



**Hispanic community celebrates**  
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September 13, 2009

<http://www.idahopress.com/sports/?2009-09-14-Hispanic-community-celebrates>

Thousands from the Hispanic community filled Lakeview Park Sunday to attend a fun, free family event with a message.

The second-annual Hispanic Community Event, organized by Bustos Media and the Idaho Meth Project, brought together live bands, dancers, Mexican businesses, vendors and information booths to celebrate Mexican Independence Day — which falls on Sept. 16 — and to show unity in the local fight against methamphetamine.

According to the Idaho Department of Education Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 14 percent of Hispanic students have used meth one time or more during their lives, compared to 5 percent of white students.

Even experts like Idaho Meth Project executive director Megan Ronk don't know exactly why those numbers are higher among Hispanic youth, but statistics like that underscore the importance of Sunday's event, she said.

"I don't want to send the message this is a Hispanic-only problem, because it's not," Ronk said. "But events like this are important to show that we are paying attention to the Hispanic community. It's significant enough that, from a prevention perspective, we are paying special attention to this community."

At Sunday's event, three members of the state's juvenile corrections program stood in front of hundreds of spectators, sharing their personal stories in Spanish about how the drug devastated their lives.

"That was a very powerful message," Ronk said.

The Idaho Meth Project is very much a grass-roots effort, Ronk said, with 700 volunteers statewide and about 120 in Canyon County. Many are recovering addicts who speak frankly about the drug around the community and in schools.

Others are like 16-year-old Vallivue High School sophomore Rebecca Elkin of Nampa, whose friends got into the drug and then drifted away. Elkin manned a booth at Sunday's event and answered questions from the crowd.

"We've had a lot of teenagers come by and say, 'I think my friends are using, what do I do?'" Ronk said.

Elkin said some of her own friends went through detox but got back on the drug, and she lost contact with them.

"They don't do anything, they just sit there, they zone out a lot, they stop going to school," she said, describing what a person taking meth might act like. "It's sad."

Prevention efforts are key, Elkin said, because even smaller towns in Idaho are seeing the drug emerge in larger quantities.

"It's very important, especially because of the ideas people are coming up with to sell it," she said. Nationwide, dealers target youth with meth packaged to look like Pixy Stix and Pop Rocks candy "to sell faster and make quick bucks," she said.

Bustos Media — which operates Spanish language radio stations in the valley including the Ke Buena and La Gran D networks — approached the Idaho Meth Project last year just as the meth project was getting ready to launch its own Spanish radio ads, Ronk said.

From that, the Hispanic Community Event was born.

"They have great reach into this community," Ronk said of Bustos Media. "They could have just held this event in honor of Mexican Independence Day, but they made a conscious decision to partner with the Meth Project. They wanted to have a message."