

*British Columbia's  
Crystal Meth Community Response Program*

Summary Report

Submitted to:

Union of BC Municipalities

on behalf of the Crystal Meth Secretariat,

Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General

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## BACKGROUND

In September 2005 the Crystal Meth Community Response Program was established to provide \$2-million in funding for BC communities to respond to local concerns around the issue of crystal methamphetamine. The program was administered by the Union of BC Municipalities on behalf of the Crystal Meth Secretariat, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. The objective was to raise awareness, provide information and build community capacity to respond to the use of methamphetamine.

Funding was available to municipalities, regional districts, and community organizations that had the support of their local government, First Nations or Aboriginal organizations, and First Nations/local government joint initiatives in the province. Of the 160 applicants that received funding, 44 (28%) were local governments; 72 (45%) were First Nation and Aboriginal organizations; and 44 (28%) were community organizations (including schools districts and existing Crystal Meth Task Forces).

## PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The intent of this report is two-fold: 1) to provide a summary of the projects and activities funded through this grant program and 2) to offer some specific considerations and overall strategies for planning future community-based substance use prevention projects. The content is based on the 142 final reports submitted upon completion of the program. In reviewing the reports, particular attention was paid to what the projects identified as lessons learned, successes, strengths and challenges. A selection of projects demonstrates examples of various approaches and activities. A full listing of projects funded through this grant program is available at: <http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/crystalmeth/pdf/CrystalMethGrants2006.pdf>

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Community groups throughout BC welcomed the unique opportunity to access funding to support locally -driven substance use prevention initiatives. They expressed a range of perspectives about how to undertake developing community prevention plans for a single drug. Some groups chose to take a direct approach, exclusively addressing crystal meth use, often through education, public awareness and enhanced treatment services. Others noted the potential limitations of addressing a single substance and thought it imperative to broaden their focus and communicate that crystal meth was one of many potentially harmful drugs. Through local data collection and/or professional opinion based on experience in substance use addiction, a few communities determined that crystal meth was not a problem in their area, or at least not a significant problem. All but one of these communities felt that this funding initiative provided an excellent opportunity to be in a uniquely proactive, rather than reactive, position for addressing substance use problems.

For many communities, this funding provided an opportunity to enhance the overall prevention infrastructure by bringing together service providers, businesses, municipal government and First Nations groups to coordinate and integrate their approaches to substance use prevention. Further,

identifying and addressing some of the underlying risk and protective factors, as well as community assets and strengths were central to many local strategies.

In Golden, the Task Force experienced some initial resistance from community members. "They were stating that 'meth is not our problem, other drugs are, so why is the Task Force focusing on meth?' However, through media interviews, advertisements, and school presentations, the public started to realize that this was their chance to take a preventative approach. This goal was achieved and demonstrated through the increase in the number of attendees at the public education sessions. The first public education session hosted in June brought in only 35 people, while the second session (hosted in October) brought in over 600!" *Golden & District Methamphetamine Education Initiative*

The districts of Elkford, Sparwood, Fernie and the Elk Valley, combined grants to maximize the number of projects that could be carried out, as well as to collaborate and learn from one another. "When we looked at the factors that would strengthen our ability to prevent Crystal Meth, we took into account four primary prevention principles: address all substance use as potentially problematic, be relevant to the local community and target to different audiences, work with the strengths in your community, maintain a strong focus on family and community relationships as prevention tools." *Keeping Kids Safe: Working Together for a Safer Community Final Report*

A large number of the projects utilized a collaborative approach involving partners such as municipal government, First Nations, the school district, the chamber of commerce, addiction service providers, law enforcement, service organizations (e.g. rotary club) and the general public. Working in collaboration allowed community groups to maximize strengths and avoid reinventing the wheel. For the most part, communities executed multiple strategies at diverse population groups, with the aim of effecting both individual and community-wide change. In many instances, groups created an impact by implementing intensive community campaigns with multiple strategies over the relatively short time period of a couple of months.

While a few groups focused on one primary activity, many implemented all or a combination of the following strategies:

- Education and awareness through community forums and events
- Targeted programs and events for parents and/or youth at risk
- Distribution and/or creation of informational resources such as brochures, websites and DVDs, and other campaign materials such as posters, wrist bracelets and t-shirts
- Media campaigns
- Awareness programs for businesses

- Professional development and networking opportunities for service providers

The types and extent of activities depended on various factors such as: community priorities, community size, geographic location, demographics, the history of prevention activities and the current level of prevention resources.

Several groups combined their grants and determined that by sharing information, strategies and project costs they could develop more robust and comprehensive prevention activities.

The Kitimat-Stikine Regional District partnered with the City of Terrace, the District of Kitimat, the District of Stewart, the District of New Hazelton and the Village of Hazelton to develop a district-wide regional project. Community partners included the RCMP, First Nations, school districts, and the Chamber of Commerce. Using a collaborative approach they were able to respond to local issues while removing barriers caused by geographic isolation. Networking opportunities resulting in the sharing of resources and lessons learned, and overall they were able to create an infrastructure for future planning.

In Hope and the surrounding area, the school district, area service providers, the RCMP, community leaders and First Nations councils collaborated to develop and implement a comprehensive substance abuse prevention curriculum for school-aged children and youth.

The Sunshine Coast Substance Abuse Task Force formed a committee with representatives from Vancouver Coastal Health Mental Health and Addictions, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the school district, and the RCMP to develop *Open Doors: a Coordinated Substance Abuse Strategic Framework*. The Task Force also partnered with the Sechelt Indian Band in their funding to hold education and awareness events. This was the first time that a broad based community task force had come together to work with the Sechelt Nation to address substance abuse: "The result of our work with the Band has contributed to an understanding that this is a problem both communities face and a desire to work together more in the future has been expressed. It has been very worthwhile to work with them..." *Project Manager, Sunshine Coast Substance Abuse Task Force.*

## PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

The following describes the different types of activities undertaken by community projects and provides considerations when planning activities to address substance use.

### PUBLIC AWARENESS & EDUCATION

Enhancing public awareness of crystal methamphetamine was a significant part of almost every community project. The goals of public awareness campaigns were to raise awareness of the dangers of crystal meth, inform the public of resources available, increase local networking and find out about community needs. Primary target audiences included the general community, youth and parents.

### FORUMS & PRESENTATIONS

These typically included a panel and/or presentations on related topics, an opportunity to respond to questions and informational displays of resource materials. A number included interactive forum theatre and videos, and some utilized discussion groups to focus on local issues and concerns, intervention strategies and future planning. Some of the groups applied a train-the-trainer model, such as The Prevention Awareness and Community Education (PACE) Program. Service providers and community members were provided with skills and information to facilitate education sessions on crystal meth in the community. Conducting surveys and soliciting verbal feedback were the most common ways that the forums and presentations were evaluated.

### CONSIDERATIONS:

- **Being Creative in Your Approach** – Combining a variety of activities is an effective way to increase attendance, enthusiasm and active participation. Many of the forums provided refreshments, door prizes (items donated by local businesses), and giveaways (posters, bracelets, buttons, t-shirts) that carried the message of crystal meth awareness. Some of the communities held dinners and dances in additions to presentations. Including recreational or other fun activities was also believed to work well: in Nanaimo, a number of community agencies in the Snuneymuxw First Nation held a weekend youth soccer tournament that incorporated education about crystal meth and other drugs. Other projects used art, film and music festivals as mediums to engage the community (particularly youth) in the dialogue on crystal meth. Also, incentives such as transportation and baby sitting on site helped to facilitate community member attendance.
- **Coordinating the Timing of the Event** - Piggyback the event with another related campaign (e.g. National Addictions Awareness Week). A number of communities partnered their event with touring forum theatre companies that performed plays related to crystal meth addiction. The combined publicity generated a large amount of interest and high attendance.
- **Doing More Than One Event** – This is suggested if you are planning to reach different audiences with specific content or activities. It is also beneficial to have more than one event to broaden and sustain community awareness. As Tsleil-Waututh Nation stated, “We felt that it was important to provide ongoing educational and prevention efforts to maintain interest levels and not overwhelm people with information.” Many community groups also found that they learned from their experience and from participant feedback at the first event, and used this knowledge to improve on the next event.

- **Relating to Your Target Audience** - It is important to consider your audience when deciding on speakers and content. For example, service providers or other professionals may be interested in research data, while youth may be more attracted to hearing personal stories of addiction and recovery.
- **Using the Media** - Advertise or have media articles prior to an event to generate interest (see “Media Campaigns” below). More than one group reported that there was an increase in attendance at a second event after the first received media coverage.
- **Having a Variety of Speakers and Content** - Utilizing local “experts” is a way to recognize the strengths within the community and enhance interconnections (“we’re all in this together”). Speakers can include police (information on meth labs, drug enforcement); health or addiction professionals (physical and medical aspects of addiction, other risks such as HIV and hepatitis); community professionals (service providers, school officials); community elders (provide cultural context); and former crystal meth users in recovery from their addiction (personal experience). Several communities recommended interactive presentations that provide ample time for Q&As, networking and spontaneous prevention brainstorming and planning.
- **Having a Speaker with a Personal History of Addiction** – It is an educational reality that personal stories have a strong impact – particularly on youth, but it is also important to ensure it won’t create the effect of “glamourizing” drug addiction. It is recommended that the former user has had experience sharing their story and is well entrenched in their recovery.
- **Addressing a Single Drug** - While there are situations where addressing a single drug may be warranted, in doing so it is advised to consider what message is imparted to the audience. For instance, consider the possibility that in demonizing one drug, others are legitimized. Many community projects attempted to confer the perspective that addiction to any substance can be harmful. As well, a number of communities expressed concern about focusing too much on the ingredients of crystal meth, for example, out of fear that the knowledge could be used inappropriately (e.g. to make meth).
- **Bringing in Professional Speakers** - Having widely recognized “experts” as presenters can generate interest in the community and provide incentive for attending (e.g. noted author and physician Gabor Mate spoke at a number of community forums). A significant number of First Nations groups (29 in total) contracted with The Young Warriors Network to provide their “Meth=Death” workshop for youth and adults. The Crystal Meth Society of BC was involved in a number of communities (particularly on Vancouver Island). These presenters also provided a number of resource materials that were distributed and then housed in a resource library for the public. A budget consideration is that these types of professionals charge fees (and sometimes travel) for their services, so looking to your local experts may be a more feasible alternative. Further, if outside experts are used as speakers, it is wise to also involve local experts to build awareness of services available.

In addition to extensive education for youth, Langley’s *Project Resiliency* held educational sessions for parents and the community at large. Specific information about crystal meth was provided, as well as an understanding of the school district’s prevention approach. Two hundred and fifty community members attended these sessions. They were so popular that additional sessions were held at each school.

Throughout the Lillooet Municipal District and Upper St'at'imc Territory, the Lillooet Friendship Society organized 22 targeted community information sessions, in addition to a host of other prevention activities. In their experience, they found having a visual component, such as a PowerPoint presentation, to be effective in disseminating important information. "The PowerPoint became the starting point of many breakout sessions and discussions that reflected local issues and concerns. It was also important to provide ample time to ask questions, have discussions and network. Many sessions included spontaneous discussions regarding intervention ideas, capacity building and future planning opportunities." *Meth Alert: Aboriginal Community Methamphetamine Response Project, Final Report*

In Maple Ridge, in addition to media campaigns and a variety of youth and community forums, 120 municipal employees participated in a viewing of "Meth Epidemic" offered during three lunch hours. As well, a celebration luncheon was organized for community members, service providers and those recovering from addiction and homelessness. Ninety people – forty of whom were recovering addicts – attended what was described "as an emotional event and very much a celebration." *Life or Meth – Community Solutions, Final Report*

### *FORUM THEATRE*

While interactive forum theatre was often part of community forums and youth events, its popularity among so many of the community projects warrants further description. Forum theatre is audience interactive performance that raises awareness and investigates possible solutions to relevant social issues. Headlines Theatre, Green Thumb Theatre and Street Spirits performed plays created by young people about crystal meth addiction. The productions "Meth", "Cranked", and "Jib" provided powerful experiences for audience members to actively participate in the play and attempt to address and resolve the issues presented. Forum theatre can be a valuable method for helping to present a complex issue such as substance use and addiction. A few youth groups developed and performed their own plays, resulting in them gaining theatrical skills and a new sense of confidence and accomplishment. Their plays proved to be highly impactful and extremely popular with the community.

An impact of forum theatre is its ability to enhance understanding and empathy regarding the cycle of addiction, demonstrated by one youth's comments about "Cranked": "I thought this was so amazing. You guys made it so real. Just think of what people might go through. It must be hard, and you guys did an amazing job." *Keeping Kids Safe: Working Together for a Safer Community Final Report*



In 100 Mile House, First Nations youth worked with Street Spirits to develop and perform their play. "The youth actors were hailed as community ambassadors for creating new momentum with dialogue on drugs and drug addiction...(the mayor) travelled to Canim Lake... to present a community service award to the eight young actors for their dedication and talent to helping the South Cariboo become a safer and more resilient community. Moreover, these eight youth demonstrated how the process of social theatre can be a powerful catalyst for social change."

### *SHORTER PRESENTATIONS / INFORMATIONAL DISPLAYS*

Some communities developed shorter presentations for specific audiences such as: municipal/city council, businesses, the chamber of commerce, teachers, health workers, property owners, and community elders. Several communities commented that presentations targeting specific groups were quite effective because they could be interactive, addressing the audience's interests and needs. A few community groups created presentations or developed information booths for events such as community health fairs, service club events, youth clinics, and a child and family service agency annual general meeting.

In the rural interior communities, the Cariboo Chilcotin Metis Association took their workshops on the road, providing awareness presentations to a wide range of audiences ranging from elders, youth in alternative school programs, newspaper staff, care providers who work with mentally challenged clients who use substances, and hospital staff. In some instances, the facilitator traveled more than 2 hours to deliver the targeted presentation.

### *RESOURCE MATERIALS*

A majority of the projects included creating or gathering materials related to crystal meth and other substances as a component of their education and awareness campaigns. These materials included:

- Print - posters, fact sheets, pamphlets, reference books and brochures listing services in the community. Several also included information on the community crystal meth task force or planning committee.
- Audio-Visual – PowerPoint presentations, DVDs ("Death by Jib", "Crystal Clear, Crystal Fear", specially created videos)
- Computer-Based – websites, confidential e-mail for youth
- Paraphernalia intended to raise public awareness such as t-shirts and wrist bracelets

Resource libraries were set up in central locations in the community. In a few cases, computers were donated to provide online access to information and materials. Brochures, informational pamphlets and posters were widely distributed to households, schools, doctors' offices, hospitals, youth centres, businesses, service providers, and at community events and presentations.

### **CONSIDERATIONS:**

- **Using What is Available** - Professional speakers usually provide handouts, videos and PowerPoint presentations. Consider using and/or modifying what has been developed in other jurisdictions, making it relevant to the local situation. If relevant, purchase or download existing fact sheets, pamphlets and DVDs from crystal meth and other drug information websites.
- **Creating Your Own Materials** – Presentations, brochures and other materials can be developed to address a specific community. Involving the target audience (e.g. youth) in the creation of posters, videos, brochures and/or websites is an effective way to engage, educate and provide new skills. Some of the groups developed educational videos and handbooks. In a few cases these were found to be complex projects requiring more time and funds than originally anticipated.
- **Going Electronic** – Setting up a local website is another way to provide information and resources, but websites need to be sustained and updated to be useful to the community. An ongoing commitment for maintenance and related costs are required. Check out other established crystal meth websites that may be able to serve your community's needs. Another approach taken by a couple of the projects was to set up a confidential e-mail address for youth to connect with a youth worker to receive further information.

In the South Similkameen Valley, the Task Force developed and distributed brochures in Punjabi and French – significant population groups within the community that lacked information on crystal meth.

Charlford House, a recovery house for women in Burnaby, developed a video "Letter to Myself" profiling two women in recovery. The project received additional funding from the National Film Board and is currently distributing the video as a prevention tool.

### **MEDIA CAMPAIGNS**

Some communities utilized the media as part of their overall prevention plan. This proved to be a highly effective means of informing the public about the effects of crystal meth and generating greater interest and participation at public awareness activities in the community. Specific strategies included:

- Posters, newspaper advertisements and contests promoting upcoming events
- Press releases about project goals, activities and events
- Newspaper articles about crystal meth facts and interviews with recovering addicts
- Local television and radio interviews on project activities and events, crystal meth information and questions and answers from audience members
- Media attendance at and coverage of events
- Postings on community websites – task force, town council

### **CONSIDERATIONS:**

- **Timing** – Several groups noted that by coordinating the timing of their media campaign with another related campaign (e.g. Drug Awareness Week, BC Crystal Meth Strategy Awareness Campaign), the combined publicity generated a lot of interest and high attendance at events.
- **Branding** – Having a slogan for message congruence and recognition proved valuable. Many groups piggy backed on the BC government’s catchy slogan “no2meth”. Others used slogans such as “don’t meth around”, “be crystal clear” or “meth alert”.

In Penticton, to promote the community’s awareness campaign, the municipal government, school district, and the business community partnered in sponsoring vehicle advertising where five city vehicles and two school district vehicles were splashed with the “no2meth” brand.

The project in Vanderhoof created a series of public service announcements that aired on television, radio and print. The message of the ads was developed in collaboration with a group of crystal meth users. The poster ad was also placed in the weekly newspaper. To increase their overall public impact, they timed their campaign to coincide with the provincial BC Crystal Meth Strategy Awareness campaign in newspapers and television.

### *INVOLVING THE RETAIL AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY (METH WATCH)*

Many communities implemented the Meth Watch Program with their local retail stores and businesses. This national program aims to curtail the theft and suspicious sale of common household products used in the manufacturing of methamphetamine, while promoting cooperation between retailers and law enforcement officials.

The communities worked with their local RCMP/police (and in some cases, the Chamber of Commerce) to provide Meth Watch toolkits to pharmacies, grocery stores, hardware stores, and building supply stores. The Toolkit includes training for employees and notices and tags to post in their businesses. Suspicious transactions are to be reported to police. In Chetwynd, local waste disposal contractors were alerted to the manufacturing ingredients and packaging samples in the production of crystal meth so that they could report any observations to the RCMP.

In all, involving business was found to be a very effective way of including a sector of the community that might otherwise be on the periphery of addressing the crystal meth issue. As well, some communities indicated that the local RCMP/police reported a decline in associated crime after the implementation of Meth Watch.

The business community proved to be a great supporter of many community projects through donations and in-kind support. Several projects were successful in acquiring donations of goods and services, door prizes or refreshments for community events.

The Kitimat-Stikine's regional strategy included a strong collaboration with local businesses. Their organizational structure included local committees within each town made up of diverse sectors, including the Chamber of Commerce. These committees helped develop local responses and were integral in getting the Meth Watch program off the ground. Further, Alcan Primary Metals became a corporate sponsor, enabling the district to expand "Experts in Drug Addiction", providing education to service providers and the community at large, including a youth forum.

## YOUTH-SPECIFIC APPROACHES

In general, youth were the most prominent target audience for crystal meth awareness and education and a variety of approaches were undertaken by the community projects.

### *SCHOOL-BASED EDUCATION & PROGRAMS*

Many of the projects included presentations on crystal meth to children and youth in their area schools. These sessions often included components on healthy decision-making, coping skills, self-care and where to seek help. For some projects, working with the schools' parent advisory councils offered a means of informing parents of the educational sessions their children were receiving. Some of the groups also developed and or purchased educational resource materials that could be used by teachers. It was noted that having a school-based prevention worker helped by providing further information and follow up and developing relationships with youth and school staff. In some cases, this worker was able to provide direct support for students who were using drugs or were identified as being at-risk for drug use. Some community programs developed or enhanced school-based intervention projects for youth who were caught using substances at school.

The Fraser Cascade region developed and implemented a comprehensive substance abuse prevention curriculum for kindergarten through grade 12. This was accomplished in collaboration with a large number of community partners, including school districts, area service providers, the RCMP, community leaders and First Nations councils.

In Mission, a Prevention Worker in the schools expanded the supports available for students and families. In addition to providing education in classrooms and building relationships with students, the Prevention Worker provided a very important role in building relationships with school staff in an effort to develop an atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration to help students at risk of using Crystal Meth or other substances. Support for families was also available.

### *INVOLVING YOUTH IN CREATING AND DELIVERING THE MESSAGE*

Several community projects noted the importance of engaging youth as partners in designing prevention initiatives. An effective way to engage youth is to provide opportunities for creative self-expression. Some of the projects involved youth in the creation of print and audio-visual materials for their crystal meth awareness campaigns. Other groups held art, film, or essay contests and profiled the submissions at public awareness events. A few youth groups developed and performed their own plays. As a result, information was presented in a way that was appealing to young people. Youth increased their knowledge about crystal meth, learned new skills, gained recognition and experienced a sense of accomplishment for their efforts.

In terms of developing activities to engage youth, several groups commented on the importance of providing young people with an opportunity to ask questions and share ideas regarding the issues and possible solutions. For some, youth-only events were successful in fostering environments for candid discussion. Going to where youth meet, such as a presentation at a youth centre, was also mentioned as a useful approach. Further, several groups commented that youth responded positively to “real life” stories provided by youth in recovery.

In Grand Forks, youth were involved in the development and distribution of lapel buttons, wallet cards and posters. “These buttons, with their easily identifiable skulls, were great conversation starters and spread the meth awareness message through different sectors in a subtle yet effective way. The mixing of factual information with a youth-oriented delivery style allowed conversation starters with youth that would otherwise have been hesitant to engage. It was great to see the involvement of youth in all facets of the program, and to realize that the message was reaching the intended audience in a way that mattered to them.” *The Boundary Meth Project, Final Report*

In Victoria, the Bridging the Gap project engaged high-risk street youth in art-based activities as a way to provide harm reduction education about crystal meth and other drugs. One activity was the creation of a youth 'zine as a vehicle to communicate their experiences with crystal meth and other drugs. Youth also took part in public art and music therapy sessions, and created and performed a forum theatre play that was hugely successful.

In the Campbell River area, youth created art and films addressing crystal meth and related youth issues. A film festival and art show was held at a local theatre and the response was overwhelmingly positive, with attendance from diverse parts of the community. Subsequently, the films were aired on the local television station and will be distributed to schools and social service agencies. The local arts council plans to continue the film festival annually.

### *EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION TIED INTO RECREATIONAL & FUN ACTIVITIES*

A number of groups found that including recreational activities as part of their education and awareness process worked very well to generate interest and participation among youth. These included swimming, basketball, camping, soccer, and skateboarding. Other groups arranged music concerts and hip-hop performances to attract youth. These types of activities proved very successful in engaging youth, promoting participation in drug free events, and creating a connection to the community. Further, several communities mentioned that using incentives such as door prizes and a prize for any youth who asks questions, were valuable in generating participation at the event.

In Spallumcheen/Armstrong, an *End of Summer Family Bash* was held "to get information out ... in an environment which promoted active living and community involvement. We set up at a local skateboard park on a Saturday, had hot dogs, bounce and play for the younger kids, and brought in a group of professional skateboarders to do presentations with some instruction afterwards. We had booths set up with crystal meth awareness paraphernalia, along with some of the community resource booklets that we had developed." *Township of Spallumcheen - Crystal Meth Education and Awareness, Final Report*

The Abbotsford Police Department and Fire Rescue Services created "Good 2 Go", a positive ticketing campaign as a strategy for connecting with youth on drug awareness and prevention. Youth received a 'positive ticket' from the police for a free ice skate, a free swim, a free ice cream cone or free french fries – all from local sponsors.

In Kamloops, a concert was held in a local park on the Friday prior to an all day youth event. Several youth who attended the concert then registered for the all day event, which included presentations, performances, interactive educational booths, a Velcro wall, basketball, and free T-shirts and dog tags. A unique incentive was to issue a passport at the event – the youth had to visit a number of educational booths and get their passport stamped. Once they had ten stamps, they completed a survey on the back of the passport to contribute feedback on what they learned at the event. The passports were then entered into a draw for several prizes including a mountain bike and a whitewater rafting trip.

### *ADDRESSING UNDERLYING ISSUES USING CULTURAL, WELLNESS AND ASSET APPROACHES*

Several projects prioritized addressing some of the underlying issues related to crystal meth (and all substance use) problems. These included factors such as cultural crisis, loss, disconnection between community members (e.g. between youth and elders) or other risk and protective factors within the community. For communities who embraced this approach, specific awareness and information about crystal meth was a by-product of the main objective, which usually dealt with increasing community resiliency and assets. Many of the projects within First Nation communities centred on the recognition that many Aboriginal communities continue to deal with the effects of loss of culture, traditions, and spiritual ways and that drug or alcohol use is often a means of dealing with these losses. A common approach taken by the First Nations groups was to incorporate cultural teachings and wellness into activities that brought youth and elders together. Gathering as an Aboriginal community and as family members provided youth with the opportunity to experience their identity. These activities included community feasts, sharing circles and camping retreats. While not specifically intended to address underlying issues, it should be mentioned that a number of First Nations communities contracted with the Young Warriors Network from North Vancouver, who provided culturally relevant educational workshops on crystal meth – one for youth and one for adults. Often, the workshops were attended by members of a number of area bands, promoting a greater sense of unity among them.

The Hupacasath First Nation Wellness Program focused on health promotion activities. These included a family canoe trip led by two elders; a series of sessions on emotional healing and dealing with trauma and difficult life circumstances; participation in a community awareness day sponsored by the Port Alberni Crystal Meth Task Group; and sessions on good nutrition, health and fitness as a means of addressing risk factors such as poverty than can contribute to drug addiction. The project culminated in a sober New Year's Eve Celebration – an event promoting family unity without alcohol or drugs - that drew over 500 people from the Hupacasath and Port Alberni areas.

In Kimberley, the project focused on addressing community risk and protective factors, along with building assets and strengths. Community connection was improved through the implementation of an inter-generational art project where adult artists mentored youth and developed a community-wide art show. To celebrate the strength of young people in the community, a multi-media presentation was delivered by youth, police and addiction workers to parents and the general community. Community strengths, how to keep it safe, and substance use prevention information were highlighted.



### *EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION*

A number of smaller First Nations bands incorporated “Scared Straight” tours of communities with a visible drug market, such as Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, so that their youth could see firsthand the effects of drug addiction. Communities are often motivated to use this approach due to the number of youth that leave their rural communities for the city, where they are likely to experience isolation and the possibility of becoming street entrenched. The tours included talking with local elders, service providers, people on the street and those recovering from their addiction. The Klahoose Nation’s project involved an elder from their nation currently living in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside to welcome the youth, helping to facilitate a connection for the young people. Communities that used this “reality check” approach felt it had a powerful impact on the youth, noting that some youth indicated experiencing personal change as a result of their involvement.

The Nazko Indian Band in Quesnel wanted to empower their youth to become the local “experts” on crystal meth so that they could conduct community education sessions. Five youth were trained in research, public speaking and leadership skills. Part of their research involved a trip to Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, and the youth decided they wanted to create a video about their experience to take back to the community. At their presentation, the youth provided information on crystal meth in the form of posters they had created, showed their video, facilitated discussion and answered questions. As a result of this project, some of the youth participants wanted to honour members of the Nazko community that were sober by hosting a large feast. They were shocked to see the number of members from their own community who had struggled and recovered from addiction.

## SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### *SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS*

For the most part, community groups were concerned with prevention; however some communities also prioritized service enhancement. Overall, the types of actions included:

- Funding specific services, such as an outreach or youth worker
- Increasing community awareness of addiction services e.g. using promotion materials or through trainings or meetings with service providers
- Researching best practices in treatment for crystal meth addiction
- Producing an inventory of treatment services and identifying service gaps
- Advocating for enhanced services, e.g. to address the specific needs of crystal meth addiction
- Developing a framework for substance use prevention and intervention, e.g. *Open Doors: A Coordinated Wide Substance Abuse Strategic Framework*



In Kelowna, the Task Force's Post-Treatment Pillar conducted an extensive literature review of post-treatment approaches and developed an inventory of services available in their community. Their report outlines service gaps and delivers nine recommendations for developing a continuum of treatment services. This report has been presented to the Interior Health Authority.

In Vancouver, the GaMMa project hired and trained three two-spirit (queer, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender) First Nations outreach workers to distribute prevention and harm reduction materials and services information, as well as facilitate weekly talking circles.

Takla Lake First Nation created a youth worker position to provide children and youth with alcohol and drug information and counselling, cultural activities, and recreational activities. Supported by in-kind contributions, they were also able to set up a youth centre.

### *PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT*

Some projects' activities included education and training for professionals in the community. For the most part, the target audiences were first responders (RCMP, Fire and Rescue, Emergency Medical Services); health care workers; social workers; mental health workers; counsellors; and school staff. Audiences also included municipal employees and the private business sector (e.g. pulp mill representatives). Topics varied depending on the audience, and included:

- manufacturing (meth labs) and distribution
- use of crystal meth and physiological effects
- understanding addiction
- associated violence and crime
- how to identify, approach and assist users
- overdose intervention
- safety precautions regarding meth labs
- strategies for prevention
- treatment approaches

In Burns Lake and surrounding communities, an important factor contributing to the success of the project was educating service providers in the community – such as police, fire, ambulance, front line social workers, counsellors and child and youth workers. It was found that this education had a huge ripple effect in that those that attended the education spread information through formal workshops and/or informally through their networks.

## TASK FORCES & COMMITTEES

For the most part, task forces contained representation from service providers, business, and the general public. Committees tended to be comprised of professionals such as addiction service providers, police, municipal or First Nations government and school district representatives. Some communities had a task force in place prior to receiving the grant while others used the funding to establish one. For the most part, the task forces and/or committees were an important catalyst for planning and implementing a variety of actions. Benefits of task forces and committees included:

- Coordinating substance use efforts within the community and identifying what was working well and what required improvement
- Keeping the problem at the forefront of community issues, thereby increasing the potential for community participation
- Collaborating to maintain momentum behind the issue and sustain efforts over time
- Participating in grassroots community-oriented approaches to identify and develop local responses.

### ***CONSIDERATIONS:***

**Identifying and/or Hiring a Coordinator** – A key to success, especially for community tasks forces, was having a coordinator who could implement and coordinate the main activities and administrative tasks such as recruiting new members, communicating within the task force and to the larger community, building partnerships and running meetings.

**Keeping the Community Informed** – Several groups mentioned that it was important to find ways to keep both the general public and task force members informed regarding the task force and its activities. Some created an e-mail list to keep those who couldn't attend meetings up to date. Several Task Forces found it important to develop mechanisms to communicate externally with the public and with potential supporters such as city council. Common mechanisms included presentations and informational brochures outlining the mandate and activities of the task force. Several groups also developed donation letters and fundraising brochures to accompany general information about the task force.

**Using Sub-Committees**– Many task forces set up a structure with several committees or “pillars,” and education and public awareness, treatment, and enforcement were the most common. For the most part, committees were found to be a useful way to get work done, and the most active committees tended to be education and public awareness. One task force, that had been successful in recruiting new community members, found that the new members wanted to be involved in all aspects of the initiative; therefore the idea of committees was abandoned.

**Connecting with other Task Forces** – All task forces mentioned that an integral aspect of their success was building alliances with other task forces. Several groups invited members of more established task forces from other communities to share information and resources.

In Chetwynd, the grassroots task force hired a coordinator to focus on building partnerships and community support, resulting in 25 new community members. The coordinator became involved in a myriad of activities that helped coordinate existing substance use activities and enabled the development of new programs. For example, the Task Force became involved in expanding the high school program for youth caught using substances and also in supporting a Youth Leadership Initiative at the local school.

In the Alberni Valley, United Native Nations local 560 spearheaded the creation of a First Nations Task Force to address the specific needs of the Aboriginal community. In developing this group they worked to identify the barriers to participation and encouraged participation from a diverse group of people, including those struggling with addiction, community leaders, counselors, educators, and spiritual and cultural groups. Further, the task force ensured that the emotional, spiritual, mental and physical needs of people with addictions were addressed.

## RESEARCH

Research formed a significant part of several community projects. The primary intention for conducting research was to inform planning and help maintain project focus. For the most part this “research” was quite informal and focused on information gathering. A couple of community groups undertook more formal research projects, usually in conjunction with a university or hired consultant. The primary types of research included:

- **Consultations with Professional Service Providers and Community Members** – Many communities brought together service providers and community members to assess the degree of crystal meth use and addiction in the community and to identify possible local responses. In Cache Creek, the coordinator of the crystal meth project met with a range of community leaders within the small community in order to be informed of the perspectives on substance use and gaps in service. From this meeting they were able to focus their activities on community needs.
- **Investigating and Learning From Other Communities** - A number of community task forces benefited from having a member of a more established community substance use task force attend their meeting to share resources, information and discuss what has been working in their area.
- **Assessing Community Attitudes, Knowledge and Use Levels** – Several communities used surveys, focus groups or informal interviews with community members to gain information on attitudes and knowledge of crystal meth, as well as understand the general perception of crystal meth use. A group in Delta conducted a formal research project on youth substance use patterns in conjunction with Kwantlen University College.

The newly formed Drug Free Committee in Dawson Creek developed a survey to gain awareness of the growing drug problem in their community, identify potential solutions, and provide guidance in the development of resources and future plans. They sought out professional support from research agencies such as the McCreary Centre Society. Rather than approaching this issue punitively by fostering suspicion and creating divisions among community members, their aim is to use the results to bring people together and focus on community strengths and collaboration.

In Kaslo, 120 high school students attended a forum which was used as an opportunity to gather and share information on youth, crystal meth use and substance use prevention overall. Using a peer model, youth facilitators led breakout groups on topics such as what in the community promotes or prevents youth from using substances and what will help young people avoid substance use. In an effort to increase understanding between adults and youth in the community, the youth facilitators presented their findings to adults at a community forum.

## STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY PROJECTS

The following components are based on information identified in the final reports of the projects funded through the Crystal Meth Community Response Program and are intended for consideration when planning community-based substance use prevention initiatives.

### WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Collaboration amongst key stakeholders in the community facilitates the networking and communication critical to the effective implementation of projects and delivery of services. Partnerships encourage the sharing of expertise, information and resources, thereby maximizing the potential of the project to meet its objectives. Typical partners may include the city/municipality, law enforcement, schools, youth agencies, addiction agencies, the chamber of commerce, service clubs and members of the general public.

### KNOWING YOUR COMMUNITY

Finding out what has been done previously and what is currently being done in the community to address substance use issues is an important step in developing goals and objectives. Getting the perspective of a wide representation of the community – service providers, politicians, law enforcement, parents, businesses, schools, youth, elders, and spiritual /religious leaders - can generate support and provide the framework to understand community needs, strengths and readiness for change. This is important, as community action is most successful when built upon the foundation of a community's strengths, resources and its unique characteristics.

## DETERMINING GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Goals and objectives help ensure agreement among partners and maintain a focus. Make the objectives SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-limited. When thinking about the types of goals and objectives for your initiative, consider the following:

- Focus on primary prevention activities that address general awareness within the general population and promote healthy community development and secondary prevention activities for those at increased risk.
- When possible, multiple strategies aimed at multiple target groups is an effective approach. While education and public awareness are important prevention goals, a combination of activities, that address underlying issues, risk and protective factors, are likely to have a greater impact.

## PLANNING YOUR ACTIONS

Plan the project activities based on the identified objectives. Consider the following:

- Pursue opportunities that will create a lasting impact, such as purchasing or developing useful resources, arranging for service provider education and networking, enhancing an existing program/service, building a grassroots task force with ongoing administrative support.
- Know your resource capacity and plan accordingly.
- Target your actions to meet the needs of the audience/participants.
- Allow sufficient time for program development and plan for the unexpected. It may be prudent to add 20% more time than is estimated. Consider the time of year for certain undertakings (e.g. winter weather in rural areas, summer vacation).
- Identify specific time-limited tasks and indicate who is responsible for the completion.

## EVALUATING AND KEEPING TRACK OF LESSONS LEARNED

Measuring the impact of prevention is extremely difficult, however it is wise to include some plan to assess what approaches or activities worked and didn't work. Common evaluation methods to consider include:

- **User Feedback** – Usually gained through feedback forms or by verbal discussions with participants. Feedback forms can be a good way to gauge change in participant knowledge or attitudes, and to assess which aspects of an event or program were most effective. Conducting pre-event and post-event surveys is another way to gauge change in a participant's knowledge or attitudes.
- **Formative Evaluation** - Learning from experience and modifying actions as new information becomes available ensures needs are met more effectively.
- **Process Evaluation** - Focuses on describing the nature and extent of the activities, such as the types of activities undertaken, the number of sessions and attendance levels.
- **Outcome Evaluation** - This is the most thorough type of evaluation and is usually conducted by someone with experience in evaluation. It is concerned with the effect or impact of a project/program. While process can tell you how many people attended an event/program, an outcome evaluation can demonstrate what changed within the community or an individual, as a result of the event/program.

Whatever method you use, consider disseminating the evaluation results to staff and other stakeholders in the community.

## CONCLUSION

The Crystal Meth Community Response Program provided communities with valuable funding to develop local initiatives for substance use prevention, in this case with a particular focus on crystal meth. Noting the limitations of isolated, one-shot events, many communities used this one-time funding as an opportunity to identify and respond to local needs by developing interventions that have lasting impact. The funding was used to initiate new projects, enhance existing ones, and expand community involvement and partnerships. While some community groups were successful in leveraging funds to continue, a challenge for many community groups is accessing resources so that initiatives can be sustained over time. Making an impact in substance use prevention requires a long-term commitment and the combined learning from these community initiatives lays a foundation for future local substance use endeavours.