



Wyoming Meth Project launches new website

By JOSHUA WOLFSON Star-Tribune staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, November 9, 2011 6:15 am

The Wyoming Meth Project unveiled a new, interactive website and advertising campaign Tuesday that organizers hope will discourage more young people from using the dangerous stimulant.

The site, methproject.org, uses the same gritty, confrontational style seen in the Meth Project's television advertisements. It's designed to be the definitive source of information on methamphetamine for teens.

"If people are well informed, meth use declines dramatically," said Heidi Foy, executive director of the 12-24 Club, a Casper nonprofit that houses programs for people in recovery.

The Meth Project began in Montana in 2005. It's since spread to seven other states including Wyoming, which began its campaign in 2008.

The Meth Project's old website offered facts, but nothing in the way of interactivity, said Jean Davies, executive director of the Wyoming program. The revamped site provides a multimedia experience where visitors gain information by clicking on graphics, watching videos and sharing their own stories.

"Kids today, they really need to be stimulated," she said. "They don't want to pull up the site and read it."

The site is based around 26 questions related to methamphetamine. Answers come in the form of interactive features, videos and art.

Visitors who click the question "What is Meth Mouth?" can flip switches to see how the drug damages teeth and gums. Another page allows teens to play a meth-themed version of the Operation board game, with each removed body part revealing a harmful effect from the drug.

"There is so much more information and things that young people can do to kind of stimulate their minds," Davies said.

To develop the new campaign, the Meth Project surveyed more than 50,000 young people and held 112 focus groups. The effort resulted in a website that provides teens with information they want, in a format they are comfortable with, said Nathan Bekke, Star-Tribune publisher and chairman of the Wyoming Meth Project.

"I think that's the big distinction from our last website," he said. "It really wasn't targeted at young people."

The Meth Project is also reaching out through social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, and traditional outlets like radio and television. The organization has begun airing new television advertisements directed by Darren Aronofsky, the filmmaker behind "Black Swan" and "Requiem for a Dream."

Davies unveiled three new television spots during a Tuesday press conference at Kelly Walsh High School. One showed a teenage boy prostituting himself for drug money. Another featured a girl struggling with her mother after a suicide attempt.

Judging by student responses, the ads will have no trouble getting attention from young people. Several teenagers who attended the press conference appeared shocked by the commercials. One boy shook his head "no" after they were finished.

"They are really impactful," said Taylor Hockley, an 18-year-old Kelly Walsh senior. "There is so much information thrown at you at once, and you are just like, 'Holy crap. Why would you ever want to get into something like that?'"

Intense messages are necessary to get through to teenagers, she added.

"If you ask someone if they've seen these ads, they will all tell you that they are not a joke," she said. "They are scary."