ThinkUKnow e-Newsletter - Volume 2 Issue 5

This issue of the ThinkUKnow e-newsletter will look at the Digital Divide. We often talk about the divide between parents and their children when it comes to use and knowledge of digital technologies, but there is also a great divide between rich and poor, educated and uneducated in relation to digital technologies. This issue will look at the global issue of the Digital Divide and how it affects us here in Australia. Addressing this issue is timely as 17 May is World Telecommunications and Information Society Day with the theme of "Better Life in Rural Communities in ICT".

The Digital Divide

Traditional means of examining the Digital Divide focussed solely on the issue of access. This highlighted the gap between those who had access to the internet and those who did not. When looking at internet usage worldwide, it is apparent that those in developing nations have less access to the internet than developed countries. According to the latest statistics, 61.3% of the population in Australia/Oceania use the internet compared to only 10.9% of the population in Africa (Source: internetworldstats.com).

Looking even more closely at our own backyard, 80.1% of Australians use the internet which means that almost 20% of our population do not. This may be for a variety of reasons: choice, age, socioeconomic status or location.

Strategies developed to reduce this divide concentrated on providing access to high-speed internet access to those of lower socio-economic status. These strategies included providing laptops and wireless

Time2Talk

This section provides some useful conversation starters for talking with young people about their use of technology.

Do you think quality internet access should be a right or a privilege?

How would your life be different if you didn't have the internet/mobile phone?

What's the most important advice you would give to someone who is going online for the first time?

How could we spread the message of safe and responsible use of technology to everyone?

There are already efforts underway internationally to improve the access and use of the internet, particularly in Asia. So how do we bridge the digital divide here in Australia to provide meaningful internet access and usage? We need to ensure that cyber safety and security education is not only provided to those people engaged with their community, but also those who are disengaged. Parent information evenings are great at reaching some parents, but those who are time poor or not involved with the school are left out. We also need to reach those young people who don't attend school and don't have a trusted adult they can

networks, as well as increasing the coverage of mobile networks. Whilst these initiatives were successful in providing the technology, they did not improve digital equity.

Where to from here?

The current approach to bridging the Digital Divide aims not only to improve access to technology, but to ensure that this access is meaningful and productive. Just providing the technology is not enough; we need to also provide the education and skills for those people to use the technology in a positive and productive way.

Looking again at the Australian situation, currently 80.1% of Australians use the internet, but how many use it in a safe and responsible way? A 2010 US study by the Pew Research Centre found that households in the higher income brackets used the internet for a wider range of activities than those in the lowest income cohort. This means that some internet users do not access important health information, community services, opportunities for skills development or support services.

depend on for guidance and support.

We're starting to take steps to expand our reach and trying different strategies to provide education on the responsible use of technology to different groups. It's not an easy task, but it's one that must be done. We'd love to hear your views on how this could be achieved or how you are currently reaching out to those at the end of the Digital Divide.