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Meth: You should be scared

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First lady attends Idaho Meth Project fundraiser, says group's new ad campaign is working

COEUR d'ALENE -- Lori Otter can point to many recovering addicts she has encountered since the beginning of the Idaho Meth Project.

Like the 23-year-old who told the state's first lady about starting meth in high school to lose weight with the other cheerleaders.

"It took three years for her downward spiral and then she hit bottom," Lori said. "Since then she's rebounded in an awesome way. For me, that's what it's all about. Recognizing addicts who get up every day and take another swing at life."



SHAWN GUST/Press

First lady of Idaho Lori Otter greets attendees of the inaugural Give Meth the Boot fundraising luncheon Wednesday, hosted by the Idaho Meth Project at The Coeur d'Alene Resort.

Lori, who initiated the IMP prevention program with her husband, Gov. Butch Otter, two years ago, was the key speaker Wednesday at IMP's first fundraiser, "Give Meth the Boot" luncheon.

Lori can back up the nonprofit's success with more than just anecdotes, she said.

"I can point you to data, because I'm kind of a nerd that way," she said to the 300 gathered in The Coeur d'Alene Resort ballroom.

For instance, the 700 volunteers statewide who help with the organization's media and educational campaign, she said. Or the 2009 IMP survey showing that 82 percent of teens see great risk in getting hooked on meth, up from 71 percent two years before.

"In 2007, I could have walked into a room this size and no one would have known what meth was, let alone that we were the fifth worst state for use," she said. "Now when I ask about meth in a room this size, about 90 percent of the hands go up."

The event included a showing of the latest IMP TV ads, made by "Requiem for a Dream" director Darren Aronofsky, which feature dark scenarios like a group of teenagers dumping their friend's body at the hospital after she has OD'd.

The ads were played to teenage focus groups to ensure their impact, Lori said.

"This ad campaign is specially designed to find where kids live on the Internet and the radio," she said. "If we do nothing more than start conversations at home when it needs to happen, we've accomplished quite a lot."

The scenarios in the ads can happen to anyone, said event chair Ellen Jaeger.

"Families have been bankrupted by those who choose to make meth their life priority," said Jaeger, a former school counselor. "Meth not only destroys the life of the person using, but it has long lasting effects on the friends and family of that person."

Ron Nilson, a Kootenai County businessman who encourages companies to hire recovering addicts, spoke on why the public must help pitch in.

Describing how his sister suffered from a heroin addiction, Nilson said families suffer greatly losing their loved ones to drugs.

"We need to put a face on this," he said. "Meth takes effect the first time. We've all made stupid decisions, so look back and think, 'What if it had been meth that time?' We need to stop these kids."

Carol Erickson, who attended the event, said she hopes the nonprofit can reduce meth use in Idaho.

"I have grandkids in the school system, and I know it's a problem for a lot of the classrooms," Erickson said. "For younger kids it's just sad."

The luncheon followed a week of IMP forums where community members like law enforcement and recovering addicts discussed the impacts of meth use.

"It's events like this (fundraiser) that makes that possible," said Megan Ronk, IMP executive director. "We really support the local community in being willing to help IMP efforts in North Idaho."