

Ads help teens see dangers of meth

by *Terry Goddard, Don Stapley and Vikki Shirley* - Jul. 13, 2008 12:00 AM
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Over the last year, the Arizona Meth Project has delivered riveting depictions of the dangers of meth use to young Arizonans.

The gritty, hard-hitting "Not Even Once" campaign has resounded across our state, and a new survey indicates this campaign has started to etch itself into the minds of many teens and young adults, with more than 94 percent of them now seeing a great risk in trying meth.

We wanted people to see and remember our campaign to "unsell" meth, and it has been hard to miss.

A strategy of message saturation shoved the topic across the state: It was featured in newspapers, magnified onto billboards and rotated on television programs frequently watched by young people.

On popular radio stations, we offered firsthand accounts from local Arizona youths struggling with meth addiction, and we placed ads on Web sites for teens and young adults.

As a result, teens' attitudes toward the dangers of methamphetamine use have shifted substantially since the campaign began a year ago.

To measure effectiveness, the Arizona Meth Project conducted a

survey prior to the campaign launch and again recently.

In addition to acknowledging the risk of meth use, Arizona youths are now more aware of the specific dangers of first-time use; their perceptions of benefits and risks have changed by as much as 26 percentage points in the past year.

Specifically, risks reported by teens include: getting hooked (94 percent); becoming someone you don't want to be (89 percent); dying (83 percent); and becoming violent (81 percent).

These types of attitudinal shifts are the first sign of changing behavior. Yet experts say for an education and prevention campaign to be successful, a continuous presence as well as an evolution of the message are needed.

While this month's survey results are very impressive, their release has produced mixed emotions: excitement because of the potential long-term impact and success of the campaign, but also frustration because of a potential lapse in funding to continue pushing this message in full force.

While the first and second phases of the campaign were focused on the physical effects of meth use and its impact on the user, the next phase sheds light on how meth affects all of us.

It will show how meth destroys relationships with friends and loved ones; it will echo the stories that we've already heard from law enforcement, treatment providers, parents and children.

These stories inspired our commitment to this issue more than a year ago and triggered the creation of the Arizona Meth Project.

Increasing awareness about the risks of meth use is fundamental to stopping it from taking over our communities. The survey results

demonstrate that we are headed in the right direction, but completing the journey will require support from our entire community.

Our first appeal months ago for public donations to support our campaign inspired a few generous groups to step forward.

However, substantial dollars are still needed to catapult the third phase of this campaign to the intensity required to make a long-lasting impact.

But ultimate success will be achieved only through the support of the entire community, including law enforcement, policy makers, treatment providers, families and private donors.

"Unselling" meth comes at a price, yet the alternative is much more costly.

Consider the power of prevention and education, and don't hesitate to invest - not even once.

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