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Community organizer targets meth

She says the drug is an escalating problem in Kamiah

By Kathy Hedberg of the Tribune

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As if persistent poverty and unemployment weren't problems enough, methamphetamine use among youth and adults in Kamiah is on the rise, one community organizer believes.

Sharlene Johnson, program coordinator for the Kamiah Community Partners Coalition, said a recent survey reveals methamphetamine use is more prevalent than most people think.

"I was not surprised that it's an issue," Johnson said of the revelation that 90 percent of the survey respondents believe meth use is a problem in Kamiah.

"I don't think that our community realizes that we have a problem with meth. We do have an up-and-coming problem. ... You see in poverty areas that the meth issue is really high. Everybody's losing their jobs, and people do it for depression, people do it to make money and I think it's going to be on the rise here."

Eighty area residents participated in a recent forum on the issue, including youth, parents, grandparents and recovering meth addicts.

Johnson said 69 of the attendees also completed a written survey questionnaire, with results broken into age groups 10 to 18, 19 to 30, 31 to 50 and 51 and older.

Among the 90 percent who believe meth use is a problem in Kamiah, 62 percent knew someone who uses or has used meth. Three-quarters of those who said meth use is not a problem reported knowing someone who uses or has used meth, Johnson said.

Johnson said many in the audience were moved to tears by the testimony of a young woman who talked about how her parents' drug use and subsequent arrest had affected her life. The girl's mother, a recovering addict, was in attendance at the forum.

Meth is the top drug of choice and the No. 1 drug problem in Idaho, according to the Idaho Meth Project. Johnson said the next step is to discuss how to use the information gathered to educate and inform the public about the problem in Kamiah.

"I think that probably we'll try to do a heavy media campaign to get the message out to the kids," she said. "You know, it's really hard in our area. Word of mouth is easy here. However, oftentimes it's not

the correct word of mouth."

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