



FIRED UP: Independent Senator John Madigan and Horsham College year 7 student Colton Preusker work on forging a fire poker. Picture: SAMANTHA CAMARRI

Senator backs school program

Forging ahead

By MATT COUGHLAN

FOR most secondary students, a typical school day probably doesn't involve forging a fire poker alongside a blacksmith-turned-federal senator.

It was a reality for students from Horsham College's Hands On Learning program on Tuesday, when Senator John Madigan visited the school.

Senator Madigan, an independent, said he had been a long-term supporter of the program.

"They engage students who fall through the cracks and young people need hope," he said.

"It's a valuable program because it is proactive not reactive – prevention is better than cure.

"I fully support hands-on learning, both financially and by coming out to visit the schools giving young people hope they can do things with a little bit of help and a little bit of encouragement."

Hands On Learning is an engagement program for students where they participate in construction and other projects.

It operates across the Wimmera in schools at Warracknabeal, Murtoa, Donald, Hopetoun and Rainbow.

Senator Madigan said Horsham's Hands On Learning students had shown positive attitudes and a willingness to have a go.

"Hands On Learning teaches the students valuable skills for life instead of waiting until they get into trouble or get disengaged from school," he said.

Senator Madigan donated a socket set to the program, before guiding students through the process of forging a fire poker.

"We made some fire pokers, something they can take home and use – hopefully to stoke the

Regional Australia suffering: Madigan

INDEPENDENT Senator John Madigan believes the heart and soul is being sucked from small towns across Australia.

Ballarat-based Senator Madigan has recently formed the Australian Manufacturing and Farming Party.

He said regional Australia was suffering.

"All's not as good as it should be in rural and regional Australia," he said.

"A lot of money leaves the regions, leaves the small towns and doesn't return.

"People don't return and I see the heart and soul being sucked out of them.

"I fear for rural and regional Australia that if we don't have some empathy and understanding, we're going to wake up and we're going to be shocked at what's left."

Senator Madigan said the Wimmera was a proven food-producing region that needed to be supported through lean years.

"Year after year after year, it's delivered," he said.

"It's had a few tough years

fire, not belt their brothers and sisters," he said.

"It's not about me saying, 'be a blacksmith', it's about saying, 'you can do things'.

"Hands On Learning really deserves to get a bit of government support for what it does.

"It's far better than the other option of not engaging young people."

College principal Rob Pyers said the program was designed

from the drought and commodity prices, but we know it's a proven performer and when things are right it delivers 10-fold.

"In this interim period where things are tough it's about getting in place policy, listening to people and engaging the community because there are some very smart, very accomplished people in the broader community who have seen the ups and downs.

"We should be harnessing their knowledge and their experience for the younger generations to help them take on the challenges of the future and not just leaving them to rot in nursing homes."

The former Democratic Labour Party senator sits on the diverse crossbenches of the federal senate.

Senator Madigan said he wanted farmers to get a fair price for their commodities.

"When things are tough for farmers we need to support them through those tough periods and encourage them," he said.

for students who needed extra support to engage in school.

"It's about developing social skills and connectedness to school," he said.

Mr Pyers said the program had engaged in a partnership with Horsham Special School.

Special school students attend the college one day a week to work on projects.