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Graphic ads turn around Montana teen meth use

By Ben Tracy



(CBS News)

KALISPELL, Mont. - For more than five years, Wendy Macker has fought an enemy more powerful than anything she's ever known.

"It takes every bit of nurturing that they might have inside of themselves and just rips it out ," Wendy told CBS News correspondent Ben Tracy. "It makes them feel like they're worth nothing."

Wendy's talking about methamphetamine, and what the drug did to her son Graham.

[More about HBO's "Montana Meth"](#)

Graham was just 16 when a 2007 HBO documentary showed his rapid descent into the grips of meth.

It's a sadly familiar story in Montana, where meth has loomed as large as the state's big sky. In the early 2000s, meth related arrests jumped 90 percent. Montana was spending \$300 million a year fighting the drug.

Montana had a big problem and decided to tackle it head-on with a series of in-your-face ads targeted toward teens.

Gritty public service announcements hit the airwaves in 2005.

Watch the ads

"When they first came out it was a huge deal just because you'd never seen anything like that on TV," said Emily Dean.

Dean was in middle school when the ads started running. The commercial spots are graphic - an unvarnished view of meth's devastating effects.

"It doesn't just tell you 'no don't do this,'" Dean said. "It shows you why you don't do this."

The ads were created by the Montana Meth Project - a privately funded organization that has become the one of the largest advertisers in the state.

The results have been dramatic - teenage meth use is down 63 percent since the ads started running in 2005 and Montana, which used to rank 5th in the nation for meth abuse, now ranks 39th.

"These ads have changed the consciousness of an entire generation of teenagers," said Cascade County District Attorney John Parker. "The ads don't take a preachy tone. They don't talk down to the kids but they lay out in very graphic very real terms how this can ruin lives."

Graham macker survived his four year meth addiction. He says he's now clean and "doing it a day at a time right now."

"I don't even know what normal is you know," Graham said. "I did drugs for awhile and I thought that was normal and now I'm assuming this is normal."

During the worst of his drug use, Graham's mom Wendy asked how it all ends. Today, she doesn't have an answer, she doesn't know. "Not yet," she said. "Not yet. She knows just how powerful an enemy can be."

The hard-hitting ads have now been shown in eight other states, including Idaho and Arizona - states that have seen teen meth use decline by more than 50 percent.