Good Things Foundation Australia

Submission & Recommendations

Inquiry into support for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Good Things Foundation Australia Submission

November 2021

Good Things
Foundation Australia

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement of Country

Good Things Foundation Australia acknowledges that we work on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. We pay our respects to elders – past, present and future.

Introduction

It is important that everyone can access the information and services they need. In today's society this means being digitally included - able to affordably access digital technology and having the confidence and digital literacy skills to use the internet safely. The benefits of digital inclusion are diverse and wide-reaching across all aspects of society.

The COVID-19 lockdown restrictions across Australia have changed the way we live and work, and highlighted digital inclusion as an issue for all states and territories. As the world increasingly moves online, some Australians are more at risk of being left behind in their ability to access information, services, contribute to Australia's digital economy, and stay connected to others.

Older people tend to be less digitally capable and confident than younger generations. For those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, there are additional barriers to being digitally included and accessing important support services, information and connection.

Good Things Foundation Australia believes that building digitally resilient communities will assist in creating more connected communities, and to do this, Governments need to work collaboratively with community organisations to develop and implement solutions to improve digital inclusion with targeted, specific and additional investment for programs and resources.

Good Things Foundation Australia thank the Committee for the opportunity to make a submission to the *Inquiry into support for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds*.
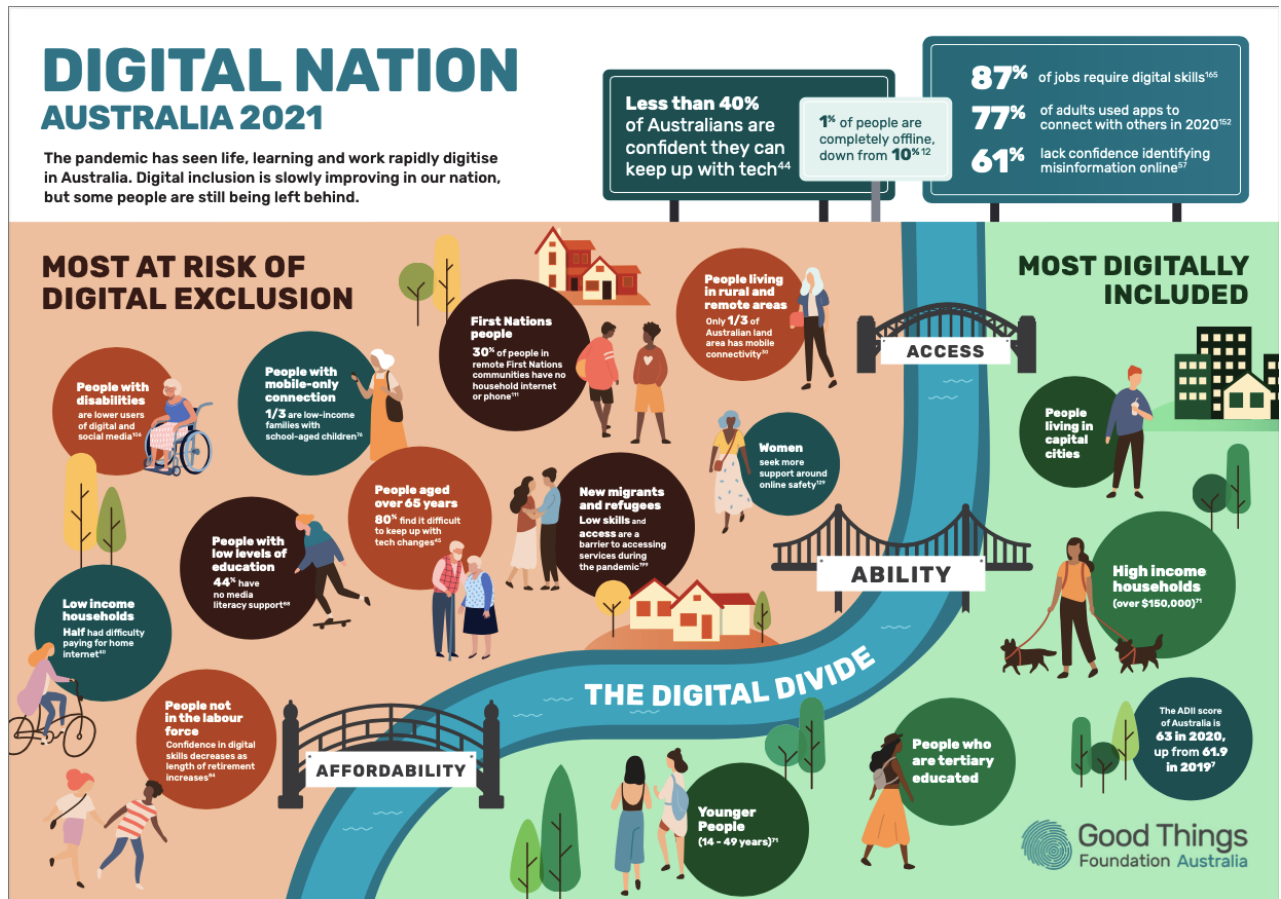
The Digital Divide

Across Australia, the digital divide impacts many people and communities. While some evidence indicates that the pandemic has seen the rate of people completely offline fall during the pandemic,[1] one in four people are still digitally excluded.[2] People who are on low incomes, have lower levels of education, have a disability, are older or have a

---

[1] ACMA (2021) Communication and Media in Australia. How we use the internet
[2] Thomas, J., Barraket, J., Parkinson, S., Wilson, C., Holcombe-James, I., Kennedy, J., Mannell, K., Brydon, A. (2021). Australian Digital Inclusion Index: 2021. Melbourne: RMIT, Swinburne University of Technology, and Telstra, p. 5

mobile-only connection, First Nations people and people living in regional/rural Australia are particularly at risk of being digitally excluded.[3]

DIGITAL NATION
AUSTRALIA 2021

The pandemic has seen life, learning and work rapidly digitise in Australia. Digital inclusion is slowly improving in our nation, but some people are still being left behind.

Less than 40% of Australians are confident they can keep up with tech[44]

1% of people are completely offline, down from 10%[12]

87% of jobs require digital skills[165]
77% of adults used apps to connect with others in 2020[152]
61% lack confidence identifying misinformation online[97]

MOST AT RISK OF DIGITAL EXCLUSION

People with disabilities are lower users of digital and social media[104]

People with mobile-only connection 1/3 are low-income families with school-aged children[78]

First Nations people 30% of people in remote First Nations communities have no household internet or phone[111]

People living in rural and remote areas Only 1/3 of Australian land area has mobile connectivity[50]

MOST DIGITALLY INCLUDED

ACCESS

People living in capital cities

Low income households Half had difficulty paying for home internet[80]

People aged over 65 years 80% find it difficult to keep up with tech changes[42]

New migrants and refugees Low skills and access are a barrier to accessing services during the pandemic[89]

Women seek more support around online safety[129]

ABILITY

High income households (over $150,000)[71]

People not in the labour force Confidence in digital skills decreases as length of retirement increases[84]

AFFORDABILITY

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Younger People (14 - 49 years)[71]

People who are tertiary educated

The ADII score of Australia is 63 in 2020, up from 61.9 in 2019[7]

Good Things Foundation Australia

Good Things Foundation's Digital Nation Australia 2021 infographic showing the key digital inclusion challenges in Australia.

The risk of digital exclusion increases with a person's age, particularly when it comes to access and digital ability.[4] Australians aged over 65 years record an overall Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) score 13.7 points lower than the Australian average.[5]

Three main factors influence a person's ability to cross the digital divide: **ability, affordability, and access**.[6] Often, these factors interact to influence levels of inclusion. For example, without an affordable and reliable internet connection, there is reduced access to information, service and communication channels with community,

[3] Thomas et al (2021).
[4] Ibid, p. 15
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid, p. 4

family and government.[7] There are also reduced opportunities to develop key skills. Further, even after older Australians are connected to and using the internet on an appropriate device, many still don't feel confident or safe online, or feel they can't keep up with the rapid pace of technological change.[8] Higher levels of inclusion in all three areas are required to lead people and communities to be 100% digitally included.

Before the pandemic, approximately a third of older Australians over 50 used the internet one or less times a month, while another third used the internet less than once a week.[9] Data from 2018 showed that 45% of over 65s didn't use the internet at all.[10] While usage has increased in this age group in recent years,[11] research still points to it being significantly lower than younger generations, with a higher reliance on offline media such as print, radio and television.[12]

Research with new migrants and refugees also points to an emerging digital divide in some communities, which can have an impact on their settlement experience. For example, one report indicates that migrant and refugee women use the internet less than men and struggle to access online support and essential services such as banking, education and health services.[13]

The shift to digital-first services, information and activities during COVID-19 exacerbated the digital exclusion of some groups, such as newly arrived migrants and refugees, creating a barrier to accessing local news and reliable information, health and government services, and causing increasing social isolation.[14]

- Read Increasing Digital Participation of Refugees and New Migrants report

---

[7] ABS (2016), Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2014-15, https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/8146.0Main+Features12014-15?OpenDocument= accessed on 11 January 2021

[8] Thomas et al (2021), p. 5

[9] eSafety Commissioner (2018) *Understanding the Digital Behaviours of Older Australians. Summary of National Survey and Qualitative Research*, p. 3

[10] ABS (2018), *Household use of information technology* https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/industry/technology-and-innovation/household-use-information-technology/latest-release accessed on 21 December 2020

[11] ACMA (2021) *Communications and Media in Australia. The Digital Lives of Older Australians*, p. 4

[12] Notley, T Chambers, S Park, S Dezuanni, M (2021) Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs, WSU, QUT and University of Canberra, p. 27

[13] Culos, I., McMahon, T., Robertson, S., Baganz, E., Magee, L. (2021). Foundations for Belonging 2021 Insights on Newly Arrived Refugees: Women and Digital Inclusion. Settlement Services International/Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University

[14] Settlement Council of Australia & Good Things Foundation Australia (2021) *Supporting the Digital Inclusion of New Migrants and Refugees*.

Ability

In addition to lower levels of internet usage, older people in Australia have lower levels of digital skills and confidence than younger generations. 80% of older Australians are finding it difficult to keep up with the fast pace of technological change.[15] Only 28% would go out of their way to learn about technology, and 67% are worried about the invasion of their privacy through new technology.[16] Additionally, the social impact evaluation of digital skills program for over 50's 'Be Connected' showed that the longer a person was out of the workforce post-retirement, the more likely they are to not feel confident in having the digital skills they need to keep up with technology.[17]

Older people are also more likely to be missing key digital media literacy skills. 75% of over 75s fall into the 'low media ability' category when assessing their own confidence across 12 different online tasks, compared to just 12% of 18-23 year olds.[18] Gaps in digital media literacy include lacking confidence to identify misinformation online (61% of adults).[19]

Consultations run by the Settlement Council of Australia revealed that digital literacy is a key barrier to digital inclusion for newly arrived and older migrants and refugees.[20] Concerns around security and privacy are a common concern for some migrants and refugees. Not having the digital literacy skills and understanding of the systems they may be required to use, differing levels of trust in government agencies and information, as well as privacy and security concerns can result in a reluctance to put personal information into online portals.[21] A lack of knowledge around security and privacy can also lend itself to individuals being more at risk of scams.

Together, this creates particular risks for older migrants and refugees around safety and protection from online harms, as well as their social inclusion and ability to access services. Given people who are late adopters or have a low level of interest in new technologies tend to also be low consumers of digital media, such as social media, in general,[22] this link between usage and attitudes needs to be considered when

---

[15] ACMA (2021), p. 9
[16] Ibid.
[17] McCosker, A., Tucker, J., Critchley, C., Hiruy, K., Walshe, J., Suchowerska, R., Barraket, J. (2020) *Improving the digital inclusion of older Australians: The social impact of Be Connected*. Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, p. 35
[18] Notley et al (2021), p. 35
[19] Ibid, p. 8
[20] Settlement Council of Australia & Good Things Foundation Australia (2021), p. 6
[21] Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia (2017), 'Digital Access and Equity for Multicultural Communities', p. 6.
[22] Notley et al (2021) p. 67

designing or implementing digital-first support services for older migrants and refugees in Victoria.

Community-led approaches can help to mitigate these digital skill and confidence based risks and overcome attitudinal barriers. Greater knowledge around managing security and privacy online can empower individuals to manage their personal information confidently and appropriately. Digital media literacy can also support people to identify misinformation online. The ACCC's 2019 Digital Platforms Inquiry report recommended that a community-based education program be established to develop resources and train community organisations to upskill all Australians in identifying and scrutinising online news, building on the model of the Be Connected program.[23] Throughout COVID-19, we have found that community-based digital literacy programs can be implemented even in the toughest circumstances, given the right support.

- Read about the digital skills program at Sikh Community Connections, VIC
- Read our Reinventing Digital Literacy Support in a Crisis report

Affordable access

Affordable access is a big barrier for older Australians, particularly those on low incomes and who are new migrants or refugees. Both the ADII access and affordability scores for people aged over 65 are significantly lower than the national average.[24] From research with the Be Connected Network, we also know that many who need digital skills support in this age group did not have access to an appropriate, internet connected device they can use at home during the pandemic.[25] Even after loan device programs were implemented, 74% of our network community organisations delivering digital skills programs to seniors said their learners were lacking access to appropriate devices and data.

Migrants and refugees have also experienced access and affordability barriers to digital inclusion. Newly arrived refugees may have internet access at home, especially households with preschool aged children. However, we understand this is likely to be mobile-only and can often be a single device across multiple family members. This can see people miss out on information, leading to limited education opportunities and access to support services, further increasing social exclusion and isolation.[26]

---

[23] ACCC (2019) *Digital Platforms Inquiry, Final Report*, p. 33
[24] Thomas et al (2021).
[25] Good Things Foundations Australia (2020) *Reinventing Digital Literacy Support in a Crisis. The Impact on Community-based Digital Inclusion Programs*
[26] Settlement Council of Australia & Good Things Foundation Australia (2021) p. 15

- [Read about the digital device loan program at CIRE, VIC](#)

Social exclusion

Digital technology is a vital connector — of communities, of businesses, of families and of friends. With older migrants and refugees more likely to be digitally excluded, there is the risk of a growing digital divide between these communities and the rest of Victoria. This can negatively impact their settlement experience, opportunity to find and maintain voluntary or paid work, and their ability to find reliable information, build social connections and participate fully in their new communities. This can be further amplified by older Australians being more likely to live alone.[27]

With social distancing policies enacted across Victoria over the past two years, the pandemic showed more than ever the need for people to have basic digital skills and affordable access to technology to stay connected. Older people in Victoria have been particularly encouraged to reduce their face-to-face socialisation[28] and in a very short period of time a more extensive range of activities moved online, from ordering essentials to medical consultations. However, at the start of the pandemic, one in five older Australians did not use the internet at all.[29]

Digital inclusion initiatives have been shown to actively reduce social isolation and increase connectedness.[30] The Be Connected program has shown that community-based essential digital skills programs create significant social return on investment of $4 for every $1 spent.[31] Be Connected learners showed an increase in social connections and reductions in loneliness alongside improvements in digital confidence and online safety.

- [Watch video case study of Australian-Filipino Community Services, VIC](#)
- [Read Mama Fe's story](#)

Good Things Foundation's grassroots campaign Get Online Week has also shown success in impacting motivation, capability and connectedness. In 2021, 95% of digital skills event attendees wanted to learn more about what they could do online after attending the event and 86% of event holders said that Get Online Week helped their community to socially connect. Similarly, in our Health My Way program, 92% of our

---

[27] ABS (2016), accessed on 11 January 2021
[28] Thomas, J, Barraket, J, Wilson, CK, Holcombe-James, I, Kennedy, J, Rennie, E, Ewing, S, MacDonald, T, (2020), *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2020*, RMIT and Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, for Telstra, p. 23
[29] Ibid.
[30] McCosker et al (2020), p. 8
[31] Ibid.

participating organisations said the community-based digital health literacy program increased their community's social interactions and connections.[32]

However, these initiatives alone will not ensure all older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds have the essential digital skills and support they need to socially connect.

Language barriers

Language barriers or low English proficiency can be a barrier to digital inclusion for people of migrant and refugee backgrounds.[33] Accessing information on websites and online portals can be difficult when this information is primarily in English. Though in-language and translated information is frequently made available, for example on government websites, this information can be difficult to access due to what has been described as an 'English language firewall' by settlement agencies, where several clicks into the website are required to find the translated information or relevant material. [34] Language barriers and limited in-language upskilling opportunities can also make it difficult to navigate digital literacy skills development.

Our experience has shown that bilingual digital mentors providing digital skills support in trusted community settings supported by translated resources can help to overcome language barriers for older migrants who have English as a second language.

- [Watch video case study of two bilingual digital mentors from Melbourne](#)

Digital technology can also empower people to improve their literacy with the right support. English My Way was a program developed by Good Things Foundation with partners in the UK, which used a blended program approach powered by digital to support English literacy. It was shown to reduce people's social isolation in addition to improving literacy and confidence.[35]

- [Find out more about English My Way](#)

---

[32] Good Things Foundation Australia (2021) '[The social impact of Health My Way](#)', p. 1
[33] Alam, K and Imran, S (2015) 'The digital divide and social inclusion among refugee migrants: a case in regional Australia'. Information Technology and People, vol.28, no.2. p. 16.
[34] Settlement Council of Australia (2020), '[Communicating with migrant and refugee communities during COVID-19](#)', p. 16.
[35] Good Things Foundation. *English My Way*, https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/what-we-do/our-partnerships/wider-inequalities/english-my-way/ accessed 29 November 2021

Health

During COVID-19, healthcare rapidly digitised as restrictions were put in place for in-person services due to lockdowns and risks for patients. Having access to online information and communication technology for health proved invaluable for many people. 50% of older Australians used telehealth for the first time during the pandemic, and 29% increased their use.[36] However, only 52% of Australians over 75 used digital health services in 2021, compared to 82% of 18-35 year olds.[37] The majority of people still used their telephone for their telehealth appointments rather than video conference.[38] This shows the significant room for further digitising health service delivery.

Online health information and communications continue to be critical service pathways for vulnerable communities even with restrictions easing, such as for older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. For many older Australians, transport to appointments can be an issue which could be helped with digital health skills. However, the digital divide means vulnerable populations can be marginalised further through poor access to traditional health and now also digital health services. The digital health divide can affect older patients and patients with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, the same populations experiencing higher rates of chronic disease and worse healthcare outcomes.[39] In addition, there are pre-existing barriers still in place for Australian healthcare providers to support CALD populations with appropriate health care models, resulting in a lack of understanding and patients not feeling supported.[40] Improving older people from migrant and refugee background's ability to affordably access digital health services would provide opportunities for patients to understand their health information better through online translations, and possibly access more culturally appropriate models of healthcare.

- See our Expanding Digital Health Roundtable reports for more recommendations

---

[36] ACMA (2021), p. 8
[37] Thomas, et al (2021).
[38] The University of Queensland, Centre for Online Health (2021) *Telehealth and Coronavirus: Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Activity in Australia*
[39] van Gaans, D, Dent, E. (2018) 'Issues of accessibility to health services by older Australians: a review.' Public Health Review, vol. 39, no. 20.
[40] Ibid.

Current digital inclusion initiatives

Be Connected

Good Things Foundation is an international leader in supporting digital inclusion. Core to our model is a network of hyper-local community organisations alongside high-quality online learning materials. In Australia, we have built and support the Be Connected Network of 3,500 community organisations delivering in-person digital skills programs to over 50's in their community. Be Connected is an Australian Government initiative supporting and enabling older Australians to develop digital skills and confidence online. To date, the program has reached one million Australians and seen 15,000 people become digital mentors, who are able to further support their communities to gain confidence online.

This program is a blended learning approach - using digital tools and a network of in-person support provided by community organisations to motivate and encourage older people to improve their digital capability. In Victoria, we have over 1,000 diverse organisations involved, including community centres, libraries, local Councils, Men's Sheds, aged care and retirement villages and multicultural seniors groups. The digital mentors delivering the support and the community organisations in the network are trusted members of the community, and a big reason as to why this program approach works.

- [Watch our video case study of Indochinese Elderly Refugee Association, VIC](#)

In 2018, we worked with the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) on a Capacity Building project. Through this work, ECCV recruited organisations supporting seniors with English as their second language to use Be Connected materials to upskill community members on using their devices and the internet. ECCV supported organisations to apply for Be Connected funding, then reach out and teach their communities. This community-led approach to digital skills training worked well and ECCV continued to work with University of the Third Age and cultural seniors groups to support digital skills delivery.

Other Network Partners have used bilingual digital mentors to support their older community members with English as a second language. In 2021, we introduced reduced grant KPIs for community organisations supporting CALD communities, recognising the additional time it can take to support this group. While some Be Connected materials are translated into eight languages in downloadable tipsheets, we

know that English literacy remains a barrier to participation for some older migrant community members in this program.

Health My Way

Health My Way is another successful digital literacy program managed by Good Things Foundation Australia. This smaller program worked alongside 75 Network Partners, 15 located in Victoria. Nationally, we trained 232 digital mentors to support over 3,000 learners develop basic digital health skills. This program was open to Australians over the age of 18, and 79% of participating organisations noted that the program increased participants' access to digital health literacy support, and 92% said the program increased participants' social interactions and connections.

- [Read more about the social impact of Health My Way](#)

One identified gap in this program is in providing these resources in Easy English for people with low English literacy, or translated into community languages. This would support the digital health literacy program to reach more older people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Loan digital devices and access for Victorian school children and older people

During remote-learning due to COVID-19, the Victorian government provided loan laptops and dongles to improve digital access for at-risk school children. This was critical to the success of remote learning initiatives for this group to continue their education.[41] Similarly, through the Be Connected program, we provided over $1m in funding to community organisations to develop loan device and data programs for older people in their community at risk of being socially isolated. This program was very successful, and led to many older people being able to connect from home where they otherwise would not be able to. Other organisations such as The Smith Family also support families with digital access programs.

Data indicates that while loan device programs are a good short term solution, they do not go far enough to close the digital divide long term. Even after the Be Connected loan program was implemented, 74% of our community partners still said older learners in their community were lacking access to appropriate devices and data at home. This can in turn have impacts on their ability to socially connect with their friends, family

---

[41] State Government of Victoria (2021) *Lessons learned from Term 2, 2020 remote and flexible learning*, https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/Pages/coronavirus-lessons-from-remote-learning.aspx accessed 29 November 2021

and community, and shows the reliance on community infrastructure for digital access, such as libraries.

Recommendations

Improving digital inclusion will help older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds access reliable information and support services, and stay connected to others.

While there have been successful national programs funded to support the broad population of older Australians to improve their digital skills, there is no national or state-led program specifically supporting the digital inclusion of older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Solutions will require an approach ensuring Victorian communities have affordable access to the internet and appropriate devices, as well as the skills, motivation and confidence to use it safely.

To support older Victorians of migrant and refugee backgrounds to become digitally resilient for the future, Good Things Foundation Australia recommends:

1. **Ensure everyone in Victoria has affordable access to the internet and appropriate devices.** Implement the recommendations of organisations such as ACCAN to support households to afford a reliable internet connection and appropriate digital devices. This may include free internet access and affordable devices.

2. **Co-design digital-first government support services with seniors from refugee and migrant backgrounds**. When designing digital-first services, older people with low levels of English literacy and digital skills must be considered and included, and alternative service provision options made available while the digital divide is closed.

3. **Expand on successful digital skills programs and community infrastructure of the Be Connected Network,** to provide digital mentoring and social support services targeted at older Victorians of migrant and refugee backgrounds. This would include:

    ● Ensuring all older people have the essential digital skills and confidence to access support services, avoid misinformation, and stay connected to others, potentially requiring additional funding for translators or bilingual digital mentors.
    ● Translating digital mentoring and digital skills resources into more community languages and Easy English. Good Things Foundation hosts a

number of web-based resources that support learners and digital mentors with their digital skills training. With funding support, these resources could be translated to make digital upskilling more accessible to those with low English language proficiency.

- Ensure multiple opportunities are available for people to learn digital skills in different contexts, whether embedded in an AMEP class, as part of a social activity, through one-on-one support with a digital mentor or completing an online learning course. This gives learners options to learn the way they prefer.

About Good Things Foundation Australia

Good Things Foundation Australia is a social change charity, helping people to improve their lives through digital. We work with partners in thousands of communities across Australia and the UK.

In Australia, we have built and manage the Australian Government funded Be Connected Network of 3,500 community partners and deliver a small grants program to support people over 50 to learn essential digital skills. We coordinate the annual digital inclusion campaign Get Online Week, which last year supported 23,500 people to improve their digital skills. With the support of the Australian Digital Health Agency and our network of community organisations, we assisted adults of all ages to improve their digital health literacy through our Health My Way program.

Good Things Foundation has run digital inclusion projects in the UK for over ten years and worked in Australia since 2017.

Learn more about our work:

- Information about our projects
- Our research and publications
- Our work in the UK

Contact

Jess Wilson
CEO, Good Things Foundation Australia
P: 02 9521 9292
E: jess@goodthingsfoundation.org
www.goodthingsfoundation.org