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Idaho Meth Project

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Givin' meth the boot

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River City Weekly

Everyone seems to have a story – a friend, a relative, a child, a co-worker, lost to methamphetamine. The drug is widely abused in Idaho, and few people who try it once are able to resist using it — again and again.

"While no city or county in Idaho has been immune from the impact of meth, rural communities and Native American tribes have faced some of the biggest challenges with meth abuse," said Megan Ronk, executive director of the Idaho Meth Project. "In Idaho, the majority of the meth we see is imported from Mexico, although the drug is also produced locally in meth labs."

The Idaho Meth Project was launched Jan. 7 in an effort to reduce the prevalence of first-time meth use in Idaho. A graphic statewide advertising campaign was combined with an aggressive grassroots community awareness initiative designed to educate teens and young adults about the dangers of meth use.

The "Not Even Once" ads are gritty, depicting desperate young people, most with faces scarred from the toxic drug, committing crimes to get money for more drugs.

"The response to the ads has been extremely powerful especially from our target audience — teens and young adults," Ronk said. "Throughout the state, kids are telling us that the ads get their attention, and they want to know more about the dangers of meth."

The Meth Project team has a targeted media campaign that is trying to reach 70 to 90 percent of Idaho teens, three to five times per week. Ads run on MTV and VH1 and next to shows popular with the project's target demographic: "The Simpsons," "American Idol" and "Dancing with the Stars." Radio spots also appear on popular rock, alternative and country stations, and officials buy space on billboards near areas where teens and young adults often gather. And print ads also appear in high school newspapers throughout the state. All told, more than 75 million "not even once" impressions have been made across media to date.

"Too often, when we go into the schools or talk with teens and young adults at community events, we find that they have very real experiences with methamphetamine. They have friends who are using, their parents are using, or they have been in situations where they have been confronted with the opportunity to try meth," Ronk said. "Until they were exposed to the Idaho Meth Project many times, they did not understand the highly addictive nature of meth. We believe the campaign has had a tremendous impact in terms of changing their perceptions about the dangers of this drug."

Before the campaign was launched, the project conducted a baseline research study for an in-depth look at what young Idaho residents thought about meth. The study also provided a framework for measuring the impact of the campaign, with results to be published in early 2009.

On Oct. 27 officials will host a concert to raise funds for the Idaho Meth Project. The concert will feature Lady Antebellum, a rising country group recently nominated for two Country Music Awards as best new group and new artist.