

## **Preventing Meth Abuse and Promoting Recovery with Crystal Darkness Oklahoma**

By Terri White

The health of our state directly impacts its future, and the prosperity of its people. For far too long, untreated and underserved substance abuse issues have weakened the health of our citizenry and led to many of the social ills that we face today – increased crime and incarceration, deterioration of families and communities, chronic disease and reduced quality of life. It is imperative that we as a state stand together and work to solve this problem for the benefit of our friends, families and loved-ones.

Over the past year, I have had the privilege to work on Crystal Darkness Oklahoma, a statewide initiative aimed at saving thousands from the horrific effects of methamphetamine abuse. The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services has been working with law enforcement, private businesses and other state agencies in support of this effort. First Lady Kim Henry and Burbridge Foundation President Wes Lane serve as our co-chairs.

It has been a tremendous experience to have all of these different organizations working together to target shared resources toward a common goal; however, what is vitally important to ensure our success is public support and community involvement.

Never as a state have we come together, as a whole, to address an issue such as this and said, “Enough is enough. Not anymore. Not my family. Not my community.”

This will change on the evening of Jan. 13. The Crystal Darkness Oklahoma campaign will kick-off that night with the airing of a specially produced documentary at 6:30 p.m. to be simultaneously broadcast by multiple television stations across the state. A Spanish-language version of the program will broadcast at 6 p.m. on Telemundo and Univision. The gripping 30-minute program features the powerful testimonies of people who have experienced the dark and lonely depths of meth addiction and survived to share their stories of hope and recovery.

Oklahomans can call 211 the night of the documentary and in the days that follow to receive answers to questions and links to local treatment providers. They may also use the number to report meth activity in their community. Following the airing of the documentary, phase two of the campaign begins. During this phase, prevention action teams will assist communities across Oklahoma in assessing their problems and strengths, and initiate activities to build community support and launch effective prevention efforts.

Oklahoma made headlines in 2004 with passage of one of the toughest anti-meth laws in the country. As a result, individuals always ask me whether or not meth is still an issue of concern in our state. The answer is a resounding, “Yes.”

House Bill 2176 placed restrictions on the availability of pseudoephedrine and eliminated the local supply side of the equation. However, meth use and addiction, the demand side of the equation, was not addressed. Recent trends indicate about one in every five people receiving substance abuse treatment in Oklahoma cite meth as a top drug of choice.

That is why prevention *and* treatment is so important in Tulsa and across the state. Prevention is the key if we are to curb the devastating effects of methamphetamine abuse and addiction. For those whose lives have already been impacted by this illicit drug, access to services is the key to recovery. Substance abuse and untreated addiction impact the lives of individuals, families and communities as a whole. Yet, when afforded access to appropriate care, people do recover. There is hope. Working together, we can change lives and create a healthier Oklahoma. We must intervene early and make substance abuse treatment a priority healthcare concern if we are to impact the future.

Methamphetamine directly impacts not only the user and immediate family members, but entire communities. As a community, it is our time to stand up to meth through the promotion of preventative efforts coupled with increased access to recovery. With your help, Crystal Darkness Oklahoma will be a turning point in our state's history.

I encourage you to visit [www.crystaldarknessoklahoma.org](http://www.crystaldarknessoklahoma.org) and schedule a watch party for Jan. 13. By doing so, you will join the many churches, schools, community groups, businesses and private organizations already on board.

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