



**LOOKING UP:** Soar Youth Development Inc founder Ian Lilley with Wangaratta's Daniel Nottle, 15, and William Mell, 15, from Wahgunyah at Wangaratta airport on Wednesday. **Pictures: JAMES WILTSHIRE**



**IN CONTROL:** Daniel and Will took part in the second program, an aviation-based course teaching risk management and life skills on the ground and in the air.



**MOTIVATED:** Mr Lilley is also a CFA member and was motivated to create the program to support kids going through a rough patch - it got off the ground in 2016.

# Emotional journey for teens mid-air

BEING at the controls of a plane stalling at 20,000 feet is overwhelming - but what's even more intense is the feeling of accomplishment, taking back control of that flight.

This is part of the emotional roller-coaster Ian Lilley takes teenagers on, through his Soar Youth Development program.

The CFA member and part-time flight instructor kicked off the initiative for at-risk youth last year, after a two-year push to get it off the ground - literally.

"We're doing this to see a change in the kids," he said. "We talk to them about risk management - there's bad and good risk, and life would be boring without it. "We teach them about the aircraft and themselves."

The volunteer-run program partners with North East Action for Youth Inc and was modelled off Newcas-le's Lift Youth Development.

The first four kids to participate in the second round undertook classes - on both life and flying - before getting in a Cessna 152 with an instructor on Wednesday.

"The last lesson is about resilience," Mr Lilley said. "We take them up and stall the plane - the aircraft drops and they have to control their emotions, pull it together and draw on what they've learned on the ground.

"When you ask, 'Did you think you'd be landing a plane on your own today?', it just blows their mind."

Wahgunyah's William Mell, 15, was referred to Soar by his school counsellor. "I learned about safety, confidence, risk and emotions," he said.

"I wanted to do it just to prove that I am not afraid of myself or anyone else and to not be judged by family or friends."

- ELLEN EBSARY