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New director outlines goals of Montana Meth Project

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The new executive director of the Montana Meth Project — former Department of Corrections head Bill Slaughter — said meth forced him to change the way he thought about drug abuse.

"Early on, we realized we're not going to arrest our way out of this," he said. "It was a transformation for me, because I believed in arresting people and putting them in jail."

Slaughter visited Great Falls on Wednesday to talk about the future of the graphic anti-meth advertising campaign.

Slaughter began working full time for Montana Meth Project — the nonprofit organization responsible for the graphic anti-meth ad campaign — in November. He took over the top spot last month when former executive director Peg Shea retired. He plans to stay the course of the current organizational structure.

"This is a very successful model," he said. "I have no intention of changing something that isn't broken."

He said one goal for the future is to bring the group's message to Montana's most rural areas, which are difficult to access because they have little media coverage.

While Slaughter considers the ads effective, meth is still more of a problem than many people realize, he said.

"One of the big things we're fighting is the success," he said. "People think we've got this licked, and that's not true."

A particular challenge of meth is the drug's use among women, Slaughter said. With most drugs, about 70 percent of the use is by males. With meth, females represent 50 percent of the use or more, he said. For that reason, the Meth Project has tried to tailor some of the ads to females, he said.

The ad campaign was launched in 2005 and initially financed by software billionaire and part-time Montana resident Tom Siebel. Today, the project's \$2.1 million annual budget comes from state and federal tax dollars and private donations.

In the state budget for the next two years, there had been \$1 million set aside for the Meth Project, but Gov. Brian Schweitzer cut that amount in half. Slaughter said he was disappointed but understanding about the cut.

"He had a lot of things on his mind and he did what he thought was best," Slaughter said. "We appreciate the half million dollars, and we'll spend it wisely."