



PhilanthropyRoundtable
STRENGTHENING OUR FREE SOCIETY

A Road Trip Across Philanthropic America

Northwest

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WYOMING

Truth in Advertising

Methamphetamine is all about hollowness: the hollow-eyed look of meth addicts after their bodies consume their own muscle tissue and fat, and the hollowness of rural communities when meth moves in and destroys their peacefulness. Nowhere has the scourge been worse than in Wyoming, which was ranked the nation in rates of meth use among individuals aged 12 and over. Wyoming's share of people in treatment was 4.4 times higher than the state's share of the U.S. population, and more than a third of those admitted for treatment in the state were below the age of 25. Over 90 percent of drug prosecutions in Wyoming involved meth—putting untold strain on local law enforcement.

In the face of this catastrophe, the Wyoming Meth Project (an affiliate of the six-state Meth Project led by philanthropist Tom Siebel) began changing attitudes toward the drug by combining standard drug education programs with stark TV, billboard, and Internet ads aimed at teens. For example, in "Losing Control," a camera is centered closely on a young teen's face as books, clothes, and glass go flying around his head. The camera pans out to show the cause: the boy's older brother is ransacking his bedroom looking for marijuana. Other vignettes follow: the girl prostituted by her boyfriend; the family terrorized by meth-head burglar; the addict son pounding on his family's front door at Christmas. The ads are both compelling and deeply unsettling; they work like a punch to the gut.

And they seem to be helping: the latest Wyoming health-attitudes survey finds that after several years of exposure to the project, Wyoming teens have elevated "perceptions of risk" associated with meth use, including "getting hooked," "suffering brain damage," and "having sex with someone I don't want to have sex with." 87 percent of teens in the state report that the Wyoming Meth Project's ads helped them understand that meth is more dangerous than they had originally thought. —*Justin Torres*