



# Local students trade books for cars

BY VANESSA ILICIC

**The job of repairing and painting car parts is an impossible mechanical puzzle to most people.**

But to Waikerie Independent Learning Centre (ILC) student Jake Chappell the steps are clear, and he has no doubt about his ability to fix a vehicle's panel damage – and get it mechanically sound – very soon.

These are the skills automotive students have gained through training and employment provider Bedford's Innovative Community Action Network-Flexible Learning Options (ICAN-FLO) program.

The program is currently open to Riverland students, including those at Waikerie High School and its annex the ILC, which deals with 17 to 19-year-olds who have disengaged from the education system.

For the past term, nine Waikerie students have been undertaking the Fix My Ride program, designed to teach youths the skills required to own, operate, maintain and repair their own vehicles.

The students will also learn trade-based skills from automotive professionals and earn nationally accredited qualifications, helping them to gain jobs in the industry.

Bedford organisation development and human resources manager Renee Draper said

the program works because it acknowledges some students learn best out of the classroom and in the real world.

"The importance for these young people is firstly around engagement (because) many have not been successful in the mainstream school and learning has been a negative experience," she said.

"Having the confidence to even attend a course is sometimes a big step.

"The other key component is to assist young people to identify and plan goals, and learn how to implement their planning.

"Sometimes young people do not have direction or believe they can't achieve due to many negative experiences."

But with the opportunity to study what interests them – and at their own pace – many of the students have reengaged in learning.

"The beauty of the way they (Bedford) are running this course is that it's done in a way that's real to them (students)," ILC project manager Greg Hatcher said.

"They don't need any sophisticated tools to do the repairs, so it's quite feasible that they can go and work on a car themselves and do similar sorts of work."

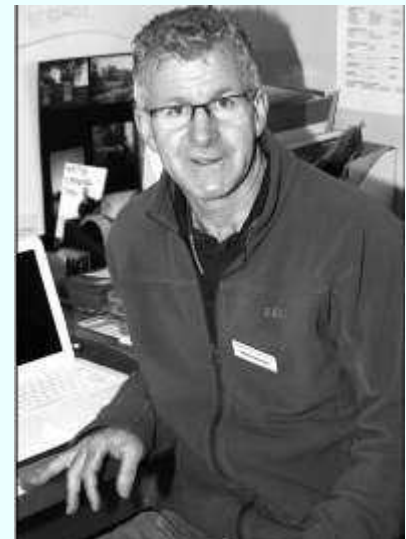
Although Mr Chappell has been repairing cars at home for some

time, he is relishing the chance to add to his skill set.

"It's good to learn how to do body work – and from an actual panel beater (Scott Muller of Riverland Enhanced Vehicles)," he said.

The 18-year-old is confident the program, which runs at Bedford's training centre in Berri, will be an asset when he later pursues automotive work at the organisation.

"Kids who can show their initiative really succeed," Mr Chappell added.



**ABOVE:** Waikerie Independent Learning Centre project Greg Hatcher says Bedford's Fix My Ride automotive program is helping local youths to reengage in learning.