



**KUSA-TV**

**The many dimensions of the fight against addiction**

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That first try is now a distant memory. It happened more than 20 years ago. The aftermath of that decision still haunts Tonya Wheeler.

"I believe I was addicted the first time I used," Wheeler remembered. "It affected my children, I had kids at a young age, it affected my family."

The methamphetamines also affected her body. Wheeler barely topped 100 pounds in the midst of her addiction.

Today, she's convinced that first try would never have happened had she been given the truth about meth beforehand.

"I can't say I knew anything about it at all," she said.

That awareness is the goal of a relatively new public education campaign in Colorado.

It's the brainchild of the Colorado Meth Project.

The most prominent aspect of the campaign is the TV ads.

"It's graphic, it's not sugarcoated in any way," Ken MacLennan, executive director of the Colorado Meth Project, said. "That's how people have told us they want it."

The commercials are indeed graphic, portraying the meth addict as scarred and violent.

MacLennan hopes the campaign works in conjunction with law enforcement efforts by taking on the demand side of the meth problem.

"We've got things stabilized [in Colorado] so maybe a redoubling of prevention efforts and an education campaign can have an impact in stopping future generations from using this drug at all," he said.

Five other states have seen a similar campaign.

"In terms of the demand reduction, Montana saw a 45 percent reduction in two years," MacLennan said.

Wheeler, who is now a recovery advocate, is encouraged by the campaign, but worries about stigmatizing those who have already fallen into an addiction.

"It becomes harder for the addict to reach out for help," she said.

This is why Wheeler wants talk of intervention, treatment and recovery placed alongside prevention and enforcement.

"We've got to make sure people have access to all sides," she said.