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Roger Curtiss: Idaho Meth Project shows positive results

READER'S VIEW: TEEN DRUG USE

BY ROGER CURTISS - Idaho Statesman
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As a licensed treatment provider to adults and adolescents struggling with drug addiction in Idaho, I have been surprised to encounter skepticism about the success of programs like the Montana Meth Project. While our communities cope with the devastation wrought by methamphetamine addiction, we cannot afford to discount the concrete solutions offered by a proven prevention program. Treatment providers understand the profound effect that prevention has had on teen meth use in Montana, and we are witnessing firsthand the transformation being made in Idaho.

When the Montana Meth Project started, teen meth use in the state had declined by 15 percent between 2001 and 2005. From 2005 to 2008, while the Montana Meth Project's public service campaign and series of community action programs reached youth ages 12-17, that decline increased to 45 percent. The significant impact of the Montana Meth Project helped move Montana from fifth in the nation for meth abuse to 39th. According to the CDC's latest Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, the state of Montana achieved the second largest drop in teen meth use in the country.

Here in Idaho, we are already seeing promising trends. For example, from July 2005 to June 2006 in Idaho's Region 5, nearly 30 percent of adolescents in treatment were admitted for meth addiction. The following year, that number decreased to 24 percent. And most recently, between July 1, 2007, and March 31, 2008, only 14 percent of adolescents admitted to treatment were for meth.

The timeline of this decrease corresponds to key milestones with the Idaho Meth Project. When Gov. Otter traveled the state raising funds for the Idaho Meth Project, communities throughout Idaho started speaking more openly about the threat meth poses, and health providers began to see a small drop in adolescent treatment admissions for the drug.

This year, with the Idaho Meth Project fully launched, we've seen an accelerated decrease in admissions for methamphetamine abuse, even as treatment numbers for other substances have remained steady or even increased. Young people are choosing to stay away from meth, and the Idaho Meth Project has played a key role in this reversal.

I was fortunate enough to observe the enormous impact the Meth Project had when I was a resident of Montana. I am thrilled to see this prevention model adopted by Idaho, as a licensed addiction counselor and a member of the Boise, Gooding and Twin Falls communities. I am confident that, as we continue to change teen attitudes and perceptions about this insidious drug, we will accomplish the impressive results already achieved in Montana.

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