

METH

NOT EVEN ONCE.

A CLOSE EXAMINATION OF THE GEORGIA METH PROJECT BY KELLEY GIRARDIN



SCABS, HALLUCINATIONS, AND THEN THINGS REALLY GO DOWN

methproject.org

Insomnia. Weight loss. Hallucinations. Scratches and scabs all over my face. Paranoia. Tooth decay. How is this happening to me? I was only going to try meth once.

These types of confessions, often bound with graphic illustrations, are appearing all over Georgia through TV, radio, billboards and the internet as a result of the Georgia Meth Project. The Georgia Meth Project's target audience is 12-17 year olds who have never tried Methamphetamine before.

"It is a research based

messaging campaign that strives to understand attitudes and behavior towards methamphetamine through state wide surveys" according to the Georgia Meth Project's website.

Laura Smith*, who began using meth when she was 18, says, "The Georgia Meth Project was not around [eight years ago], and before I used, I had never heard of meth before."

According to their website, the Georgia Meth Project is part of a larger program simply titled The Meth Project which was founded by Thomas Siebel.

The Meth Project website states the project is being conducted in Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Wyoming and Illinois but originated in Montana. Montana ranked number five for meth abuse in 2005 when the program first launched. Five years and 277,100 advertisements later, the program is proving a success with Montana ranking in at number 39 in the nation for meth use.

The advertisements portray the effects of meth through bone-chilling quotes and disturbingly gruesome pictures. "My girlfriend would do anything for me, so I made her sell her body" and "Picking for bugs under you're skin isn't normal, but on meth it is," are phrases seen on billboards and magazine ads. The radio ads are told in first person and recall the users' terrifying experiences and downward spirals on meth.

Sally Rogers*, who began doing meth in the fall of 2002, calls the advertisements "extremely accurate." One ad that stands out for Rogers states, "Before meth, I had a best friend. Now I have an addict." Rogers says that once she started doing meth, there was a domino effect among her friends. Before meth they all cared deeply for one another, but once they started using their main concern was the addictive drug.

"If your friends are really your friends, they won't make you do it," Rogers says through clenched teeth. "I didn't realize that until I got all my friends doing it."

According to The Meth Project Foundation, methamphetamine, also known as meth, speed, ice, crystal, crank, and tina, is an extremely addictive drug that affects the nervous system and over stimulates the brain. Meth can be snorted, smoked, inhaled and swallowed.

"When I first started doing meth, I would snort it. Over time I preferred to do hottrails," says Rog-



A bone-chilling advertisement for the Meth Project.
Methproject.org

15 BUCKS FOR SEX ISN'T BUT 0

MONTANA METH PROJECT

ers, who was spending as much as \$300 a week on the narcotic. Hottrailing is a combination of smoking and snorting it.

The Meth Project reports when methamphetamine enters the blood stream it travels to the brain and unnaturally releases dopamine, which is the brain chemical that allows the feeling of pleasure. Food raises dopamine levels by 50 percent while sex raises it 100 percent. The powerfully addictive drug cocaine raises levels by 300 percent, but that is nothing compared to the toxic methamphetamine which raises dopamine levels by a whopping 1200 percent! The website also states that the dopamine takes two to 10 days to fully replenish (that is if the user stops using completely during this time frame) which means the crash after the high is this long as well.

Rogers's first time doing meth was with her boss and co-workers. "We were all hanging out when my boss pulled some-

thing out and asked if anyone wanted to do a line. 'A line of what?' I asked. After doing it, my face felt like it was on fire. In a sick way, it felt amazing. I didn't go to bed til noon the next day. I felt invincible, like I could do anything."

"I had nothing and hit rock bottom in less than a year.... [Meth] is the f---ing devil"
-Sally Rogers

After first time use, the tolerance already starts to build, making users crave more meth at more frequent intervals. According to The Meth Project research, the dopamine release peaks after the initial use, making it an unmatched feeling in compari-

son to future uses.

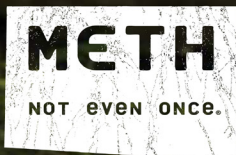
Smith, who used for one year, remembers her first time using as, "The best thing I had ever tried. I stayed up for two days, and it was so intense it made me feel invincible. I thought it would make all my problems go away.

Smith and Rogers both reported that the drug made them feel invincible, and Rogers says at first it gave her a big, false confidence boost

"It made me skinny. I wasn't the fat chick anymore. It was nice to be noticed. I made bigger tips at work," Rogers says. "At the end of the day though, I was disgusted with myself. I became crazy."

Long-term meth abuse may result in many damaging effects, including, anxiety, confusion, insomnia, paranoia, auditory hallucinations, mood disturbances, delusions and violent behavior" according to the Georgia Meth Project website. Rogers was a victim of the violent behavior on a daily basis because of her

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N METH IT IS.**



MontanaMeth.org

meth-dealing boyfriend.

"He had stolen a bottle of Crown from my parents house, and then he went and hung out and drank it with a girl I didn't like," Rogers says. "We began arguing, and then he started beating me. He beat me the whole way home, and people driving by saw him and called the cops. When we got to our apartment the cops were waiting for him and arrested him right away.

Five people wrote statements. I looked and felt like a rag doll."

So how does this affect Georgia? According to Jim Langford, executive director of the Georgia Meth Project, Georgia ranks number three in the country for meth abuse. Langford also stated that meth is costing Georgia \$1.3 billion annually. This is a combination of law enforcement, family and social services, treatment, and lost productivity.

Wanda Huggins, an administrative secretary for Richmond County's Narcotics department recalls that in the past year approximately 60 people have been arrested for methamphetamine.

"People arrested for methamphetamine receive one to 10 years in prison, and those arrested for manufacturing receive one to 20 years in prison," says Huggins.

Sometimes jail is not the worst thing that can happen to users. The Meth Project tries to stress how much meth will ruin every aspect of a users life.

"I was no longer close to my family. I chose the drug over the people I loved most in my life. I lost my friends, dropped out of school, and almost lost my job. I had nothing and hit rock bottom in less than a year," Smith, who has been sober for seven years,

recalls.

Rogers, who has also been sober for seven years now, has a very similar outlook on her experience, "I lost my job, I lost my car, I was getting beaten on an everyday basis, I got kicked out of my house, and I hated my family. If it weren't for my mother's unconditional love I would be dead."

A huge issue that Georgia is facing is that Georgia teens do not seem to think that there is anything wrong with meth. According to the Georgia Meth Project website, 35 percent of Georgia teens do not perceive a risk to using meth, 23 percent of Georgia teens think there is a benefit of using meth, and 23 percent of Georgia teens think there is no harm in using meth on a regular basis.

When asked what she would say to a teenager contemplating using meth, Rogers paused for a long second before saying, "JUST SAY NO! Reevaluate yourself and what you want. Do you like yourself, your family, your friends? It's not okay and I wouldn't recommend it to my worst enemy. Meth is hell. It's the f---ing devil."

The Georgia Meth project launched on March 8, 2010 and initial results will be released mid-2011.

*Names have been changed.

**NO ONE THINKS THEY'LL TRY
TO TEAR OFF THEIR OWN SKIN.
METH WILL CHANGE THAT.**

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