Georgia Prevention Project Puts Prescription Pills “Out of Reach”

An almost hidden drug abuse epidemic enters Georgia homes in the form of compact, harmless-looking pills. Ritalin®, OxyContin®, Adderall®, Xanax®, Kickers, Uppers, Bennies, Z-Bars, skittling—brand names and street slang for potent prescription pills are all too common vocabulary in the halls of Georgia schools.

The Georgia Prevention Project reaches the heart of local communities to shine a blaring light into the dark shadows of prescription drug misuse and abuse.

In the captivating “Out of Reach” documentary, a teen filmmaker, in collaboration with director Tucker Capps (of A&E’s “Intervention”) and the Partnership for Drug Free Kid’s Medicine Abuse Project, captures the countrywide issue of teen prescription drug abuse. A teenager highlighted in the film shares a first time experience that led to addiction. “I don’t remember what it was, but it was a pain killer. So he gave me two of those and it just didn’t hurt anymore.”

Georgia Rx Abuse Project Receives Community Grant to Implement Program

America’s biggest drug problem isn’t on the streets—it’s in our medicine cabinets. Prescription drug misuse and abuse is a dirty affair, causing more overdoses than street drugs, such as cocaine, heroin and meth.

The Georgia Prevention Project recently launched the Georgia Rx Abuse Project to educate teens about the risks of abusing prescription drugs. The program primarily targets college-age students. Research shows this group abuses and misuses prescription drugs at higher rates than most demographics.

This summer, the Georgia Rx Abuse Project received a Cardinal Health Foundation Prescription Drug Abuse and Misuse Prevention Grant. The Georgia Prevention Project partnered with three community-based organizations to gain the funding—Pike County Family Connection in Zebulon, Columbia County Community Connections in Grovetown, and the Family Alliance of Paulding County in Dallas.

“At the end of September, the Georgia Prevention Project debuted “Out of Reach” during community meetings in Columbia and Pike counties. By design, these events provoke discussion, which then permeates into homes and schools across the state. Statistics indicate kids are less likely to use when parents talk with them about drugs.

“we’ve been doing drug prevention in schools since 2006,” stated Executive Director Linda Verscharen with The Family Alliance of Paulding County, which conducts at least 10 community events around meth and prescription drug abuse prevention each year. “Most recently we hosted a Drug Take Back Day during our annual public safety event in October.”

The grant project is funded for one year.
The Georgia Prevention Project gained a new and important leader when Larry Connolly joined the organization this summer as its new chairman.

Larry brings a wealth of business and non-profit management experience to the organization. After a long and successful career as head of his own financial services companies, he now serves as President of the Connolly Family Foundation and on the boards of multiple non-profit organizations. Most notably, he serves as president of CURE Childhood Cancer, headquartered in Atlanta.

“I am delighted to help the Georgia Prevention Project as it moves forward into its next phase – expanding its programs to reach more Georgians and save more lives.”

Lee Shaw, co-founder of the Georgia Meth Project and its successor the Georgia Prevention Project, stepped down as chairman of the organization this past summer. He remains as a board member and advisor to GPP.

“After six years of great progress and rewarding work, it was time for me to step aside and let others take the lead,” Lee explained. “I believe it is a healthy process for all organizations to periodically change leadership.”

Lee helped create the Georgia Meth Project in 2008 after he was invited by then Georgia Attorney General Thurbert Baker to a meeting about the methamphetamine epidemic sweeping many parts of Georgia. Baker included technology entrepreneur Tom Siebel in the meeting who had created the Meth Project as a major initiative of the Siebel Foundation.

Since the creation of the Georgia Meth Project, the organization has raised more than $18 million in cash and in-kind media contributions from private and business
Larry stated recently, “I am hopeful that I can carry forward in the dedicated tradition of founder and past chairman, Lee Shaw. I was flattered when he called and asked me to consider this position.”

In his business career, Larry was the CEO of Connolly LLC, serving healthcare payers and retailers. Connolly, LLC was sold to Advent International in 2012 and then merged with Atlanta-based iHealth Technologies in May of 2014.

Lee offered a glowing review of his successor. “Larry grasps the issues very quickly, and he shows great enthusiasm for our mission. His non-profit work exhibits a great track record of working to save and improve lives.”

Larry earned his undergraduate degree at Washington and Lee University and an MBA from Tulane University. He serves on the boards of two initiatives at Washington and Lee – the Shepherd Program for the Interdisciplinary Study of Poverty, and the Entrepreneurship Program. Additionally, he serves on the boards of Connolly iHealth, LLC of Atlanta, and several small start-up enterprises.

In addition to his continuing association with the Georgia Prevention Project, Lee will also continue as a member of the Board of Directors of the Partnership for Drug Free Kids, headquartered in New York City. The Partnership is the oldest drug-prevention organization in the United States. The Georgia Prevention Project is an affiliate of the Partnership.

"Thanks to Lee’s leadership, we have been able to save countless lives and families in Georgia from the devastating impact of methamphetamine."

GPP Executive Director Jim Langford stated, “We are grateful for his energy, his commitment and his ongoing counsel to the organization.”

Sources. The organization rebranded itself earlier in 2014 as the Georgia Prevention Project in order to expand its drug prevention work beyond meth. GPP now continues to grow the Georgia Meth Project while also launching the Georgia RxAbuse Project to prevent abuse of prescription drugs in the state.

The Georgia Meth Project responded with the Meth Prevention Lesson (MPL), an online educational tool offered to teachers to enable them to educate students about the dangers of methamphetamine use.

The MPL communicates the risks of meth use through powerful images and stories of real experiences that teenagers have faced from using meth. It provides middle and high school teachers with engaging, easy-to-use materials that bring to life the breadth of research on the subject in a way that is highly interactive and accessible to young people.

For the first time, The Georgia Prevention Project introduced the MPL in Dublin-Laurens County to middle school students at East Laurens Middle School. During the 2014-2015 school year, we will target more schools in southeast Georgia, as we work tirelessly to expand our reach. The Georgia Prevention Project will also create an Rx Abuse Prevention Lesson to be taught in middle and high schools.

We encourage all Georgia school districts to partner with us to conduct system-wide teacher trainings on the MPL. To date we have trained approximately 375 teachers, who then instructed more than 10,000 students using the MPL.

Educators who need access to the webinar for the Meth Prevention Lesson, or administrators who want training information, please call us at 404-500-4373 or email lpatrick@georgiapreventionproject.org.
New Program Coordinator to Focus on Rx Abuse

The Georgia Prevention Project welcomes another new member to the team. As our new program coordinator, Ashley Sequens is primarily responsible for establishing partnerships with colleges/universities to implement the Georgia Rx Abuse Project college initiative.

“I look forward to immersing myself in the community with the Georgia Prevention Project,” Ashley stated.

“I am committed to making an impact on our target population’s views of meth use and prescription drug abuse.”

Prior to working for the Georgia Prevention Project, Ashley volunteered with the Georgia Meth Project. A native of Kennesaw, Ashley earned her degrees locally from Kennesaw State University. She obtained her undergraduate degree in Communications with a focus in Media Relations and a master’s degree in Conflict Management.

Red Ribbon Week Kicks Off in Georgia

The state of Georgia kicked off Red Ribbon Week with an event at the Mable House Barnes Amphitheatre on October 22, 2014. The goal of this kickoff event is to get the youth involved in promoting fun activities that are safe alternatives to substance use and abuse.

The Georgia Prevention Project promoted its “Not Even Once” message to more than 1,500 students who attended the event. It was an opportunity for us to encourage drug prevention efforts by educating the public on the effects of meth use and prescription drug abuse.

Each year, Red Ribbon Week runs Oct. 23 to 31 to bring schools and communities together to demonstrate their commitment to living drug-free lifestyles. The Red Ribbon serves as a catalyst to mobilize communities to educate youth and encourage participation in drug prevention activities.