ED CONNECT Australia

2025 - 2026 ANNUAL REPORT







www.edconnectaustralia.org.au

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1. About EdConnect Australia

Education in Australia is facing challenges on multiple fronts, including increasing rates of school absenteeism, disruptive classroom behaviours, teacher shortages, and technological disruption. These factors, resulting in loss of instructional time have led to stagnant or declining scores in standardised tests, such as NAPLAN, highlighting a long tail of underachievement against performance baselines from earlier this century.

Teacher shortages are an increasing concern for the stability of various education systems around the world. According to the 2022 round of OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the share of students in schools whose principal reported that instruction is hindered by a lack of teaching staff increased by 21 percentage points (from 26% to 47%) between 2018 and 2022, on average (OECD, 2023).

EdConnect and our volunteers:

Research supports the value of having trusted, alternative adults in classrooms to provide emotional safety and academic motivation amongst students.

Research also suggests that students who connect with at least one trusted adult in school are more resilient and have a stronger sense of well-being.[1],[2]

Research identifies positive relationships as an important influence on children and young people's engagement in school and learning. EdConnect's volunteer programs align with two of these key factors: having an adult at school who takes a genuine interest in their wellbeing and future, and developing positive relationships with other students. While EdConnect volunteers provide the trusted adult connection, member schools have also reported improvements in peer relationships among students receiving volunteer support.(3)(4)



[1]Meltzer, A., Muir, K., & Craig, L. (2018). The role of trusted adults in young people's social and economic lives. Youth and Society, 50(5), 575–592.

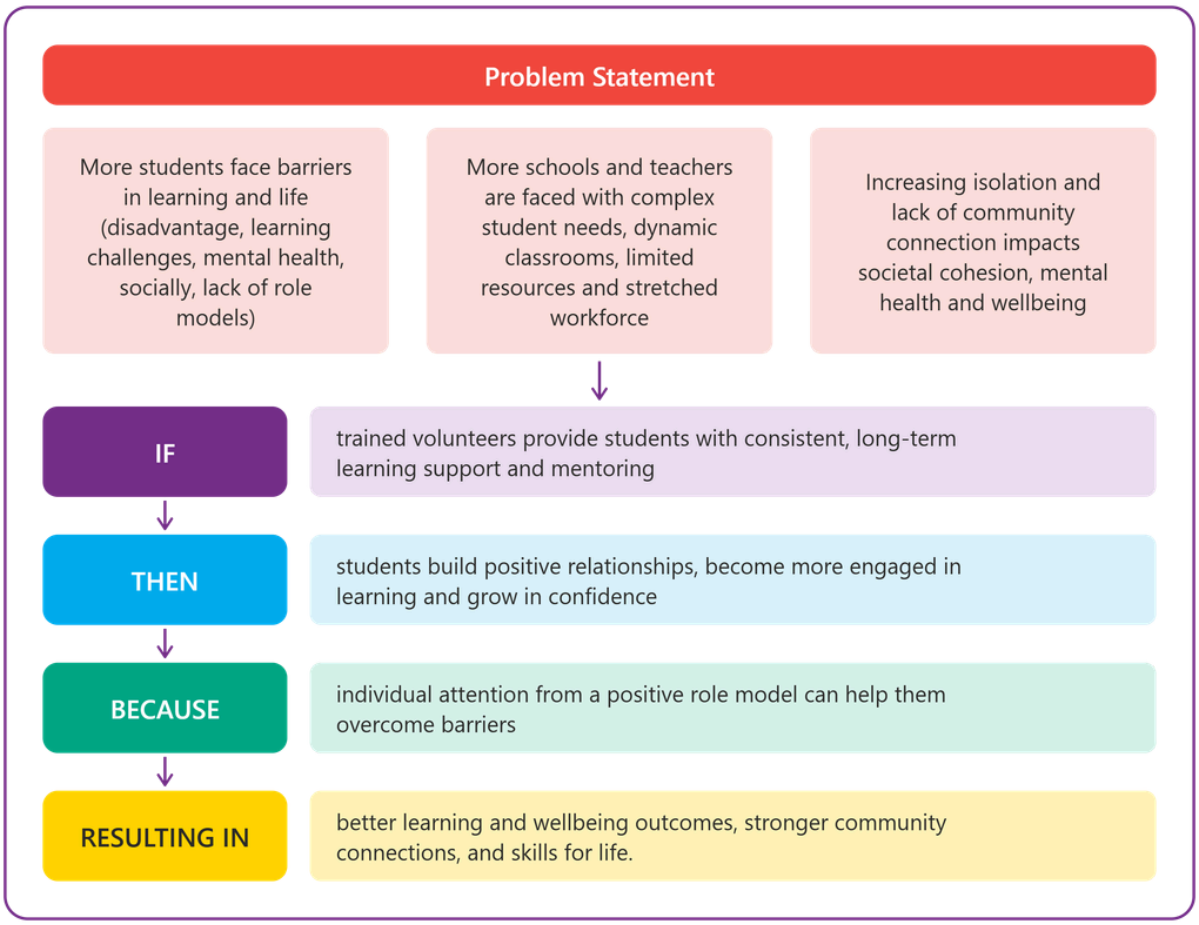
[2]Bellis, M.A., Hardcastle, K., Ford, K., et al. (2017). Does continuous trusted adult support in childhood impart life-course resilience against adverse childhood experiences - a retrospective study on adult health-harming behaviours and mental well-being. BMC Psychiatry, 17(110).

[3]Ref: Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia (2018) Speaking out about School and Learning

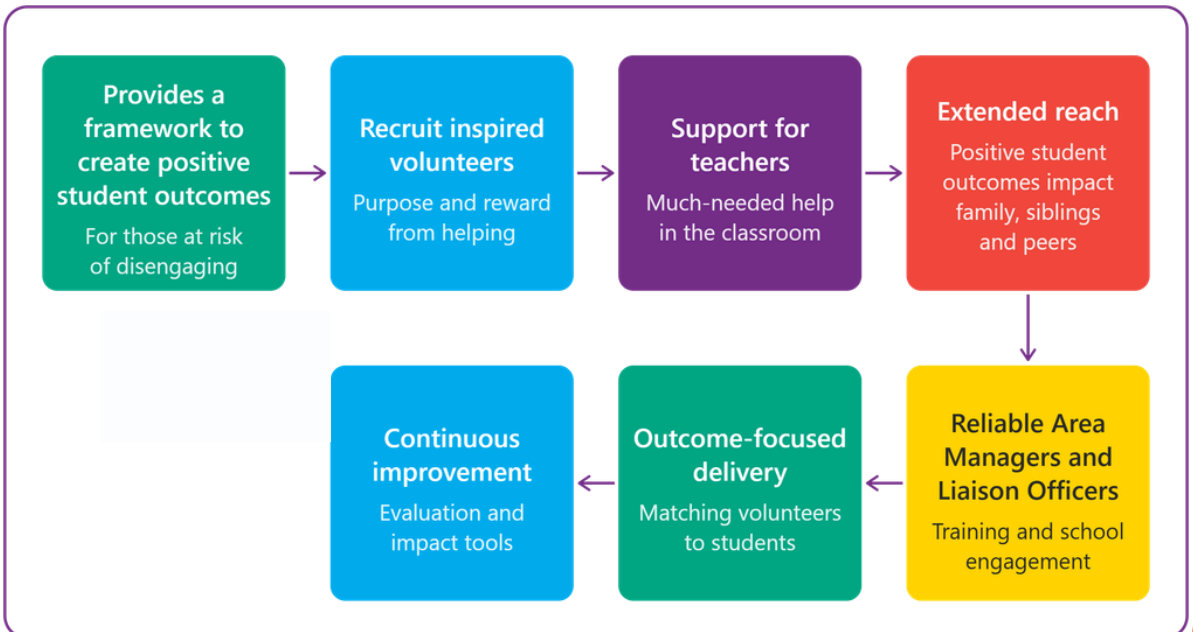
[4]Ref: End of Year School Surveys (Avge 78% of respondent schools agreed or strongly agreed)

2. Theory of Change

Across our communities, more students are facing barriers to learning and life, teachers are stretched by growing classroom demands, and many people feel increasingly disconnected from those around them. EdConnect exists to help close these gaps. Our theory of change sets out how we create impact: by placing trained volunteers in schools to give students consistent, long-term support and mentoring, we help young people build positive relationships, re-engage with learning and grow in confidence. Over time, this leads to better learning and wellbeing outcomes, stronger community connections and skills that last a lifetime.



EDCONNECT FRAMEWORK



3. EdConnect Chairperson Report - Sabine Dejey

Every student deserves the opportunity to learn and reach their potential. Yet for many young people, disadvantage, disengagement and barriers to learning can make that opportunity harder to realise. In 2025, the most disadvantaged Year 3 students were more than two years behind their most advantaged peers in reading; by Year 9, this gap had grown to nearly six years.[1] Alongside academic outcomes, school attendance has deteriorated, with 11% of students missing school on any given day.[2]

As demonstrated by our impact data, the weekly support provided by EdConnect volunteers is making a meaningful difference to children's learning and self-confidence. In turn, this contributes to improved academic outcomes[3] and greater engagement in learning, both important factors in helping to reduce the disadvantage gap.

Our volunteers are there for one child or one classroom, each school week. Their commitment to helping students rewrite their futures is unwavering, and their willingness to go above and beyond continues to inspire. By the end of the 2025 school year, more than 24,000 students had been directly or indirectly supported by an EdConnect volunteer, a 20% increase compared with 2024.

We thank each and every one of our volunteers, whose consistency and dedication foster caring and supportive relationships with students who need it most. The wider impact of our volunteers is also significant, as their contribution helps create more connected communities. It has been a personal highlight for me to meet so many of them and hear firsthand just how much volunteering with EdConnect means to them.

During the year, EdConnect grew its program through increasing volunteer and school participation in both existing and new geographical areas, including the introduction of Learning Support in Tasmania and Buddies in Queensland. The need for additional student support remains considerable and drives our ambition to improve, strengthen and extend our program.

EdConnect concluded its 2020–2025 Strategic Plan with great pride. Over the period, more than 110,000 students benefited from EdConnect's support and we delivered substantial achievements across all strategic pillars. A new Strategic Plan has been developed to guide us through to 2030. I thank our many supporters and partners who shared their insights and perspectives through our consultation process, helping to shape our direction for the next five years.

In November 2026, EdConnect will celebrate its 30th anniversary, a significant milestone in our history. We acknowledge the successive service agreements with the Western Australian Department of Education that have supported our work in Western Australia for three decades. The longevity of the program, providing targeted support to Students at Educational Risk (SaER), has enabled us to establish a strong model that has since been replicated across the country. This long-term funding partnership demonstrates confidence in EdConnect's capacity to create positive impact and outcomes. It also provided a strong foundation from which to build new partnerships and funding opportunities.

We sincerely thank the Governor of Western Australia, His Excellency the Honourable Chris Dawson AC APM, and Mrs Darrilyn Dawson for their Joint Patronage of EdConnect Australia. Directors Yawar Zoeb and Lesley Street retired from the board and we are grateful for their contribution and insight over their tenure. New board members Julia Fraser OAM and Joanne Teagle were elected at the 2025 AGM, and Mike Mount-Bryson and Ayden Doohan were appointed to casual vacancies in June 2026, with their elections being submitted to the 2026 AGM.

I thank our volunteers, staff, schools, partners, funders, supporters and fellow board members for their ongoing commitment throughout the years. Together, we make a positive impact on the education trajectory of young people and strengthen our local communities.



Sabine Dejey

EdConnect Australia Chairperson

[1] Mitchell Institute, Report "Years apart: Australia's growing education inequality", May 2026. [2] Grattan Institute, Policy brief "Every day matters: Improving school attendance in Australia", December 2025 [3] AERO – Evidence-based practices in school settings for student wellbeing

4. EdConnect CEO Report
Danie McNeil

Every school day, EdConnect Australia volunteers help create brighter futures, stronger relationships and more connected communities.

Education in Australia is facing significant and increasingly complex challenges. Declining literacy and numeracy outcomes, rising rates of school absenteeism and disruptions to classroom learning are placing greater pressure on students, teachers and schools.

The need for safe and trusted adults who can provide additional support to students has never been more important. Whether helping in the classroom, supporting learning, participating in programs to raise aspirations or building connection and confidence through one-to-one mentoring, EdConnect volunteers provide valuable time, encouragement and consistency. The impact for volunteers cannot be underestimated, as they too learn and find a sense of purpose and fulfilment through their engagement.

One of the greatest privileges of my role is meeting our volunteers and hearing their stories. I am continually inspired by their "moments that matter" - the breakthroughs in learning, the growth in student confidence, the stronger relationships formed and positive changes they witness. Equally rewarding is hearing volunteers reflect on what the experience has meant to them. Time and again, they share how volunteering through EdConnect has enriched their own lives.

In 2025-2026, EdConnect continued to deliver meaningful impact across predominantly (51%) lower ICSEA rated schools (<1000) in Western Australia, Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland.

Western Australia remains our largest area of program delivery, reflecting our origins as we approach 30 years of operation. From the Pilbara to Albany, in Perth, Bunbury, Geraldton and Exmouth, schools and students continue to benefit from the commitment of our volunteers. This impact has been made possible through the generous support of the Western Australian Department of Education, the Alcoa Foundation, and Iluka Resources.

In Victoria, the program continued to grow across metropolitan and regional communities, including Portland, Ballarat and Shepparton. The establishment of the Mornington Peninsula as a new region, supported by the Hansen Little Foundation, was a significant milestone and demonstrated the strong demand for volunteer support in schools.

Dedicated funding secured in 2025 for New South Wales, through the Waratah Foundation and Tasmania, from the Tasmanian Community Fund, enabled the employment of staff to manage the programs locally. These local connections have been instrumental in driving continued growth. 2025-2026 completed the first full financial year of the EdConnect Literacy and Buddies Program. The program continued to demonstrate significant impact as it transitioned from Ardoch, improving students' confidence in learning while also helping them develop confidence in engaging with new adults, an important life skill that will support them well into the future.

As we conclude the 2025-2026 year and look ahead to celebrating 30 years of EdConnect helping students thrive, there is much to be proud of. The impact achieved, the outcomes delivered, the brighter futures created and the meaningful relationships formed are a testament to the power of community.

None of this would be possible without the generosity and commitment of our funders, partner schools, school coordinators, volunteers, board members and ambassadors. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to the dedicated EdConnect team. Their passion, professionalism and belief in the importance of our work drives stronger partnerships, greater community awareness and, ultimately, better outcomes for students.

Together, we are helping build a future where every student has the opportunity to thrive in learning and life.



Danie McNeil
Chief Executive Officer

5. Funding Partners & Supporters

EdConnect's work would not be possible without the generosity and commitment of our funding partners, sponsors and supporters. Their investment helps ensure volunteers are trained and equipped, and schools have access to the program and students in greatest need receive additional support.

In 2025-2026, the support of our generous funding partners and sponsors enabled EdConnect to:

- deepen and expand our programs across metropolitan, regional and rural communities,
- train and equip volunteers with the skills, resources and confidence to make a meaningful difference in schools,
- deliver specialised initiatives, including the EdConnect Buddies Literacy & Numeracy programs, supporting student confidence, education engagement and lifelong learning pathways,
- strengthen community connections, bringing together schools, volunteers, businesses, philanthropists and community partners to create better learning environments in our primary and secondary schools.

We are deeply grateful to our funding partners - government agencies, corporate sponsors, philanthropists and community donors. A commitment to EdConnect is a commitment to the future of our children through education.

MAJOR FUNDERS & PARTNERS

Department of Education – Government of Western Australia
Alcoa Foundation
The William Buckland Foundation
Proudly Supported by Telethon 7
Tasmanian Community Fund – Breaking Barriers, Building Futures
Victoria State Government
Mazda Foundation
Anthony Costa Foundation
Dawn Wade Foundation
Roy Hill
Geelong Community Foundation
John and Myriam Wylie Foundation
Waratah Education Foundation
Lotterywest
Bendigo Bank
Pilbara Ports
Iluka
Preston Rotary Australia
Southern Ports
ClubsNSW
Fortescue
Russell and Womersley Foundation – managed by Equity Trustees
Hansen Little Foundation
Frank and Janet Williams Charitable Trust

5. Funding Partners & Supporters continued

BUDDIES ® & LITERACY BUDDIES PARTNERS

CLAYTON UTZ · Cummins · Paramount Pictures · LGT · crestone. · CORRS CHAMBERS WESTGARTH

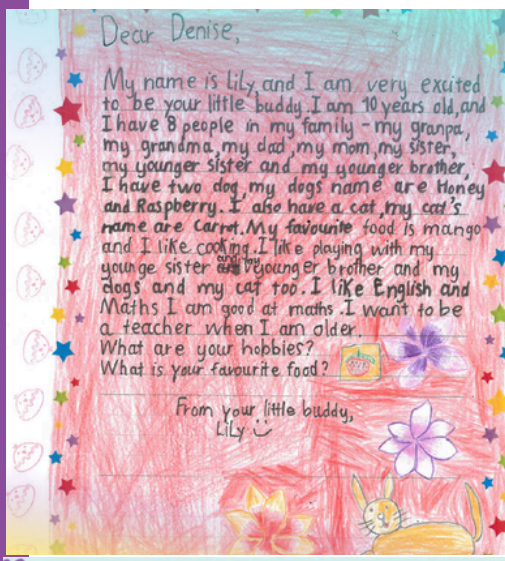
Literacy Buddies ® & Numeracy Buddies

After attending a workplace visit, a Little Buddy proudly announced, "I want to work in the city when I grow up". These few words perfectly captured the spirit of the Literacy and Numeracy Buddies Program. The experience brought to life the saying, "You can't be what you can't see."

Through letter writing, students build meaningful connections with positive adult role models. Then the program truly comes alive through the site visits.

Whether exploring a city office, participating in hands-on activities, learning about different careers or simply building confidence in conversation, students are exposed to new possibilities. The visits to schools are equally special, with Little Buddies proudly taking the lead, sharing their world and strengthening relationships that help build confidence, aspiration and a brighter future.

Our Literacy and Numeracy Buddies programs run in Victoria, Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland.

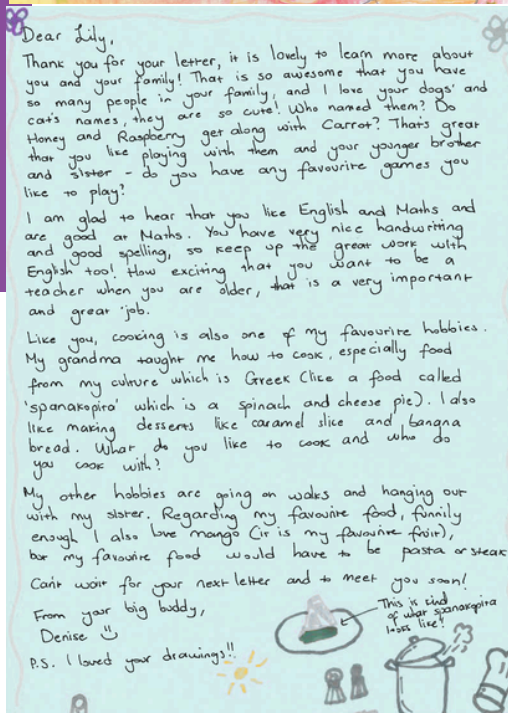

Dear Denise,

My name is Lily and I am very excited to be your little buddy. I am 10 years old and I have 8 people in my family - my granpa, my grandma, my dad, my mom, my sister, my younger sister and my younger brother. I have two dog, my dogs name are Honey and Raspberry. I also have a cat, my cat's name are Carrot. My favourite food is mango and I like cooking. I like playing with my younge sister younger brother and my dogs and my cat too. I like English and Maths I am good at maths. I want to be a teacher when I am older.

What are your hobbies?

What is your favourite food?

From your little buddy,
Lily


Dear Lily,

Thank you for your letter, it is lovely to learn more about you and your family! That is so awesome that you have so many people in your family, and I love your dogs' and cat's names, they are so cute! Who named them? Do Honey and Raspberry get along with Carrot? That's great that you like playing with them and your younger brother and sister - do you have any favourite games you like to play?

I am glad to hear that you like English and Maths and are good at Maths. You have very nice handwriting and good spelling, so keep up the great work with English too! How exciting that you want to be a teacher when you are older, that is a very important and great job.

Like you, cooking is also one of my favourite hobbies. My grandma taught me how to cook, especially food from my culture which is Greek like a food called 'spanakopita' which is a spinach and cheese pie). I also like making desserts like caramel slice and bangna bread. What do you like to cook and who do you cook with?

My other hobbies are going on walks and hanging out with my sister. Regarding my favourite food, finnily enough I also love mango (it is my favourite fruit), but my favourite food would have to be pasta or steak.

Can't wait for your next letter and to meet you soon!

From your big buddy,
Denise

P.S. I loved your drawings!!

This is kind of what spanakopita looks like!

> "Many of our students who usually require 1:1 support to complete writing tasks were able to plan and publish their letters completely independently, and this confidence has transferred to other areas of their learning."
>
> *Buddies Partner School*

IN-KIND PARTNERS

VADDIS · McCusker Centre for Citizenship · TANARRA SOCIAL PURPOSE · jodi reilly

6. Delivering Impact Strategic Plan 2020 - 2025



6.1 National Presence – Local Response

EdConnect has continued to maintain strong program delivery in existing communities while opportunities for growth have been explored with the support of new funders. EdConnect has strived to strengthen relationships within our schools, with our volunteers and our funders. Recognising the dynamic nature of schools, EdConnect has broadened its communication with schools, engaging multiple contacts to facilitate stronger connections between EdConnect volunteers and staff and the school and local community.

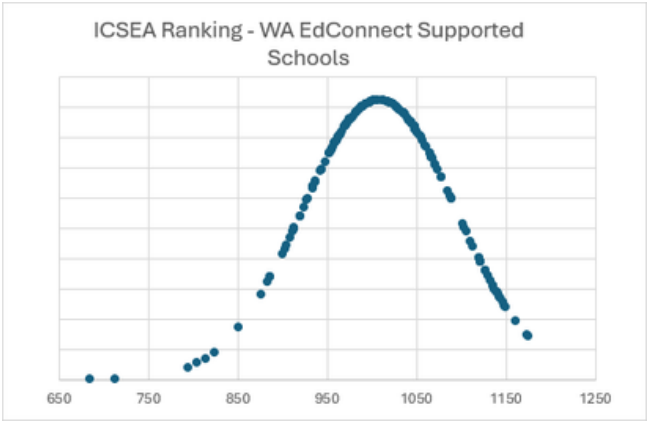
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Supported by a skilled and stable team, EdConnect's WA school volunteer program grew strongly in 2025-2026. School participation increased by 7.1%, while volunteer numbers rose by 9.8%.

In an average week, EdConnect Learning Support Volunteers assisted more than 900 classrooms, while Volunteer Mentors worked with over 500 students. Volunteers also, on average, contributed more of their time - 2.3 hours each week - extending the program's reach and impact for children and young people.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority uses the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) to indicate the average educational advantage of a school's student population. In 2025-2026, EdConnect achieved its goal of expanding its portfolio of lower-ICSEA schools, directing support to more students at educational risk.

The Service Agreement with the WA Department of Education is central to EdConnect's success in Western Australia. The Department is EdConnect's principal funding partner in the state. The Agreement provides the guidance that underpins effective services to schools. During 2025-2026, EdConnect demonstrated its capacity to deliver the Agreement's objectives and outcomes.



Growing school membership in existing areas, EdConnect extended the benefits of its volunteers' work to more children across Western Australia through regional growth. In 2025-2026, the program expanded into Geraldton and Exmouth. Five new schools joined the program: four in Geraldton, supported by eleven volunteers, and Exmouth's only school, supported by two volunteers.

Successful delivery in regional and remote communities depends on both strong local engagement and a stable volunteer base. Volunteers who can contribute consistently over time are especially important. EdConnect will continue to apply these criteria when considering future locations, helping to establish sustainable programs from the outset.

"Staff value the EdConnect mentor program, noting the positive observable change to student behaviour over time. Classroom volunteers make a valuable contribution in the classroom, having an impact on the education of students. All of our volunteers and mentors take their role seriously and are highly respected by students and staff."
WA Member School

"I think what I have loved about my mentoring, is that I have received, just as much as (hopefully) I have given. One of my mentees loves plants & birds, and I have learnt so much from him. Another loves to play table tennis - my skills have improved immensely! I have loved spending time with them."
WA Mentor Volunteer



VICTORIA

The EdConnect program continued to support primary and secondary students across the Geelong/Surf Coast, Western, Northern and South East regions of Victoria, connecting schools with dedicated local volunteers.

Volunteer numbers remained consistent throughout 2025-2026, with new volunteers replacing those who concluded their time with EdConnect. Collectively, Victorian volunteers contributed more than 27,000 hours of support, averaging 2.3 hours per volunteer during each school week.

EdConnect's reach across Victoria continued to grow, with 20 new schools joining the program. This included four schools in the newly established Mornington Peninsula region, made possible through the support of the Hansen Little Foundation.

EdConnect is committed to supporting schools and communities where there is significant need as is evident with 54% of Victorian partner schools having an ICSEA rating below 1000. EdConnect also continued its presence in regional communities, including Portland with support from the Alcoa Foundation, Shepparton and Numurkah through the William Buckland Foundation, and Ballarat through the Mental Health Fund.

EdConnect is a provider on the Victorian Department of Education's Schools Mental Health Menu and government schools can access mentoring and volunteer support through dedicated mental health funding. During the year, 11 schools accessed the program through this funding.

Learning support remained the primary focus for Victorian volunteers, with 84% supporting students in learning support roles. 57% of volunteers focused on student literacy support, while 22% supported numeracy. EdConnect also increased its visibility and engagement with Victorian schools through participation in key sector events, including the 2026 Government Schools Principals Conference, providing an important opportunity to build awareness of the program and highlight the impact volunteers can make for students and schools.

"One EdConnect volunteer listens to 47 students read every day who don't get to read at
home."
VIC Member School



"It is a most fulfilling experience to be amongst the younger generation in their journey to adulthood, and a great privilege which I never take for granted. I feel proud to walk through the school premises (wearing my EdConnect lanyard together with the school's), feeling connected (and accepted) to the community in the true sense of the word. In my tenth year, I really feel quite at home."
VIC Volunteer

NEW SOUTH WALES

The Western Sydney program continued to grow and deliver meaningful outcomes for students, with the local community stepping forward to share their time, knowledge and support. This strong community engagement saw volunteer numbers triple over the past 12 months, with volunteers contributing more than 2,100 hours during 2025-2026 and enabling more students to benefit from positive adult role models and additional learning support.

The number of partner schools also doubled, with seven new schools joining the program, bringing the total to 14 schools across Western Sydney. Of these, 71% have an ICSEA rating below 1000, reflecting EdConnect's focus on supporting schools and communities where there is significant need.

The needs of partner schools are also reflected in volunteer roles, with 90% of Western Sydney volunteers providing learning support, including a strong focus on student literacy.

"Volunteers have been extremely valuable to support learning in the classroom. They positively impact classrooms by offering extra support, enhancing student engagement, and helping teachers provide more individualised attention. Our volunteers always present with enthusiasm and eagerness to support student learning."
WESTERN SYDNEY MEMBER SCHOOL



TASMANIA

EdConnect's inaugural full financial year in Tasmania focused on literacy and numeracy support, achieving key milestones and establishing a strong foundation for future growth. Targeted volunteer recruitment increased both volunteer numbers and community awareness of EdConnect, supporting the continued development of the program across the North West region.

The program is working in communities where there is significant need, with all six Tasmanian partner schools having an ICSEA rating below 1000. During 2025-2026, two new schools joined the program, further extending EdConnect's reach across the region and providing a strong foundation for continued growth in the coming years.

Volunteers collectively contributed more than 490 hours during the year, with literacy a clear priority. 86% of volunteers supported student literacy, reflecting the needs identified by partner schools for their students.

A highlight of the year was hosting the inaugural Tasmanian Volunteer Awards in Ulverstone, bringing together partner schools and volunteers to recognise their contribution and celebrate the impact achieved during EdConnect's first full year in the state.

"Our volunteers read with small groups of students who were identified as needing extra support. The students looked forward to their reading sessions and showed growth in their fluency and comprehension."
TAS Member School

6.2 Quality Outcomes

At EdConnect, delivering quality outcomes is at the heart of everything we do. We are committed to creating strong, sustainable connections that benefit students, volunteers and school communities.

Our 2025 impact data highlights the difference these connections make and how our work continues to grow and strengthen. By listening to our schools and volunteers, monitoring effectiveness and adapting our programs, we ensure every hour of volunteer support contributes to meaningful outcomes.

Whether it's improved student wellbeing, enhanced learning or stronger community connections, our focus remains on creating positive change where it is needed most.

2,058
EdConnect Volunteers
1,597 learning support & mentors
+ 461 Big Buddies

93,432
Volunteer Hours Given

301
Member / Partner Schools
across Australia

93%
of schools agreed that student self-esteem and confidence have increased



88%
of schools agreed that student social skills have improved



85%
of schools agreed that student prosocial behaviour has increased



80%
of schools agreed that student relationships with peers have improved

"Our EdConnect volunteers are an invaluable part of our school, they provide wonderful support for our students and our teachers."
Kyilla Primary School, WA



As reported in the 2025 EdConnect Impact Statement - published 2026.
Volunteers, Volunteer Hours and Member Schools as at 30 June 2026

PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

LEARNING SUPPORT

732 VOLUNTEERS

23,197 STUDENTS

Supporting students in literacy, numeracy and classroom confidence.

90%

of teachers agreed that students seemed more engaged in school because of the learning support volunteer

90%

of teachers agreed that the Learning Support Volunteer has helped improve students' skills, knowledge and understanding

82%

of teachers agreed that the Learning Support Volunteer has helped improve students' literacy and/or numeracy

MENTORING

503 VOLUNTEERS

670 MENTEES

Building confidence, wellbeing and connection either 1 to 1 or in a small group.

94%

of schools agreed mentee self-esteem and confidence had increased

83%

of schools agreed mentee engagement in education had improved

LITERACY BUDDIES ® & NUMERACY BUDDIES

301 BIG BUDDIES

391 LITTLE BUDDIES (297 LITERACY 94 NUMERACY)

Pen-pal initiatives connecting workplace volunteers with school-aged children.

100%

of teachers agreed that the programs contributed to increased student confidence to engage with literacy/numeracy

96%

of Big Buddies felt that their workplace made a positive contribution through the Literacy / Numeracy Buddies program

"EdConnect has played a powerful role in building respectful, trusting relationships between students and their mentors. Many students who once struggled to attend school now show up consistently because they feel valued and supported by their mentor."

Hampton Senior High School, WA



EdConnect Volunteers

Building strong and meaningful relationships with our volunteers is central to their engagement, wellbeing and ongoing connection with EdConnect. We recognise the diversity of our volunteer community and the different experiences, motivations and needs volunteers bring to their roles. Our approach is relationship-focused and designed to ensure volunteers feel informed, supported, valued and connected.

Throughout the year, a range of opportunities were offered for volunteers to engage with EdConnect and with one another, including local gatherings, regular communications, professional development, school visits, surveys and focus groups. These touchpoints provide opportunities to share experiences, provide feedback, access support and remain connected to the broader EdConnect community.

EdConnect volunteers range in age from 18 to 91, bringing a diverse mix of skills, knowledge and life experience to schools and students. This diversity creates meaningful opportunities for intergenerational connection and learning, strengthening relationships between volunteers, students, schools and the wider community.

Through these ongoing connections, EdConnect supports a volunteer community that is engaged, valued and empowered to make a meaningful contribution to student learning, development and wellbeing.

Snapshot of EdConnect Volunteers





As at 30 June 2026







EdConnect 2026 Volunteer Award Winners



MENTOR OF THE YEAR - WA
BABS FLEMMING



MENTOR OF THE YEAR - EAST COAST
KAPAL MALHOTRA



LEARNING SUPPORT VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR - WA
BRENDA HASSELL



LEARNING SUPPORT VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR - EAST COAST
PETER HUGHES



DES HEENAN SCHOOL COORDINATOR OF THE YEAR - WA
HELEN HAMES



SCHOOL COORDINATOR OF THE YEAR - EAST COAST
CHRISTIAN HADDAD
ANNIE NEVILLE

LEARNING SUPPORT TEACHER RECOGNITION

WEST COAST
Nicolle Wall, Como Primary School
Robyn Cartell, Busselton Senior High School

EAST COAST
Kay Sawyer, Altona College
Shay Gibson, Lollypop Creek Primary School

RISING STAR OF THE YEAR
Marjolyn Willis - East Coast
Sally Stewart - West Coast

SPIRIT AWARD - EAST COAST
Phil Reid

SOUTHWEST WA - VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR
Ali Casagrande

SOUTHWEST WA - SCHOOL COORDINATOR OF THE YEAR
Rob Muscat

OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION - WA
Sonny Ang

Proudly supported by

Alcoa Foundation



PEEL VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR
RUTH CATHCART - BUNGAREE PRIMARY SCHOOL



PEEL SCHOOL COORDINATOR OF THE YEAR

JUDY MCLEAN - COODANUP COLLEGE







Volunteer Training

EdConnect continued to invest in the development and support of its volunteers through a program of training and professional learning opportunities across the states. Training was designed to strengthen volunteers' knowledge, confidence and capability, while responding to emerging needs within schools and the changing contexts in which volunteers support students. Sessions covered a range of topics including literacy, numeracy, student wellbeing, trauma-informed practice, understanding autism and ADHD, providing volunteers with practical strategies and current insights to enhance their contribution in schools.

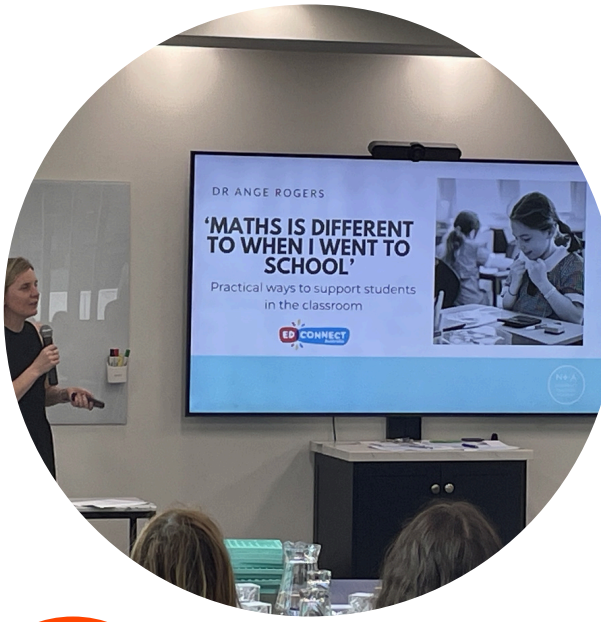


In WA, EdConnect introduced a broader range of volunteer training opportunities. Drawing on the team's knowledge and experience, two new in-house sessions explored how children learn to read and comprehend, and another supporting volunteers to understand autism. Through a partnership with Berry Street, volunteers gained insight into trauma-informed communication. A session with Dr Paul Swan demonstrated how familiar language and concepts can make mathematics more accessible and build students' knowledge and skills.



Across induction and supplementary training, EdConnect aims to align its training content with current school practices. EdConnect also aims to continue to give its volunteers relevant, practical tools to support students effectively while enriching their volunteering experience.

On the East Coast, online training opportunities included Mentor and Learning Support Panel Sessions, Understanding and Reducing School Stress, presented by HeadSpace, and Supporting Students with ADHD. In Victoria a highlight was the Term 1 face-to-face event featuring guest speaker Dr Angela Rogers, who provided practical strategies and hands-on learning experiences to help volunteers confidently support student numeracy development in the classroom. Both Victorian and NSW volunteers attended EdConnect Trauma-Informed Volunteering workshops. In Tasmania, learning support training was delivered predominantly face-to-face.



6.3 Brand Awareness

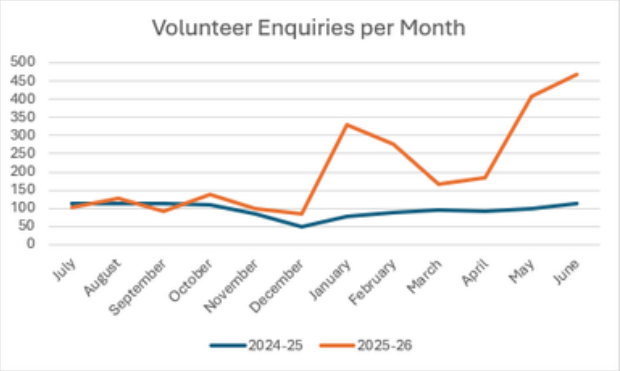
Marketing and communications continued to play an important role in strengthening EdConnect's profile, connecting with volunteers, schools, partners and supporters, and communicating the impact of volunteering in education.

Across the year, communications focused on increasing awareness of EdConnect's role, supporting volunteer recruitment and retention, strengthening stakeholder relationships, and sharing the stories and outcomes behind our work. A coordinated approach across digital channels, media, campaigns, events and direct communications helped ensure EdConnect's message remained consistent and relevant across Australia.

Building awareness and engagement
EdConnect's digital presence is important for sharing volunteer stories, school experiences, organisational achievements and opportunities to get involved. Content across Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn highlighted the contribution of volunteers and the difference they make to students, while also supporting relationships with schools, community organisations, corporate partners, funders and other stakeholders.

Supporting volunteer recruitment
Targeted marketing campaigns supported EdConnect's ongoing volunteer recruitment activity, with a particular focus on reaching potential volunteers in locations where volunteer numbers needed a boost. Paid digital campaigns and lead-generation activity provided opportunities to test local and targeted approaches, generate enquiries and connect prospective volunteers with EdConnect's team. In 2025-2026 EdConnect saw a 116% increase in enquiries and a 30% increase in volunteer applications over the previous year.

Alongside paid activity, organic social media, word-of-mouth, school networks and community engagement remained important channels for attracting new volunteers.



Sector Partnerships & Memberships

EdConnect strengthened its connection with the education, volunteering and community sectors through active membership of key industry and professional networks. These memberships support knowledge sharing, collaboration and sector awareness, helping EdConnect stay connected to emerging issues, opportunities and best practice.

6.4 Our People

Board of Directors

Over the past year, the Board has committed significant time and energy to shaping EdConnect's future direction. A key focus has been the development of a new five-year strategic plan, designed to provide a clear framework for the organisation's next phase of growth and impact.

Through this process, the Board has worked closely with the leadership team to consider where EdConnect can have the greatest impact, the opportunities and challenges ahead, and how the organisation can build on its strengths while remaining responsive to the changing needs of schools, students and volunteers. The new strategic plan will provide a foundation for the years ahead, with a focus on ensuring EdConnect remains sustainable, relevant and well positioned to support students and schools across Australia.

Sabine Dejey
Non-Executive Director (Chairperson)

Ben Peacock
Non-Executive Director

David Barwise (Secretary)
Non-Executive Director

Matt Reed
Non-Executive Director

John Inverarity MBE
Non-Executive Director

Joanne Teagle
Non-Executive Director

Julia Fraser OAM
Non-Executive Director

Michael Mount-Bryson
Non-Executive Director

Ayden Doohan
Non-Executive Director

EdConnect Australia Management Team

Danie McNeil
Chief Executive Officer

Carol Shannon
General Manager

Tony Donaldson
Finance Manager

Melinda Spiteri
Victorian State Manager

Agatha da Fonseca
Marketing & Communications Manager

EdConnect Australia Staff

The dedication and passion of EdConnect staff continue to be a great strength of our organisation. Their connection to our purpose is reflected in the strong relationships they build with volunteers, schools, communities, funders and partners, and in their commitment to achieving the best possible outcomes for students.

Across the country, our team explores opportunities to strengthen the program and improve the way we work. Training and professional development enable staff to grow their skills and knowledge, learn from one another and continue to build EdConnect's capability.

EdConnect Ambassadors

We thank the EdConnect Ambassadors for sharing their networks and passion for EdConnect, promoting the impact of our work and inspiring others to get involved.

6.5 Financial Sustainability

The year-end result, a modest surplus of $28,495 before depreciation and amortisation, reflects EdConnect's disciplined cost management in an inflationary environment.

Primary revenue sources, including government grants and service agreements, corporate partnerships and school membership fees, grew during the reporting period. Overall revenue was 12% greater than the previous period (excluding an extraordinary donation in 2024-2025). Staffing expenses represented 80% of total expenditure. A largely part-time workforce (12.8 FTE - 22 headcount), human resource task allocation is based on the demand and capacity of each region.

Recent analysis of workforce effectiveness, using data from the Western Australian State of Volunteering Report 2024 (prepared by Volunteering WA), indicated almost 40% of volunteer managers oversee more than 50 volunteers. Across the volunteering sector, a ratio of approximately one Full Time Equivalent (FTE) to 50–80 volunteers is generally regarded an industry benchmark.

An EdConnect WA based FTE supports an average of 173 school volunteers and 44 school relationships. This reflects the maturity of the WA program and the strength of EdConnect's systems and processes, refined over many years to enable a highly efficient model of volunteer and school support.

Across the East Coast there is significant opportunity to expand EdConnect's volunteer base and increase the number of partner schools within existing and emerging regions. As these operations continue to grow and achieve greater scale, opportunities to improve operational efficiencies will increase, with the longer-term objective of establishing a sustainable operating model comparable to that achieved in Western Australia.







6.5 Financial Sustainability

CONCISE FINANCIAL REPORT

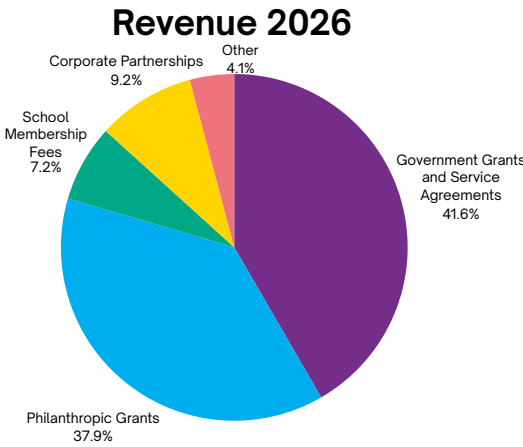
Revenue

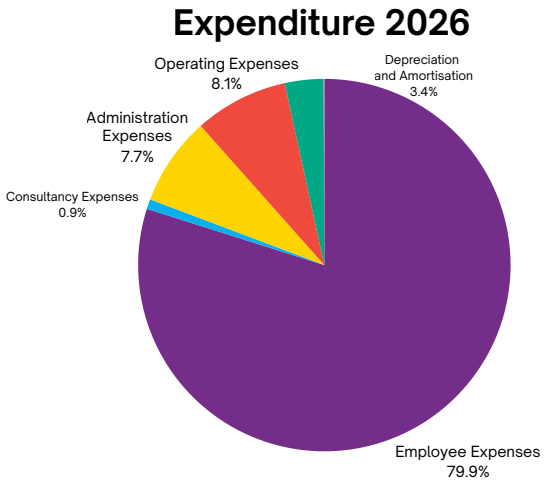
	FY2026	FY2025
Government Grants and Service Agreements	834,646	742,652
Philanthropic Grants	759,948	767,326
School Membership Fees	143,502	133,384
Corporate Partnerships	183,584	74,378
Other	82,744	569,995
	2,004,424	**2,287,735**

Expenditure

	FY2026	FY2025
Employee Expenses	1,633,312	1,394,509
Consultancy Expenses	17,524	1,600
Administration Expenses	157,476	157,640
Operating Expenses	166,389	174,965
Depreciation and Amortisation	68,680	81,209
Finance Costs	1,228	2,082
	2,044,609	**1,812,005**

(Deficit)/Surplus	(40,185)	475,730









6.6 AUDITORS DECLARATION

ARMADA
AUDITING

T (08) 6165 4090 F (08) 6165 4067
A 18 Sangiorgio Court Osborne Park WA 6017
P Locked Bag 4 Osborne Park DC WA 6916
E info@armada.com.au

strength in numbers

AUDITOR'S INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION

TO THE DIRECTORS OF THE SCHOOL VOLUNTEER PROGRAM LTD TRADING AS ED CONNECT AUSTRALIA

In accordance with the requirements of the Corporations Act 2001 and Division 60 of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2021 in relation to our audit of The School Volunteer Program Limited trading as Ed Connect Australia for the year ended 30 June 2026, to the best of my knowledge and belief, there have been:

(i) No contraventions of the auditor independence requirements as set out in the *Australian Charities and Not Profits Commission Act 2012* in relation to the audit;

(ii) No contraventions of the independence requirements of the Corporations Act 2001 in relation to the audit; and

(iii) No contraventions of any applicable code of professional conduct in relation to the audit.

Armada Audit & Assurance

Armada Audit & Assurance Pty Ltd

Nigel Dias
Director
Perth, Dated 17 September 2026

Armada Audit & Assurance Pty Ltd – ABN 52 618 974 119. A member of the Armada Group. Whilst the Armada Group logo is utilised by all members of the Armada Group, each member of the Armada Group is a separate legal entity in its own right and is not in partnership with any other members of the Armada Group. Liability limited by a scheme approved under Professional Standards Legislation.

6.7 DIRECTORS DECLARATION

Directors' Declaration

In the opinion of the Directors of The School Volunteer Program Ltd t/a EdConnect Australia:

a) The financial statements and notes of are in accordance with the Australian Charities and Non-for-profits Commission Act 2012, including:

   (i) Giving a true and fair view of its financial position as at 30 June 2026 and of its performance for the financial year ended on that date; and

   (ii) Complying with Australian Accounting Standards – Simplified Disclosures (including the Australian Accounting Interpretations) and the *Australian Charities and Non-for-profits Commission Regulations 2013*; and

b) There are reasonable grounds to believe that the Company will be able to pay its debts as and when they become due and payable.

Signed in accordance with a resolution of the Responsible Entities.

S Dejey

Sabine Dejey - Chair
Dated this 17th September 2026

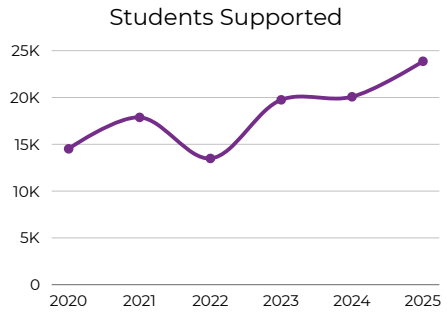
7. 2020-2025 Strategic Review

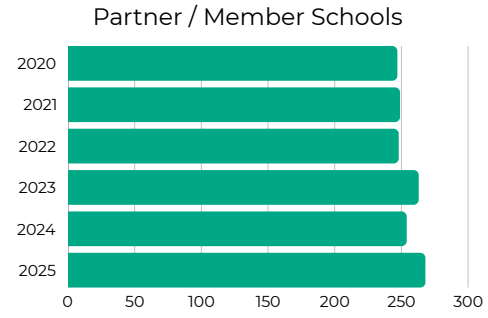
The outcomes achieved by EdConnect since 2020 are impressive.

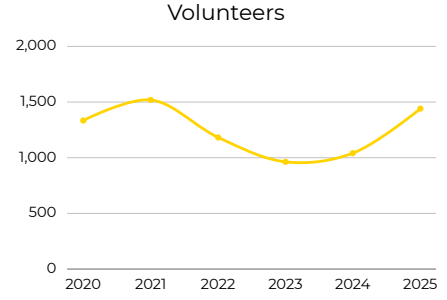
When the 2020–2025 Strategic Plan was developed, no one could have anticipated the impending pandemic or the impact it would have. Lockdowns, state lock-outs, remote learning and social distancing created significant and long-term challenges in relation to learning loss, resilience, community connection and volunteering.

In reviewing and assessing EdConnect's outcomes since 2020, it is no surprise that there was a decline in volunteer and student numbers during this period; however, school partnerships remained consistent. EdConnect navigated its way through these unprecedented times and the subsequent recovery, followed by growth in both existing regions and new geographical areas, including Geraldton (WA), South East Victoria, Mornington Peninsula (Vic) and North West Tasmania.
EdConnect asks volunteers to commit to the school year and give one hour each week; however, the vast majority give a great deal more. As at 30 June 2026, the average tenure of EdConnect volunteers was 2.5 years, with current volunteers having contributed between three months and 24 years of service. An impressive 13% of our current volunteer base has continued volunteering throughout the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan period.

Through EdConnect being entrusted by Ardoch to continue to support schools and volunteers and take ownership of the Literacy Buddies ® and Numeracy Buddies program, unplanned but opportunistic growth occurred, enabling EdConnect to establish a small presence in Queensland.

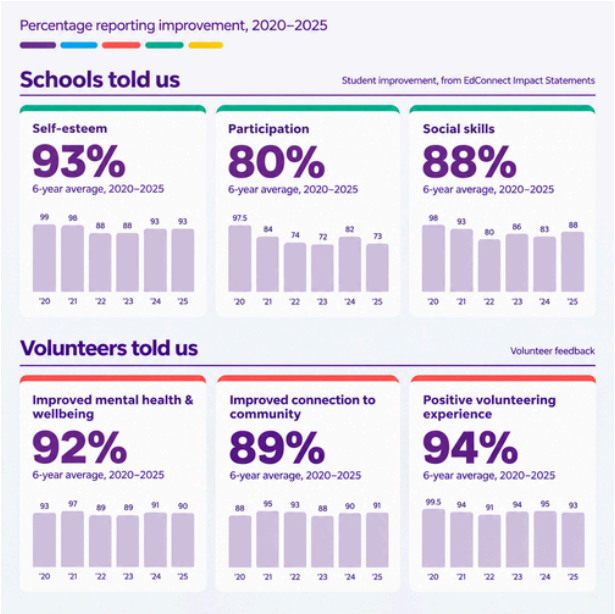






The impact and outcomes of the program, as reported by schools and volunteers, have remained exceptionally high across 2020-2025. In 2023, Curtin University released its evaluation of the EdConnect program, providing independent validation of the positive impact and outcomes achieved by volunteers in schools. This was followed by published research further highlighting the positive impact of volunteering.

The quality and breadth of training provided to EdConnect volunteers has continued to grow. Alongside mandatory training, volunteers have access to supplementary learning in areas such as neurodiversity, school refusal, literacy, numeracy and trauma-informed practice, delivered both internally and by highly regarded external facilitators. This ongoing investment strengthens volunteer capability and connection, provides valued opportunities for further learning, and ensures volunteers are increasingly well equipped to respond to the needs of schools and, most importantly, provide meaningful support to students.



7. 2020-2025 Strategic Review

Each year, schools have consistently identified the leading benefits of having the EdConnect program as:

- being able to offer one-to-one assistance to students who need it most; and
- providing a positive, older role model for children to interact with.

The rise in EdConnect's profile over the period has been strong. The quality of communications, impact statements, social media presence and, most importantly, storytelling, both through personal conversations and digital resources, has supported EdConnect in achieving its objectives.

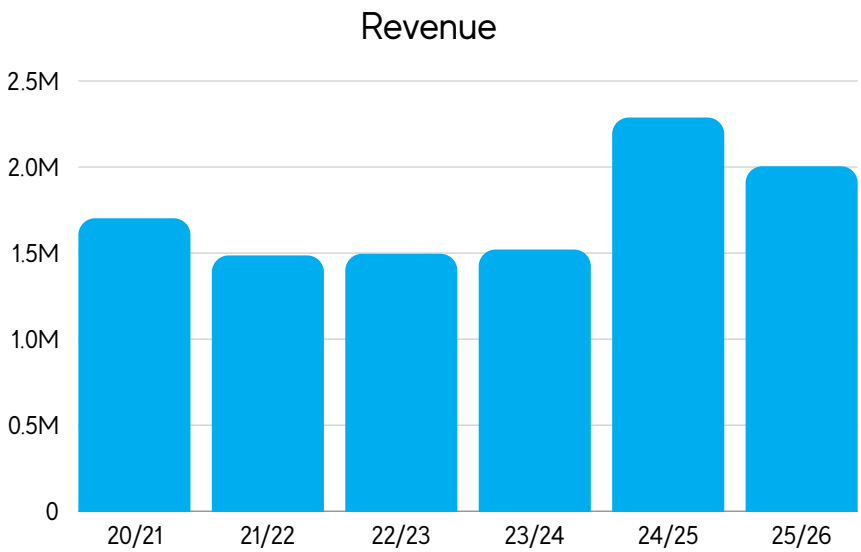
The role of the Marketing and Communications Manager has been modestly increased and, in 2024, EdConnect engaged Mullen 303 to support brand awareness initiatives, with learnings subsequently embedded into recruitment and online campaigns.

In 2020, EdConnect had 15 personnel across Western Australia and Victoria. This has now grown to 22 personnel, with new staff in South West WA, Western Sydney (NSW), South East Victoria/Mornington Peninsula (VIC) and North West Tasmania, as well as additional volunteer administrators to reflect the organisation's growth and to support efficient operations. Employee expenses are the largest expenditure item for EdConnect, required for strong relationships with schools, volunteers, funders and the community to deliver the program. EdConnect continues to recruit and retain a quality and engaged workforce who are highly engaged and mission focused. This is evident through an average 89% staff satisfaction rate.

The Western Australian Government Department of Education Service Agreement continues to be EdConnect's largest source of funding and provides the foundational funding for program delivery in Western Australia. As an organisation heavily reliant on philanthropic funding of varying durations, EdConnect maintains prudent management of expenses and cash flow through the EdConnect finance team and the Finance, Risk and Compliance Committee, chaired by Board Member David Barwise throughout the 2020-2025 period.

The EdConnect management team continues to build strong relationships with funders and ensures the impact and outcomes achieved through the funding received are effectively communicated. In the 2024–2025 financial year, a substantial donation was received. As EdConnect moves into its 2026–2030 Strategic Plan, the Board and Management team will focus on prioritising projects and initiatives that support the organisation's long-term sustainability.

Acknowledgement and appreciation is extended to all funders and supporters, especially those who journeyed with EdConnect throughout the period, including the Western Australian Government Department of Education, Alcoa Foundation, Lotterywest, Fogarty Foundation, Tanarra Social Purpose, Vaddis, McCusker Centre for Citizenship, John & Myriam Wylie Foundation, Geelong Community Foundation and Dawn Wade Foundation.





7. 2020-2025 Strategic Review

Over the tenure of the Strategic Plan, there have been staff changes at operational and management levels, as well as around the board table. Current and former staff and board members have remained mission-focused and passionate about creating a brighter and better future for students in learning and life, achieved through the additional support provided by volunteers in schools.

The dedication and passion of EdConnect staff continues to be a great strength of the organisation. Their connection to EdConnect's purpose is reflected in the strong relationships built with volunteers, schools, communities, funders and partners, and in the commitment to achieving the best possible outcomes for students.

Across the country, the EdConnect team explores opportunities to strengthen the program and improve the way we work. Training and professional development enable staff to grow their skills and knowledge, learn from one another and continue to build EdConnect's capability.

The May 2026 EdConnect staff survey recorded a 94% staff satisfaction rate, reflecting the strong connection and commitment of staff to the work and impact of EdConnect.

EdConnect continues to operate an efficient model that can be scaled to respond to school and community needs and the available funding. The organisation continues to explore opportunities to improve processes and streamline tasks, enabling staff to dedicate more time to building and strengthening relationships.
An EdConnect Ambassador Program was launched during the period, and our appreciation is extended to our Ambassadors for helping to raise awareness of EdConnect and its impact.

In 2024, EdConnect was proud to announce the Governor of Western Australia, His Excellency the Honourable Chris Dawson AC APM, and Mrs Darrilyn Dawson, as joint Patrons of EdConnect. This followed the passing of our previous Patron, Mrs Ruth Reid, wife of former Governor of Western Australia Professor Gordon Reid.

Mrs Reid served as Patron of EdConnect from 1997 to 2004, following the establishment of the School Volunteer Program in 1996. The program later became EdConnect following its merger with TimeHelp in 2015.

As we close the 2020–2025 Strategic Plan period, EdConnect can reflect with pride on a period defined by resilience, adaptability and growth. Despite circumstances that could never have been anticipated, the organisation remained focused on its purpose: to recruit, screen, train, place and support amazing volunteers within partner schools to support students to thrive in learning and life. The commitment of our volunteers, schools, staff, board, funders, partners, Ambassadors and supporters has enabled EdConnect not only to navigate significant disruption, but to emerge stronger, with an expanded geographical footprint and an enduring commitment to quality and impact.

Staff value the EdConnect mentor program, noting the positive observable change to student behaviour over time. Classroom volunteers make a valuable contribution in the classroom, having an impact on the education of students. All of our volunteers and mentors take their role seriously and are highly respected by students and staff.

Lesmurdie Primary School, WA



7. 2020-2025 Strategic Review

Strategic Plan 2020 to 2025

Priority 1
National Presence Local Response

We will help young people and their communities

Objective

We have consolidated our position in our chosen communities, and taken an opportunistic approach to growth

Priority 2
Quality Outcomes

We will deliver services that are effective

Objective

We dedicate resources and activity to support schools, students and volunteers and have elevated our focus on volunteers to increase retention and build capacity

Priority 3
Brand Awareness

We will promote the life-changing work that we do

Objective

We will ensure that key stakeholders know, understand and appreciate our work and actively support us

Priority 4
Financial Sustainability

We will be cost effective and financially secure for long term success

Objective

We have established a minimum reserve of three months operating costs, and allocated 3% of our annual budget to strategic initiatives

Priority 5
Our People

We engage people of the highest calibre who share our commitment and passion

Objective

- We have an industry-leading level of employee engagement (over 75%)
- We use technology to have streamlined relationships with our volunteers and schools

---

Priority 1
Achieved

- Growth in existing and new locations including South West WA, Mid West WA, NSW, SE and Mornington Peninsula + Tasmania.
- Ardoch Buddies Volunteer numbers.

Priority 2
Achieved

- Staff base grew.
- Increased training.
- Student numbers increased
- Impact and outcomes have remained consistently high.
- 68% of our volunteers have been volunteering for longer than 6 months.
- Average tenure 2.5 years.

Priority 3
Achieved

- Curtin University Evaluation.
- Digital storytelling assets.
- Comprehensive impact statement.
- EdConnect week established 2024
- Increased online profile.

Priority 4
Achieved

- EdConnect has over 6 months of operating costs.
- Maintains prudent management of expenses.
- Some strategic initiatives were completed and some were able to be funded through grants.
- Revenue grew from $1.7M to $2M.

Priority 5
Achieved

- 89% Average staff satisfaction rate over the period – reflecting the mission-focused staff.
- The Board has diverse members with varied skillsets and experience matched against skill matrix to guide and govern EdConnect.
- The Ambassador program was launched.

8. 2026-2030 Strategic Plan

Growing EdConnect means we can help more students reach their potential.

By 2030, EdConnect aims to have a consistent base of 1,750 volunteers, to improve educational, social and wellbeing outcomes for 37,500+ students across 390+ schools.

2030 TARGETS

1,750 volunteer base

37,500+ students

390+ schools

These are ambitious goals, but ones the challenge deserves. To reach them EdConnect must strengthen stakeholder relationships, attract additional funding and increase our organisation's national profile and reach. Success will be underpinned by strong leadership, sound governance and taking an evidence-based approach and remaining committed to continuous improvement.



9. Contact Us

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www.facebook.com/edconnectaustralia

www.instagram.com/edconnectaus

http://linkedin/company/edconnect-australia

https://www.youtube.com/@edconnectaustralia7735





EdConnect Australia connects volunteers who want to make a difference with school students who need extra help and guidance through mentoring or learning support.

PHONE:
1800 668 550

EMAIL:
edconnect@edconnect.org.au

WEBSITE:
www.edconnectaustralia.org.au