



Delivery of the SEE Program 2023

Good Things Foundation Australia Submission

February 2022



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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.

Consultation Terms of Reference

In considering changes to the SEE program, the Government seeks to:

- improve access and participation
- increase program outcomes with a greater focus on quality LLND training
- improve performance reporting while also looking for opportunities to reduce the administrative and compliance burden on providers where practicable
- ensure flexibility to respond to change.

This Discussion Paper does not include future arrangements for the SEE program in remote and very remote regions of Australia. A Discussion Paper seeking feedback on proposed changes to the delivery of the SEE program in remote and very remote regions will be released in early 2022.

[Discussion Paper available here.](#)

Key Recommendations

This submission includes a number of recommendations regarding the delivery of the SEE program in 2023, particularly related to the needs of learners with low digital literacy. In summary we recommend that:

- LLND training is offered to program participants through community-based providers, who receive upskilling and funding support to deliver programs tailored to their local community's needs.
- Contracting options are updated so that national peak bodies and non-RTOs can provide expert LLND services through their local member network in a multi-provider model, to reach more people and boost participation.
- Program participants are fully digitally included, which may involve intensive digital upskilling and the provision of affordable data and an appropriate device through this program.
- Digital skills training resources are produced in multilingual and Easy English formats to accommodate learners who have English as a second language, people with low English literacy levels or people with learning difficulties.
- Digital mentors are provided with professional development, resources, networking and funding support to effectively deliver quality digital skills programs tailored to their learners needs. This does not necessarily require that the mentors have formal education qualifications - particularly for mentors providing pre-training skills pathways.

Good Things Foundation Australia would welcome the opportunity to discuss our submission and recommendations relating to the SEE program, including our learnings from the delivery of our highly successful digital literacy initiatives.

Introduction

Digital exclusion is an issue that impacts **1 in 4 Australians**,¹ preventing them from accessing skills development and educational opportunities that increase their employability.

Everyone in Australia has the right to affordable access to digital technology and the skills and confidence to use it. Essential digital skills are key to an individual's social and economic participation and to ensuring they are work-ready for the digital economy.

COVID-19 lockdown restrictions across Australia have changed the way we live and work, and highlighted digital inclusion as a national issue. As the world increasingly moved online, so did the modern workplace with digitisation accelerating across sectors. Not only are digital skills now a large part of many jobs, searching for and gaining employment is almost exclusively done online. **87% of jobs in Australia now require digital skills.**²

As an expert in digital inclusion, Good Things Foundation Australia has seen the benefits of community-based digital upskilling in supporting the hard to reach in both the UK and Australia, and understands the challenges, solutions and opportunities to create a more digitally capable workforce for the future.

Good Things Foundation Australia thank the Department of Education, Skills and Employment for the opportunity to give feedback on the *Delivery of the SEE Program 2023*.

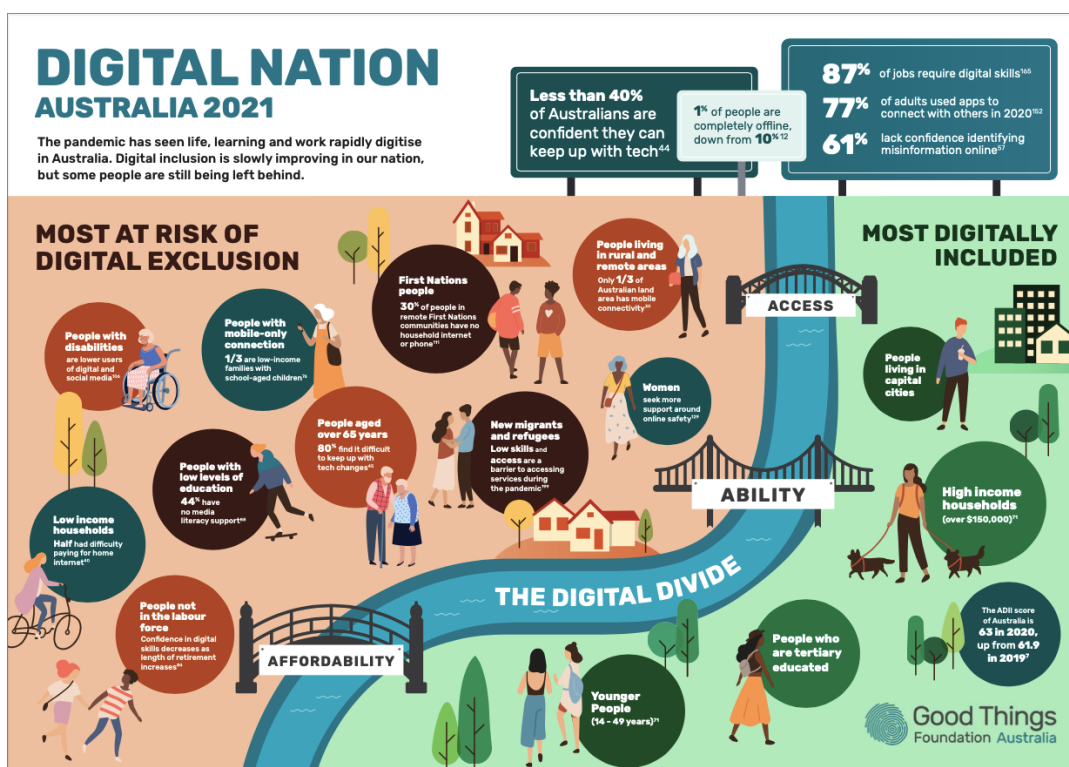
This submission responds to the topics raised in Chapters 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 of the Discussion Paper.

¹ 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

² RMIT Online (2020) [Ready, Set, Upskill: Effective Training for the Jobs of Tomorrow](#), prepared with Deloitte Access Economics, p. 3

The Digital Divide

Across Australia, the digital divide impacts many people and communities. People who are on low incomes, have lower levels of education, have a disability, are older or have a mobile-only connection, First Nations people and people living in regional/rural Australia are particularly at risk of being digitally excluded.³



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

Three main factors influence a person’s ability to cross the digital divide: **ability, affordability, and access**.⁴ 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, family and government.⁵ There are also reduced opportunities to develop key skills. Higher levels of inclusion in all three areas are required to lead people and communities to be 100% digitally included.

A number of the key demographics of participants of the SEE program are also characteristics of people who are more likely to be digitally excluded, such as older

³ Thomas et al (2021).

⁴ Ibid, p. 4

⁵ 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

Australians, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, people out of the workforce, and First Nations people.

Knowing this, Good Things Foundation Australia recommends that specialised and tailored supports are provided to engage people with low levels of language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) and enable them to participate in the SEE program pathways.

- [See our Digital Nation report for more information on Australia's digital divide](#)

Response to Discussion Paper

While the Discussion Paper has a focus on LLND, with the proposed move to remote and online delivery of the SEE program it is useful to think about the program through a holistic digital inclusion lens. This means considering the implications of program delivery from a digital capability and digital access perspective.

It is positive to see that the Digital Capability Framework is part of the LLND focus in this Discussion Paper, given digital skills are a key contributor to modern job-readiness. We note that the detail of this Framework is currently open for [separate review and consultation](#), so will not focus on the value of this specific Framework in this submission.

Boosting participation through digital access

Chapter 2 - Job seeker access and engagement

Affordable access to the internet is a big barrier to full and equal participation in the digital economy for many Australians, particularly those on low incomes.

With the rapid move to remote and online service provision, having an affordable, internet-connected device at home is essential to a person's ability to find and maintain work, access support services and stay connected with friends, family and peers. A lack of affordable digital access is a major barrier to the full participation of people in the digital economy and the continuous improvement of their digital skills.

The increasing reliance on job seekers to search for employment opportunities via online platforms, such as the Government's New Employment Services Model (NESM) platform, requires them to have affordable, personal digital access to self-manage their activity.

Research shows that the divide between people not in the labour force and those who are employed continues to widen, largely due to the cost of being digitally connected.⁶ People who are not in the labour force have an ADII score 13.5 points lower than people who are employed.⁷ A social impact evaluation of Good Things Foundation Australia's Be Connected program, which supports and enables older Australians to develop digital skills and confidence online, has shown that the longer a person has been out of the

⁶ 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. 17

⁷ Ibid., p. 5

workforce (in this case post-retirement), the more likely they are to not feel confident in having the digital skills they need to keep up with technology.⁸

From research with our Be Connected Network, we know that many who needed digital skills support during the pandemic, did not have access to an appropriate, internet connected device they can use at home.⁹ Even after loan device programs were implemented, 74% of our network of community organisations said their learners were lacking access to appropriate devices and data. And, it's not just older Australians who are impacted. A survey of 500 low-income households saw half of those with a home internet connection reported difficulty paying costs associated with the service.¹⁰

- [Read our case study on loan devices from Grafton, NSW](#)
- [Read about the digital device loan program at CIRE, VIC](#)

While the NBN has improved broadband coverage, less than a third of the Australian land mass has mobile coverage.¹¹ This leaves large areas in regional Australia not covered, or covered by only one service provider limiting choice and market competition.

- [See our submission to the Regional Telecommunications Review 2021](#)

Additionally, mobile-only users are less digitally included than people with other connections. However, mobile-only use is a key strategy people implement to overcome connectivity barriers. The coverage issues of mobile networks in regional Australia has the potential to have a significant impact on low income community members, given they are more likely to be reliant on a mobile-only service.¹² Further, a relatively high proportion of First Nations peoples are mobile-only users with prepaid connectivity (35.0% versus the national average of 19.9%), which has a higher cost per unit than fixed internet connections.¹³ We also know that a mobile device such as a smartphone may not be adequate for the needs of a job-seeker or online learner.

In the UK, Good Things Foundation developed the [UK National Databank](#), providing free sims and mobile data (as well as talk minutes and texts) to people in need. The databank platform has been built with support from the O2 lab, and with data donated by both Virgin Media O2 and Vodafone, and allocated to people through Good Things Foundation's network of local community partners. This is one example of a model that

⁸ 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

⁹ Good Things Foundation Australia (2020) [Reinventing Digital Literacy Support in a Crisis. The Impact on Community-based Digital Inclusion Programs](#), p. 11

¹⁰ Ogle, G Law, R (2020) [Connectivity Costs II. Telecommunications Affordability and Waged Poor Households](#), SACOSS, ACSS, TCSS and ACT SS, p. 3

¹¹ Infrastructure Australia (2019) [An Assessment of Australia's Future Infrastructure Needs. The Australian Infrastructure Audit 2019](#), p. 568

¹² Thomas et al, (2020), p. 18

¹³ Ibid. p. 19

could be built on to close the digital access divide for this program, especially if delivered hand-in-hand with digital skills support.

To ensure the SEE program reaches its goals in improving access and participation, it is our recommendation that program investment includes personal access to appropriate and affordable internet connected devices and data for every participant.

Supporting the hard to reach to increase participation

Chapter 2 - Job seeker access and engagement

Chapter 3 - Training delivery

A stated objective of the SEE program outlined in the Discussion Paper is to increase access and participation, while increasing program outcomes and quality delivery of LLND supports.

As an organisation with experience running programs for hard to reach populations (the digitally excluded), several factors have proven to be invaluable in designing programs to increase participation.

1. Providing education pathways via community organisations and networks

The Productivity Commission has identified that foundational work-ready digital literacy programs need to be delivered through channels like community adult education, in addition to school and VET providers, to reach those who would not engage in formal education.¹⁴

It is clear that the community sector is a powerful force for change and drives community participation. Over 1 million people across Australia have already been reached through our Be Connected digital skills program. Our diverse network of 3,500 community partners deliver high quality digital learning programs in hyper-local settings, for example within community centres, Men's Sheds, public libraries or via local support groups, providing effective places of learning for people who are hard to reach.

These organisations offer important alternative pathways to traditional RTO or VET providers with the potential to reach job seekers who have had poor past experiences with formal education, or are experiencing barriers to enrolling in formal education programs.

In our experience, community organisations who are funded to provide this non-accredited training can successfully offer free training courses to learners, delivered by trusted community providers, in an environment that is familiar, localised

¹⁴ Australian Government, Productivity Commission (2020) [National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review. Productivity Commission Study Report Overview](#)

and more readily accessible. There are particular opportunities here in terms of community organisations providing “pre-training” pathways into formal education, and it is our recommendation that this model be integrated into the SEE program.

2. Delivering culturally appropriate training and literacy support

Language barriers or low English proficiency can be a barrier to digital inclusion for many Australians. This is particularly the case for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

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 who provide culturally appropriate support in trusted community settings supported by translated resources, can help to overcome language barriers for digital skills learners who have English as a second language or low English literacy skills. Digital skills training resources also need to accommodate people with low literacy levels, such as Easy Read format resources and video/audio content in plain English, given this is a noted additional barrier to upskilling and participation.

- [Watch video case study of two bilingual digital mentors from Melbourne](#)
- [Read our Increasing Digital Participation of Refugees and New Migrants report](#)

3. Promoting programs via community partners and awareness campaigns

Localised marketing and awareness raising campaigns have been shown to be an effective way of reaching people who are offline or low users of technology and encouraging them to seek support. In our experience, this is best delivered at the local level through community engagement and supported marketing activities with the backing of a national media campaign (including traditional and digital channels).

Good Things Foundation Australia’s annual ‘Get Online Week’ campaign and our Be Connected marketing campaigns consistently reach people in need of digital skills support, resulting in increased referrals to local network partner programs. Utilising marketing and awareness raising campaigns and supporting providers to undertake local initiatives with targeted funding and upskilling may help to overcome the concern

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Settlement Council of Australia (2020), [‘Communicating with migrant and refugee communities during COVID-19’](#), p. 16.

raised in the Discussion Paper about the heavy reliance on participants coming from referring agencies.

- [Read our report on the impact and reach of Get Online Week](#)

Distance learning to reach more people

Chapter 3 - Training delivery

With social distancing measures in place over the past two years, many of Good Things Foundation Australia's community network partners were unable to provide face-to-face digital skills support. This led to an increased risk of people becoming socially isolated. Our dedicated partners found ways to maintain connections with people in their communities by transitioning their delivery of face-to-face training to online programs. For example, two-thirds of our regionally-based network partners were providing digital skills support in August 2021, through face-to-face, telephone and online means, despite COVID restrictions and widespread lockdowns returning.

Helping people with limited digital skills to learn digital via digital is hard. It takes patience, a lot more time, and a clear focus and understanding about the real difference that this can make to people's skills and more importantly, their wellbeing. It also takes offline activity, like phone calls and printed tipsheets delivered with added hygiene measures. However, these efforts have shown that no matter the distance or restrictions, it is possible to provide digital support to those often viewed as too hard to reach.

Though learning face-to-face is more ideal, if we are going to increase digital inclusion in our country long term and reach people during times of crisis, this distance delivery approach needs to continue. Lessons from delivering digital skills programs when mentors and learners could not meet in person are now ready to be applied to long term SEE digital inclusion initiatives, co-designed and specific to the needs of job-seeking Australians.

Key to the delivery of online education and digital support is the need for participants to have access to digital devices and affordable data at home in order to participate in distance education. Providers will also need to be funded for the additional time that it takes to support a digitally excluded participant to get the skills and access needed to participate in online learning opportunities such as webinars.

- [Read our Reinventing Digital Literacy Support in a Crisis report](#)
- [See our Get Online Week 2020 campaign report.](#)

Contracting services & reporting impact

Chapter 3 - Training delivery

Chapter 5 - Performance

Chapter 6 - Quality Assurance

Chapter 7 - Procurement

Good Things Foundation Australia supports the suggestion in the Discussion Paper for extended contract periods of 6 or more years. The digital upskilling and outreach journey, particularly when delivered through a grassroots networked approach can take time, but is a proven and effective model. We have heard through our community providers that they need time to deliver tailored program support and build trusted relationships with learners, and would prefer longer term contracts for the sustainability of local programs.

Additionally, there may be opportunities to contract to service providers that operate nationally at that level, rather than at a contract region level, in order to streamline contracting processes. There is an opportunity for national coordination of community sector providers to ensure quality delivery, ongoing professional development and digital mentor support is in place.

A multi-provider approach would assist to ensure that program participants have options on who they feel comfortable working and learning with, which may improve long-term engagement in programs and outcomes. For example, in one Council area there may be multiple community organisations offering LLND pre-training that creates pathways and warm referrals into formal SEE education offered by existing VET and RTO providers in that area. In our experience, it would also be beneficial to enable organisations such as national peak bodies to be contracted to manage and administer grant funding programs for local members to support their delivery, following the successful Be Connected model.

- [Read the social impact evaluation of Be Connected](#)

The Be Connected program has proven that quality digital upskilling programs can be delivered without an organisation being an RTO or VET provider. However, effort is needed to ensure that mentors are skilled and proficient, particularly in supporting job seekers with additional needs. Digital mentoring is a specific skillset that can be built in the informal education workforce, including volunteers. To our knowledge, there is not currently a formal qualification that is dedicated to digital mentoring. Instead, we have developed approaches to digital mentor upskilling that can be delivered at scale in the community sector alongside small grant contracting & reporting processes that ensure delivery targets are met. Our approach also allows for local flexibility and a tailored approach that suits the individual's and communities learning needs. Further detail of

our independently reviewed governance, grant-making and reporting processes may be shared with the DESE review team on request.

- [Read about our Capacity Building program for digital mentors](#)
- [See our upskilling resources for digital mentors](#)

It is useful to note here that with increasing digitisation of platforms and tools used through this program, employment services and education support workers may also need to be digitally upskilled, in addition to developing their digital mentoring skills for job-seekers. For example, 49% of not-for-profit staff recently stated that they are not confident using technology.¹⁷ Essential skills for employment and education service workers will need to include online safety (cyber security), as well as platform specific literacy.

¹⁷ Infoxchange, Connecting Up & Techsoup New Zealand (2020) [Digital Technology in the Not-for-Profit Sector](#), p. 6

Learnings from digital inclusion initiatives

Having delivered leading digital inclusion initiatives in Australia over the past four years, Good Things Foundation Australia have gained key insights that could benefit the development of the SEE program.

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 supported the Be Connected Network of 3,500 community organisations to deliver in-person and remote 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 1 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 personalised support provided by community organisations to motivate and encourage older people to improve their digital capability. Across Australia, the diverse network of providers includes community centres, libraries, community colleges, local Councils, Men's Sheds, employment service providers and multicultural 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 WorkWays, Charters Towers](#)
- [Read the social impact evaluation of Be Connected](#)

However, Be Connected is only funded to reach over 50's, does not currently contain supports for job-readiness, and offers limited support for audiences with additional needs, such as those with low English literacy. This model is ready to be built upon through the SEE program, if designed in a way that is applicable to their context.

Health My Way

Health My Way is another successful digital literacy program managed by Good Things Foundation Australia. This smaller program involved 75 Network Partners. Nationally, we have trained 232 Digital Health 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.

This program shows that this model is an effective delivery mechanism for programs beyond basic digital skills, and the community sector can effectively upskill people on their employment journey with the right supports in place for digital mentors.

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

Key learnings

From delivering these programs plus our annual Get Online Week digital skills campaign, we have found that:

- Skilled community-based digital mentors are highly effective in engaging local communities in digital literacy programs
- Digital mentors can benefit from targeted upskilling programs, such as those run through our [Capacity Building program](#)
- Flexible, tailored delivery is essential to success - prescribing a universal program does not empower digital mentors to meet the needs of their community in a way that works best for them - particularly when being applied nationally
- Digital mentors and community providers need funding, professional development opportunities and networking with like-organisations to be effective in their delivery long-term. They do not have to be tech-experts or have formal qualifications, but need to be the helping hand or guide on the side of the learner. They need to be patient, empathetic and skilled in motivating people to learn.

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 15,000 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](#)

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