



Idaho Meth Project seeks end to drug's use

By MARLISA KEYES
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Ronk: 95 percent of first-timers users use again -- and again

SANDPOINT -- Not even once is Idaho Meth Project motto.

The reason: 95 percent of first-time meth users will use the drug again and again and again, said project director Megan Ronk. She spoke at Thursday's general Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce meeting held at Cedar Hills Church.

"It's time to work together folks to see what we can do," she said.

The campaign needs to be conducted by employers, people in churches and wherever people gather.

The goal of campaign, which kicked off in January, is to keep people from using meth. The campaign focuses on the group most susceptible to meth use, those ages 12 to 24.

That is not to say that people cannot and have not kicked the drug, but it is difficult.

"It is a tough road, folks," Ronk said.

Methamphetamine produces a dopamine level of 1350 in the human body, while the average person's dopamine level is 100 with the user constantly seeking a comparable high.

"This high is so high," she said.

For those who use the toxic brew, however, it causes all kinds of problems, both social and physical. Skin lesions and extreme cases of tooth decay are just some of its manifestations.

Many people who use meth end up in jail or prison either because of drug-related convictions or stealing to get money for more drugs.

It destroys families. Children become wards of the court and some are adopted.

Methamphetamine use also does far worse, said Debbie Kelly, who also agreed to speak at Thursday's meeting.

"I know that meth use has ruined my family," said Kelly, a mother of three.

Although she has tried other drugs, Kelly said she has never used meth. She knows its affect on families.

It is the first time Kelly has shared her story with anyone but close family members.

When she was 8, Kelly was placed in foster care with a loving family. When she was 17, she went in search of her family and discovered a mother, brother and younger sister who were hooked on drugs - - who all had Hepatitis C because of sharing contaminated needles to do drugs.



Her brother is serving a life-term in prison as a result of being high on meth. He tried to rob some people in a bar one night and pistol whipped a man who tried to intervene. The next day he tried the same thing at a different bar. That same man again tried to intervene and Kelly's brother shot and killed the man.

Her sister died a year ago, and although the cause was not drugs, Kellys believes her drug use contributed to her death.

The Idaho Meth Project is a nonprofit organization that relies on donations to keep it afloat.

It is designed after the Montana Meth Project funded with a \$20 million donation by billionaire businessman and rancher Tom Siebel. When that project kicked off in 2005, Montana was fifth in the nation among states for meth use and has since dropped to 39th, Ronk said.

Idaho has not fared so well. It now is fifth in the nation among states for meth use.

"We've got to drive it out of the state," she said.

Although you personally may not know someone with a meth problem, every person in the state is affected by it -- whether employers who have employees who miss work or quit altogether or in the cost to the state, Ronk said.