

Students head to Helena for March Against Meth

By LAURA TODE
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While many Billings students might have spent this morning sleeping late and enjoying a day off, brothers Brody and Kael Giebink were up before dawn to catch a 6:45 a.m. bus to Helena for the March Against Meth. The event is sponsored by the Montana Meth Project, a public service marketing campaign for the prevention of methamphetamine use.

They'll be joining about 2,000 other young people to march on the state capitol where they'll deliver the signatures of more than 55,000 Montanans, urging Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer and the state legislature to fund the Montana Meth Project.

More than 500 Billings students are making the trip, and many are from Lewis and Clark Middle School, where Brody, 13, and Kael, 12, attend classes. Their day will start at Helena High School with a party before the rally, sponsored in part by First Interstate Bank. The youngsters will then walk to the capitol and meet with U.S. Sen. Max Baucus, Montana Attorney General Steve Bullock, and state lawmakers.

During the past two months, Brody and Kael have each spent more than 40 hours gathering signatures at school and at local events, including a Billings Bulls hockey game. They gathered a stack of signature sheets more than an inch thick, which they sent to the Montana Meth Project headquarters last week.

The Montana Meth Project hits closer to home for Kael than for most children his age.

Brody and Kael are adopted, and Kael's birth mother was a methamphetamine user, who, after more than 12 years, has not been able to quit using the drug. Kael taps the emotions of his personal experience to encourage young people to never try the drug.

"We're the ones who either stop it now or let it keep on growing," said Brody.

The Giebink boys became involved in the Montana Meth Project March Against Meth and signature campaign after coming across the project's Web site while browsing the Internet. They decided they wanted to get involved, and when they talked to their mother, Rita Giebink, she decided to become involved as well.

A retired Montana Women's Prison corrections officer, Rita worked with incarcerated women whose lives had been destroyed by methamphetamine addiction.

"We can't do as much for the people who are addicted to meth as we can to make sure people don't start using it," Rita said.

Since her boys became involved, Rita has since stepped in as the Billings volunteer coordinator for the Montana Meth Project. She does presentations on the dangers of meth use and the success of the Montana Meth Project. In the past two months, she's spoken to civic organizations, senior citizens and youth groups.

She said the March Against Meth is the first opportunity for young people to become involved in the Montana Meth Project and spread the "not even once" message from one young person to another.

"At this age, peer pressure is No. 1," Rita said. "If you can get young people to go in a positive direction, you can make a difference."

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Montana Meth Project speaker Rita Giebink is the Montana Meth Project volunteer coordinator for Billings, and does presentations on the effects of meth addiction, and the role the Montana Meth Project has played in reducing meth use in the state. She has talked to local service organizations, senior citizens and youth groups.

To have her speak to your group, call 406-321-4216.