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**Group: Meth a Danger**

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A nonprofit organization has asked Forsyth and surrounding counties to participate in the fight against a drug that it says 35 percent of Georgia teenagers see little to no risk in trying.

Jim Langford said donations, ideas and volunteers are needed as part of a statewide campaign to prevent first-time methamphetamine abuse.

Langford is executive director of the Georgia Meth Project. He gave a presentation on the campaign Wednesday at the Forsyth County Administration Building.

Forsyth County District Attorney Penny Penn welcomed Langford and other representatives of the project on behalf of the Forsyth Against Drug Abuse Committee.

The project, launched in March, is using advertising, public policy and community outreach to warn about the effects of methamphetamine, or meth as it's more commonly known.

"We're trying to take this campaign to the next level," Langford said. "Another important part of the campaign is having people from the community come out ... and figure out what can we do in our community in addition to this ad campaign."

The commercials depict the dangers of meth, including how quickly the addiction progresses and how younger siblings may try the drug because they see their older teenage brothers or sisters doing so.

Some show young girls who look barely 15 offering their bodies in exchange for money to buy more meth.

He said the radio campaign features teens and young adults sharing stories about their own experiences with the drug.

Langford said 35 percent of the state's teens see few if any problems with trying meth and, according to a survey, 23 percent reported there were some benefits to taking the drug.

Langford said the meth problem in Georgia is "serious."

"We're talking about Georgia being the third worst state in the United States in terms of number of teens ages 12 to 17 using meth," he said, adding that the statistic is from about three or four years ago.

"Another statistic said that Georgia has the fifth worst problem in terms of per capita problems of meth usage," he said.

Langford said that in a number of Georgia counties, meth is the reason why 70 to 80 percent of children in foster care are not with their families.

"Fifty percent of all emergency room care is related to meth in some way," he said.

Latrina Patrick, program manager, said the campaign is designed to empower people on a local level.

“We can go to the federal government for all kinds of stuff, we can go to our county for all kinds of stuff, but real change comes from this level,” she said.

Langford and Patrick fielded questions and ideas from the crowd, which included residents of Forsyth, Hall, White and Jackson counties.

Paxton Caratti and Alisha Swearingen came from neighboring Hall to hear what the project was about.

“I think it’s important that parents understand meth and what it does and what it can do to their kids because that way they can better help them,” she said.

Caratti suggested encouraging young people to make a pledge, much like the abstinence pledge to refrain from sex until marriage, to stay away from meth.

Langford said while prescription medications and other drugs may also be abused, meth’s impact is strong.

He said the drug’s effect on dopamine, a pleasure-transmitting chemical in the brain, is four times more powerful than cocaine.

“So that means it’s four times more addictive and four times more likely to become addictive and we know what it does to families,” he said.

“It’s very tough to break that addiction cycle.”

Melisa Fincher said the White County Meth Task Force began focusing on the drug in 2006.

“I think this is awesome and they’re doing a good thing from our experience in four years to focus on one thing,” she said.

The project is part of a nationwide effort that started in Montana in 2005 and has since spread to Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois and Wyoming.