

Productive partnerships

History

Lindsay Park and the Hayes family have established over the past 15 years the opportunity for school based students from Nuriootpa High School to complete certificates I and parts of certificate II in Racing (TB) based in the Racing Stables, at Lindsay Park Angaston. The model has been a blend of theory sessions, some provided by the teachers in the Agriculture department who have been able to cover the generic units, such as OH&S to compliment the learning guides, workbooks and practical experience gained in the racing stables. Some course have involved 7 or 8 students at a time and it has not be unusual for those who have completed certificate I to return the following year to undertake Certificate II.

Developments

With support from Barossa Lower North Futures (BLNF), Balaklava High School encouraged students along a similar pathway and in the formative years, a local horse owner / trainer provided a similar opportunity for school based learners to undertake Certificate I. When that local trainer was no longer able to continue, Lindsay Park was able to offer assistance.

By the time this opportunity arose, Lindsay Park management had recognised the value of having a suitably qualified person on their team to provide structured induction, on site training and support for a range of employees undertaking Certificates II to IV in the workplace. It was then a logical next step for Lindsay Park to become involved in what we have described as 'out reach' work in schools. Students from as far afield as Streaky Bay and Mildura were already seeking work experience opportunities at Lindsay Park and so we were pleased to be able to work in partnership with BLNF to take the next step. Our trainer then became part of a small team with Balaklava High School for the students interested in Certificate I and later on, Certificate II.

The structured approach to the training offered was enhanced by a formal induction process for each student on arrival for work experience and a formal appraisal at the end of the week. The appraisal provides the opportunity to consider a range of developing knowledge, skills and competence with a focus on the employability skills, such as:

1. <i>Attention to Detail</i> - all work completed leaving no loose ends
2. <i>Communication</i> - able to communicate effectively with customers, co-workers and management
3. <i>Dependability</i> - completes given tasks with minimum supervision
4. <i>Initiative</i> - willing to perform all tasks without continuous supervision and provides useful feedback
5. <i>Job Knowledge</i> - demonstrates full understanding of job requirements carrying out standard operating procedures
6. <i>Occupational Health and Safety</i> - carries out all requirements and demonstrates duty of care for self and others
7. <i>Organisational Skills</i> - performs tasks in a planned and organised manner
8. <i>Teamwork</i> – cooperates with others and shares the workload

Coupled with an assessed level of competence, the students are provided with a sense of achievement and accomplishment. These achievements have led to further recognition of this regional initiative for VET in schools.

Success breeds success

In the meantime, Julie Fielder, CEO of Horse SA been very proactive in drawing together teachers from across the State to share their experiences and develop ideas for taking forward education in schools related to equine employment and the racing course in particular. In our own region, schools at Eudunda, Burra and through to Hawker became involved. Our Trainer, Louise Milton participated in a Certificate I course for students of the Burra Community School and used the facilities and horses provided by Graham Radford of the Burra Trail Riding Centre for the practical sessions. For each course there would be at least one visit to Lindsay Park and others arranged to Alan Scott Park, Morphettville Equine Clinic and so forth. Most often, school based learners would have the opportunity to complete their 100 hours of work experience either at Lindsay Park or with other stables, some of which are Racing Stables but not all.

Threats

Selling a career in the racing industry is not easy as we all know. There are perceptions and preconceived ideas that are held by parents, the students themselves and the schools about the nature of the course and its relationship to the racing industry and what it has to offer. The association between the race horse and gambling is one of the challenges we often have to deal with. Another is a lack of knowledge about options and career prospects across the various facets of racing and breeding horses, be it thoroughbred or harness.

In an attempt to widen the net, it would perhaps be easier to run a generic Certificate I which would equip young people to handle horses safely and learn about standard procedures such as catching and restraining horses; rugging horses and other tasks that would be applicable in any equestrian employment situation. It is argued that the value of the course in its present format is that it meets a defined industry requirement. Perhaps there is a middle road solution for the racing industry certificate to be fashioned as a more inclusive certificate, working with other groups to provide a generic entry qualification with a nominated number of hours for racing. Or perhaps develop a system for recognition of prior learning as part of the process. I leave this matter for further discussion.

Opportunities

One of the most important opportunities from our experience is attracting the students into our workplace. Often when young people come into the work place, it is that experience which informs the choices that they make for the future. Through constant review of approach to the training and work experience, we enable students to gain a genuine insight. The outcomes are many and varied, as you would expect. Some students struggle to be weaned off their mobile phones while others some become engrossed in their new experiences and quickly assume a level of responsibility. Some can see opportunities for training to become a track rider, which may then provide an income to support further study or travel.

This first experience in the workplace may become an entry point to gain confidence in handling horses and determine other career choices such as veterinarian or scientist, sports journalist or to make a move into breeding and bloodstock. Others through their work experience find that their passion for horses can be channeled into a career as a strapper and horse handler and take considerable pride in the presentation of their charges for training and preparation in racing.

It is fair to say that for many, a career in our industry has little financial reward when compared with other career choices. It may not be everyone's cup of tea to work the hours of a stablehand, starting on a cold at frosty morning before the sun gets up, or to be working 13 mornings out of every 14. However, employers can

put together employment packages that offer flexible working hours; education including exchange programmes; travel and subsidized accommodation; all of which help to attract and retain people. Employers need to be aware that they are on show in this partnership and that the rewards of working in our industry are part of the information that a student can gain. For other students, it may be the case that they learn enough to know that working in our industry is not for them.

Sitting on my desk on Tuesday afternoon was a letter from a Senior School coordinator which read:

“Thank you for having one of our students for Work experience recently.

The placement provided valuable opportunities for the student to observe work practice and the environment to learn work skills, to develop personal skills in dealing with adults and the community and to gain useful advice in relation to career decisions and opportunities.”

A willingness to be involved in vocational education in schools, developing the productive partnerships and providing an individual experience for each student has many benefits. Comparison with other sports disciplines would suggest that even at the year 10 stage, we are not tapping into this audience at a young enough age. However, that’s a subject for another day!

I am grateful to Louise Milton, our Trainer who has embraced the challenge of our ‘out reach’ work in schools and who has travelled long distances to make this partnership come alive. To the schools, teachers, parents and students who have participated in the programmes, congratulations. Working together, with the excellent coordination of Barossa Lower North Futures, we have achieved a productive partnership. I wonder what the future will hold, “moving forward”.

Sarah Adams

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