

Georgia Meth Project works with local coalitions to educate students

by Lydia Senn, Calhoun Times
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The Georgia Meth Project has released several public service ads to deter kids from doing meth.

The Georgia Meth Project recently released the results of a first-ever statewide survey of teen's attitudes toward methamphetamine.

The survey, which was released to the public March 8, indicates 35 percent of teens in Georgia see little to no risk in trying meth, and 23 percent see little or no risk in using the drug regularly.

Many of the teens surveyed even said they saw benefits to taking meth; 21 percent of teens said using meth helped them lose weight.

"This survey clearly demonstrates that many of Georgia's young people are unaware of the risks posed by meth use and they are not communicating with their parents about the drug," said Geoff Feinberg, vice president of Research for GfK Roper Public Affairs and Media.

But those misconceptions are false, and many experts believe dangerous.

"Meth is highly addictive and can cause dramatic changes in the brain, irreversible physical damage, and extreme psychosis. It is alarming that many of our young people see little risk — and even some benefits — in using meth, and that many of them have access to the drug. We need to change these perceptions," said Thomas Bornemann, director of mental health at the Carter Center.

The Georgia Meth Project is taking steps to educate people through public service announcements that use real former meth users. These recovering addicts tell their tragic stories of the ways that meth has change their lives. One radio spot features a former user named Andrew who attempted suicide while on meth, and another user named Mike who beat up his pregnant girlfriend when he was high.

This is just one tactic that organizations are using to educate young people about the dangers of the highly addictive drug.

The Gordon County-based Citizens Against Meth (CAM) is working with the Georgia Meth Project to educate high school students by going into the classroom.

"Studies have proven Georgia Meth Project strategy is successful, it has been implemented in seven other states," said Latrina Patrick, executive director of CAM.

Patrick said the project has had an impact on local coalitions by partnering with them to educating the community, and also by reminding people that those coalitions exist.

"Calhoun hasn't had a problem convincing people meth exists in this community, now we are educating people," Patrick said.

The first step in the education process is going into schools to show kids the dangers of meth use.

305 East Sixth Avenue, Rome, Ga (706) 291-6397

“We have had great success partnering with Gordon County schools to implement the drug curriculum,” Patrick said.

The classroom-based educational program called “Project Alert” targets children between the ages of 12 and 17, but the educational endeavor wouldn’t be possible, Patrick said, without grant funding and the support of the community.

“The education program has a very tight budget,” Patrick said. “Our hope is to continue that program.”

On May 5, CAM will host the first ever “Running for Recovery,” a 5K, flat surface race to raise money for the educational programs.

“We want to raise awareness of meth issues in Gordon County, and raise funds to continue the education program,” Patrick said.

The run will begin on Yellow Jacket Drive in front of Calhoun High School and will end at the Recreation Park on Recreation Road, where the runners will loop around the park and finish there.

Early Registration end April 15 and is \$15 with Regular Registration at \$20. Same Day Registration is \$25.

To sign up for the race call 706-624-8417.

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