



IR View: Meth Project proving itself

April 2, 2008

As the Montana Meth Project kicks off its latest ad campaign — with TV ads directed by Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu, whose credits include the movies “Babel” and “21 Grams” — the program already has earned some truly impressive boasting rights.

According to a report released Monday by Attorney General Mike McGrath, methamphetamine use by teens has dropped by nearly 45 percent since 2005, when the Meth Project began. Meth-related crime has decreased by 62 percent, and the number of employees testing positive for meth fell by 72 percent.

A state Department of Public Health and Human Services survey found that 93 percent of Montana teens now believe that using meth would put them at “great risk.” When the meth campaign began, a quarter of Montana teens saw “little or no risk” in trying meth.

That kind of track record speaks for itself — and to the merits of extensive focus group research with real youths and the use of shocking images to drive the point home.

Of course, the nature of the drug itself lends itself to such a campaign. Meth is quick to bring a young person to grief, unlike, say, tobacco that usually takes most of a lifetime, or alcohol, which teens see most people can handle without disaster. A similarly graphic “marijuana project” would be seen as a “Reefer Madness” joke.

But it was methamphetamine use that was taking over Montana’s young people in the early years of this century. In 1999, 13.5 percent of Montana high school students surveyed said they had tried meth. In 2007, that number had dropped to 4.6 percent. The Montana Meth Project deserves much of the credit. Here’s another finding, one that doesn’t need a survey to report: They’re making new teenagers every year. The need for the Montana Meth Project isn’t going away anytime soon.