

crystal darkness:

An Innovative Approach To Informing San Diegans About Methamphetamine Use and Addiction

The profound cost, damage, and destruction that methamphetamine (meth) can impose upon a family and community is a challenge to many jurisdictions across the country. San Diego County has a long history with meth and tackling the issue from several angles, including prevention, treatment, and enforcement. Capitalizing on the power of the media, the San Diego Prevention Coalition, in partnership with the Drug Enforcement Administration and San Diego County District Attorney's Office, reached out to over three million people by launching the *Crystal Darkness* Campaign¹ (the "Campaign"). The Campaign, which was comprised of a variety of components, including public service announcements, radio spots, and advertisements in local newspapers, centered on a one-night television event. Airing simultaneously on five local stations on December 12, 2007, this powerful documentary focused attention on the impact and signs of meth use. The broadcast also was shown at 15 viewing "host sites" throughout the County to encourage community partners to invite individuals to view the documentary and participate in a guided follow-up discussion. Particular attention was given to providing tools for families, individuals, and communities to help identify signs of use and provide resources and support to facilitate intervention. Coupled with the Campaign was extensive outreach to community partners (e.g., treatment providers, faith-based agencies) who work on this issue to ensure the capacities were available to respond to those who sought assistance after seeing the campaign.

"How can I help my daughter?"

Viewer of the *Crystal Darkness* calling for help

While resources were not available to conduct a formal evaluation, as a partner in the Campaign, the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) participated in the efforts to capture the impact of the media event. In addition to information gathered from individuals who called the Meth Hotline (1-877-No-2-Meth) as a result of the broadcast (the number was listed during the broadcast and on print ads), survey results were analyzed from individuals who attended the viewings at host sites. However, future Campaigns would benefit by setting aside funds to implement a more rigorous evaluation that could better measure the Campaign's effectiveness.

Reaching Out to Those Who Need Help

Results from over 400 calls to the Meth Hotline received during and immediately following the broadcast indicate that many viewers were in need of support. The most frequent reason for calling was to obtain a referral to a treatment program (43%). However, anecdotal information gathered from treatment providers indicated no referrals were received as a direct result of the Campaign. Other callers wanted additional information on meth, to share their experience with meth use, to compliment the program, or to provide feedback on the documentary. When asked who they were calling for, the largest percent of callers (44%) reported that they were accessing the hotline out of concern for a family member (most often their child), with nearly two in five (38%) calling about their own meth use.

OF THE 400+ CALLS RECEIVED

44% were calling out of concern for a family member (most often a child)

38% were calling about their own meth use

¹ San Diego was one of four cities to launch this Campaign. The other cities included Portland, Oregon and Las Vegas, and Reno, Nevada.



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The trained hotline workers offered a supportive ear and a link to services in the community. Hotline workers provided over 250 referrals to callers, including to substance abuse treatment, medical and mental health agencies, law enforcement, child protective services, and to the *Crystal Darkness* Web site (www.Crystaldarkness.com).

"I reasoned with the caller and validated the caller for going for help. I listened and expressed that he is not alone in this struggle. He can help himself and his daughter as they wait for his wife to finish her current run (using meth) and return home."

. . . hotline worker's response

Raising Awareness

Data gathered from over 100 participant surveys administered at the 15 host sites indicate that the event was beneficial in raising participants' awareness and knowledge about meth. Nine out of ten respondents to the survey (distributed after the event) reported feeling more informed about meth problems, better able to identify the signs of use, and better prepared to prevent their children from using meth.

Next Steps

This Campaign is a national model, and San Diego again proved to be successful in drawing on its strong collaborative foundation to produce one of the largest *Crystal Darkness* Campaigns to date. The documentary produced 25 broadcast television news stories and was seen by more than 100,000 viewers. These collaborative partners, such as the San Diego Prevention Coalition and the Meth Strike Force, will continue to seek innovative ways to address the issue of meth use in the County. For more information about the Campaign or to learn more about prevention and education activities in San Diego County, visit the Meth Strike Force Web site at www.No2meth.org.