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### Former meth addict shares tale

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Idaho Meth Project forum reveals impacts of drug use

COEUR d'ALENE -- When Brian Lux's friends prodded him to try meth at 17, he figured it wasn't going to hurt.

"Euphoric," the 39-year-old described the feeling of his first high. "I thought it was great."

The decades that followed, though -- not so much.

By the time the Coeur d'Alene resident was 30, what he had sustained as a side habit suddenly consumed his life.

After losing his job as a painter, he started manufacturing meth in the woods to deal out, anything to keep money coming in.

"I wasn't looking for a job. It became my job," Lux said.

The 6-foot-tall man weighed roughly 130 pounds, he estimated, and every day was committing acts he had never thought himself capable of.

"You have to do things. Like when people rip you off, you have to get back at them somehow, so their friends don't rip you off, too," he said. "You never know what you're going to get into. I've done a lot of things I'm not proud of. Probably ruined other people's lives in the process."

But now his story might save some lives, too.

A volunteer for the Idaho Meth Project, Lux was a featured speaker at a community forum the nonprofit held Wednesday night at North Idaho College to reveal the impacts of methamphetamine.

Megan Ronk, IMP executive director, said it's crucial for people to hear stories like Lux's.



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Brian Lux, an Idaho Meth Project volunteer, recently spoke about his former meth addiction at an IMP community forum at North Idaho College. Lux got hooked on meth at 17 and continued using into his 30s.

"It helps folks understand this drug can happen to a normal person in a normal family," Ronk said. "I think we all in our minds have that image of the stereotypical drug user, and meth doesn't necessarily fall within those boundaries."

Former addicts she meets through IMP often describe seeing their families and livelihoods fall apart, she added.

"People's priorities change. Some end up committing crimes to support their habit. Violence is very common with the people they love," she said. "And even the first couple times a person uses, it has a devastating impact on the brain. The implications are lifelong."

It wasn't until Lux was arrested for possession a few years ago that he wanted to get clean, he said.

"My family disowned me," he said. "I realized I was getting older. This wasn't how I wanted to live."

He enrolled in several rehabilitation programs, and is now living in a halfway house while studying information technology at NIC.

One of the most crucial steps was disassociating himself from his old meth crowd, Lux said.

"It wasn't really hard. I knew what it was coming down to, and I didn't want any more part of it," he said. "It really wasn't too much fun."

Local law enforcement sees meth used more than any other illegal drug, said Coeur d'Alene Police Chief Wayne Longo, who also spoke at the IMP forum.

"It's not just Kootenai County, it's the whole country," Longo said. "The interesting thing with meth is you can't point to any one age group and say 'It's just young people or older people or baby boomers.' It pretty much crosses all age barriers and all socioeconomic barriers."

The drug is popular because of the cocaine-like high it induces, Longo said. It's also easy to obtain the substance, which can be manufactured from store-bought products or smuggled in from Mexico.

Society at large is affected by widespread meth use, he said, like when breadwinners lose their jobs because of addictions and put their families on state assistance.

"The biggest issue we're going to see is as the majority of addicts start getting older, we'll start to see the physical part of what meth does to the body medically," he said. "We'll see those folks coming into the medical system, and they don't have insurance."

The key to reducing meth use is awareness, Longo said, reaching young people before they have a chance to get hooked.

Already campaigns like IMP's TV and radio commercials are having an impact, he added. The group released a survey taken last year that reported 78 percent of young adults believe there is great risk in trying methamphetamine once or twice, compared to the 68 percent of those surveyed in 2007.

"I'm feeling very optimistic, and cops typically aren't the most optimistic people in the world," Longo said. "We know if we can stop people from doing the drug to begin with, we're so much ahead of the curve."