug Use Patterns in 2014?

- 59% of arrestees have ever tried meth with average age of first use at 18
- On average, arrestees reported using meth 15 out of the last 30 days
- On average, arrestees reported using meth for 16 years
- 89% report it is “easy” or “very easy” to get meth
- 49% report using meth before going to work or school
- 41% have received treatment before, and for 61% of these, the most recent time was court-ordered

### Is Meth Use Up in San Diego County? Yes.

According to the Methamphetamine Strike Force’s Annual Report Card, in 2014 (or the most recent data available), the number of total meth-related deaths rose from 2010, as did the number of emergency department discharges for amphetamines; the percent of all public drug treatment admits where meth was indicated as the primary drug of choice; the percent of adult arrestees positive for meth; the number of arrests for meth sales and possession; and the amount of meth seized at U.S.-Mexico border points of entry.

According to the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, alcohol and drug misuse and abuse cost San Diego County \$4.2 billion in 2010.

Notes: “Michael” is not a randomly selected case and the description provided here is not intended to suggest he is reflective of a typical meth user or represents any average. “Michael’s” name has been changed to protect his identity, but the description of “Michael’s” experiences reflects data documentation from San Diego County and his freely sharing his experiences; for this we are grateful. Additional experiences in treatment and with Child Welfare Services (CWS) were not included due to lack of data availability and could have increased the costs reflected here. Average system costs were used to prepare this estimate and the total cost could be higher or lower with additional information regarding actual costs, including actual number of days served in custody, rather than merely sentenced, which were required in some instances as estimates.