



North

Fitzroy High School program engages students interested in practical learning

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👤 Chad Van Estrop Melbourne Leader



Senator John Madigan puts on a blacksmithing workshop at Fitzroy High with students Paul 15, Myles. 14, Jen, 13 and Sol, 14.

WHEN she first walked into the gates of Fitzroy High, school was a chore for Courtney Hildebrand.

But two years later, the Year 9 student looks forward to attending school thanks to an early intervention program aimed at engaging students who have a liking for practical learning.

“The program does make me enjoy school more because now it’s more interesting,” she said.

“I don’t have to sit in a classroom all day and listen to the teacher. I get it make things like a pizza oven and using tools.”

Courtney, 15 said the program had also imbued her with confidence to be more articulate among her

peers.

Charity Hands on Learning run the program at Fitzroy High School, and 47 high schools across the state, as a precursor to the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning.

The early intervention program, which has been operating at Fitzroy High for two years, aims to keep disenfranchised 13 to 16-year olds engaged in school.

Fitzroy High Hands on Learning leader Penelope Stray said the initiative helped kids from troubled backgrounds.

“We have kids that are completely disengaged in the classroom but come to us and function amazingly,” she said.

“The reason they do this is because the confines of a pen, paper and classroom don’t work for them.”

Ms Stray said 20 students had participated in the program this year, run out of a decommissioned W Class tram at the Falconer St school.

“I’ve had students who were too scared to talk when they arrived who are now mentoring the younger kids.”

“A lot of them may have missed early steps in preschool.. and social skills and confidence are lacking.”

Victorian senator John Madigan recently visited the school to pass on his blacksmith skills which he plied until 2011.

The independent senator said the program was vital in keeping kids at school.

“Hands on Learning gives kids a sense of achievement, boosting their self-esteem, while also helping them recognise the value of what they are being taught in class.”

He said the program could help address a skills shortage in Australia and remove the need to bring in skilled migrants on 457 visas.