



Try, Test and Learn Fund

Initiative: *Finding Strengths*

Location: Victoria

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 are we trying to achieve?

Improvements in the education and employment outcomes of people with undiagnosed learning difficulties who are offenders on parole or on community correction orders, and/or recovering from drug use, and living in the Hume Region of Victoria.

What is *Finding Strengths*?

Participants in this project are referred by the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety. They are assessed by the department as having a high to moderate risk of reoffending, as well as a high to moderate need for education and employment support.

People referred to *Finding Strengths* are assessed by a registered psychologist or speech pathologist and those with one or more learning difficulties have their condition explained and profiled. They are offered a place in a two-day-a-week, accredited training and treatment program specifically designed for adults with learning difficulties. Participants are also provided with work experience opportunities with local employers, and are assigned a mentor. Upon successfully completing the training, participants receive a Certificate II in General Education for Adults.

What does the evidence tell us?

- There exists a group of people for whom day-to-day living in a literacy-based society presents particular barriers to education and work. These barriers can also impact the life choices people make.
- While learning difficulties are not conditions that automatically lead to crime, research indicates an abnormally high incidence of undiagnosed learning difficulties among offenders. Nearly half of all Australian adult offenders released from prison will return to prison within two years.

How is this initiative new and innovative?

There does not appear to be any program in Australia offering profiling and treatment of learning difficulties to offenders. Many of the project participants are unaware they have learning difficulties so this is the first time they have access to appropriate supports and modifications enabling them to engage with education.

Fast facts

Priority group: Other

Target participant number: 150

Locations: Wodonga, Wangaratta, Seymour and Shepparton

Trial period: 21 months

Total funding: \$1.45 million

Service provider: The Centre for Continuing Education with the Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria

Potential future saving: This project supports a group of people identified through the provider's experience in working with vulnerable people, and other research. To date, potential future savings for this group have not been calculated. Such a calculation may be possible once data on participants in this project is available if an appropriate comparison group can be identified.