



# Try, Test and Learn Fund

## Initiative: *Support to Skills*

Location: New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory

Using insights from the Priority Investment Approach, the Try, Test and Learn Fund is gathering evidence on new or innovative approaches to addressing barriers to work.

The Try, Test and Learn Fund will help achieve the objectives of welfare reform — that is, to develop a modern welfare system that increases the capacity of individuals, reduces the risk of welfare dependency and maintains a strong welfare safety net.

## What were we trying to achieve?

To increase apprenticeship completion rates and create a skilled, resilient young workforce positioned for financial independence through enhancing the mental wellbeing of apprentices employed by small businesses.

## What was *Support to Skills*?

Young apprentices and small business owners were supported to address barriers to apprenticeship completion caused by the impact of mental health issues in the workplace.

The project was designed to offer young apprentices, aged 16 to 25 years and experiencing mild to moderate anxiety, depression or other symptoms, evidence-based support — Beyond Blue's *NewAccess* program. Trained coaches offered up to six free sessions of low-intensity cognitive behavioural therapy via video, telephone or face-to-face. Participants needing more support were to be referred to other services, such as headspace.

The project design included support for small businesses that host young apprentices to provide a mentally healthy workplace. *Support to Skills* staff were to work with businesses to identify psychological risks in the workplace and provide support, including Mental Health First Aid training.

## What does the evidence tell us?

- Young unemployed people face a variety of barriers to further education and employment. Data from the National Centre for Vocational Educational Research (2018) shows that 47 per cent of all apprentices who commenced in 2013 did not complete their training, 29 per cent withdrew within the first year, and small businesses tend to have lower apprenticeship completion rates.
- If nothing changes, 42 per cent of 16–21 year olds currently receiving Youth Allowance (other) or Disability Support Pension with mental health as the primary condition will be receiving income support payments in 10 years, and 33 per cent will be receiving income support payments in 20 years.

## Fast facts

**Note:** This project has ended.

**Priority group:** At-risk young people

**Target participant number:** 1,000  
(Actual number: 18)

**Locations:** Bathurst, Orange, Dubbo and Canberra

**Trial period:** 14 months

**Total funding:** \$1,292,868

**Service provider:** Marathon Health

**Potential future saving:** The purpose of these initiatives is to test whether an intervention works to reduce long-term reliance on welfare. If around 72 per cent of participants (13) are prevented from moving onto income support because of this project, the savings to the welfare system are likely to outweigh the costs of the project.

**Note:** This project ceased early at the request of the provider.

## How was this initiative new and innovative?

The project was designed to test whether early intervention therapy, delivered flexibly using phone and video technology, could improve employment and training outcomes. Support to Skills was also designed to test the effectiveness of a mental health service that engages both individuals and workplaces, rather than individuals alone.