

Meth Addicts Find Hope, Healing Through Christian Ministries

Some 1.3 million people are believed to be addicted to the drug, which causes brain damage similar to the effects of a stroke

As use of a man-made drug spreads nationwide at a pace the National Institute on Drug Abuse says is unrivaled by any other in recent history, ministries are reaching into the lives of addicts, families and entire communities with a message of hope and healing through Jesus Christ.

Dubbed the “devil’s drug,” methamphetamine is a powerfully addictive stimulant that affects the central nervous system, creating an intense high that can last as long as 24 hours. The drug causes brain damage similar to that caused by Alzheimer’s disease, stroke and epilepsy; use can also produce psychotic behavior, resulting in extreme violence.

Also known as “speed,” “meth” or “chalk,” methamphetamine is made in clandestine laboratories from everyday household products and is the most prevalent synthetic drug manufactured in the United States. According to a 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an estimated 1.3 million people used the drug during the previous year.

“It is the devil’s greatest tool in the world of drugs,” warns Paula Wood, reformed methamphetamine addict and founder of Break Free Ministry, an organization that reaches out to methamphetamine addicts and their families.

Founded in 2003, Break Free is run by Paula and husband Andy Wood from their home in Savanna, area that has been ravaged by the drug. The ministry consists of 10 team members, eight of whom are former meth addicts.

Wood says her team will go anywhere to spread the message that saved her life. "We tell them that there is hope," she told Charisma. "The only hope is through Jesus Christ."

The team travels to the streets equipped with a custom-built cooker that feeds hundreds. "We pray with them, we clothe them, we cook for them and we love them," Wood added.

Since August 2003, Break Free has hosted four rallies. In just one weekend, approximately 90 people dedicated their lives to Christ, Wood reported. Now Break Free is working to establish a discipleship home for addicts because of the increasing need for in-house rehabilitation facilities specifically for meth addicts.

"It may take anywhere from three to four months to get into a facility," Wood said. "By the time a bed is open, the person is back on the street. We get calls every day, asking if there's a place to put them."

One of those calls came from 26-year-old Cory Weidner, who was a drug addict by the age of 14. Weidner was facing a 20-year prison sentence when he met Wood in a county jail, where she works as a licensed practical nurse. "They loved me after everyone else gave up on me," Weidner said. After his release, Break Free ministered to Weidner until his placement in Teen Challenge, a faith-based drug rehabilitation facility.

“It is an epidemic, a mushroom cloud that is exploding over this country,” said Dr. Mary Holley, founder of Mothers Against Methamphetamine, a ministry that distributes methamphetamine-related literature nationwide. “We haven’t seen the worst of it yet.”

An obstetrician in Alabama, Holley estimates that 10 percent of her pregnant patients are meth addicts. She says a faith-based approach is key to rehabilitation. “Faith-based programs tend to be far more successful because they go deeper into the heart of people,” she said.

John P. Walters, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy and President Bush’s “drug czar,” warns that methamphetamine is a threat to entire communities. “With meth, you have all the harms of other drugs, but there is also a safety hazard” because meth labs exude potentially explosive toxic fumes.

In October, Walters released the nation’s first comprehensive strategy for reducing the production, trafficking and use of synthetic drugs. The Bush administration’s National Synthetic Drugs Action Plan provides an overview of recent trends in the consumption and trafficking of synthetic drugs and outlines a plan for addressing the problem based on four core areas: prevention, treatment, regulation of chemicals and drugs, and law enforcement.

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