



Towards a digital strategy for the Northern Territory

Discussion paper priority: Children

Submitted by the Alannah & Madeline Foundation

October, 2017



**Alannah & Madeline
Foundation**

Keeping children safe from violence

The Alannah and Madeline Foundation welcomes the opportunity to provide this response to the Northern Territory Government's Digital Strategy submission.

The Foundation strongly supports the creation of a Digital Strategy, which seeks to improve provision of digital education in the Northern Territory by designing services around the community needs.

The submission addresses the following questions:

1. What are your ideas for best supporting Territory children in the digital age through education, opportunity and balance to stay happy and healthy in an increasingly online lifestyle?

eSmart is the flagship program of our digital literacy and safety work which has been implemented in nearly one third of Australia's schools, 80% of Australia's public libraries and a number of leading companies with close ties to their community e.g. eSmart is implemented in every McDonald's store across the country.

After eight years of working closely with communities, the Alannah & Madeline Foundation (the Foundation) has developed a deep appreciation of the challenges and opportunities faced by children and families to be smart, safe and responsible online.

Our children increasingly live their lives both on and offline. Our responsibility as a society is to enable them to benefit from technology while keeping them safe. There is no magic "technological solution" – it comes down to behaviours, practices and appreciation of risk. These are skills that can be taught and adopted within families from very early on with the right support.

Addressing the challenge of keeping young children safe online needs to be part of a broader effort to build cyber safety and promote security awareness and behaviours. Frameworks and policy development needs to be supported by an investment in behaviour change. Changing people's behaviour is complex and there is overwhelming evidence in the field of public health that shows that governments cannot simply deliver key policy outcomes to significantly change public behaviour, without investing in education and support.

Within Australia there is a significant "digital divide" – not just to access to technology, fast broadband and access to programs, but there is also a wide disparity in access to digital literacy, cyber safety training and support. This is evident when examining current access to up to date information - very few schools in the Northern Territory have access to eSmart (the most widely adopted eSafety framework) and support service leaving teachers, parents and students without systematic training, support, guidance, professional services and advice on reducing cyber bullying, building digital safety, and creating safe, smart and responsible online behaviours in schools.

In the 2016 Census, 69.7% of homes in the Northern Territory had an internet connection. This compares to the national average of 80%. This also meant that 30% of possible respondents didn't have internet connection or didn't answer the question. The lack of internet access indicates a level of disadvantage related to socio-economic factors, age, or geographical isolation. In terms of remote areas, the most likely factor to lack of access is geographical isolation and the lack of infrastructure.

As technology changes, significant disparities in access and opportunity are emerging. With an increasing proportion of economic, social and government activities going digital, those Territorians who are not digitally connected or engaged are less able to experience the social and educational benefits of digital technology. Having equitable access is critical to the success

of a healthy, happy and engaged community. Successful government digital strategies have prioritised enabling digital access and found this led to improved social and civic engagement, improved quality of life and educational achievement.

The Measuring Australia's Digital Divide report was led by Telstra and Swinburne University and, in 2016, the Australian Digital Inclusion Index was released. It identified that Indigenous Australians have a low digital inclusion score, way below the Australian average. However this gap may be greater than this figure suggests; remote Indigenous communities were not surveyed and other research shows that this group is less likely to have internet connections.

Indigenous Australians are much more likely to be mobile-only users (49% of those surveyed compared with the total population 21%).

This adds further disadvantage because it is a more expensive way to access data and these mobile-only users generally are found to have lower than average capability for basic digital skills.

In order to achieve genuine community digital inclusion, awareness of the benefits of digital technology needs to be promoted, building digital infrastructure to enable community to be online needs to be prioritised then updating digital skills can begin.

2. What are your ideas for encouraging young people, especially girls, to take-up STEM subjects and develop the digital skills required for the workforce of the future?

A strong STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) curriculum is essential in preparing young people for the workforce, and also to equip them with the essential skills to fully participate in society. In the future, it will be even more important for young people to develop the skills and capacity to problem solve and be able to think innovatively and creatively.

Digital skills are essential in supporting the STEM curriculum. Traditionally girls have been less likely to pursue these subjects, and today there is little evidence of women role models showing capacity in these spheres. Lacking STEM skills will put young people at a significant disadvantage in the future both in the workforce and being able to participate fully in society.

The importance of STEM subjects in education at all levels - primary and secondary - is a priority for education in the Northern Territory. There is significant value of including STEM in education to develop students with the broad learning skills and an ability to solve real-world problems.

The Foundation has developed relationships and programs for young women in the Northern Territory. In 2016, in collaboration with the Stars Foundation, the local community and Telstra, the Foundation created the STARS Program. The program provides Digital Licence scholarships and hands-on training, to 500 girls in years 7-12 in the Northern Territory. We also train and support mentors and teachers.

The Digital Licence ensures that participants have the skills and confidence to use digital technologies safely. Several adaptations were made in response to the particular needs of the Northern Territory community, including the development of resources to support mentors, many of whom were not trained teachers. Cyber bullying was a particular focus, as it is for girls in general.

Limited understanding of cyber safety may lead to some Northern Territory communities taking longer to use digital technologies, and they are therefore putting themselves and their community at risk. Up until quite recently, there has not been a comprehensive digital study or evaluation of the issues and challenges to address cyber safety in remote Indigenous communities.

The landmark study Cyber Safety in Remote Aboriginal Communities and Towns (Rennie; Hogan and Holcombe-Jones, 2016 Swinburne Institute for Social Research) outlines the significant challenges regarding privacy, financial security, violence, cyber bullying, jealousy, reputation, smashing devices, sharing of devices. There is a deep requirement for digital literacy which acknowledges cyber safety as part of digital inclusion and incorporates the unique cyber safety concerns related to mobile only users.

The eSmart program provides child centred tools including the award winning Digital Licence to build children's skills, awareness and confidence. Based on various scenarios, the Digital Licence allows a child to step into the digital world, explore and make choices. Their choices get immediate feedback, reinforcing mastery, agency and awareness of risk across a range of domains. The Foundation is working with Indigenous students in schools in the Northern Territory and together we have co-designed a version of the Digital Licence which is more play based, uses voice activated options and applies a range of comprehension and reading requirements.

It has been very well received and is proving very effective. Students enjoy using the Digital Licence in and out of school and feedback from schools indicate that students and staff feel more confident online. Our partnership with Google will further extend this work to reach more communities in 2018.

3. What are your ideas for enabling children to have the confidence to be creators as well as consumers of digital content?

Central to being confident with digital technologies is the understanding of risks, and the capacity to manage them. Being confident and knowledgeable online also addresses the fears associated with what may be illegal activities, a lack of trust in the online world, or not knowing where to start online.

Online learning is integrated into the curriculum from transition through to the final years of school in age appropriate ways in the Northern Territory. Some will be in technology-specific subjects and others embed the content of other subjects. This is important and must continue.

Over the past five years, the Foundation has been working with public libraries across the breadth of Australia and with our partner, Telstra, we have been privileged to see the rise in play and exploration using robotics and coding. Public libraries use Ozobots or miniature robots, to help children learn basic coding in a fun and safe way. State libraries are funded to offer resource kits which are booked and sent out to remote communities to enable them to have access to new and emerging technology. Library members across Australia can borrow resources, such as iPads, to support literacy and learning in more regional and remote communities.

Coding involves telling a computer what you want it to do through step-by-step commands. It requires knowledge of the programming languages of code. Speak this code and you can create toys, music and ideas relevant to life in the 21st century. Coding clubs are spreading like wildfire across Australia and can be resourced by volunteers, such as Code Clubs Australia.

Children access digital technologies at home, and it is important that parents have the skills to guide and support their children's access at home. Providing support at school, home and in the community is a priority of the eSmart program, which is currently available in all public libraries in the Northern Territory.

4. What are your ideas for keeping kids safe online and helping them to make good decisions to be equipped to deal with issues they may encounter online?

While digital technology has created many wonderful opportunities, it has also increased the potential for harm. The Raising Children Network, a website dedicated to providing parents with

evidence-based content suggests there are three main kinds of internet safety risks for children – content risks such as exposure to pornography, violence and other content meant for older people; contact risks including children coming into contact with people they don't know; and conduct risks such as cyber bullying and sharing of private information.

According to the Australian eSafety Commissioner 60% of parents say their child is exposed to risks from being online. All levels of government have an obligation to protect our youngest Australians and teach the right protective behaviours before the wrong ones are formed.

It is important for children to build knowledge, respect and positive relationships with their community and also have an opportunity to enrich their cultural life. Digital technology paves the way for greater accessibility to information and services than ever before however, with this access, comes safety priorities.

Some governments have previously chosen to restrict the access to certain sites in an overly restrictive, paternalistic manner. We believe passionately that this is not the road to head down, children are very skilled in work-arounds, hacking and breaking restrictions, but more importantly, we believe that education is key and mentoring children with skills in schools and public libraries is critical to keeping them safe online.

We believe the Northern Territory Digital Strategy should aim to champion inclusion and lifelong learning to ensure children are digitally skilled, confident and literate. To achieve this, the strategy should focus on creating people-centred programs and services using technology to be responsive to the needs of the community.

5. What are your ideas for helping parents and carers to help their kids get the most from the digital world?

To be able to serve the Northern Territory population of 240,000, partnerships are key to building positive, meaningful and lasting digital services and impact. The Northern Territory has a rich and diverse population of Indigenous peoples and more than 25% of Territorians speak a language other than English at home. Cultural inclusion is paramount and it is important to support parents and carers with a wide variety of tools and resources. This involves a holistic, community approach to embed positive and lasting change, awareness and skills.

The Foundation currently facilitates learning in school and public library settings across Australia to build successful digital skills. Our work in remote communities using a co-designed approach to develop the Digital Licence is a good example of creating the right environment of trust, mutuality and effective tools. This focus impacts the learning environment by making it safe online and reaches out to families and communities to also learn and build skills.

To explore and embrace the benefits of technology, and at the same time educate and protect children from online risks, requires a skills building focus and open conversations with parents and carers.

Talking about online safety and being responsible online also requires parents and carers to role model acceptable behaviour. With skills developed, parents can empower children to practice positive decision making when faced with difficult online situations.

Our digital inclusion partner, Telstra, already contributes an on-the-ground digital literacy and cyber safety program in communities across the Northern Territory, called Indigimob. The program provides technical support in remote areas. This program directly addresses critical barriers to the take up and use of technology and is being delivered in conjunction with the Indigenous Remote Communications Association.

We understand that one of the unique challenges is the need for digital literacy programs to be co-designed and community based. To improve digital inclusion, even those in remote Indigenous communities who may be currently resisting the adoption of digital technologies,

need to be shown the value of being connected to the online world and how this could improve their lives.

How we can work together with great success?

The Alannah & Madeline Foundation is well placed to work with the Northern Territory Government to support Territory children to stay happy and healthy in an environment with an increasingly online lifestyle.

The Foundation has developed and implemented a range of programs to promote the safe use of digital technologies. The programs have been developed in response to the growing use of online technologies and their potential impact on wellbeing. The programs are provided through schools and libraries, and more recently workplaces.

Our partners include the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, Telstra, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), Google and government Departments of Education and Training across Australia. In fact our programs are accredited by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner and we work closely with them to remain up to date and current.

The Foundation's prevention programs are Better Buddies, eSmart Schools and Libraries, the Digital Licence and the National Centre Against Bullying (NCAB). Better Buddies is a curriculum resource for primary schools, designed to enhance or introduce buddy systems in schools, eSmart Schools and Libraries uses a cultural change approach to improve cyber safety, increase digital literacy and reduce cyber bullying within schools and public libraries, the Digital Licence is an online challenge which uses quizzes, videos and games to teach school age children how to play, learn and socialise online in a smart, safe and responsible way and NCAB is a peak body working to advise and inform the Australian community on the issue of childhood bullying and the creation of safe schools and communities, including the issue of cyber safety.

The Foundation has a strong history of working in digital safety with the eSmart suite of Schools, Libraries and the Digital Licence. The Digital Licence is an interactive and engaging online platform with a variety of Avatars to choose from. Children answer 80 quiz questions within eight key learning areas. These include; Digital Devices, Protecting Privacy, Searching and Researching, Creating and Sharing, Social Networking and Gaming, Communicating Safely Online, Credit, Coins and Tokens, Relationships and Reputations and Friends and Strangers. The Northern Territory currently has 12 schools who are already incorporating the Digital Licence in their learning curriculum, meaning over 1,000 students have experienced its benefits.

We have worked with Education Departments and schools since 2009, when the Foundation developed the eSmart Schools program which now reaches nearly 2,500 schools across Australia. The program has been developed for both primary and secondary students. We currently work with a number of schools in remote communities and schools with indigenous populations. eSmart is a key program in schools across Australia from Penrith, Rockhampton, Townsville, Mildura, Katherine, Warrnambool and Gippsland.

The Foundation works across Australia, providing care to children affected by family violence in every region. Our ground breaking work in cyber safety and digital literacy is delivered within public, private, secular and community controlled settings. In the past year we have increased our strong commitment to address the "digital divide" by actively partnering with the Stars Foundation to support young women in remote Indigenous communities to become digital champions and reduce their online risks and experience of cyber bullying. The Stars Foundation, with support from Telstra has delivered 500 eSmart Digital Licences to young women between years 7 and 12 in Darwin and Katherine.

The Foundation also has a history of working with communities in the eSmart Libraries program. Since it was piloted with 80 Australian library branches in 2012 including northern and central Australia, the program now engages more than 1,000 library branches across Australia, including all 33 in the Northern Territory. The reach of eSmart Libraries is significant given that more than half of the

Australian population use public libraries and eSmart is currently in 70% of the 1,500 public libraries nationally.

The eSmart Libraries initiative was evaluated in 2014 and 2015 by the Western Sydney University which concluded that participating library services respond better to, and develop, library users' digital literacy and cyber safety needs. This outcome was achieved through building management and staff confidence, introducing or improving internet access policy and procedures, delivering training and support to library users, and engaging more broadly in the community.

Library managers and local government representatives reported that the implementation of the framework has enabled them to demonstrate to their local government their expertise in digital literacy, cyber safety and online risk mitigation. This indicates that eSmart is playing a crucial role in increasing the visibility of coordinated approaches to fostering smart, safe and responsible online engagements in libraries.

All of these programs are supported by the Connect program where speakers can provide specialist presentations on cyber safety, bullying and wellbeing. Through Connect workshops and the consultancy service, the Foundation would partner with the Northern Territory Government to jointly work in a number of regional and remote Indigenous communities to enhance digital ability, online safety and to ensure digital inclusion for all.

Connect provides low cost workshops to parents, teachers and students on cyber safety, cyber bullying, and inclusion – over 350 workshops have been delivered to communities in 2017.

The Foundation is the convenor of the National Council Against Bullying (NCAB) which is the peak body for bullying in Australia. NCAB is often asked to provide policy and media advice on bullying issues. We would be happy to provide the Northern Territory Government with policy guidance, when requested.

We are a research partner in the 1,000 Days project addressing key factors affecting the first three years of Aboriginal child development; we have a good partnership with the Danila Dilba community controlled Aboriginal Health Service to support the Nurse Family Partnership; we provide material aid to support Indigenous children entering kinship care and we have provided emergency care services (Buddy Bags) for free to more than 6,000 children in the Northern Territory who were exposed to violence in the home.

We are strongly committed to equity and digital inclusion and believe we can successfully work together to provide schools, libraries and communities in the Northern Territory with eSmart and the services they require to stay up-to-date and to be digitally safe and aware.

The Alannah & Madeline Foundation provides ongoing support, guidance, advice and access to crisis management services. In conjunction with the Northern Territory government, we can address the needs of communities and especially of children.

Lesley Podesta
CEO
Alannah & Madeline Foundation

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