

# Loddon Times

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Local news and information



## FUN BEFORE CHRISTMAS

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## SLIME CYCLE

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LEARNING. Students in a previous Wedderburn shearing school class.

# SHEAR CLASSES

JENNY DENTON

TEN young people enrolled in the Wedderburn shearing school last month, with seven of them completing the two-week course.

While some of the students had already been working as roustabouts, others had never set foot in a shearing shed before, organisers said.

One young woman, Stacey Stanickas, was among the enrollees, and kept pace with the blokes "at every turn", they said.

Chris Radcliffe, from Shearer Woolhandler Training, which runs the course in partnership with the Wedderburn Community House, said the shearing school was "basi-

cally open to everyone", and although there's a well-deserved perception that the shearing industry is a tough one, "the culture is starting to shift towards supporting female shearers."

"I'd encourage anyone to have a go at it," he said.

Mr Radcliffe said the November course gave participants "a good solid start" to the Certificate II in Shearing and Wool Handling, providing the skills and knowledge needed to get a job in the industry.

Instruction moved from an initial strong emphasis on both occupational health and safety and animal welfare to roustabouting, crutching, equipment maintenance and fleece grading, he said.

Although not necessarily very fast at it yet, by the end of the course students were competent and confident to shear, and were also ready for shed work, Mr Radcliffe said.

He praised the "collaborative approach" of the Wedderburn community in organising the school, which was an example of what was needed in rural communities that are struggling to survive, he said.

"The support from the Wedderburn community - the community house, the Lions Club and local farmers - was amazing. The Lions Club cooked all the meals, the community house organised the accommodation and local farmers organised the sheep in the shed. A

lot of people came in to encourage the kids in the program. It was an outstanding effort."

Retired farmer and wool classer, Ray Tonkin, one of a small group who initiated the shearing school in Wedderburn 15 years ago, was one of those volunteering in the background.

He said he thought this year's school had gone very well and the instruction had been excellent.

As well as organising the sheep, Mr Tonkin provided some training of his own, demonstrating to students how to make a bed and sleep on a wool bale, organisers reported.

According to Mr Radcliffe, there is strong demand for shearers and

shed hands.

Wool growers are finding it difficult to find them, and a recent 25 per cent pay increase for shearers in New Zealand will further exacerbate the problem, he said.

Projects to develop robotics for shearing, while underway, are probably 25 years off being introduced into shearing sheds, in Mr Radcliffe's view.

The next Wedderburn shearing school is likely to run around November next year.

Shearer Woolhandler Training, the training arm of the Shearing Contractors Association of Australia, runs courses in locations around Victoria.