

Shoshone News Press

Idaho Meth Project continues awareness, prevention campaign

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SHOSHONE COUNTY - The Idaho Meth Project is a non-profit organization launched in January of 2008 by Idaho Governor C.L. Otter and First Lady Lori Otter to reduce methamphetamine use in Idaho.



- Photo by ROBERT DEANE
Megan Ronk, Idaho Meth Project
Executive Director.

Currently, Idaho ranks seventh in the nation in methamphetamine use, and one in five teens in the state see no risk in trying meth once or twice, according to information provided by the Idaho Meth Project.

The project, according to Megan Ronk, Idaho Meth Project Executive Director, uses extensive research, advertising campaigns and community action programs to target potential first time meth users.

Those methods help bring awareness about meth and its affects on those who use it.

"We are trying to make people aware that we are here to help and answer any questions," said Ronk.

The current campaign, "Not Even Once," Ronk said, is based on a similar 2005 campaign in Montana that focused on teens and young adults.

The Montana program, according to information provided by Ronk, helped the drop from fifth in the nation in meth abuse to 39th in two years.

To target the group the Montana campaign targeted in Idaho, Ronk said, the group will also work with the schools.

"We are trying to do a grass roots program, by working with schools and other departments," said Ronk.

Ronk said in the future, the project would like to integrate other curriculum into the schools of Shoshone County and the state and that can be used in classes.

Ronk said the Idaho Meth Project is currently, in discussions with schools in the Silver Valley, about bringing awareness programs into the schools like the speaker program, with others to follow.

Part of the program, Ronk explained, would involve former meth users speaking to students, discussing their experience's with the drug, and how it is different than other recreational drugs.

"Unlike other recreational drugs, the affects of meth are seen right away," said Ronk.

The reason those effects are seen so soon, she said, is because how addictive the drug is.

A particular area of concern for the project is meth use in rural communities, like those in Shoshone County and North Idaho.

"Rural communities are the areas that we see the highest meth use," said Ronk.

Ronk explained, meth use in rural communities can spring up without residents knowing it in young teens and adults due to boredom, the need for self-medication, or people needing energy using the drug and distances between homes and communities.

How meth enters these communities, Ronk said though, has changed from seven to eight years ago.

"We see less meth labs in the United States now," said Ronk, "but now it comes mostly from across the border, mostly from Mexico but also Canada."

Which is why, Ronk said, the campaign is ongoing and focused on making sure kids are seeing the campaign and studying its impact on how those same kids view the drug.

"We are trying to track the outcome," said Ronk. "We will try to come back later on to see if there has been an impact."

Meanwhile, Ronk wants parents to understand, talking to their children even at the age of 12, about meth is not too early.

"We see meth use start between the ages of 12 and 24," said Ronk.

Ronk said, parents should also be watchful for any signs that may hint at potential meth use in their own children.

Signs of meth use can include, behavioral changes, staying awake for days, sleeping all day, different types of friends, stealing from family members or friends, dramatic weight loss, tooth decay and sores or also known as "meth bugs," appearing on the body.

Ronk said the Idaho Meth Project plans to discuss the campaign with local organizations like rotary and Elks to bring further awareness to the state and Shoshone County about meth.

The Idaho Meth project is funded by contributions from private individuals, corporations, foundations, and tribal and local governments.

For more information on the Idaho Meth Project, including additional statistics on meth use and its affects on the state of Idaho go to www.idahomethproject.org.