



Education on alcohol

By **ADAM COUZENS**

A NEW drug and alcohol education program will start at Morisset and Lake Macquarie high schools after the Easter holidays.

The initiative, funded by Centennial Coal, will be offered as an addition to the curriculum for students in years seven to 11.

It will be run by independent community-based charity Hunter Life Education, which supplies instructors for workshops at the schools.

"We're particularly concerned about under-age binge drinking," Hunter Life Education executive officer David Baker said.

"We've seen that 10 per cent of kids 12 to 17 are actually binge-drinking – that's more than five drinks in a row – on a weekly basis and that's a concern for us.

"This program that Centennial Coal are sponsoring basically gives us access to the whole school, from year seven right through to year 11.

"Each year has a different phase of the drug education program. We start

with alcohol then we go through cannabis and then through all the illicit drugs.

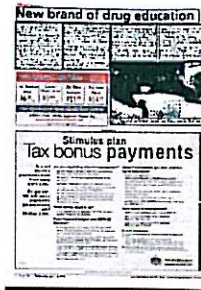
"It's done in a workshop style. Kids learn what standard drinks are, what the substances are and how they affect their bodies.

"We do a lot of work on communication, resilience to peer pressure, and hopefully by the time they reach that age where they are experimenting with alcohol, around 15 or 16, they have at least got the knowledge they need to make choices."

Hunter Life Education says 30,000 Hunter secondary students have completed similar programs since 2005.

Centennial Coal's group manager for external affairs Katie Brassil said the mining company had offered support to ensure the Morisset and Lake Macquarie schools could also gain from the resource.

"We really saw some benefit in providing some sponsorship dollars, particularly for Morisset and Lake Macquarie high school, who haven't had that program," Ms Brassil said.



New brand of drug education

HUNTER Life Education, in partnership with mining company Centennial Coal, will blitz local high schools with a new brand of drug education.

Morisset High and Lake Macquarie High will receive the revamped Alcohol and Other Drugs program through Life Education.

Life Education is a community-based, independent charity and has been at the front line of positive and preventative drug and health education in the Hunter since 1985.

In 2005, the secondary schools program Face the Facts began in the Hunter and has, so far, involved more than 30,000 students.

The Life Education high school program is led by a team of educators with updated resources on alcohol and other drugs.

The Life Education program is based on the model of the Circle of Safety which recognises that effectively educating students about drugs requires a partnership between parents, the school and Life Education. Life Education educators support and compliment the local school's drug and health initiatives.

Centennial Coal's group manager for external affairs Katie Brassil said her company's support for the new brand of drug education program built on Centennial's commitment to actively engage and support

the community.

The successful Safer Celebrating Hypothetical is one tool available to schools and the community.

Executive officer of Hunter Life Education David Baker said the hypothetical enabled schools to easily reach other agencies which promoted pro-health messages that directly contributed to effective drug education.

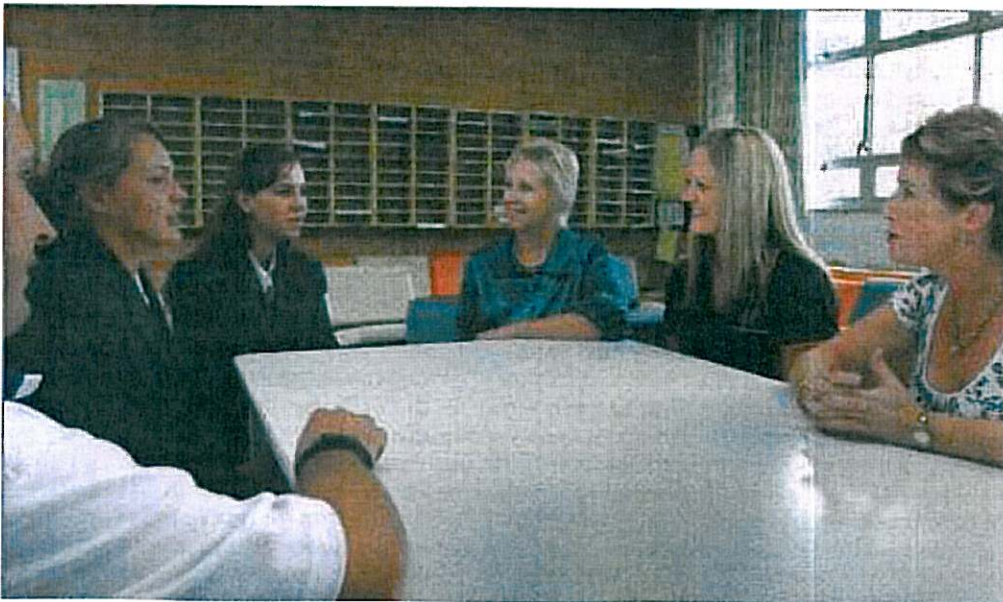
"One of the aims of the forum is to come together as a whole community to develop a response to the issues of underage drinking," he said.

"I don't think we can make this just about the parents or about the kids. It has to be a community issue and a community response."

"Alcohol is commonly used. It's affordable, widely available and it's a celebrated part of our culture – alcohol is the drug of choice for many people.

"Unfortunately, for many adults and young people we know all too well the social effects of underage drinking and the dangers of binge drinking.

"It's a sobering fact that alcohol is responsible for the deaths of more young people under 35 than any other drug. Alcohol use is a major contributing cause of hospitalisation and death."



INFO SESSION: (from left) Morisset High School head teacher of PE Josh Lyden listens as year 11 students Michelle Eastcott and Kathryn Sennett talk with Katie Brassil from Centennial Coal, Karlie McCaffrey from Life Education and school principal Karen Nicol.
Photo: JAMIE WICKS