

Local group uniting community against drugs

By Sean Breslin
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For Ayngela Pope, shedding pounds became an obsession. As a girl, Pope struggled with eating disorders before turning to methamphetamine to control her weight.

"It was a quick fix to losing weight and being skinny," she said.

But as time went on, she fell deeper into addiction. After a while, it wasn't just pounds she was losing. It was her family.

"I'll never forget having my kids ripped from my arms," Pope said, forcing back tears.

Pope, now sober for almost 16 months, has been working to turn her life around. She spoke at Thursday night's Southern Idaho Partners Against Drug town hall meeting at the College of Southern Idaho, along with state officials and social workers about the effects of drug abuse on communities and the need for community-based treatment.

Pope's story isn't unique, said John Hathaway, Region Five director of Idaho Health and Welfare.

"I don't know that there's anything more difficult than separating a family," he said. But that's what drug problems sometimes lead to, he said.

Legislators, state corrections officials, health workers and recovering addicts attended the meeting, which was sponsored by SIPAD. Formed in 2002, SIPAD has worked to coordinate local anti-drug efforts rather than remaining disorganized, said George Brown, an advisor with SIPAD.

"There were people who were doing good things, but they were kind of off on their own," Brown said.

Although it is not nearly as prevalent as alcohol or marijuana abuse, methamphetamine abuse in Idaho has received much attention from Debbie Field, director of the Idaho Office of Drug Policy.

"I hate this drug more than I've hated anything in my life," Field said.

Field told a roomful of people familiar with the "Not Even Once" advertising campaign that the Idaho Meth Project has already been successful in spreading information about the drug.

"Last year when I asked, 'What do you know about methamphetamine in our state,' no one raised their hand," Field said.

Larry Callicutt, director of the Idaho Department of Juvenile Corrections, said he sees kids with addiction problems coming through his system almost constantly. Despite the desperate situations some kids end up in, he remained optimistic.

"As long as your child is breathing, there's hope," Callicutt.

It's hope, along with her faith in God, that Pope said has sustained her in getting through her own addiction. She said she hopes others will hear her message and avoid the problems she's endured.

"I've gone through what I've gone through to help people."