



**QUT**

# **BRIDGING THE LOW-INCOME FAMILIES DIGITAL DIVIDE**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

I acknowledge the Turrbal and Yugara, as the First Nations owners of the lands we meet on today. I pay respect to their Elders, lores, customs and creation spirits.

I recognise that these lands have always been places of teaching, research, learning and knowledge-sharing.

I also acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples on whose unceded lands our research takes place, and pay respect to their Elders, past and present.

# LOW-INCOME FAMILIES DIGITAL DIVIDE

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- Families **living on a low-income** are often highly digitally excluded.
- They face barriers accessing and using digital technologies that are often compounded by other forms of disadvantage such as not finishing high-school or being **'mobile-only.'** (Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2023)
- **15-20%** of Australian children are impacted by a serious level of digital exclusion.
- **Low-income students** are significantly behind the expected benchmarks for digital skills.



**“When COVID first started last year, we had to do online education. I asked for the hard copy of what the teacher was setting out, but there were certain programs that we had to do online. The school had a record of what was being done and could see if she was getting it right or wrong. She would do that on my phone. And it was really hard, cause it’s just a small phone and the keypad was really small, and just everything was really hard to use because it was a phone. Yeah, it was just really hard for her to see, to type. We really needed a tablet at least.”**

**Mother**

# DIGITAL INCLUSION MATTERS

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- Ethnographic research with families in six communities around Australia over two years (see Dezuanni et al., 2023; Osman et al., 2024).
- Children, families and communities experience digital inclusion in complex ways.
- Differential access across families impacts children's learning at home.
- Parenting and caring approaches impact digital inclusion.



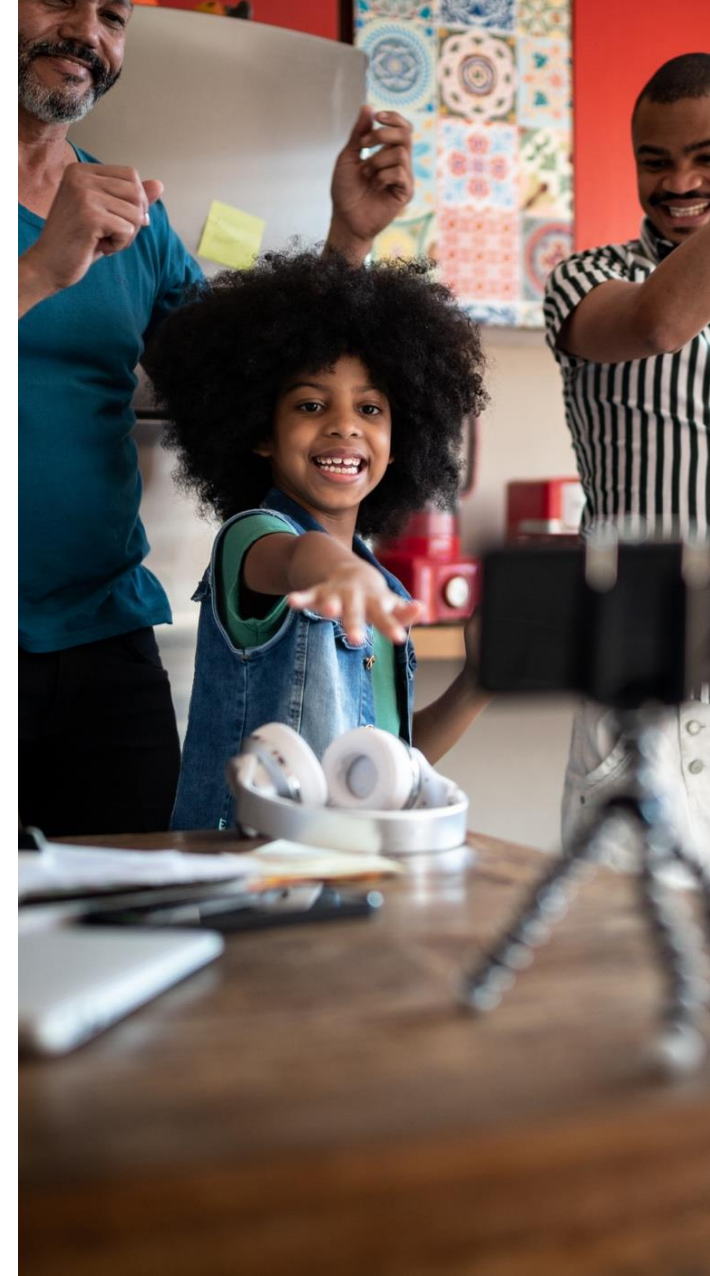
# LOW-INCOME FAMILIES VALUE CONNECTION

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- **Affordability:** Families are resilient, but hard decisions have to be made.
- **Access:** Technology is critical for education, lifelong learning and pathways to employment.
- **Digital ability:** Cultural, creative and social activities drive digital participation.

**“I’m really restrictive about data with my daughter as my older sons need it more”**

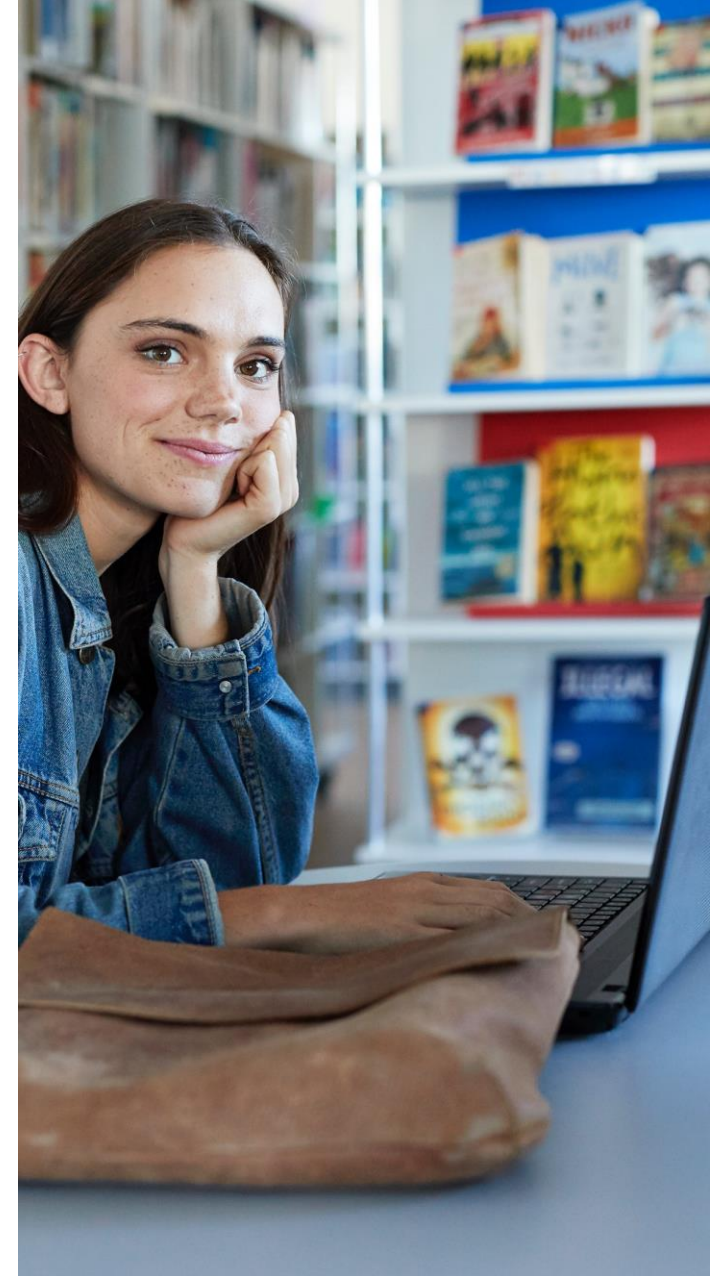
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# DIGITAL INCLUSION IN THE COMMUNITY

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- Libraries and community centres play a central role in supporting families' digital inclusion.
- Very few digital literacy programs are designed specifically for children, teenagers, parents and caregivers.
- Communities rely on Facebook to circulate vital information.
- Families living in regional and rural towns face specific digital inclusion challenges.



**“We're preparing our kids for this world that exists with this [mobile device] is the only thing that that they can use, you know, they don't need anything else. But here we are on the ground constantly dealing with people who don't even have that.”**

**Community Worker**



# BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

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1. Low-income families should have access to affordable pre-paid products.
2. Provide just-in-time support for families to access technology and digital services.
3. Community-based organisations should collaborate to advocate for increased resourcing to support low-income families' digital inclusion.
4. Develop guidelines & policy for the provision of school technology to low-income students.
5. Expand the range of consumer information available.



# DIGITAL INCLUSION IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS

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6. Design and deliver digital inclusion programs for families and young people.
7. Digital service delivery platforms must be appropriate & accessible.
8. Funding for programs & activities needs to be fit-for-purpose and sustainable.
9. Rural and regional towns need particular support to meet the digital inclusion needs of low-income families.
10. Essential community information needs to be communicated across a variety of digital and non-digital platforms.



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**THANK YOU**

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