



READY FOR TAKEOFF: NESAY and SOAR representatives including Michelle Lilley, Leah Waring, Ian Lilley, Colleen Drury and Mark Strack, are working together to launch an aviation-based program helping at risk youth. PHOTO: Luke Plummer

Soaring higher

TWO local organisations will join forces to help get a program supporting at risk youth off the ground, with the help of funding from the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR).

North East Support and Action for Youth Inc (NESAY) will partner with SOAR Youth Development Inc to enable 12 students aged between 14 and 17 who are at risk of disengaging from school, to participate in SOAR; a program which uses the principles of aviation to teach risk management and life skills.

NESAY executive officer Leah Waring said the funding of about \$10,630 will allow three groups of four students living in the Wangaratta, Indigo and Alpine shires, to participate in the program.

The students would be invited to take part in the two-day course based at Wangaratta airport run by trained



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volunteers, where lessons learnt in the classroom relating to risk taking and decision making, are followed up in a plane.

Ms Waring said the first round of the program is expected to kick off in Wangaratta in August, with the NESAY team to work with schools in the region and identify young people who fit the criteria, would benefit from, and be interested in, the program.

She said the program was a great initiative which gave kids the opportunity to try something new, push themselves and build their self-confidence and resilience.

"By partnering with SOAR we'll be giving young people the opportu-

nity to try the program and then our support team will be able to reinforce it when they go back to school - so it's not just a one off event," she said.

"They will be learning skills to take back with them to school and at home."

Funding received from the FRRR follows on from a community grant of \$5000 which SOAR received from the Rural City of Wangaratta earlier this year, which was used to purchase equipment including a data projector and laptop for its classroom.

SOAR coordinator and pilot Ian Lilley said the funding boost will help get the program off and running and hopefully enable the charity to secure its long term future.

"This funding will enable us to get the runs on the board, helping us show corporations we're not just a concept, and hopefully encourage them to partner with us to keep it going," he said.