**Planting a career in horticulture has bloomed into accredited industry certificates for eleven local secondary students.  The Berendale School and Montague Continuing Education Centre students, who undertook this School Based Traineeship program during 2013, are now the very proud recipients of a Certificate II in Horticulture qualification and a step closer towards a career in this industry.**

Some graduate students are already looking at future horticulture careers, something many hadn’t considered until taking part in the program.  Year 12 student Jonathon is hoping to find a landscaping apprenticeship or to undertake landscaping training at TAFE next year and he believes that all of the skills he has developed in his horticulture program will make his transition a lot simpler.

The Horticulture Program was launched in 2013 and is an innovative joint venture program between ATEP, Franklyn Scholar and Berendale School.  The program allows students to spend one day per week in paid employment at Berendale School, one day in vocational training and the remainder of the week in their senior school studies.  The program, which also involved the support of Marriott Employment Options, has enabled students to gain technical horticulture skills and employability skills that will benefit their future careers in the growing horticulture or other industries.

This year’s students undertook gardening and landscaping projects, learned to pave pathways, and are now skilled in the use of tools and machinery and knowledgeable about plants and gardening processes.  Students, staff and visitors alike are astounded with the work achieved by the group during the year and younger students are now keen to join the program when they are older.

Stuart Davies, ATEP Projects and Compliance Manager, said that “at the beginning, some students were not able to operate a push lawn mower but are now using a ride-on mower safely and with confidence”. Stuart also said that, “the fact that it is a ‘hands-on’ program enables students to work outside and immerse themselves in physical learning and skill development rather than always learning inside a classroom”.

Experienced horticultural trainer Nicole McLeish, from Franklyn Scholar, said that “A significant aspect of the program has been supporting the students to develop the employability skills desired by all employers, regardless of the industry or sector”.  Over the year, students have developed resumes, built on their communication skills, and learned how to manage time and work with colleagues.

Paula Barnett, Principal of Berendale School, is extremely proud of the students and grateful to the program partners for developing a traineeship program “that will lead to future employment opportunities for these very capable and committed young people who are about to embark on the next stage of their lives”.  Paula looks forward to welcoming the next group of students, coming from a range of schools in the southern region, into the program in 2014.