

Oregon Project Helps Shed Light on Growing Meth Epidemic in Powerful New Films

Local officials, private and public groups come together to develop a much-needed resource

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. — It transcends headlines and ruins lives: the problem of methamphetamine has reached epidemic proportions in Oregon and throughout the nation.

Now, local government officials, non-profit organizations, and private companies are joining forces to combat meth addiction by showcasing it in an eye-opening and realistic light in a format that schools, libraries, civic groups, and employers can readily use.

The effort has resulted from an innovative partnership between the Klamath Falls District Attorney's Methamphetamine Task Force, Citizens for Safe Schools, and JELD-WEN, an Oregon-based windows and doors manufacturer.

These groups have come together to produce two powerful new films that explore not only the personal devastation caused by meth, but also how people can become agents of change in fighting back, both on a personal level and within their own communities.

Unlike typical anti-drug tools, the project doesn't pass judgment or resort to melodramatic scare tactics. Instead, it's meant to educate and empower viewers, allowing them to draw their own conclusions about the harsh realities of meth addiction by featuring the real-life stories and challenges of recovering addicts from Klamath Falls. The multimedia package includes a DVD with two films and discussion guidelines for teachers and community organizations.

Entitled *Messed Up: Straight Talk about Meth*, the first film features the frank, factual accounts of three addicts who share stories of the incredible highs and devastating lows of meth, the lost days and weeks, the ravages on lives and bodies, and their personal experiences with crime, jail time, a suicide attempt and finally, the long road to recovery.

The second film, entitled *Danielle's Story: A Commitment to Being There*, highlights a story of mentoring, hope, and help for a teen-age victim of meth.

The two productions total about 25 minutes and were shot and produced by CMD, a leading communications firm in Portland with an award-winning film and video division. CMD is owned by JELD-WEN, the company that provided funding for the project. Both films were shot entirely in Klamath Falls.

"We've all seen the news and read the statistics about the meth problem," said CMD producer-director Ron Bourke, who created the films. "What we haven't heard are the tales of survival and triumph. These two films tell the story of courageous individuals who found the tools and

support they needed to make substantive change in their lives. Their openness and honesty are instrumental in providing a completely credible look at meth abuse from the viewpoint of the user."

The films premiered at the Oregon Institute of Technology in Klamath Falls in August. Congressman Greg Walden and officials from the Klamath Falls District Attorney's office and Citizens for Safe Schools were on-hand to present the films.

With the goal of reaching teen-agers and adults throughout Oregon, project partners plan to distribute the DVD along with comprehensive discussion guides developed by Citizens for Safe Schools to Klamath Falls-area schools. They also hope to offer it to as many community service groups, non-profits, schools, and parent groups as possible, both throughout the state and nationally.

A nominal charge of \$15 for each DVD, including discussion guides, will help cover shipping costs and benefit Citizens for Safe Schools. To order a set, contact Citizens for Safe Schools at 541-883-5147, ext. 3199.

"These films are important tools in our arsenal against the meth crisis. We simply don't have the kind of resources needed to help get the word out in our local communities," said Klamath Falls District Attorney Ed Caleb. "Without these public and private groups joining forces to see this project through, we would never have been able to create such an incredibly powerful resource. Now that the DVD is available, our hope is that the films will be shown widely, in as many communities as possible."

According to officials, it's not surprising that a project of this scope originated in the community of Klamath Falls (population 43,000). Statistics show that meth addiction is a huge problem in much of rural America. The Klamath Basin (population 72,000) is hit hard because it's located in what is considered to be the "meth transport corridor."

Caleb said that while rural towns are particularly at risk, the problem is growing everywhere and the need for better resources and educational tools to help combat it is just as large.

According to nationwide statistics, as reported by *Newsweek* magazine (Aug. 8, 2005), 58 percent of county police cite meth as their biggest drug problem. Federal estimates suggest that more than 12 million Americans have tried methamphetamine and 1.5 million are regular users.

Meth-making operations have been discovered in all 50 states. Many experts believe the problem is growing into "an epidemic and crisis unprecedented."

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