Practical skills: Luke Hamilton crafted a noughts and crosses set out of spare plaster and old brooms as part of the Hands On Learning challenge set by teacher and artisan Barbara Rigano.

Hands-on learning inspiring creativity at GSSC

By Georgia Rossiter

Students at Greater Shepparton Secondary College haven't let lockdown demolish their creativity.

With building projects that were part of the Hands On Learning program put on hold after Shepparton's COVID-19 outbreak, teacher and artisan Barbara Rigano decided to adapt the program for students at home.

"If they're sitting in front of the computer for the entire day, it's probably worse than sitting in the classroom so I thought I'd set them a challenge," she said.

Normally the program invites students at risk of leaving school early to engage in practical learning experiences like building and cooking.

To be part of the program, students have to work hard in other subjects and become a role model for students.

Stuck at home, Ms Rigano challenged the students to create, cook or build something out of materials they had available.

"I was just blown away with the amount of kids that actually responded," she said.
"We had straw bale creatures, we had kids cooking meals for their families, a little chook swing out of recycled furniture.

"I can't even remember all of them."

Hands On Learning student Luke Hamilton created a large noughts and crosses set out of old brooms and plaster and won one of the prizes up for grabs.

"When I'm home I always look around the house to find what I could build," he said.

"Dad helped me a bit, so we set (the brooms) up in noughts and crosses and then we had the leftover plaster from when we were doing up our house.

"That was just sitting in the shed and we cut them out with a jigsaw."

At school, Luke has also been part of projects to build bird boxes for Kyabram Fauna Park, as well as crafted mosaics, and a basketball rack.

National partnerships manager for Hands On Learning at Save the Children Australia Lisa Vagg said the program fostered a range of real-world skills in students that don't necessarily engage in the academic side of school.

"It's all about learning by doing but mostly building those social and emotional capacities that really set us up to thrive at school," she said.

GSSC executive principal Barbara O'Brien said Hands On Learning was a valued program at the school with "fantastic" success rates.

"We haven't had a student yet that hasn't enjoyed it - they all love it," she said.
Luke's mum Julie said his involvement in the program had encouraged him to become a role model for other students.

"He has grown, he's matured, he's become a leader," she said.
"I believe that it's a program that should be offered in all schools, it does make a big difference."

Hands On Learning is a national program supported by Save the Children Australia. It's run at more than 120 schools across Victoria, NSW and Queensland.

GSSC has participated in the program for five years now, with almost 100 students involved.