

These trainers taking the lead

By SARAH DEAN July 20, 2013, midnight



Benalla EdSpace students Jordan McNamara and Steven Cavichio, both 17, have been working with dog trainer Yariv Ben-Yosef, centre. Pictures: MARK JESSER

THERE'S an easel in the middle of the classroom but no painting in sight.

A certified dog trainer, Yariv Ben-Yosef, asks students what they see.

The students quip there's no painting, nothing to see.

"Dogs see it," Mr Ben-Yosef said.

The point he was making to the Benalla EdSpace students was that dogs see differently to humans and pick up on things, such as anxiety or stress.

The students with special needs have been training service dogs — used by dementia patients and the emotionally or physically disabled — with the assistance of the leading dog trainer from Melbourne.

Mr Ben-Yosef has been using an interactive approach, equipping students with both animal and life skills.

"These dogs are really a tool and they help these students gain skills for life," he said.

For the past year he has been working with the Benalla students two days a week, including those completing Certificate II in animal studies through GOTAFE Wangaratta.

EdSpace principal Maggie Fanning established the partnership after her 17-year-old son Daniel acquired a service dog that had been trained by Mr Ben-Yosef.

“Daniel needed a dog that could go to school and also be at home with us,” she said.

“Before we got Shadow he couldn’t walk down the street because of his fear of children and he didn’t like the noise.

“Now he walks through the street without a problem.”

Mrs Fanning said the partnership with Mr Ben-Yosef had been fantastic.

“The kids look up to him and are engaged in his classes; that can be half the battle working with special needs children,” she said.

Student Jordan McNamara, 17, said it was nice to be giving back to the community.

“These dogs will go on to help people and there’s no better feeling than that,” he said.



Students from EdSpace Benalla training at the Benalla showgrounds.