

Shocking is good when it comes to meth message

If you're reading this, you probably aren't the target audience for the Wyoming Meth Project's aggressive new campaign.

But there are young people in the state who definitely need to hear the group's core message, which is: "Meth — not even once." As in, don't try it at all.

How do you get through to potential meth users? The Wyoming Meth Project is using a series of graphic print, television and radio advertisements depicting real stories of people affected by meth.

Wyoming has made some progress in its fight against meth in recent years. The number of clandestine meth labs seized by law enforcement has been dropping, a sign that manufacturers of the drug are finding it harder to get the supplies needed to make it.

But three years ago, Wyoming ranked 13th in the nation for meth use by people 12 and older. Now, the state is first. In this important category, we're moving in the wrong direction.

The national Meth Project has its roots in Montana, where a unique anti-meth campaign was launched in 2005. While its graphic images and words were controversial, the results were unmistakable.

Three years ago, Montana ranked fifth in the nation for meth use. In 2007, it dropped to No. 39. Adult meth use dropped by

72 percent, while teen meth use decreased by 45 percent. Meanwhile, meth-related crimes declined 62 percent.

The Montana Meth Project definitely struck a nerve, and the program has been adopted by four other states. Now it's Wyoming's turn to see if meth usage here can be turned around. (Full disclosure: Star-Tribune Publisher Nathan Bekke is a member of the Wyoming Meth Project's advisory board.)

The Wyoming campaign is hard-hitting, and no doubt some of its content will shock and disturb some people. For example, one ad depicts a filthy public restroom with this accompanying statement: "No one thinks they'll lose their virginity here. Meth will change that."

But it's worth shocking people if the message reaches teens and young adults who need to know that meth can quickly make the quality of the user's life horrible. The devastating impact of meth use shouldn't be hidden. The more young people know about meth's reality, the less likely they should be to try the drug.

While the Wyoming Meth Project is privately funded, the state of Wyoming should track the progress of the campaign and consider becoming a financial partner in the future. A coordinated campaign that focuses on meth treatment and prevention could reach even more people.