



May 13, 2010

Georgia Meth Project wants to make you uncomfortable

Charles Oliver

charlesoliver@daltoncitizen.com

Since the Georgia Meth Project's advertising campaign started in March, Executive Director Jim Langford says he has gotten plenty of telephone calls and letters about the ads.

"One woman said, 'These ads make my children uncomfortable,'" he said. "I said, 'I'm glad they are uncomfortable. That's exactly what we are trying to do.'"

Langford and other officials from the Georgia Meth Project showed some of the ads, which are currently running on TV stations across the state, at Dalton City Hall Wednesday afternoon during a meeting of Visions of Hope. Visions of Hope is a coalition of service agencies and individuals that aims to help children in Whitfield and Murray counties.

Chairman Lee Shaw, who is originally from Dalton, said the Georgia Meth Project got under way two years ago, when Georgia Attorney General Thurbert Baker invited him and other business leaders to discuss the meth problem in Georgia. At that meeting, they heard from Tom Siebel, who had helped create the Montana Meth Project, which became the model for similar projects in other states.

"We had the problem identified. We had the solution to the problem identified. We just needed to get someone to take the initiative," Shaw said, saying that's when he called in Langford, an old friend, to spearhead the effort

Langford said the TV ads have been created by some of the nation's top advertising companies and directed by some of Hollywood's leading directors. The goal, he says, is to make methamphetamine seem unglamorous and to scare kids away from using the drug the first time. He said each ad costs between \$400,000 and \$800,000.

The organization has raised \$3 million, with about 95 percent of it coming from private sources, for the first year of the campaign. Langford said they are hoping to raise an additional \$12 million for the final two years of the campaign.

The Georgia Meth Project is also running a radio ad campaign. But that one is a bit different.

"We are letting meth addicts tell their own stories," Langford said, adding that some of those who have taken part in that ad campaign are from Dalton.

Langford said a survey the organization took before rolling out its ad campaign showed that 20 percent of Georgia teens and 34 percent of young adults believe meth is easy to get, and 35 percent of Georgia teens see little or no risk in trying meth.

He said the survey will give them a baseline to compare to over time to see how effective the project has been.

The Montana Meth Project claims that teen meth use has dropped by 63 percent since the ad campaign started there, that adult meth use has dropped 73 percent, and that meth-related crime has dropped 62 percent.

Critics note that teen meth use in that state had been falling for six years before the campaign started. And a study published last year in the peer-reviewed journal *Prevention Science* found that the Montana Meth Project's own data suggest that prolonged exposure to the ads may lead teens to believe meth use is acceptable and not dangerous.

Latrina Patrick, program manager for the Georgia Meth Project, said it is important for the organization to work with agencies such as those present at the meeting to educate people about the dangers of meth.

Dalton Police Chief Jason Parker was one of those attending the meeting, and he said meth is a "pervasive" problem across the state.

"If we can get to kids and keep them from trying drugs for the first time, it's possible we can stop the epidemic use of this particular drug," he said.

The Daily Citizen, Dalton, GA 308 S. Thornton Ave. Dalton, GA 30720