



# Digital Mentoring Program & Practice Forum

## HIGH LEVEL SUMMARY & KEY THEMES

### Welcome!

On a gorgeous sunny day in Sydney this autumn, a group of 28 people from various parts of Australia's 'digital mentoring community' gathered to share, learn, and celebrate the important work that digital mentors do across the nation.

We are delighted to share this summary document with you. It is intended primarily for the many other people across Australia who work as, with, or in support of digital mentors and digital mentoring. First, we hope it will give you an insight into the rich discussions that took place during the Digital Mentoring Community Forum ('the Forum'); second, we want this document to act as an invitation to the broader digital mentoring community to connect with others on the issues that resonate most for you.

Digital mentoring matters. 2.5 million Australians are not online;\* 9% never go online; and a further 17% rarely engage with the internet.\*\* We know that digital mentoring is one of the most effective ways to help people bridge the digital divide – and yet this crucial work receives relatively little in the way of public attention.

The Forum was jointly hosted by Australia Post and Good Things Foundation. Australia Post has a deep interest in digital mentoring, and more broadly in digital inclusion, particularly as they relate to and

\* Australia Digital Inclusion Index 2018, <https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/>

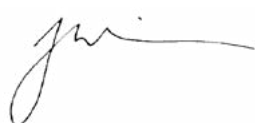
\*\* Digital Participation, A view of Australia's Online Behaviours 2016 by BehaviourWorks Australia for Australia Post, [auspost.com.au/digitalinclusion](https://auspost.com.au/digitalinclusion)

advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Over Australia Post's long history, our social purpose and commitment to the community has remained the same: to create connections and opportunities that matter to every Australian. As digitisation continues to reshape our country and our economy, people who never or rarely use the internet are at risk of being left behind. As a business that's had to go through a digital transformation of our own, we know firsthand the importance of not being left behind. It's why we want to help everyone in Australia become equipped with the skills and confidence to participate in the digital world.

Good Things Foundation is a social change charity helping people to improve their lives through digital. We built and manage the Be Connected Network of over 2,000 organisations across Australia who support their communities to learn digital skills. Through this Network, over 5,000 digital mentors have been recruited. We are dedicated to supporting those organisations and mentors with professional development, grant funding, skill-sharing and creating capacity building resources.

We hope you enjoy reading! We invite you to share this document with your colleagues and networks and to contact us if you are keen to connect with others around the country to discuss particular issues of interest.

With thanks, your hosts



Jess Wilson  
Good Things Foundation



Jessie Fountain  
Australia Post

## Participants

Kirrin Sampson, Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)  
Nan Bosler, Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association (ASCCA)  
Penny Douglas, Brisbane Seniors OnLine  
Stephen Harris, Bundaberg Regional Libraries  
Renee Parr, Department of Social Services  
Paul Segrott, Department of Social Services  
Jill McNaught, Office of the eSafety Commissioner  
Mariette Mikhael, Ethnic Communities Council of NSW (ECCNSW)  
Bridget Rowe-Sykes, Good Things Foundation  
Julie Gibson, Hitnet  
Lynette Phuong, Infoxchange  
Cecily Michaels, Leep NGO  
Himalee Raj, Leep NGO  
Anna Donaldson, Lively (apology)  
Janet Maccora, National Seniors Australia  
Clare Corbet, Neighbourhood Houses Victoria  
Jenny Hickey, Queensland Department of Housing & Public Works  
Michelle Carter, Queensland Department of Housing & Public Works  
Amber Marshall, Queensland University of Technology Digital Media Research Centre (QUT DMRC)

Michael Dezuanni, Queensland University of Technology Digital Media Research Centre (QUT DMRC)  
Laura Landmann, State Library of Queensland  
Anthony McCosker, Swinburne University of Technology  
Susie Nelson, Vision Australia  
Matthew Hunter, Yarra Libraries (City of Yarra)

## HOSTS

Jessie Fountain, Australia Post  
Julia Symons, Australia Post (apology)  
Yvette Pratt, Australia Post  
Cassandra Strakosch, Good Things Foundation  
Jess Wilson, Good Things Foundation

## FACILITATORS

Clare Harding  
Marylou Verberne



**‘One of my main roles is to alleviate fear around technology and to normalise the experience. Many people feel that they are the only ones having such difficulties.’**

Matthew Hunter, Yarra Libraries

## Shining a light: why did we host the Forum?

### Acknowledging the important role of digital mentoring

The role of one-to-one, face-to-face support for digital learners is widely acknowledged as one of the critical success factor of an effective digital learning experience. In early 2019, an informal discussion amongst a small cross-sector group of digital inclusion stakeholders revealed a common interest to share learnings, learn about existing digital mentoring projects and programs, and to collaborate on relevant initiatives where interests and priorities aligned. The group were keen to continue these discussions with a broader audience and to learn more of other digital mentoring activities across Australia.

The Forum grew organically out of several informal conversations. It evolved into an idea to dedicate a day to recognising the vital role that digital mentors play. We aimed to bring together people working on very different aspects of digital mentoring (which takes many forms) from right across the country, to encourage as much diversity in perspectives as possible. The Forum also provided an ideal opportunity for an informal launch of *Digital Mentoring in Australian Communities*, a report and handbook prepared by the Queensland University of Technology for Australia Post.



**'Digital mentoring is a critical component of the digital inclusion effort in Australia'**

Amber Marshall, QUT

**Objectives**

A central aim of the organisers was to create an opportunity for as broad a group as possible to contribute and connect. Although a relatively small number of people from across the sector gathered in Sydney to meet face-to-face at the Forum, this document was conceived as the means to open the conversation to a wider group.

Accordingly, our objectives at the Forum were 'community-oriented'. Overall, we hoped participants would discover new network connections, new ideas, and a renewed sense of inspiration for their work.

**NEW FRIENDS:** we wanted to connect people from across sectors, geographies, and different kinds of expertise, so that they could share, learn, and build relationships in a 'forum of practice'

**NEW IDEAS:** we offered opportunities for participants to share their expertise, research, ideas and top tips.

**RENEWED INSPIRATION:** we sought to celebrate and shine a light on the good work being done in this rewarding, challenging, and important area.





## From hot dates to share plates: what we did on the day

### Connecting

- Setting the mood & breaking the ice with the “Yes, and!” game.
- Indulging in some (cacophonous!) speed dating to get to know one another.
- Enjoying a meal together at the inaugural ‘Australian Digital Mentoring Community Lunch’ (so to speak!).
- Working together.

### Sharing and learning

A diverse group of presenters shared their work and some ‘top tips’ on their experience of digital mentoring including: Mariette Mikhael from the Ethnic Communities’ Council of NSW who shared learnings from their experience running Be Connected training sessions for culturally and linguistically diverse seniors; Stephen Harris from Bundaberg Regional Libraries who told the group about his Digital Health Literacy Program, Susie Nelson from Vision Australia who described her key learnings in running digital mentoring programs for their clients and we heard about the Queensland Government’s GetOnlineQld initiative. Michael Dezuanni and Amber Marshall presented findings from their new report *Digital Mentoring in Australian Communities* and shared their eight principles for effective digital mentoring.





## Mapping the Digital Mentoring Sector

Collectively, we built up a picture of work already underway today in four key areas:

- attracting and recruiting digital mentors;
- training and supporting digital mentors;
- programs that utilise digital mentors; and
- research and sharing best practice.

## Imagining

In small groups we developed visions for the future of these four key areas.

## Key themes from the Forum

The conversations were wide-ranging and threw up many intriguing ideas: we offer here a synthesis of those conversations and the good thinking contributed by all participants on the day, with a focus on the issues that received most attention.

Overall, participants were particularly interested to debate opportunities for maturing digital mentoring through the '*passionate individuals > engaged organisations > vibrant community > professional sector*' spectrum, to permit aligned action on awareness-raising, knowledge-building, and advocacy at a national level. It was felt that this maturing will be necessary if we hope to meet the sheer scale of both current and future need for digital mentors (acknowledging that part of the work to be done is quantifying that need!).

Three main themes emerged, each of which could be an important driver of the evolution of digital mentoring into the future. We have synthesised the Forum participants' many great ideas for the future, and how to get there, into a summary of activities.



## What we learned

### 1. Increase the profile of digital mentoring

- Build a volunteering brand for digital mentoring (eg a household name like surf lifesaving)
- Recruit high profile champions
- Explore and leverage untapped resources for recruiting digital mentors (eg the Corporate Social Responsibility market)
- Storytelling for government

### 2. Increase connection, sharing, and peer support for digital mentors

- Share information on creating learning experiences for specialist cohorts
- Establish regular face-to-face events for the DM community
- Establish regular online events for the DM community

### 3. Enhance knowledge

- Create more effective opportunities and platforms to share what we know
- Calculate the current and predicted national cost of digital illiteracy
- Build the evidence base about the size and nature of the digital mentoring community
- Establish development pathways &/or formal qualifications for digital mentors

**'...trainers/mentors need their own on-going digital education, as technology evolves and changes every day.'**

Kirrin Sampson, ALIA





**'It was great meeting everyone involved in this program and hearing about how others are dealing with challenges.'**

Mariette Mikhael, ECCNSW

## Forum Impact

Participants were surveyed about the impact the Forum had on their program or activity one month post-event. From the responses received, it is clear that participants found multiple aspects of the Forum useful for their programs and projects.

In particular, as a result of the Forum participants described that they:

- Have connected with new contacts that they met on the day regarding their programs, learnings or research projects.
- Have been able to incorporate their learnings from the Forum into their support and engagement models for digital mentors or into workshops within their own programs.

## What's next?

At the Forum, Good Things Foundation and Australia Post undertook to share the learnings from the event with the broader digital mentoring community. If you have any questions regarding information included in this summary and key themes report, do not hesitate to get in touch.

Good Things Foundation are co-hosting a forum in June with our friends at Leep, Australian Seniors Computer Club Association and Brisbane Seniors Online to keep the conversation about digital mentoring going. Digital Mentors: The Heart of the Digital Revolution will take place on 26 July 2019. Tickets available at [leep.ngo/forum](http://leep.ngo/forum)







## Coming up...

### **AUSTRALIA POST**

Following six years of learnings taken from a number of digital inclusion programs and partnerships, Australia Post identified a critical gap in valuing and understanding the role digital mentors play in helping learners to develop their digital skills and confidence. We partnered with Queensland University of Technology's Digital Media Research Centre in July 2018 to investigate digital mentorship in a variety of formats and community contexts. This research is the first of its kind in Australia to focus on the role of the digital mentor in a digital learning interaction. You can read the full report *Digital Mentoring in Australian Communities* at [auspost.com.au/digitalmentoringreport](https://auspost.com.au/digitalmentoringreport)

Based on this research, QUT have been supported by Australia Post to develop *The Digital Mentor's Handbook - 8 Principles of Effective Digital Mentoring*. This resource was designed in close consultation with digital mentors working in community organisations and libraries. It aims to support digital mentors with knowledge and resources, backed by research and best practice. You can view the handbook online at [auspost.com.au/digitalinclusion](https://auspost.com.au/digitalinclusion)

### **GOOD THINGS FOUNDATION**

As managers of the Be Connected Network, Good Things Foundation is delivering face-to-face training and support to thousands of Be Connected digital mentors in 2019 - 2020 through our network of Capacity Builders. We are also hosting a series of meet-up events around the country in July & August 2019, to give digital mentors in the Be Connected program an opportunity to come together and share ideas. In addition, our training and support resources for digital mentors, including professional development webinars, are regularly updated and can be found online: [www.beconnectednetwork.org.au/training-resources](https://www.beconnectednetwork.org.au/training-resources).

In collaboration with our UK team, in 2019 we are also releasing two special guides to support digital mentoring, including one on using games as a way to build digital skills and confidence. These have been developed in partnership with community organisations to ensure they meet the needs of local digital mentors.

## Contact us

We'd love to hear from you if have any queries or would like to continue the discussion.



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