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SPREADING THE WORD: Lara's Helen Torpy is a mum on a mission, teaching kids that "no" is a cool response to use under pressure.

Relief to say 'no'

HELEN Torpy said a sense of relief seemed the primary response at Lara Secondary College after a ground-breaking campaign focusing on teen drinking was launched.

It radiated from both parents and their year 7 kids.

"I think the parents are worried about kids getting involved with alcohol. They're worried about peer group pressure, the culture and I think the kids have expressed it too," said Ms Torpy, teen drinking campaigner.

"The kids have spoken to the teachers and actually said 'hey, great we don't have to drink'. Honestly, it's quite amazing. It's given parents and kids choices and we in no way wanted to come across as telling people what to do."

The campaign, branded The Smart Generation: Brains for Life, is already leading the way in Australia.

With partners including Deakin University, Communities That Care, Murdoch Children's Research Institute and Ms Torpy through her website, Keep Em Safe, the campaign aims to encourage and empower adolescents and their families to delay consumption of first alcoholic drinks until age 18.

Its motivations are many, including the growing wall of evidence pointing to the

derailing education and starting risk-taking behaviour.

The reality is startling. Research has revealed that 35 per cent of Geelong region grade 6 children have consumed a glass of alcohol and that 55 per cent of year 8 children consume alcohol.

To say under-age drinking is part of our European heritage is becoming less and less relevant, the experts maintain.

Plus now Australia and Europe have similar problems with young people and alcohol.

The Lara College program includes year 7 kids studying a Brains for Life curriculum and the campaign ambition is to make a sustained difference and help nurture the Smart Generation of young people with power to say no and brains unbruised from childhood alcohol consumption.

The Lara community has welcomed the group's method and intent and agencies including VicRoads, which is eager to act against youth deaths related to alcohol use, have flagged support.

The Smart Generation message is now on a billboard beside Forest Rd: "Think before you give 'em a drink."

More than 180 parents and children attended Thursday night's campaign

launch and young people. Her work has grown from concerns for her own children and those around them and her past achievements have included successful lobbying for new laws governing supply of alcohol to minors.

Ms Torpy told pupils at the Lara launch that saying "no" was a cool word to use under peer pressure. She told parents that boundaries might be a kid's best friend.

"If we don't learn to say no at that age, we don't learn to say no to a lot of things," Ms Torpy said. "We end up with (the) wrong friends, we end up in relationships we don't want to be in and we end up wanting to leave school."

The Smart Generation: Brains for Life is a determined homegrown mission to care and to provide kids and parents alike with power through knowledge.

That sense of relief might already point to its success.

keepmemsafe.com.au

WORD OF THE WEEK

HEY kids, here's a word you can use today: Cow, meaning to frighten or subdue or overawe with threats. Example: Dad I was impressed by the company's attempts