

## **Montana provides a blueprint Can Arizona Meth Project see the same success here?**

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By: Jennifer Bartlett

KINGMAN - Many methamphetamine users get started by thinking, "I won't be like that person, I'm stronger," or "I'm just going to try it once."

Arizona Meth Project seeks to end those myths and convince people that one time is all it takes to begin an addiction that destroys not only users but friends and families ... and communities.

The Arizona Meth Project is a "collaborative endeavor that brings together the efforts of the law enforcement, treatment, intervention, education, community outreach and prevention sectors," according to program material.

Modeled after the nationally recognized Montana Meth Project, the Arizona Meth Project combines advertising with community-based programs attempting to reduce initial meth consumption.

Since the Montana Meth Project began two years ago, statistics show it has been highly successful. That state has seen a 70-percent decrease in workers testing positive for meth, a 41-percent decrease in criminals testing positive for meth and a 53-percent decrease in meth-related crimes from 2005 to 2006, according to the most recent study.

"Data collected in 2006 indicates that programs recently initiated in Montana have begun to have a significant impact on the state's methamphetamine problem," said Montana State Attorney General Mike McGrath.

"While the data are preliminary, the evidence available clearly demonstrates that the prevention campaign started in 2005 by the Montana Meth Project has had a positive impact on the state of Montana. Critical indicators point to reductions in meth use, related crime and availability, and to a growing perception of the great risk associated with using this drug. Combined with other enforcement and prevention efforts, the Montana Meth Project's education campaign has had dramatically positive results."

In addition, 87 percent of teens disagreed with the statement that taking meth could make you more popular, up from 67 percent in 2005. Despite only 56 percent of teens disagreeing with the idea that meth helps escape your problems in 2005, 83 percent disagree now.

"Since 2005, the perception of specific negative effects resulting from meth use has changed," the 2007 Meth Use and Attitudes Survey concluded. "Among teens, risks such as stealing, lack of attention and tooth decay have increased significantly (11 percent, 7.5 percent and 19 percent, respectively)."

Furthermore, teens and young adults have reported having fewer friends who use meth than in past surveys. This year, only 10 percent of teens say they have close friends who use meth, down 33 percent since 1999; and 23 percent of young adults say they have friends who use meth, down 20 percent since 2006.

"I am only 16, and I believe these commercials served their purpose. They scared me so much, but in a good way. They showed what I could and don't want to become," said Carly Kennedy Guerra on the Montana Meth Project's Web site.

### Targeting teens

The Montana project was started by Tom Siebel because of the escalating problem he saw facing youth in his state. After forming the initial group, they conducted extensive research with teens and young adults to find what would really reach out to them.

"Research made our approach clear - develop a teen-based prevention campaign - one designed with input from Montana teens, featuring Montana teens, that will speak to Montana teens about the risks of experimenting with meth," said Siebel, chairman of the Montana Meth Project. "Our project is exclusively focused on prevention."

Siebel said they approached the methamphetamine problem as a consumer products marketing problem.

"Meth is a consumer product. It is readily available. It is affordably priced. It is distributed statewide through a very effective distribution channel. It has many product attributes that are perceived as attractive," the Web site said.

The Montana Meth Project targets teens in a graphic and real way, the Web site said. The primary objective is to educate them early and often about the risks and consequences of using meth even once.

The goal is to "arm Montana youth" with the facts so they can make a better informed decision about meth when presented with the opportunity to try it.

"The ads themselves are powerful and may shock many people," said Dr. Dan Nauts, addiction specialist. "They convey the stark truth about the devastating effects of methamphetamine - it's the type of message teens need to see."

"The Montana Meth Project is providing a major contribution toward prevention - a vital element necessary to change attitudes and behaviors."

### Arizona project

After seeing the success the Montana Meth Project had over the last two years, Arizona collaborated to raise the necessary initial funds to start the same kind of program in Arizona.

Arizona was able to save money on the project by forming a cooperative partnership with Montana and using the commercials and ads they had already created, except for radio spots from Arizona teens.

TV ad spots, radio spots and print advertisements started around Arizona about two months ago, targeting teens age 12 through 17 to "not even once" try meth.

The four commercials show how an individual is affected by meth. They address how teenagers say they won't be like "that guy" and just try meth once. The commercials continue to show what the reality is of meth use in just 30 seconds.

Kingman Police Chief Robert DeVries said the Meth Project is currently in its first phase.

Phase 1 will continue with a summer outreach program, he said.

DeVries said he will receive the material for the program soon and will then begin to arrange for the issues to make their way to public events. The outreach will focus on the realities of methamphetamine use.

Included will be a display where children can sign a pledge board to stay away from meth. Around mid-August, the boards from communities around the state will be sent to Phoenix to make a giant collage of the signatures.

After being displayed for a while in Phoenix, the individual panels will be sent back to the originating communities.

Looking at how the program took off in Montana, DeVries said they are hoping to have the same success in Arizona.

For more information, call (866) 773-8999 or visit the Web site at [www.arizonamethproject.org](http://www.arizonamethproject.org).

You can also visit [www.montanameth.org](http://www.montanameth.org).