



Hot issues

Helping people Leep into the digital world

The 2017 [Australian Digital Inclusion Index](#) showed that overall digital inclusion is growing in Australia.

Since 2014, when data was first collected for the Index, Australia's overall digital inclusion score has improved by 3.8 points, from 52.7 to 56.5.

The Index also found that gaps between digitally included and excluded Australians are "substantial and widening."

One organisation that is helping to close the digital divide is [Leep](#). The organisation runs digital inclusion programs, training and events, creates resources and supports organisations to create programs that help people get online.

We spoke to CEO, Cecily Michaels, to learn more about barriers to getting connected and the work Leep is doing to give disadvantaged individuals the skills they need to get online.

Barriers to getting connected

Through its work Leep has identified a range of barriers to getting online, from access, to skills and trust issues.

"A main barrier to people accessing digital devices on a regular basis is cost and the lack of disposable income to purchase them," said Ms Michaels.

"This also applies to home internet connections as the need to pay a monthly internet bill is outweighed by other household expenses."

Other access issues include a lack of available public devices and Wi-Fi services, lack of accessible devices for people with a disability and lack of skills to use technology.

"Whilst access to technology is often considered the primary barrier to being online, many fail to consider the fact that those who are digitally excluded may not have the skills necessary to use devices," added Ms Michaels.

"Fear of the internet and the threats to privacy and security that it might present is another reason people present to us as to why they avoid being online. Others believe that they have nothing to gain from being online."

As technology becomes more central to our everyday lives, Leep recognises that new risks will emerge from our state of constant connectivity and digitisation.

“The emergence of the Internet of Things, internet connectivity being built into everyday items such as kitchen appliances, cars and children’s toys, along with the digitisation of personal data such as health and financial records, has raised new security and privacy threats,” said Ms Michaels.

“These threats have been exemplified through the recent phenomenon of global hacking and ransomware attacks.

“We believe that by participating in programs with a familiar and trusted environment, such as our Leep in Lab, people discover how to protect their privacy and stay safe online.”

The Leep in Lab and Network

Leep works with individuals experiencing disadvantage and underserved communities to help bring them online and enable them to participate in the digital world through a range of programs.

One of these programs is the [Leep in Lab](#) which is an on-site digital mentoring program where volunteer digital mentors provide free one-on-one support to help people learn how to use their devices (laptop, computer, phone or tablet) and the internet.

The Lab runs four hours a week and mentors run a topic-based technology workshop once a fortnight. Previous workshop topics include Skype and how to manage digital photos.

“Our Lab has developed a vibrant social environment, where learners and mentors sit, chat, have a cup of tea and a bikkie and explore technology together,” said Ms Michaels.

In 2016, the [Leep in Network](#) was launched. The Network is a social and digital inclusion movement that brings community partners from across NSW together to combine efforts in bridging the digital divide. The network is open to partners who provide existing support (from free Wi-Fi and public computers to training and support services) and partners who are creating new digital learning opportunities based on the digital mentoring model.

“Leep supports community organisations, businesses and councils to create programs like the Leep in Lab by providing advice, a toolkit of resources and help recruiting and training volunteer mentors,” added Ms Michaels.

“We have hosted network events, such as our most recent forum in Blacktown; ‘Imagine Tomorrow Together: Creating Digital Communities,’ where over 100 stakeholders including learners, mentors, service providers, advocates and experts came together to discuss the future of digital inclusion in Australia and run practical workshops on providing digital mentoring programs.”

For more information on Leep and their digital inclusion work, check out their website:

www.leep.ngo

This article was also published in the Spring 2017 edition of the [ACCAN Magazine](#) which is now available online.