

OPINION EDITORIAL

“Megan Ronk: 'Not even once' campaign makes a difference in Idaho”

<http://www.idahostatesman.com/2010/04/09/1146701/not-even-once-campaign-makes-a.html>

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By: Megan Ronk

Recently the Idaho Statesman published an editorial about the Idaho Meth Project, questioning its effectiveness and raising concerns about the project receiving support from the state's Millennium Fund. Let me set the record straight. Since its inception, the Idaho Meth Project has worked closely with law enforcement, treatment providers, local drug coalitions and schools. Together we are fighting back to save lives and protect our communities.

There is strong evidence that in a relatively short amount of time our efforts have changed attitudes about methamphetamine. Earlier this year, new statewide survey data showed that compared to a 2007 survey conducted before the launch of the Idaho Meth Project, Idaho teens and young adults are now more aware of the specific dangers of meth use.

Significant increases (as much as 20 points) in perceptions of risk in trying meth were reported in every one of the 14 risk areas measured. Idaho young people also "strongly agree" that ads by the Idaho Meth Project make them less likely to try or use meth (70 percent of teens and 60 percent of young adults).

The Idaho Meth Project is fortunate to have the support of state, local and tribal officials, along with business and community leaders, because the program is making a difference. But it is not just high-level officials who support this non-partisan program. Over 700 volunteers, many of whom have a personal experience with meth use, stand behind this program and help spread the "Not Even Once" message at a grass-roots level. These volunteers have conducted hundreds of school and community presentations throughout the state over the past years.

The Idaho Statesman editorial mistakenly implied that an appropriation from the Millennium Fund for the Idaho Meth Project is somehow taking away from other programs, including Medicaid and psychiatric hospitals. The "rob Peter to pay Paul" scenario that has been insinuated is misleading.

The Millennium Fund was not created using taxpayer general fund dollars. Instead, it originated from Idaho's share of the national tobacco settlement and was specifically set up by the Legislature to fund tobacco and substance abuse-related programs. As such, the Millennium Fund appropriation of nearly \$6 million includes a mix of prevention and treatment programs all related to substance abuse. To suggest that other "established programs are losing out" because the Idaho Meth Project is awarded Millennium Fund dollars is a mischaracterization. In addition, the Idaho Meth Project engaged in a competitive grant process to even be considered for funding through the Millennium Fund.

The Idaho Meth Project is not a government program and does not rely solely on state support. In fact, over 2,200 individual, corporate and foundation donors have personally invested in the program because they believe in the organization's mission and are confident they will see a return on their investment.

Despite the fact that we have compiled thorough outcome data that is publicly available, have thousands of supporters and investment from the private sector, the Idaho Statesman editorial would rather suggest that this has all transpired because of "powerful friends."

The truth is that the success of the Idaho Meth Project is due to an entire state coming together through a common message to educate our young people about the highly addictive nature of meth. We are proud of our accomplishments and thank all who have joined us in making this project a success.

Megan Ronk is the executive director of Idaho Meth Project.