

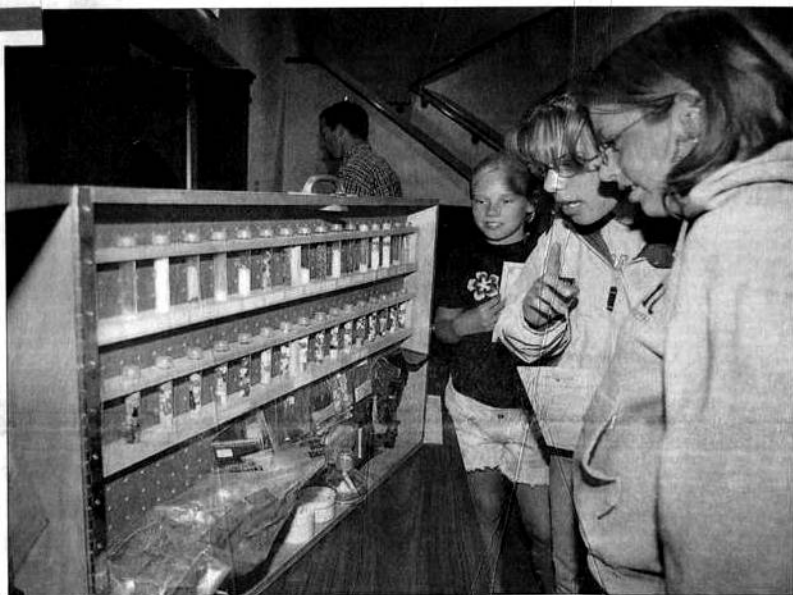
# Seeking solutions

## Community tries to formulate strategy to fight meth

June 27, 2001

A GROUP of girls examine a display of drugs during a methamphetamine forum at Flathead High School Tuesday evening.

Robin Loznak/  
Daily Inter Lake



*About 80 people showed up in the high school auditorium to talk about the addictive stimulant and what the community can do to stop its destructive path*

By **CHERY SABOL**  
The Daily Inter Lake

A much smaller crowd attended the second meeting on methamphetamine problems than one in April, but they came with ideas.

Ideas on treatment, prevention, and raising awareness of what law enforcement calls the number-one problem in the Flathead Valley.

Tuesday night, about 80 people showed up in the high school auditorium to talk about the addictive stimulant and what the community can do to stop its destructive path down highways and dirt roads in the valley. Issues include concentrating information in the schools, including first-hand information from former addicts. Even in a small group, though, there wasn't total

accord on solutions.

One participant suggested building an Internet site to post information and pictures of local people convicted of making the drug. One former addict objected and another man said it would be "inviting vigilantes in."

People convicted might be ordered to speak at schools as part of a community-service of sentencing, one resident suggested.

Another woman said simply, "It takes God."

Yet another said the justice system needs "put the fear of God" in people who are convicted so they don't continue to violate probation.

A long-term solution means being "ready to make some clear commitment," said Susan Christofferson of the Nurturing Center, and a

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Robin Loznak/Daily Inter Lake

A PANEL OF community leaders and expert discuss methamphetamine during a meeting at Flathead High School Tuesday.

## Community seeks ways to address meth problem

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panelist on the prevention discussion.

"This is community change and it takes every one of us taking a piece of that," said DeAnn Thomas of CARE, on the same panel.

That group focused mainly on stopping youths from trying the drug.

"If we start with the kids and work up from there, it's a starting place," Thomas said. "They offered specific strategies.

Christofferson talked about the foundations for helping children demur when they're offered drugs — communication, connection and concern — and specific ways adults can foster them.

The Nurturing Center, a nonprofit agency, has a library of resources on how to communicate well, she said. But parents need to know how to lis-

ten, also. It means making eye contact, putting aside thoughts about the mortgage and the dishes, and really listening.

"Trust me, they're saying something very important. We often miss it," she said.

Parents simply have to talk to children about drugs, even if it makes them squirm. "Don't freak out if they tell you they know someone who's using," she said. Keep talking and listening.

Families need to regularly spend time together, eating dinner and talking, she said.

Parents have to be good role models. They need to connect with other adults about parenting. They should have clear expectations for children and hold them accountable for their behavior, Christofferson said.

"They need to know who their children spend time with and where. And they need to realize they are completely in

control of their children.

Youths are craving a sense of belonging, one panelist said.

"Our kids are feeling a little disconnected," said Kelly Van Brandt, an advocate of a program called Prevention Works. Most youths no longer have a good neighbor down the street who will wave and ask how a teen's ball game went, she said.

A community that takes an interest in its youth, even the skateboarder blocking the sidewalk or a young shopper at the store can strengthen youth, she said.

So can programs like DARE, said Kallspeil policeman Scott Warnell, who teaches it at local grade schools.

"We like to try to get to these kids before they're exposed to it," he said of drugs. "To show them they don't even want to try it."

The program is intended to build self esteem, teach life

skills, and instill respect for themselves and others.

The two biggest risk factors for youths who may get involved in substances like methamphetamine are peer pressure and their own parents' substance abuse, said Sheila Smith, of Stillwater Therapeutic Services.

Thomas talked about the 40 assets that keep youths out of trouble, such as family boundaries, school climate, creative activities, and a caring neighborhood.

"The more assets there are in their lives, the better kids are going to turn out. It is never too late to add assets in a child's life," she said.

It's not just parents' concerns, though.

While the focus Tuesday was on prevention, treating people who are already addicted is an important part of community change.

A 42-year-old man arrested

last week with a portable meth lab had reportedly made 100-200 batches of methamphetamine before he was arrested.

Most recently, he'd rented 16 rooms a total of 76 times at a local motel, sheriff's deputy Lynn Ogle said. The cost to clean up the rooms involved: \$14,000, he said.

Warnell said police work hard to educate retailers, Realtors and schools, among others, about methamphetamine's impact.

It's working to the extent that some stores are guarded in their sales of methamphetamine components, he said.

But those who met Tuesday said there's much work left to do, and the community focus can't waver from the problem. "We've just got to keep it up and up and up," one resident said of awareness about methamphetamine.