



OP ED: Idaho's fight against meth

More teens and young adults now see a great risk in trying meth once or twice

Debbie Field is the Administrator for the Idaho Office of Drug Policy

By **DEBBIE FIELD**

During the past two years, the Idaho Office of Drug Policy has worked with community leaders and professionals from the worlds of substance abuse treatment and prevention throughout the state to keep our towns and cities drug-free. One of the most important lessons I've learned is that a strong drug policy must start with local commitment. That only comes when a community is engaged and mobilized. Here in Idaho, the Idaho Meth Project is the right vehicle to drive this important endeavor.

Before the Idaho Meth Project was launched last year, a survey was conducted in our schools asking approximately 3,000 Idaho teens and young adults about their perceptions of meth's risks. The results were startling. Many of our young people did not see any great risk in trying meth once or twice, and they did not associate the drug with its many negative consequences. The Idaho Meth Project set out to change these perceptions, and after only one year we're starting to see an effect. The project's advertising and community outreach campaign is letting young people know that they can't fool around with meth—and young people are getting the message. According to a new survey, more teens and young adults now see a great risk in trying meth once or twice, and they now associate the drug with specific negative outcomes.

These shifts in attitudes are impressive, and a first step toward changing behavior. But the Idaho Meth Project's achievement isn't limited to these survey results. In the Office of Drug Policy, success is more than just changing risk perception in a vulnerable demographic. To truly prevent the use of a drug like meth, entire communities must be galvanized against it. Here, the Idaho Meth Project, directed by Executive Director Megan Ronk, has been a valuable partner to us. More than 600 people volunteer with the meth project throughout Idaho, hosting forums to discuss issues related to meth in towns across our state. Parents, teens and tweens learn the facts about meth, and they also learn how to talk about it. I've attended hundreds of such events during the last two years. These conversations make meth prevention a part of everyday life.

Just as it has brought communities together, the Idaho Meth Project also has been a catalyst for state agencies and other prevention programs to work together. For the first time in our state's history, we now have an Interagency Committee on Substance Abuse where all state agency directors and other multi-jurisdictional partners meet on a monthly basis to coordinate and eliminate duplication of efforts. Based on the Idaho Meth Project's success, we are working together to build a strategic prevention plan in which all prevention programs across the state will follow a research-based model as robust as the meth project.

Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter and first lady Lori Otter join me in thanking people across Idaho who have donated their time, money and expertise to the Idaho Meth Project. In only one year, we've made remarkable progress

against this terrible drug. There remains much to do, but the work is easier when we know that we're on the right track. I can only hope that the next few years will be as successful as our first.