

# West Hawaii Today

## Stopping them before they start

New meth prevention project aimed at teens

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West Hawaii Today  
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Wednesday, July 29, 2009 9:58 AM HST

Not even once.

That message -- along with an edgy depiction of teens prostituting themselves, stealing rent money from their family, trying to tear off their own skin and other horrors -- in ads by nonprofit Hawaii Meth Project are heartening, several audience members said at a forum held Tuesday evening in Kealahou High School's library.

Some people think the ads that show the physical and mental disintegration of teenagers who use highly addictive methamphetamine, commonly known as "ice," are reminiscent of bygone anti-drug campaigns like "This is your brain on drugs."

Many have voiced their support for the campaign, saying it's yet another much-needed tool to get the message out there that methamphetamine is a highly addictive, devastating drug and the fewer people who use it the better.

Others find the campaign, primarily targeting people between the ages of 12 to 24, harsh and disgusting. Then there's the emergency room nurse on Oahu who told Hawaii Meth Project Executive Director Cindy Adams that the advertisements aren't graphic enough.

Whatever the response, people are talking.

Alison Bishop, one the 11 teens who shared their stories for the campaign, wished that such advertisements were around five years ago, when at age 13 she tried methamphetamine out of curiosity.

If such harsh anti-meth announcements aimed at youth had existed, Bishop said she would have probably possessed a better idea of the human wreckage and tragedy created by this drug and not been so easily tempted.

Bishop, who is a recovering addict, bravely recounted Tuesday her addiction to methamphetamine and alcohol, struggles with treatment, the pain she caused to herself, family and friends, getting help, as well as accomplishing later goals like graduating high school and attending prom.

Mayor Billy Kenoi said preventive efforts like the campaign by the Hawaii Meth Project is just one piece of the puzzle. He stressed to forum attendees that it was going to take everyone to keep the momentum going and not become complacent when dealing with the community issue.

Adams also mentioned the responsibility inside everyone to do what they can and to continue to persevere, adding that "there's tremendous opportunity to make a significant difference."

Oahu Family Court Judge Michael Broderick revealed to Adams that roughly 90 percent of the court cases that come across his desk in a calendar year are related to methamphetamine. He called methamphetamine "one of the most addictive destructive drugs we've ever seen in both the staggering financial burden and profound human costs."

Adams said the costs to Hawaii for treatment, health care, foster care services, crime and lost productivity are estimated at \$500 million per a year.

Hawaii ranks the fifth highest in the nation for methamphetamine use by people age 12 and older. Roughly 7 percent of 10th-graders claim they have used the drug, Adams said.

The first Hawaii Meth Use and Attitudes Survey, conducted in March and April, randomly selected and interviewed 1,065 teens, 318 young adults and 400 parents of teens. The survey found many of the state's young people have easy access to methamphetamine, believe the drug poses little to no risk and offers a host of benefits, such as providing increased energy, happiness, aiding in weight loss and alleviating boredom, Adams said.

The survey also found that there's a relatively low level of disapproval of methamphetamine use among teens and their peers -- 41 percent said



A portion of a print ad for the Hawaii Meth Project. - [hawaiimethproject.org](http://hawaiimethproject.org)

their friends would not give them a "hard time" if they used methamphetamine and 40 percent said they have not tried to dissuade their friends from using the drug. More than half of the participating teens said they hadn't discussed methamphetamine with their parents in the past year, Adams said.

Besides shocking statistics, Adams showed close-up photos of the particularly gruesome phenomenon known as "meth mouth," where the teeth and gums of users rapidly decay and fall out.

She also displayed images chronicling addicts' physical deterioration over 10 years. Also at the forum was Dr. Kevin Kunz, a specialist in addiction medicine in Kailua-Kona and the president of American Board of Addiction Medicine, who explained the effect the drug has on the brain.

For more information, visit [hawaiimethproject.org](http://hawaiimethproject.org).