



### **Silver surfing at Sykes Fold**

You're never too old to learn new things, according to the residents of Sykes Fold retirement living scheme in Cleckheaton.

The residents are taking part in a pilot scheme aimed at encouraging older people to get online.

Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH), which manages the grange, has teamed up with Montal Solutions to install a communal internet connection and computer. With support from the Citizens Online 'Get IT Together' project and the council, they are running weekly training sessions to help residents learn the basics of using a computer and browsing the internet.

Volunteer trainers are working with the residents to help them search for their favourite hobby, save money on bills, keep in touch with loved ones, and access local information and services.

Lorraine Noble, Digital Inclusion Coordinator for the Get IT Together project, is excited to be working on the project. She said: "I am looking forward to helping people who may not yet have had chance to find out about the benefits of the internet and hope people will take the opportunity to come down to our sessions to find out more."

According to one participant, Catherine Wilson, "I needed confidence to be able to contact friends and family on the Internet and to write poems and short stories, as I used to years ago. This has been a wonderful opportunity to get that confidence and I'm looking forward to seeing what else I can learn in the next sessions."

Cllr Molly Walton, Joint Cabinet Member for Wellbeing & Communities, said: "A lot of people assume that the internet is not for older people – but they couldn't be more wrong. I am involved in a local IT learning centre which works with people of all ages, including silver surfers, and we are about to run a course to teach, mostly the elderly, how to access their pensions and benefits on line, which eventually all of us will have to do.

"Having access to the internet can help housebound or elderly people stay connected with family, friends, and the wider community. They can also shop from the comfort of their own homes, which is tremendously helpful if they struggle to get out. It offers a way to break down barriers for older and disabled people – and that's why the Council is keen to support projects like these."

For KNH, the scheme has particular benefits for its customers and the company is looking at how it can be rolled out to other council housing schemes across Kirklees. Project manager, Helen O'Sullivan, said: "A significant number of our tenants, particularly older ones, don't have access to a computer and have never used one. This puts them at a particular disadvantage, as they may be missing out on important information and are probably paying more for goods and services.

“More importantly, the government plans to require new benefit claims to be done online, so internet access in the future will not be a luxury, but a necessity. We therefore want to do all we can to support our tenants to use this technology.”

For more information about free beginners computer courses, please contact Lorraine Noble at Citizens Online on 07854 644218.

Photo: Mike and Clare Friend and Neil Lindsey from Paddock Community Forum.

## **Ends**

Press contact: Penny Allison, KNH Communications Manager. Tel 01484 416440. Email: [penny.allison@knh.org.uk](mailto:penny.allison@knh.org.uk)

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