



COMMUNITY CONNECTORS REPORT

DANDENONG

Jul 2024 - Dec 2025



**SOUTH EAST
COMMUNITY
LINKS**

Acknowledgment of Country



South East Community Links and Metro Trains respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work. We pay respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging, and to their cultural and spiritual connections to Country.

Executive Summary



Disorderly conduct offences fell 85% since the program started.

Between July 2024 and December 2025, the Community Connectors Program continued to deliver significant and measurable impact across Dandenong, Springvale, and Noble Park. Delivered in partnership with Metro Trains Melbourne, the program provides a trauma-informed, place-based outreach model that strengthens community safety, supports vulnerable individuals, and reduces operational pressures within busy transport environments.

Across the reporting period, Community Connectors supported 4,658 people and completed 2,451 engagements, responding to complex and intersecting needs including homelessness, mental health concerns, social and financial exclusion, and alcohol and other drug challenges. The team facilitated 359 warm referrals to specialist services, helping people overcome barriers such as system navigation difficulties, cultural and language differences, and limited access to formal supports. The program's presence continues to play a central role in improving safety.

Since its commencement, disorderly and offensive conduct at Dandenong Station has reduced by 85%, and overall crime at the station decreased by 19%. Through early intervention, the team de-escalated 92 situations and prevented a further 153 incidents from escalating.

These outcomes reflect a consistently safer environment for both passengers and staff.

In November 2025, SECL and Metro expanded the initiative by introducing the Roaming Community Connector Model across Springvale and Noble Park. This flexible approach allows the team to adjust operating hours to match community demand and maintain visibility during high-risk periods. At Springvale, Community Connectors supported individuals experiencing rough sleeping, AOD use and mental-health-related distress, offering practical assistance and stabilising responses. At Noble Park, staff provided an essential presence during busy after-school periods, engaging with large groups of students, de-escalating conflict, promoting safety, and building trusting relationships with young people navigating crowded station environments.

Together, the roaming model and the established Dandenong presence have strengthened early-intervention capacity, improved coordination between services, and enhanced safety across the local transport network. The program continues to demonstrate its effectiveness as an innovative partnership model that improves wellbeing, reduces harm, and contributes to more connected and resilient communities.

Contents

04	About Metro and SECL	10	Australian Crime and Prevention Awards
05	Background	11	Roaming Model
06	Dandenong Impact Overview	12	Partnership in Action
07	Reach and Impact	14	Summary
09	Community Safety	15	Next Steps



About Metro

Metro Trains Melbourne (Metro) operates and maintains the metropolitan rail service in Melbourne, transporting approximately 500,000 passengers daily.

With more than 7,000 employees, Metro aims to encourage the Melbourne community's vibrant, ever-evolving lifestyles by providing a seamless transport solution that keeps individuals connected.

Metro maintains and renews the railway network to ensure its assets are safe and operate reliably. It also partners with the State Government to deliver city-shaping projects and build Melbourne's railway of the future.

Metro is committed to having a positive social impact in the communities it serves. Through initiatives focused on reconciliation, social partnerships, and community education, it aims to strengthen, unify and support the Melbourne community and beyond.

About SECL

Established in 1970, South East Community Links (SECL) operates with the vision that every person counts and every system should be fair. It works alongside multicultural communities in Melbourne to offer trusted place-based and people-centred services.

Guided by the core values of equity, inclusion, compassion, dignity, diversity and choice, SECL values the skills, perspectives, and experiences that multicultural communities bring to the organisation and broader society.

In partnership with governments, communities and businesses, SECL delivers culturally responsive, coordinated and effective services that meet clients' needs.

Spanning multiple locations, SECL's services include emergency relief, assertive outreach, community programs and support, youth and family services, homelessness and housing support, financial counselling, family violence support and settlement services.

Background

South East Community Links (SECL) and Metro Trains Melbourne (Metro) formed a partnership in 2023 to pilot the Community Connectors Program at Dandenong Station. The initiative introduced an innovative, first-of-its-kind place-based community outreach model to reduce incidents that negatively impact public safety and station operations. Behaviours such as anti-social conduct and trespassing can affect the wellbeing of passengers and staff, while also causing service disruptions and operational delays.

The program supports passengers and local community members who experience multiple and complex challenges, including mental health concerns, homelessness, substance use issues, family violence, and housing insecurity. SECL provides highly trained and qualified Community Connectors with multidisciplinary expertise in youth work, mental health, substance use support, service coordination, and program and team leadership.

Community Connectors engage with individuals in a respectful, trauma-informed, and dignified manner. Their work focuses on building rapport and trust, offering practical assistance, and supporting service navigation. This includes connecting people with housing, mental health, health, safety, and community supports, as well as de-escalating volatile situations to maintain a safer station environment.

During the pilot phase (24 July 2023 - 30 June 2024), the Community Connectors Program delivered significant and measurable impact, demonstrating its value to both Metro's operational environment and the broader community.

Key outcomes included:

- 2451+ engagements with passengers and community members
- 188 referrals to additional services and supports
- 54 incidents safely de-escalated, preventing escalation and reducing operational risk
- A further 49 situations where early intervention prevented potential harm
- 50–60 individuals supported through flexible casework
- 18 individuals supported through intensive casework

These outcomes highlight the program's effectiveness in reducing safety risks, improving customer experience, and strengthening connections between vulnerable community members and essential services.

Due to the demonstrated success and strong operational impact at Dandenong Station, the program was extended in 2024 and expanded to include Frankston Station, extending its reach across another high-priority location on the Metro network.

4658
people supported

Dandenong Impact Overview

The Community Connectors Program continued to play a critical role in supporting community safety and wellbeing at Dandenong Station.

Dandenong Station sits at the heart of one of Victoria's most diverse and dynamic communities. Greater Dandenong is home to residents from more than 150 nationalities, making it the most culturally diverse municipality in the state; nearly 69% of residents speak a language other than English at home.

The station functions as a major public transport interchange and is a key connection point for large numbers of students who rely on the network to travel to and from school each day.

Community Connectors provided an accessible, trauma-informed presence at the station, proactively engaging community members who may otherwise fall through service gaps.

Throughout the reporting period, the program supported 4,658 people and completed 2,451 engagements, demonstrating the ongoing need for coordinated, on-site assistance for individuals facing multiple and intersecting challenges.

Engagements were highest among young people aged 15-24, with the next largest cohort being those aged 35-44. Consistent with previous trend from the pilot program in 2023, males remained the primary demographic engaging with the Community Connectors.

More than 359 people were linked to specialist support services illustrating the vital role Community Connectors play in navigating a service system that at times feels overwhelming or inaccessible for some. The most common presenting issues related to social and financial exclusion, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, and homelessness, needs that typically require multi-agency coordination rather than single-service responses.

For many individuals engaging at Dandenong Station, the complexity of their circumstances, coupled with barriers such as limited system knowledge, cultural and language differences, past negative experiences with services, or difficulty attending appointments, makes them unlikely to access help without active support. The Community Connectors play a crucial enabling role by offering warm referrals, advocating across services, and coordinating pathways that would otherwise remain out of reach.

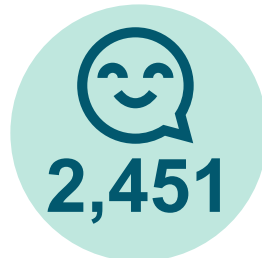


Reach and Impact

Jul 2024 to Dec 2025



people supported

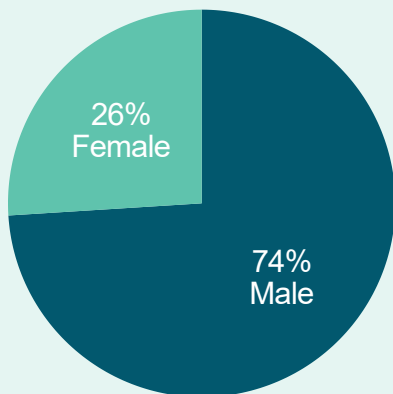


engagements

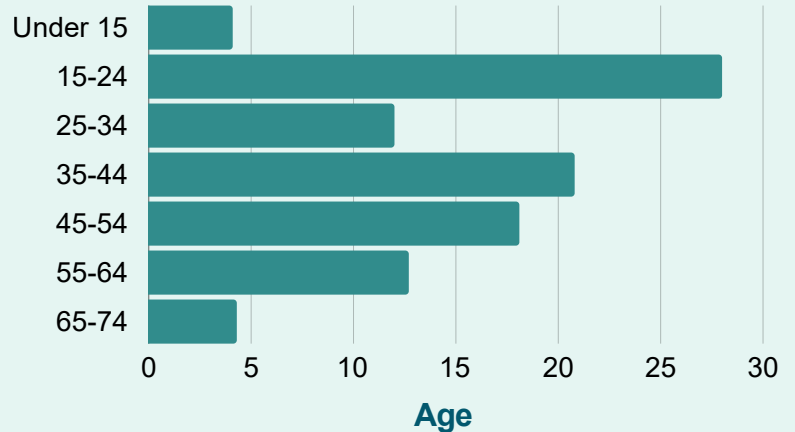


referrals to specialist support services

Demographics



Gender



Age

Presenting Issues

514 Inclusion (Social & Financial)

490 Mental Health

372 Alcohol and Drug

228 Homelessness

Supporting Emergency Services

74 Times community connectors supported emergency services

153 Incidents where harm was prevented

92 Situations de-escalated

Case study: Jonathon

Resilience and recovery

Jonathon's journey

- Frequent user of Dandenong Train Station
- Faces complex mental health issues, a history of substance abuse, housing challenges and a strong sense of disconnection from the community
- Expressed a concern about getting caught up in the justice system and re-offending
- Secured a one-bedroom apartment in Collingwood.



*Feels like life is picking up.
- Jonathon*

Supports provided

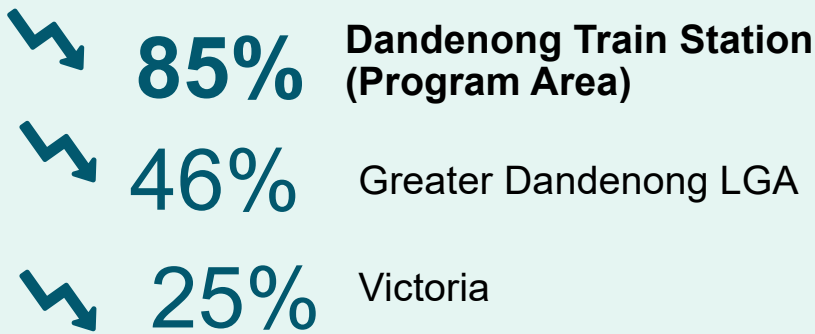
- Team have been working with him since 2024
- Regular check-ins and emergency relief provided at Dandenong, when things are getting hard
- Encouraged him to connect with Aboriginal services to explore his culture and identity.

Today

- Jonathan's long-term goal is to be able to provide for his daughter and provide her with a safe home
- His love for his daughter keeps him going and he is currently working with DFFH to ensure he can have consistent contact with her
- Working with a lawyer regarding crimes committed against him as a child.

Community Safety

Reduction in disorderly and offensive conduct offences as recorded by Victoria Police, from 2023-24



19%
reduction in all
crime at
Dandenong
station

The Crime Statistics Agency (CSA) - the independent body responsible for processing, analysing, and publishing Victoria's crime data - provides publicly available datasets that allow organisations to review local crime patterns. Drawing on CSA data, we reviewed trends at and around Dandenong Station following the commencement of the Community Connectors Program in 2023. This analysis identified an 85% reduction in disorderly and offensive conduct across 2023 and 2024, 46% reduction in the Greater Dandenong LGA, and in 2025, a 19% reduction in overall recorded crime within the station precinct.

Against this backdrop, the program continued to make a clear and consistent contribution to community safety. Community Connectors were regularly on-hand to provide timely support, addressing emerging issues early and ensuring situations remained safe and manageable. Over the year, the team assisted in 92 situations where their presence helped steady interactions and reduce escalating behaviour, and on 153 occasions, their early engagement prevented potential issues from developing further. This responsive approach supports a positive station environment, reduces operational disruptions, and increases confidence and safety for both passengers and staff.



The SECL members have been so valuable at the Dandenong RWS. The relationships and rapport that they have built with the varying community members has assisted with members at RWS. By the SECL members assisting members of the community has reduced the requirement for our involvement."

-Victoria Police

Australian Crime and Prevention Awards

Community Connector awarded Gold

The annual Australian Crime and Violence and Prevention Awards (ACVPA) recognise and reward programs that reduce crime and violence in Australia. The ACPVA are a joint initiative of the Australian, state and territory governments and are delivered by the Australian Institute of Criminology. All projects are assessed each year by the ACVPA Board, which consists of senior law enforcement representatives from each state and territory police service, and is chaired by the AIC Director.

The Community Connector program was awarded the gold award in the community based category for the role it played in reducing crime and enhancing safety at stations and contributing to safer and more inclusive public spaces.

This is an excellent initiative that promotes crime prevention and enhances community safety.

Given the encouraging results of the program with disorderly and offensive conduct down 79% and public order and security offences reduced by 59%, there is scope for adoption in other communities.

***- Deputy Director,
Dr Rick Brown, AIC***



Roaming Model

In November 2025, we introduced the Roaming Community Connector Model to increase flexibility, visibility, and early-intervention capability across Dandenong, Springvale, and Noble Park. By adjusting operating hours and assigning staff to peak times, the model enables us to respond quickly to emerging needs, enhance community safety, and build meaningful connections with vulnerable individuals.

Young people remain a key focus of our work. At Noble Park in particular, our team provides a steady and approachable presence, engaging with students during busy after-school periods, helping to de-escalate conflict, and supporting safer movement through the station. This preventative, relationship-based approach has contributed to improved wellbeing and stronger pathways into education, employment, and housing support.

Across Springvale and Noble Park, our team has engaged with a growing number of people experiencing homelessness, AOD challenges, and mental-health-related distress. Springvale continues to attract individuals sleeping rough or moving through the station early in the day, while Noble Park experiences higher volumes of young people and individuals using the waiting area for shelter and essential needs.

In both locations, our staff have played an important role in calming escalated situations, linking individuals to health and housing services, and maintaining coordinated support with Metro staff, Victoria Police, local schools, and community organisations. The combination of consistent presence and flexible case management has created smoother pathways into stable housing, improved safety on platforms, and increased trust from people who regularly interact with the transport network.

Case study

“Abdul”, an 18-year-old who migrated from Afghanistan three years ago, connected with the Community Connectors after struggling to adjust to Australia’s education system and repeating Year 11. When first engaged, Abdul was regularly spending time at Dandenong Station with peers involved in antisocial behaviour, placing him at risk of offending and disengaging further from school.

A key challenge for Abdul was navigating his new environment without strong support networks. He lacked knowledge of local systems, such as how to manage fines, and was uncertain about his future, expressing worry about following the same path as his peers. Despite these challenges, Abdul showed strong motivation to make positive changes, sharing ambitions to become a lifeguard and obtain a security licence so he could work while studying.

The Community Connectors built trust with Abdul through consistent presence and mentoring. They supported him by explaining his fine, helping him navigate administrative processes, arranging financial assistance for a security licence course, and linking him to a free gym membership to build fitness for lifeguard training. Over time, Abdul began proactively seeking guidance, attending the Dandenong office and maintaining regular contact with the team.

Abdul has since completed his security course, is preparing to finish Year 11, and is undergoing lifeguard training. He continues to work on his fitness and stays closely connected with the team for ongoing coaching and support. Overall, Abdul’s journey highlights the impact of early, relational intervention in helping at-risk young people redirect their energy into education, employment, and prosocial goals.



Partnership in Action

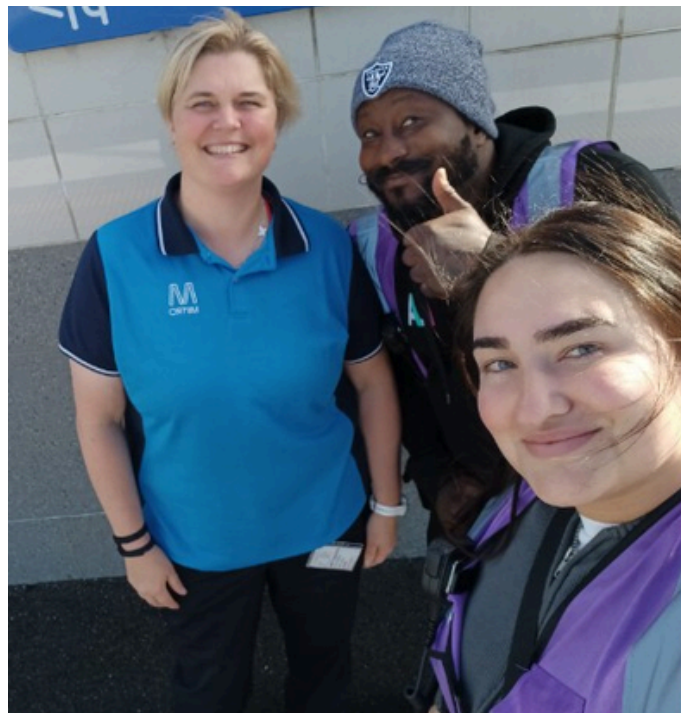
Awareness and engagement with Community Connectors is strong among passengers at Dandenong Station.



87.5% passengers surveyed knew the Community Connectors



46% of passengers had engaged with the Community Connectors



Case study: Partnership with SECL and Metro

When a community member alerted the Community Connectors to an unconscious woman near the Foster Street stairs, the team responded immediately, providing first aid, checking vital signs, and coordinating the call to Ambulance Victoria. Metro staff quickly joined, supporting with equipment and managing crowd flow to keep the area safe and accessible.

Together, the Community Connectors and Metro delivered a seamless, coordinated response:

- Rapid first aid and continuous monitoring ensured the woman received timely, stabilising care
- Metro's operational support maintained safety, redirected passengers, and created clear access for paramedics
- Community engagement by the Community Connectors kept bystanders calm and informed while emergency services worked.



This incident highlights the strength of the Metro–SECL partnership and the critical role Community Connectors play in responding to emergencies with professionalism, compassion, and collaboration.

Summary

The Community Connectors Program continues to play a vital role in improving safety, wellbeing, and support across the Dandenong, Springvale, and Noble Park station precincts.

Through place-based outreach and trauma-informed engagement, the program supports people experiencing complex challenges including mental health issues, homelessness, alcohol and other drug concerns, and social and financial exclusion while also providing reassurance and guidance to participants, regular commuters, and the broader community.

The introduction of the Roaming Community Connector Model in late 2025 strengthened the program's flexibility and reach, allowing the team to move across stations in response to emerging issues and peak activity periods. This model has enhanced visibility, improved early-intervention capability, and supported more coordinated responses across multiple locations.

Community Connectors have also built strong relationships with local community members, schools, emergency services, health and housing providers, and Metro staff, strengthening collaborative support pathways and contributing to safer, more confident station environments. Across all locations, the partnership between SECL and Metro has proven essential.

Together, both organisations have maintained a responsive, well-coordinated presence that reduces harm, prevents incidents, and ensures vulnerable individuals receive timely support.

By engaging with community members and frontline stakeholders, we continue to deepen trust, improve service navigation, and promote a safer, more inclusive transport network.



Next Steps

Looking ahead, SECL and Metro will continue to evolve and strengthen the Community Connectors Program, with several key priorities:

Refining and expanding the Roaming Model

- The roaming approach will continue to be adjusted to better align with activity patterns, school schedules, and emerging safety concerns. A core focus will be on increasing mobility between sites and ensuring the team can respond rapidly where they are most needed.

Strengthening partnerships and stakeholder engagement

- The program will build on strong relationships with Metro staff, local schools, community organisations, Victoria Police, and health and housing providers. Continued engagement with passengers and the broader community will help ensure support is accessible, visible, and culturally responsive.

Expanding to additional stations

- Given the demonstrated impact at Dandenong, Springvale, and Noble Park, planning will commence to explore the program's expansion to further priority stations within the network. This will support wider coverage, extend safety benefits, and enhance early-intervention capacity across more communities.

Enhancing communication and operational systems

- To improve coordination and safety, SECL and Metro will explore communication tools, such as radios and shared protocols, to support rapid information flow across sites.



