

Forsyth waging war on the 'Devil's drug'

by [Prisca Pointdujour](#)

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FORSYTH COUNTY – Ben once stole from his disabled mother, did two jail stints, lost three cars and had shoot outs with police during his 20-year methamphetamine addiction.

"Meth is a devil's drug and it eats you from inside out. First thing it does is, it steals your soul. You'll say anything and do anything," said Ben, 38, whose name was changed for this story at his request.

He tried the drug on a whim after graduating high school. He said he felt insecure because he wasn't going to college and his future looked bleak.

"All it took was that one line for me to absolutely fall in love with it. It was my family. I worshipped it. It was the one thing that made me feel 10 feet tall and bulletproof," he said.

Within a month, he was buying on a daily basis.

The highly addictive synthetic stimulant usually raises dopamine levels, the brain's pleasure chemical, by ten-fold (three to four times the levels attributable to cocaine), according to the Georgia Meth Project. Methamphetamine, meth, crystal, crank or ice can be snorted, injected, smoked, or swallowed. It can last up to 24 hours in the system.

Ben once spent a 14-day binge without food or sleep. He was hooked on the increased sexual appetite. Other side effects include tooth decay, weight loss, hallucinations and paranoia. Ben's mother caught him shooting across the porch and through the floor multiple times. He imagined police officers sneaking around his car and listening in.

Meth-induced psychosis may also include sensations of insects crawling under the skin, called "the creeping." Forsyth County Narcotics section commander Lieutenant Gus Sesam said this makes meth-users easy to spot, because of the self-inflicted scabs covering their bodies.

Sesam said methamphetamine is the number one drug problem in the county, along with oxycotin, and it is growing.

More than one in five drug arrests last year were meth-related. The county seized more than 17 pounds of the drug. So far this year, more than 10 pounds of methamphetamine have been confiscated. Meth could be attributed to two high-speed car chases in the past two months, one of which left two bystanders hospitalized.

The good news is that the county hasn't found a local "mom and pop" meth lab in a couple years. Meth can be made using the base chemicals ephedrine or pseudoephedrine found in over-the-counter medicines and other readily available ingredients.

"Just imagine drinking battery acid, gasoline and anhydrous ammonia mixed by drug dealers who don't know chemistry," said Drug Enforcement Administration special agent Chuvalo Truesdell.

Truesdell has been an agent for 20 years and has dealt with meth incidents in the state from rural towns like Jasper to residential areas off Jimmy Carter Boulevard.

Recent pharmaceutical restrictions have made it harder to produce locally, but Mexican distributors have adapted by deploying "smurfs" to multiple locations to purchase ingredients.

Forsyth County School Resource Officer Supervisor Sergeant Eric Silveus said methamphetamine use is not common amongst high school students, but Georgia Meth Project Executive Director Jim Langford warns that this may soon change.

"Look out, because if teens don't see any danger, then it could very easily flare up within a two-year period. Teen uses of drugs are just like attitudes of clothing that they wear, and those things can change very easily," he said.

The results of last month's Georgia Meth Project found that 35 percent of Georgia teens see little or no risk in trying meth, and 23 percent see little or no risk in using the drug regularly.

"I think most parents see the danger, but they don't realize that their teenagers are hearing from their friends that so-and-so is taking meth, and it's not a big deal," said Langford.

The program is saturating the airwaves and the Internet with its \$6 million dollar prevention campaign featuring graphic true meth testimonies. They held a community kickoff on meth abuse and prevention this morning at the county administration building.

"Some of the biggest meth arrests happened in Hall County and Gwinnett, both on opposite sides of Forsyth. We see it as a potential battleground area," said Langford.

Ben said Georgia Meth's "Not even once" message is right on the money. He has been sober for six years, but still battles cravings.

He cleaned up in Forsyth drug court after a meth arrest. From the backseat of the cop car, he told the officer he had just saved his life. Drug court subjects first-time felons to random drug tests and meetings with counselors and a judge in lieu of jail time. Ben graduated in 18 months, without failing a single drug test.

Now happily married and employed, he is keeping the promise he made to his mother on her deathbed to never use again.

"Meth is not a recreational drug. It gets in you and it gets you quick. My mother died proud of me and I feel like where she's at right now she's watching and she continues to smile," he said.