CONNECTING IN THE GULF:
DIGITAL INCLUSION OF INDIGENOUS FAMILIES LIVING ON MORNINGTON ISLAND
We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which this research was conducted, the Lardil people of Gununa/Mornington Island, and the Turrbal and Yuggera people on which QUT stands. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.
Acknowledgements

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Artwork and Report Design by Chelsey Priddle who belongs to the Gooreng Gooreng / Taribelang people of Central Queensland.

Digital ability and digital inclusion have been linked to a range of social and economic benefits. Australian families who have adequate, affordable access to digital technologies, and the knowledge and skills to use them, have better outcomes across life spheres of education, work, finance, health, and wellbeing. Families living on low incomes are some of the least digitally included Australians, and for families living in remote communities, this disadvantage can be compounded by lack of access to resources readily found in regional and urban areas.

This project, Connecting in the Gulf: Digital Inclusion for Indigenous Families Living on Mornington Island, emerged from conversations and existing relationships with Mornington Council and community members, who face complex challenges related to digital inclusion. This project aimed to address community concerns regarding access, affordability and digital skills, as well as internet safety. Our fieldwork was conducted in Gununa, the only township on Mornington Island, in the Gulf of Carpentaria (QLD) on Country belonging to the Lardil people.

Employing Indigenous research methods and methodologies, this project explored digital challenges faced by Aboriginal families living on Mornington Island toward future action, bridging the digital gap and increasing digital inclusion in Gununa and on Country (including lands and waters) outside the township.

This project highlighted the importance of Indigenous research practices and methods, including community involvement in research at every stage, and the vital need for further investigation into how poor digital inclusion affects Aboriginal families living in remote communities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Historical Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>About Mornington Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Digital Inclusion in Indigenous Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Digital Inclusion: Policy Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Indigenous Digital and Data Sovereignty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Undertaking the Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Community Voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Future Direction: Towards Indigenous Digital Wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Before discussing the project, it is important to contextualise this work historically, socially and culturally. To understand the experiences of Aboriginal families in Gununa, Mornington Island’s history must be considered. In the early 1900s, all islands in the Wellesley Group were declared Aboriginal reserves. The ‘Chief Protector of Aboriginals’, after visiting Mornington Island, lobbied the Government to establish a protectionist presence on Mornington Island after which the Presbyterian Church established a mission at Gununa, financially assisted by the Government. By 1921, the use of dormitories, isolating Aboriginal children from their families (in the name of education and protection) was well established. In addition to the movement of Aboriginal children from local mainland and island groups to these dormitories, several Kaiadilt adults were relocated to Mornington Island mission by the Government in the 1940s. The Mornington Island dormitories closed in 1954 (Queensland Government, 2015).

Today, the Mornington Island community is a blended community of local Aboriginal families, families who were historically moved to the island, and people who have moved voluntarily to the island. New and relatively transient residents include a small number of Indigenous Australians, international First Nations peoples, as well as non-Indigenous people who move to the island to work in local organisations in justice, education, health, community and social services, the Council and in other organisations. Speaking to community members, there is a shared sense of deep loss among the Aboriginal community regarding the impact of previous Government policies, that have led to separation from Country and have negatively impacted transmission of language and cultural practices between Elders and young people. Intergenerational trauma continues to impact the lives of Elders who remember these times, and their living descendants. It is within this historical and lived experience that five local Aboriginal families spoke to us about their experiences using digital technology on Mornington Island today.
ABOUT MORNINGTON ISLAND

Mornington Island is the largest of the Wellesley Islands, which are located in Southern Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland. At this time, issues related to physical isolation, supply chains and food security, health and social service provision, and educational disadvantage (including having no senior secondary school on the island) have restricted most Mornington Island community members from digital, social and economic inclusion, as reflected by the 2021 census.

In the 2021, 822 people living in the Mornington region identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (80.2% of the total population) with Indigenous community members having a median of 26 years of age (ABS, 2021). A number of people (86) did not indicate their cultural background, while 122 people identified as non-Indigenous. Of the Indigenous community on Mornington Island, 1.4% were attending vocational education (including TAFE) and 0% were completing university or higher education. Of the 173 people aged 15-24 years old, there were 31 young people attending secondary school (ABS, 2021), with 43 residents not providing information about their education. There were 327 people who spoke an Indigenous Australian language at home, and 467 people spoke English only (56.8% of residents). In 2021, 76% of Indigenous residents reported not being in the labour force (3% of residents did not respond). Of those who indicated they were employed, most (31.9%) were employed by Local Government Administration, followed by Employment Placement and Recruitment Services (13.8%) and by the grocery shop on the island (7.8%).
DIGITAL INCLUSION IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Australian Context

The ADII (2021) uses a national survey to measure three dimensions of digital inclusion including Access, Affordability, and Digital Ability. Several scholars (i.e., Babacan et al., 2021; Featherstone et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2018, Thomas et al., 2021) have reported that Indigenous people in remote communities, where high levels of geographic isolation and socio-economic disadvantage are challenges, can have very limited access to digital infrastructure and services. Indigenous families living on Mornington Island are among the least digitally included residents in Australia as the ADII shows that North-West Queensland is one of Australia’s least digitally included regions (Thomas et al., 2018; as cited in Marshall et al., 2019). Although the ADII has not, to date, captured data from Indigenous Australians in remote regions, Babacan et al. (2021), Featherstone et al. (2022), and Thomas et al. (2018, 2019) have undertaken focused studies of digital inclusion challenges in remote Indigenous communities such as Ali Curung in Central Australia, and Wujal Wujal and Pormpuraaw in Far North Queensland.

Recent studies (i.e., Featherstone, Holcombe-James, et al., 2022; Featherstone, Ormond-Parker, et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2019) indicate that the access and affordability of digital connections and devices for Indigenous Australians in remote regions is diminished with their level of geographical remoteness and, for many, internet access is limited to their mobile phone. This “mobile-only group - defined as those who access the internet exclusively with a mobile phone, internet dongle or other simcard-based device - now represent a substantial minority of the whole population” (Rennie et al., 2019, p. 115). For mobile-only users, connectivity costs are higher per gigabyte than fixed connections, and therefore results in poor levels of affordability amongst Indigenous Australians (Thomas et al., 2019). Mobile-only users also are often in the lowest household income bracket (less than $35,000 per annum), experience lower levels of education, and are more often unemployed (Thomas et al., 2019). Furthermore, being mobile-only users restricts Indigenous Australians from accessing benefits relating to the size of the data allowances which are delivered through fixed rather than mobile broadband, and also “from accessing advantages that accrue to NBN subscribers as a better type of fixed broadband technology” (Thomas et al., 2019, p. 17).

According to the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) (Thomas et al., 2021):

“Digital inclusion is about ensuring that all Australians can access and use digital technologies effectively... everyone should have the opportunity to benefit from digital technologies: to manage their health, access education and services, participate in cultural activities, organise their finances, follow news and media, and connect with family, friends, and the wider world (p. 3)."
Owing to low levels of digital inclusion, Indigenous Australians living in remote communities such as Mornington Island have limited access to online resources, including socio-economic, cultural, political, and educational activities. More specifically, as well as challenges associated with access and affordability, remote Indigenous Australians with limited digital ability are further restricted from using online and mobile technologies to improve skills, enhance their quality of life, and access education, health and wellbeing services.

Beyond individual impacts, low levels of digital inclusion can impede broader social and economic development in remote regions. The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network’s (ACCAN) Indigenous Steering Committee Chair emphasises that “any digital inclusion efforts... need to be developed and led by First Nations peoples and community-controlled organisations in order to achieve genuine progress” (ACCAN, 2021).
International Context

International literature on Indigenous digital inclusion has highlighted challenges and opportunities associated with the development, deployment, and adoption of rapidly emerging digital technologies in comparative studies conducted with small remote Indigenous communities. In North America, McMahon (2020) discussed the challenges rural Indigenous communities in Canada experience, including supply-side challenges (i.e., availability and cost) and demand-side challenges (i.e., appropriate digital literacy programs). Similarly, remote Indigenous communities in the United States of America (USA), including Indigenous communities in Alaska, have faced similar challenges of limited or no access to broadband, owing to high infrastructure costs, remote distances, difficult terrain and extreme climate (Hudson & McMahon, 2022). Likewise, Fontaine (2017) examined the digital divide in Canada’s Northern Indigenous communities and noted the impact that a lack of digital access in Indigenous remote communities has on a person’s ability to participate in the digital economy. Fontaine identified a number of barriers to digital adoption in Canadian Indigenous communities, including a lack of infrastructure and connectivity as well as a lack of digital literacy and training.

In both Canada and the USA, efforts to improve rural digital inclusion have included a) investment in extension of broadband networks through existing providers, and b) supporting remote Indigenous communities toward self-determination and community control over their broadband infrastructure.

“Indigenous organisations, including Indigenous providers, have advocated for policies to extend affordable broadband, and to require consultation by carriers that receive Government funding or licenses to serve Indigenous lands” (Hudson & McMahon, 2022, p. 93). However Indigenous connectivity using broadband in remote Indigenous communities in these two countries are still encountering challenges.

Hudson and McMahon (2022) provide several recommendations toward facilitating access to broadband in rural and Indigenous regions, toward Indigenous-led development initiatives. These include participation and Indigenous representation in regulatory and policy proceedings, provision of meaningful consultation for providers who seek licenses or approvals to serve Indigenous communities, affordability for widespread broadband adoption, operational subsidies, recognising one-time infrastructure funding may not be sufficient, incentives for facilities owners, training and hiring local residents, stronger enforcement mechanisms, and improved rural data collection. While regulatory and policy structures, and legislation vary across jurisdictions, the experience of Indigenous digital inclusion in USA and Canada is relevant for Australia.

A universal principle for digital inclusion in Indigenous communities emerges from the literature as ensuring Indigenous peoples can maintain and manage their community-owned data while utilising technologies in their own self-determined ways.
As Campbell-Meier et al. (2020) state in their literature review regarding Indigenous digital inclusion in Aotearoa New Zealand:

We support efforts to adopt instead a strengths-based approach in the design of Indigenous inclusion research aimed at shifting the current dominant deficit narratives... Indigenous peoples were often generalised... their experiences are assumed to be the same at a national, continental, or regional level. There is still a strong focus on providing access to the Internet, and less focus on the development of skills, trust, or motivation... deficit language is prevalent in the discussion of the Indigenous experience with digital technologies... there is substantial work to be done to move away from considering Indigenous digital inclusion as a problem to be solved and thus perpetuating narratives of negativity, deficiency, and failure... the knowledge, skills, values, and cultural identity that Indigenous peoples bring should be prioritised in explorations of their engagement with digital technologies (p. 301).
DIGITAL INCLUSION
POLICY CONTEXT

Digital inclusion policies vary greatly internationally; however, there are some overarching principles that highlight the basic human right to access information and the internet. The United Nations has emphasised the importance of accessible information and communication technology for all. Target 9.C in the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, aims to provide universal and affordable access to the internet. This is crucial as communities with unreliable connections are at risk of cyber theft and often lack the privacy necessary to carry out everyday tasks online (OECD, 2019).

It is important for Governments at local, state, and national levels to recognise the digital inequalities that currently exist to ensure future equal digital opportunities. By following current trends and statistics, policymakers can uncover future possibilities and mitigate risks. Through community collaboration, digitally inclusive policies, and further investments in improving local infrastructure, Governments can pave the path to digital inclusion. Most importantly, Indigenous communities must have opportunities to share their voices regarding how they want to see digital inclusion rolled out in their communities, what resources and skills they need, and how they wish to control online activity in their communities.

There is a role to play for each level of Government in supporting digital inclusion for Indigenous Australians. In recent years, initiatives to improve Indigenous data inclusion have focused more closely on the needs of Indigenous Australians living in regional and remote communities. The National Agreement on Closing the Gap, developed through a partnership between Australian Governments and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations, specifically aims to address Indigenous digital inclusion: “By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion”, in order to achieve the Closing the Gap outcome “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives.”
Activities at all three levels of Government (Commonwealth, State and Territories, and local) are increasing toward addressing Indigenous digital inclusion. The Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan Discussion Paper (NIAA, 2021) backgrounds an Indigenous Digital Inclusion plan that is in development by the National Indigenous Australian Agency (NIAA) with support from the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (DITRDC) in response to the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review. Submissions to the discussion paper drew comment from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, drawing attention to “the interlinkages between the NIAA’s policy work around digital inclusion and the rollout of social policies” and a need for “greater attention to the importance of Indigenous data sovereignty regarding the NIAA’s call for further data on Indigenous digital inclusion” (Staines & Radke, 2021, p. 3), which the NIAA Discussion paper did not address.

In our response to the development of a National Indigenous Inclusion Plan submitted in 2021 (Rogers et al., 2021), the need for Indigenous voices to be centred in digital inclusion was emphasised - at all stages of design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of any national Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan. In addition to the access, affordability, and digital ability sub-indices, we (Rogers et al., 2021, p. 5) also suggested that:

"The Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan should include funding for further, place-based research, led by Indigenous people, into Indigenous peoples’ lived experiences of digital inclusion. Indigenous research that centres the voices of Indigenous peoples, is developed in consultation with communities, and that is led by Indigenous researchers is key to understanding the impact of digital inclusion on Indigenous communities across Australia."
In view of all that has been mentioned so far, digital inclusion plays a pivotal role in improving the quality of life and participation in the social-economic activities of Indigenous Australians, particularly Indigenous communities in remote areas. However, a national Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan would be incomplete and unsuccessful if Indigenous voices were not centred in the plan, and Indigenous agency neglected. It is critical for Indigenous Australians to be digitally included, but as important are considerations for and the upholding of both Indigenous data and digital sovereignty.
INDIGENOUS DIGITAL AND DATA SOVEREIGNTY

Indigenous digital sovereignty refers to the ability of Indigenous peoples to control and govern their own digital identities, technologies, and data, including the ability to access and use digital technologies in ways that uphold and align with cultural norms, values and practices. Similarly, Indigenous data sovereignty includes the power to have autonomy over collection, storage, and use of personal and community data. Indigenous data sovereignty also suggests that First Nations peoples should have the opportunity to regulate all aspects of data governance, including management, analysis and reporting (Rodriguez-Lonebear, 2016).

Digital sovereignty is important for First Nations’ inclusion in the digital economy while ensuring Indigenous rights and self-determination are respected. Kukutai and Taylor (2016) state that “if Indigenous peoples have control over what and how data and knowledge will be generated, analysed and documented, and over the dissemination and use of these, positive results can come about” (p. xxii). However, some of the barriers Indigenous communities face in achieving digital sovereignty include: lack of access to affordable and reliable internet and mobile phone connections, lack of digital literacy and skills, and a lack of action and knowledge by Government and industry.

Digital sovereignty is not only about individual Indigenous peoples and communities having the opportunity, skills, and affordability to access the internet and digital technology; it is also about Indigenous communities having opportunities to harness the power of digital skills and tools for community self-determined, nation-building purposes. It is important to keep in mind:

While the Western idea of ‘data sovereignty’ can be seen as a product of the digital age and nation-state jurisdiction over such data, Indigenous nations are asserting their own claims to data sovereignty, which are rooted in their inherent rights to self-determination as sovereign entities predating European settlers (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016, p. 14).
Indigenous digital and data sovereignty, therefore, encompasses the interplay between social and digital infrastructure, including data, standards, protocols, processes, hardware, online services and infrastructure (Curtis, 2020). Indigenous digital sovereignty includes Indigenous people having access (and choice of access) to digital infrastructure, mobile phones, internet connectivity and other digital devices and tools to use freely for their individual and community purposes. A case study about data revolution in Indian Country in the United States argued that data about Native peoples can transform Native communities and “tribes are in the best position to capture the realities of their tribal citizens’ situations” (Rodriguez-Lonebear, 2016, p. 261). As a result, tribal data revolution is underway in the United States and some tribes are retaking control of data governance. Unfortunately in Australia, digital sovereignty of Indigenous Australians is impeded by infrastructure and technological issues, as NIAA (2021) state, the “underservicing of regional and remote areas is an ongoing issue. Commercially focused private carriers are reluctant to invest in telecommunications infrastructure in rural and remote locations as lower population density and higher capital and operational costs reduce financial returns” (p. 9).

This research project was informed by concepts of self-determination and our commitment to research that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to make their own decisions about digital development, connection and equity in connectivity. Those living on Mornington Island have experienced numerous outages of telecommunications and internet connection, and have been calling for change and assistance to improve the telecommunication services on the Island. Our research focused on investigating these challenges using Indigenous research methods, informed by principles of digital sovereignty, with aims of digital inclusion on Mornington Island being centred upon what the community sees as necessary for their full social, economic and cultural participation.
UNDERTAKING THE RESEARCH

Research Planning

The concept of the research project and partnership between our research team at QUT and the Mornington Island community developed over time, through personal connections and relationships that existed between the research team and Mornington Shire Council. Dr Rogers (Aboriginal co-lead) initially visited the island in person to discuss the idea of developing a research project face-to-face with the Mayor, the Acting CEO of Mornington Shire Council, Community Engagement workers at the Council, and community Elders. We worked with the community to understand the context, overcome barriers presented by lack of resources, and collaboratively decided on a methodology that would be practically possible and culturally responsible.

Collaboratively it was decided that yarning would be an appropriate method for a research project which would broadly look at how Aboriginal families are digitally included on Mornington Island. While yarning was determined as the most appropriate method, photography was also discussed as an option for families (especially for those who may have limited Standard Australian English skills) to share visual examples of technology use in their homes. Photography, particularly historical photography, was noted as an area of interest in the Mornington Island community, and there are digital archives, Mornington Island Facebook groups, and physical spaces on the island where the community enjoy working with both family and historical photographs. Together, yarning and photography were decided as two methods for the research with families moving forward. The ‘show and yarn’ method emerged in this research: families took images of their devices, and yarnted about how they used them, accessed the internet on them, and paid for them.

Our research plan was underpinned by an understanding that Aboriginal research requires Indigenous research practices across “planning, collection, analysis and dissemination of information or knowledge” (AIATSIS, 2020, p. 6). We were committed to a flexible, fit-for-purpose, Indigenous-led research plan focused on representing with clarity the Indigenous voices and stories shared with us. Our plan also included practical considerations that reflect the realities of travelling and staying in a remote Aboriginal community. It was decided in discussion with the Mornington Shire Council that the best approach to our face-to-face data collection phase, as researchers based in Brisbane, would be to book two weeks a month or two apart, to stay on the island and meet with families whenever they were available. Because Mornington Island has very limited accommodation for visitors, and one shop providing limited food and supplies for all community members and visitors to the island, it was suggested by community that we keep our visits short (no more than a week long), that two teams members (including one Aboriginal researcher) come to the island, and that we should visit the island twice with visits not too far apart (visits complete within a six month period). Bookings for travel would be made with flexibility options built in where possible (such as flexi-fare), to work around community timing (including shutdowns for COVID, sorry business or other unexpected community events).

It must be noted that in remote communities, the basic cost of living is much higher than in regional and urban areas; food costs are up to 40% higher in remote Australia, and the costs of accessing the internet are also higher (Staines & Radke, 2021). These were all considerations that led to the practical aspects of the plan being decided as they were within the scope set by the community for our presence in the community, and we developed our ethics and proposal based on these parameters.
Methodology

Our approach as a team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, in a remote Aboriginal community, called for an underpinning methodology that encompassed Indigenous worldviews. As Maher et al. (2021) state, the use of dominant settler-colonial approaches and perspectives becomes “problematic...within community settings as it often excludes local context, perspectives, experiences and knowledges” (p. 2). Wilson et al. (2021) further explain that Indigenous researchers recognise the need to “engage in relevant and meaningful research...an Indigenous paradigm grounded in collective obligations and responsibilities to others is opposed to the value-free objective and detached approach to research” (p. 2). Our methodology was informed by Martin and Mirraboopa’s (2003) relatedness theory: operating in ways that encouraged an equal and open relationship, led by the community, and an understanding that each and every aspect of community life we observed during our data collection phase were part of a much larger, deeply relational and connected whole. This informed our decision to use thematic analysis to interpret data - keeping relatedness of all parts of the whole as front of mind. This was essential as “the overarching glue of life, work and community is relationships. On opposing ends of the cultural spectrum are individualistic (Western) and collectivist cultures...(Aboriginal cultures) are more collective, loyal and interdependent” (Jalla & Hayden, 2014, p. 1).
Methods

Yarning and ‘show and yarn’ were the two methods employed during data collection and these methods proved effective in centering the Aboriginal families’ stories, as aligned with relatedness theory. While initially, photography was presented to participants for them to use (i.e., providing a digital device for families to take photographs of their devices), how it worked in practice was participants showing us devices, for us to take images of, or, taking us to locations for us to take photographs of their phones and devices. All of the photographs then formed the basis of the ‘tell’, with community members yarning with us about those items of technology that we or they had photographed. We had wondered if technology tours (Kennedy et al., 2020) in homes might have emerged throughout the data collection, but most families we spoke to were clear that the devices they showed us were the only ones they had.

Yarning is described as conversation and storying that is important to Indigenous peoples (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010) and in this research, worked flexibly alongside photography, allowing Aboriginal families to describe their broad experiences of digital inclusion living on Mornington Island. Development of the ‘show and yarn’ photography method in this research created an open space for families to share stories on their barriers and solutions to low levels of digital access (to internet and devices), affordability (of plans and data), safety concerns (including lack of mobile phone reception and coverage presenting barriers to activities on Country) and ability to access digital opportunities (digital skills, work and education) while living on Mornington Island.

Data Analysis

Relational ties between individuals on Mornington Island had implications on how we would gather and analyse data but most importantly, on how we would present and discuss our findings. We do not present participants individually but rather, our data is presented by family/household. We do not describe the make-up or size of these families in detail to avoid identifying participants. In determining findings, we considered recordings and transcripts carefully. The flow of these yarns was considered, with topics of conversation identified, including aspects alluded to in conversations. Keywords, for example, were much less important than repeated themes or stories that emerged across families within the data. We contextualised this within what we saw, heard and experienced during our time on Mornington Island, and checked our understandings through informal conversations with community members to deepen our contextual understandings of how things fit together. Social mores and patterns were observed and considered. It is for this reason we avoided using qualitative data analysis tools and have rather drawn on relatedness theory to ‘connect the dots’ of the stories shared with us by five families.
FINDINGS

Following a recent Northern Australia Communication Analysis prepared for the Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia (CRCNA) (Marshall et al., 2020), we preface our findings about Mornington Island community members’ experiences of digital inclusion with those related to the digital and social infrastructure underlying people’s access to and use of digital technologies.

Digital infrastructure is the network hardware needed to provide mobile or broadband connections to end users, while social infrastructure consists of organisations and services, and the connections between them, that build community. Importantly, research (e.g., Latham & Layton, 2019) shows that social infrastructure plays a growing role in building local digital capability for individuals and communities.

Digital infrastructure

The main digital infrastructure that connects Mornington Island residents to digital services includes:

- **NBN SkyMuster broadband satellite**: Consumer and enterprise grade plans can be purchased through several Retail Service Providers (RSPs), with Activ8Me seemingly the most popular. This includes recently-released unmetered data plans.

- **Telstra 4G mobile**: Telstra is the only telco to provide mobile connectivity, with servicing covering approximately one-fifth of Mornington Island. This includes the main town of Gununa but excludes the outstations across the rest of the island. Mornington Island is slated to receive a major upgrade to its Telstra mobile service funded through the Commonwealth Government’s Regional Connectivity Program.

- **NBN Community Wi-fi**: As part of a program to respond to community connectivity needs during COVID, NBN Co. installed a community wi-fi hotspot in a central location in Gununa township, close to the grocery store and butcher. The wi-fi is has a range of approximately 100m, and is switched off at night to discourage loitering.

- **Outstation phone units**: Under a federal program from some years ago, Activ8Me installed and continues to maintain cyclone proof phone boxes with satellite dishes in several outstations across Mornington Island (there are no such phones on surrounding islands). These units are solar powered and have a regular landline number attached to them for dialing in and out. Some are also wi-fi enabled.

Other forms of voice connectivity on the island include UHF radio and satellite phones, but these are not widely used in the community.
We heard from community members that their main way to connect to the internet is via their mobile phones on the Telstra 4G service. We observed that organisations had more readily adopted NBN Co’s SkyMuster satellite service, almost exclusively through Activ8Me as the retail service provider. In 2021 funding was awarded from the Commonwealth Government’s Regional Connectivity Program for Telstra to improve voice and data services on the island. The project will upgrade the existing fibre network between Mt Isa and Point Parker, and deploy a new mobile site near Century Mine, to provide microwave backhaul capacity to the Mornington Island (Australian Government, 2021). This much anticipated upgrade is yet to be completed, and local informants had little information about the project’s progress.
Community wi-fi satellite dish on roof of building which houses Dept of Corrections, next to the supermarket and butcher in Gununa.

Free Community wi-fi was advertised around Gununa.

Activ8me cyclone-proof outstation phone approximately 25 km from Gununa township.
Social infrastructure

Mornington Island has a complex network of social infrastructure organisations located within the Gununa township. Some of the key services we visited and observed during our visits included the Mornington Shire Council, Bynoe (employment/training service), Mission Australia, Save the Children (now 54 Reasons), Post Office, Gidgee Health (Primary Health Service), Primary School, Arts Centre and the Justice Centre (Junkuri Laka). Although they are all located in Gununa township there can be several kilometers between the home and services, so, a car is often needed to get to these services from the residential part of town, especially in hot conditions or if there are mobility challenges.
Several of these organisations are essential stakeholders in the digital inclusion ecosystem, providing community members with access to digital devices and connections, as well as one-on-one and group training and support to use digital technologies. For example:

- **Bynoe Community Advancement Cooperative Society (CACS)**, which houses the Services Australia Agent, who delivers employment and community development programs into the Mornington Island community. As part of this, Bynoe runs group digital skills training, and provides access to two desktop computers and internet access. Where possible, Bynoe staff offer ad hoc support to clients who may struggle to use these technologies to access the information and services they need. Bynoe also displays several ‘how to’ posters to assist clients to get online.

![Computers available for community use at Bynoe, where Centrelink services are provided](image-url)
Australia Post sells pre-paid mobile credit, sim cards, handsets and other gadgets (e.g., Telstra dongles). Unfortunately, there is no formal support available to assist people to insert the new SIM into a device and register it. This can be extremely challenging, given that a wi-fi connection and personal ID (e.g., a drivers license) is needed. The purchasing customer would need to hotspot from another phone or use community wi-fi to complete the process, with assistance from a family member or friend.

Save the Children (now 54 Reasons) offers several family-focused services for women and children (e.g., child care, parenting support). They have two desktop computers for use by community members but, owing to technical issues, they were not operational during our visits. This organisation also has a Financial Advisor role, which necessarily involves assisting people with websites and apps associated with banking and other institutions (e.g., ATO). However, that role was not filled at the time of our visit.

Mirdinyan Gununa (Arts Centre) is perhaps the cultural heart of Gununa, with several internationally recognised artists in residence. The Arts Centre runs several community programs such as Elders telling stories to young people and other youth programs. In recent times, this organisation had two desktop Apple computers for creative use by youth, but these were not operational during our visits.

Mornington Shire Council is the largest employer on the island and provides essential services including the airport, local roads, disaster management, waste and water management, and visitor accommodation. Beyond the provision of the community wi-fi in partnership with NBN Co, the Council did not appear to offer digital technology support to the community. The Council is, however, engaged in advocacy for better mobile and broadband connectivity on the island in conjunction with Telstra, NBN Co, and state and federal Governments.
Overall, we observed that many social infrastructure organisations on Mornington Island provide some level of access, training, and support to community members to use digital technologies to do essential tasks. However, devices and connections are often unavailable owing to technical issues that cannot be resolved because the expertise does not exist locally (e.g., the Arts Centre’s IT support person is based in Cairns). Furthermore, digital support is ad hoc in nature, and there are not enough devices and human resources to adequately help people get online.
This section presents the voices of community members, as they were shared with us, relating to experiences of digital inclusion. We centre their voices, presenting quotes that illustrate the major findings that emerged through thematic analysis, all of which are connected and overlapping when viewed through the frame of relatedness, impacting the connected aspects of life for Aboriginal families on Mornington Island.

**Major Theme 1: Safety and Connection**

*When we lose power coverage and all that.... people had to walk, or run to the hospital if it was really bad.... we want to know. The question is the people here are thinking, “well how come they took forever to get to (Mornington Island)”....here we’re so isolated as it is. Why did it take them that long? These are just questions that I’ve got, and the community. Landline and internet.... just gone. Well, we got no choice, darling. We just got to... go on foot and get on with it because we got no say with Telstra. Yeah, the question is why did it take so long?...That was the crisis where the butcher shop was giving people $100 cash because people had money in their key card, but they couldn’t access it in the shop...So the butcher was good enough to give each person $100 each just to do a bit of shopping, so that’s how that worked. We had to go to the butcher... get $100 then go to the shop. Same as normal. We can’t do anything. We don’t know when these people (Telstra)... We wait and rely on them. We need... Yeah. But why? The question is why did it take so long? I mean, some people’s lives was depending on that communication.... Because some of them live way away. Long way from the hospital. So they had to run. Yeah.... They got to run. Just to get an ambulance. Couldn’t ring 000 or nothing. (Family participant)*

The first major theme that emerged from the data is related to the impact of limited mobile phone reception and coverage on Mornington Island and surrounding regions. The most common concerns raised with us by the five families regarding mobile phone reception and coverage related to safety. Travelling out of Gununa township, on roads and on sea for cultural activities, was seen as dangerous, especially for Elders and those with frail health. Furthermore, the lack of mobile coverage on traditional homelands was described as a barrier to engagement in activities on Country. Stories were shared about the impact of the lack of coverage on the uptake for young people to visit outstations and areas away from Gununa township. One Elder shared that if the outstations had coverage and data available, she believed more young people would go with family to learn and participate in cultural activities, while being able to connect to the internet on their mobile phones. The lack of digital connection in Mornington Island is impacting both Elders’ connection to Country and the transmission of culture through generations.
Ring from... you know when... way out there... All these internet... we’ve got outstation and there’s a lot of venomous snake out there, if anybody get bite from snake or stone fish. You know... in the sea if they go walking on the reef, you know? Especially if we’re...out and about, and we’ve got kids out there. Anything could happen...out on the sea, anything could happen...we can teach people like you when you come up here, if you just go up and see it. (Family participant)

Well, my (nephew) said to me twice here today, "We want to go camp and make spear. I want to spear fish." I said, “cut them, show you how to make spear.” That’s what I do... I wish kids can go...If they can fix some things... and put them TV thing out there, I reckon our kids will come out (to the outstations)... For our home to be build back on our Country again... like renovate and... like when you’re talking about, phone, everything installed. And we have a good time with one another. That’s what always my people were doing, my grandfathers. They used to camp, just open air, with windbreak. I reckon on other communities more in front of us, like Northern territory, like that, those places. They’ve got their language. And they’re going on their Country, doing things for themselves, you know? We need to go back out there and do something on our Country for ourself...this is what’s happening now. We’re having problems with phones, people fighting, drinking... (Local Elder)

Recent major outages of mobile phone service were brought up by several families in our yarns, sometimes numerous times in a yarn. The reasons for these outages, including one that lasted a full week, were not clear to families we spoke to. Participants said that the impacts of these outages included inability to withdraw cash from the ATM, inability to check bank balances, issues with calling for help in emergencies, and a lack of communication with the mainland; participants said these impacts were deeply upsetting and concerning to families and the community at large. The community, however, is very resilient, and one business on the island assisted by providing people with $100 of cash, so they could purchase food from the store while the store had no EFTPOS available.
Overall, the lack of mobile phone reception on the island is presenting barriers to local families, especially Elders and young people, from regularly accessing their Country outside of Gununa. Their connection to Country is being impacted by technology, and when viewed through the lens of relatedness, the deeper impact of digital inclusion for the Mornington Island community relates to their cultural rights and practices. As one Elder said:

*If the Government can give us something, like they give us all these promises, homeland, that it’s going to be happening, like build our house, build a better place out there. We can have good things. We can teach people like you when you come up here, if you just go up and see it. See all my artwork. (Local Elder)*

**Major Theme 2: Low Uptake of Community Free wi-fi**

A new community free wi-fi service has been installed in one of the most well trafficked areas of Gununa, next to the only shop on the island. A grocery store, and butcher are both located next to the community centre, the roof of which now has a wi-fi device installed, providing free community wi-fi all day. We tested the wi-fi and it had good speed and was relatively easy to connect to. The location seemed to be chosen because it has such a high number of community members frequenting this part of town, however while using the wi-fi, people must sit in a public place, visible to everyone and with no privacy. It is outdoors, while still being undercover. The community centre that has the free wi-fi installed on the roof also houses the Corrections office.

During the times we were on Mornington Island, we drove past the free wi-fi multiple times a day and saw only singular individuals located within the reach of the wi-fi signal. When we discussed the free wi-fi with community in our yarns, adults mentioned using it once or twice, but that they were unlikely to use the free wi-fi, even if they had run out of phone credit. They also mentioned that it was primarily for young people and children (especially kids roaming the streets). There could be many reasons for the low uptake of the free wi-fi, including a lack of privacy, a social stigma that the wi-fi is for young people, some issues of mobility for those without a car that have health issues, and that the weather is often very hot or rainy. Another issue is that the location means anyone using the wi-fi has a high chance of seeing members of the community they are trying to avoid for various reasons. These reasons could include domestic violence and police orders requiring people to remain apart, issues within family groups, and unrest that was discussed while we were visiting. These include a perception by older people that young people are using wi-fi, hotspotting and data to organise and conduct antisocial behaviour.
Young people are springing up everywhere and doing stupid things around this community. And you’ll see by 5:00 tonight, you’ll see them on the road with their phone. You look on the street tonight. Teenagers…. They’re really smart. They’re smarter than me. You see that light going down the road, phone in their hand…. They’re texting one another…They’re more smarter than me… I tell you, I’ve seen little kids…They really just know what they’re doing. You see their little fingers… And that game thing come onto (the screen)...Yeah. We’ve been growing up we didn’t have this kind of thing. We had nothing like this. (Local Elder/Family participant)

Yeah, I go and work there (near the free community wi-fi) …I didn’t know about it until couple of weeks ago. My boss said, "don’t worry about your data, use the free wi-fi here." I log in, and I could… around all day, sit around all day. They limited the hours so you can’t sit there all night…. I didn’t know about the WiFi… I thought (youths) were hanging around to break in till a couple of days later, my boss said. I thought, "oh, that’s why the kids are hanging around. (Family participant)

Free wi-fi or access to the internet was also available at some local service organisations, but the families we spoke to did not mention that they were using these services, except in instances when they were also employed by the organisations. On the whole, it seemed that participants had a preference for being able to access the internet in and around their own homes, rather than having to share public wi-fi in public spaces.
Major theme 3: Reliance on Handheld Devices, Hotspotting and Prepaid Services

Almost all families we spoke with were connecting to the internet solely through handheld devices. For most, this was a mobile phone, but one family member also had a tablet. These devices were also the main source of data for the household, through shared use of prepaid mobile phone data, purchased on ‘recharge’ credit available through the Post Office on the island. Families of large and small sizes were often sharing the data from $30 recharge credit through hotspotting, for general browsing, and in the case of children and young people, sometimes gaming. One family we spoke to had both an Xbox and a Playstation.

Yeah, I hear a lot of people... On Facebook, my mother is talking about hotspotting, they are sick of hotspotting... The kids, when they run out of data...That’s the problem I have... because we can’t get the... Like how we used to do it, buy it on the card... (my daughter) will normally come back and say, "oh Mum I’ve run out of credit." And I say, "we’ll have to wait til I get paid." So you hotspot from 1, 2, 3 o’clock every day. Yeah, I’ve got no data because we’ve got to hotspot for them... Yeah... If someone wants to use the internet to do a bank transfer, they’ll come up and ask (for a hotspot). (Family participant)

Another participant reiterated that children often use and expend their parents’ or grandparents’ mobile data.

Recharge... the recharge and then you run out, then you buy it again and run out... Well, I guess it’s probably because they got no choice. Because if you only got the one, the Telstra. I mean obviously, Optus is not here on the island, and you only got that one choice, you got to go with the flow... little people... they’ll just sit... for the internet when they’re out of credit and that’s the only time. Out on the outstation, it’s got the same thing too. So, when we go out in the bush and if obviously, they’re just so mad over phones and social media, they’ll go up that houses where the wi-fi’s is and sit around there and go back on Facebook and say “this is what I caught today. (Family participant)
Residents shared their reasons for reliance on prepaid (rather than ongoing phone contracts) phone connections, and the reasons were twofold. The first was the fear of being locked into an ongoing contract. Many participants had examples of individuals they knew, had heard of, or their own lived experience of large bills getting out of control. This fear of being locked into contracts they couldn’t pay was compounded because, for many people, employment, payments and cash flow are irregular, especially within families that share money among several family members with unexpected expenses. One resident, who had previously worked in a social services organisation on Mornington Island, described that low levels of financial literacy also present barriers to the uptake of contracts that would save residents money in the long run. Some participants reported spending $200 per month regarding their mobile phone, with the service and data being shared among several individuals but often paid for by one person.

Another factor contributing to Indigenous families being mobile-only is associated with how in-home internet services and products are offered on Mornington Island. While all residences on the island are eligible for NBN Sky Muster satellite (with the most popular provider being Activ8Me), we did not hear about many homes occupied by Indigenous families that were currently connected in this way. In line with the above-mentioned problems associated with contracts, participants also said that when hardware like satellite dishes, modems and routers broke, there was often no one available to fix them. While NBN will send a technician to resolve localised interruptions to service, this can take weeks or months. With very limited technical support on the Island to resolve connectivity issues, it is often left to one tech-savvy family member or friend to fix issues (where possible). Moreover, the person whose name the NBN connection is registered with can end up shouldering the financial burden of maintaining payments for a service they can’t access.

Well first, I had Telstra connected to my house and we had the internet... So that was all connected back in I guess 2015... No lie, council done some works over here at a house and they dug up the ground to do the driveways, but I think same time must have done something with the Telstra line. Since then my internet was just, it was crappy... just loading, loading, loading. But when I ring Telstra, Telstra would say “no, everything on our side is all good.” But, which in fact it wasn’t, because it was just loading, and I keep having that same problem over and over again... And with Telstra, I tell you what, I had to cancel that whole bundle thingy and tell them to stop because it was crappy. Yeah. It wasn’t even worth my money. And (I cancelled it) a month ago. I was paying for it all that time and I just said "no, stuff it." (Family participant)
Major Theme 4: Collective Culture and ‘Digital Humbugging’

Given the connectedness of families on the Island, and the collectiveness of Aboriginal culture, sharing devices and data emerged as a strong and overlapping theme. The sharing of devices and data has resulted in what we are calling ‘digital humbugging.’ Humbugging in Aboriginal culture refers to making demands on family and community over and above what is reasonably shared (Short, 2020). Digital humbugging refers to the use of digital technologies to access resources (like data and bank accounts) without the owner’s - often Elders like parents or grandparents - knowledge. Digital humbugging can include practices like using bank details or debit cards to transfer money, leaving people without money for necessities.

Some people... they can’t walk from where they’re staying to the shop. So they get other people to do - Yeah, their grandson or their... It’s only take one second to go up to the shop. “Oh, I’ll do it. I’ll get it for you.” It’s all over. All gone. Yeah, money gone. We hear lots of complaints... About the old people there. It is robbing their own people, their own family, their own mother, and their grandfathers. They had a big fight here once about that. (Family participant)

The impacts of this digital humbugging can be serious, even though they may be unintentional.

When I do run out of food, I just go to the shop... Here on Mornington Island because everybody got to look out for their own money side of things, how they budget it and what they use it on. Most young people use it on smoking and drugs and they rob their own grandparents and grandfathers, mothers. It’s a lot happening. They got all their bank details already. We had complaints all the time because there’s old people and we try to help them. But they’re pretty smart, them kids... And then their grandparents have no money for two weeks. (Family participant)
Participants reported similar digital humbugging associated with NBN satellite connections in the past.

There’s “probably 10 (in the community on Activ8me)... lots of people just running off the mobile phones, they don’t have any connection in the house. Because I think majority of the children here on the island, when I had my Telstra one... all my nephews and my nieces, they all said, "oh, can I have the password?" And I said "okay." I was nice enough to give my password and the next minute I had every children in this neighbourhood here standing on that side of the road. I’m like... "What they doing?" ...my nephew, I seen him one day, he walked over there and apparently he gave it to one person and one person... I was, "hey, I’m changing my password." And that stuffed them all up. I changed the password. (Family participant)

The findings in this theme demonstrate the intersecting digital and social issues faced by Mornington Island residents. While digital technologies provide opportunities and life-lines to Indigenous families, they can also be used to perpetuate inequality and injustice within communities. Therefore, any attempt to address digital inclusion in Mornington Island should take a holistic approach, accounting for the contextual challenges of the community.

Summary of Findings

Taken together, our findings provide important insights into digital inclusion for Indigenous families living on Mornington Island, including digital and social infrastructure, and raising the voices of family and community members about the digital inclusion issues. Overall, while there are a few digital services available or will be available on the island, local people still depend on their mobile phones to connect to the internet via Telstra 4G service. We also found that social infrastructure organisations on Mornington Island such as Mornington Shire Council, Bynoe, Mission Australia, Save the Children (now 54 Reasons), Post Office, Gidgee Health, Primary School, Arts Centre and the Justice Centre provide some level of access, training, and support to community members to use digital technologies to do essential tasks. However, devices and connections are very limited and often unavailable due to technical issues and a lack of IT support available locally. Centering the voices of community members, our findings highlight digital inclusion experiences and connected issues impacting the life for Aboriginal families on Mornington Island.
DISCUSSION

Digital connectivity is connected to Indigenous wellbeing. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) highlights key impact areas of digital transformation on wellbeing, presented as opportunities and risks. Risks exist in digital development in areas of:

- ICT access and use (inequalities of Internet usage, even when there is equality in access);
- education and skills (including the emergence of a digital skills gap between those who do and those who do not have digital skills);
- health and wellbeing (negative use of digital technologies may be associated with mental health and wellbeing concerns);
- social connections (issues such as cyberbullying can negatively impact the social experiences of children); and
- personal security (individuals are at risk of data privacy violations in various domains).

OECD state that “not everyone has the capacity to use digital technologies for real-life activities in an optimal way, which implies a new form of inequality, namely a digital divide...fundamental inequalities that the digital transformation presents” (OECD, 2019, p. 23). We observed the effects of digital inequalities both within the Mornington Island community itself (for example, between younger and older people) and between Mornington Island and the mainland and metropolitan areas where digital connectivity and skills are more accessible. Digital safety and security risks include issues related to theft of passwords for data sharing, bank transfers/access to funds, the use of social media by young people to organise antisocial activities, and the lack of digital skills that families noted especially within older generations. These findings show that digital inclusion on Mornington Island has, in some ways, compounded existing disadvantages and social issues being experienced by the community. Having said this, Mornington Island residents also use digital connectivity for positive and community building activities, such as retracing family connections and sharing historical photos and documents. Drawing on the OECD work, we undertook theoretical discussions relating to digital inclusion on Mornington Island, and Indigenous wellbeing, presented below.
**FUTURE DIRECTIONS: TOWARDS INDIGENOUS DIGITAL WELLBEING**

In considering the wellbeing of the Mornington Island community, and the impact of digital inclusion, we combined learnings from the three pillars of digital inclusion: Affordability, Ability and Accessibility (Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance [ADIA], 2020), which have been expanded into six crucial areas in GoDigi’s ‘Digital Inclusion Manifesto’, presented on the next page. Drawing on these six areas (developed in collaboration with community organisations and individuals), we overlaid the Indigenous wellbeing model used in the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017 - 2023* (model: Gee et al., 2013), to understand how digital inclusion on Mornington Island could be informed by Indigenous wellbeing approaches.

(C) Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart & Kelly 2013
(image from Close the Gap Campaign Report 2023)
We suggest our framework outlined on the following pages could be used in many ways, including to spark community discussion toward the development of a Community Digital Inclusion Plan, led by Mornington Island community members and leaders. Such a plan would be owned and held by the community.

Informed by these understandings, we approached digital inclusion on Mornington Island from an Indigenous perspective, by incorporating Indigenous wellbeing into the six domains presented in GoDigi’s Digital Manifesto (GoDigi, nd). Using these six domains, we have created a discussion model to inform future work in digital inclusion, on Mornington Island, and in other communities who might find this approach useful.

We suggest our framework outlined on the following pages could be used in many ways, including to spark community discussion toward the development of a Community Digital Inclusion Plan, led by Mornington Island community members and leaders. Such a plan would be owned and held by the community.

GoDigi’s Digital Inclusion Manifesto (GoDigi, n.d.)

Digital Inclusion Manifesto 6-Point Plan

1. Initiatives that are community driven
2. Communities that are empowered by digital technology
3. Policy that is intergrated and visionary
4. Physical spaces that are accessible, vibrant and connected
5. Lifelong learning that is available to all
6. Technology that is universally available and accessible to all

"Culture and cultural identity is critical... Practising culture can involve a living relationship with ancestors, the spiritual dimension of existence, and connection to Country and language. Individual and community control over their physical environment, dignity and self-esteem, respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ rights and a perception of just and fair treatment is also important"

(Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017, p. 6).
Social media and digital technology is causing issues with digital humbugging and digital safety.

Digital generational divide - Elders being left behind.

Youth using social media and technology to engage in antisocial behaviour.

- Prepaid handheld device prevalence
- Lack of home laptops and desktop computers
- Connectivity low due to limited coverage
- Low number of locations with computers for community use
- Low uptake of NBN satellite home internet

Lifelong learning that is available to all

- Educational opportunities limited by having no senior secondary school on island
- Centrelink clients can access free digital literacy classes
- Low access to reliable internet limits online learning programs

Physical spaces that are vibrant and connected

- Free wi-fi available in a public outdoor area, close to shop and correctional services office (no desks or indoor areas)
- Bynoe/Centrelink previously had a room of computers for use but many were broken and not replaced
- No public library or Indigenous Knowledge Centre but discussions well underway

Initiatives that are community driven

- Low digital literacy amongst the community
- No digital inclusion plan
- Economic development plan in early stages

Policy that is integrated and visionary

- National Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan is under development
- Closing the Gap policy not currently addressing low levels of digital inclusion in community
- Government policies enacted by Mornington Shire Council
- 4G upgrade in near future

Communities that are empowered by digital technology

- Social media and digital technology is causing issues with digital humbugging and digital safety
- Digital generational divide - Elders being left behind
- Youth using social media and technology to engage in antisocial behaviour
Questions to prompt community discussion:

Technology is universally available and accessible to all:
How do community learn how to use technology? Could young people and Elders connect through opportunities to use technology together? Does the community need more technology resources? With greater coverage, would you be able to go out on Country more? How would this impact your spirit and mind? Do you connect with family and keep kinship strong through technology?

Lifelong learning that is available to all:
How does the internet help or hinder young people from finishing high school on the island? Does it affect those who go to boarding school? Would having better internet allow more people to stay on Country and connect with family and Elders? How could digital safety improve how people are feeling about online behaviour? Could online learning be used to pass on cultural knowledge, or keep stories safe for future generations? If you had opportunities, would you like to learn how to use health services online, so you don't have to travel for appointments? Would the community be stronger if there were more opportunities to learn how to use computers and the internet for business, education and to connect with family?

Physical spaces that are vibrant and connected:
Are there places available in the community to connect to the internet (free wi-fi near the shop, the computer available at Bynoe/Centrelink, etc.) that are good for your mind? How could better places be built for connecting to the internet? Could you think of places that might encourage Elders and young people to learn together in the community that better coverage or wi-fi might help with? How would better coverage on the Outstations impact cultural connection and connection to ancestors/spirituality for you? Are there physical spaces that you would like to see have wi-fi and better phone coverage?

Initiatives that are community driven:
Who is best placed in the community (council, school, otherwise) to assist with continuing conversations about digital issues in the community? What issues are the most important to you regarding digital and technology on Mornington Island (mobile phone use, reception, better coverage, cost, etc.)? Who can hold a community digital inclusion plan safely so it can keep being updated and discussed? Who are the people responsible for action in this space? Are there partners (i.e., Telstra, NBN) you wish to speak up to? Are there areas of community life that could be improved by greater digital inclusion (online business, online opportunities)? Are there areas of business online you would like to know more about? How could digital be used to increase economic opportunity on Mornington Island?

Communities that are empowered by digital technology:
What are Mornington Island community aims for being connected to technology? What are the things that are most important to the community when it comes to being on the internet, or having phone reception? What is important to the community regarding health and wellbeing and the internet? Cultural practices and protocols? Opportunities to visit Country, family and kinship groups out of Gununa? How does the impact of cost affect these things? How can community connection be strengthened by digital technology?

Policy that is integrated and visionary:
Do community have a strong voice in influencing all levels of Government policy, related to digital inclusion as it applies on Mornington Island? Are there formal mechanisms to ensure community control regarding digital improvement and strategies on the island, including links to telecommunications companies operating in the region? Is State and Federal policy fit for purpose for remote Indigenous communities? How can Mornington Island link in with other efforts to improve digital inclusion in the Gulf, Cape and Torres Strait regions? How can existing kinship and family networks strengthen voice in this space and in the local region by working and talking together?
CONCLUSION

Indigenous digital inclusion is vital to ensuring Indigenous people have the opportunity, should they so choose, to fully participate in the digital economy. Access to affordable and reliable internet and digital technologies, as well as provision of education and opportunities to gain digital literacy skills and greater understanding of digital technologies is vital for communities that choose to embrace digital skills and technologies. Digital sovereignty calls for Government and industry to promote ways for active engagement and participation of Indigenous peoples in design and development of digital technologies and services, toward improving digital inclusion. Underpinned by values of self-determination and Indigenous empowerment, there are many ways communities can be supported to participate more equitably in Australia’s digital economy.

This project has highlighted the importance of collaborating with Indigenous communities in developing digital inclusion research, policies and programs. It highlights the need for digital inclusion initiatives to be culturally appropriate, locally driven, and respectful of Indigenous knowledge systems, remaining sensitive to local community protocols and ways of living. By involving Indigenous communities in the development of digital policies and programs, digital inclusion efforts can be more effective, sustainable, and equitable in remote Australian communities like Mornington Island.

Findings from this project included:
- the desire of Mornington Island residents for greater mobile phone coverage, that will allow them to spend time on land and sea Country without fear of not being able to contact emergency services or family in the case of an emergency
- greater digital skills to enable residents to use the internet for self-determined purposes
- cheaper and more reliable internet and data to allow access to the internet for education, work and entertainment purposes
- a greater level of education regarding online safety, especially related to passwords, data sharing and use of online services such as banking.

We have provided a framework, based on Indigenous wellbeing, the principles of digital inclusion, and centred on Indigenous digital sovereignty, for the Mornington Island community to use to develop a community led and owned Community Digital Inclusion Plan.

We offer our networks and support to continue to connect Mornington Island leaders and residents with those who currently hold power to make change on Mornington Island, as they determine their digital future in remote Australia.
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Anything is possible!