

# Hyde praised for its approach to

# Digital Inclusion

**The Hyde Group has been given a big 'thumbs up' from England's largest digital inclusion network, charged with getting one million more online for 2013.**

**H**elen Milner, Managing Director of UK online centres, told HydeLife magazine she is impressed with the work we are doing to make it easier for our residents to access the internet.

She would like to meet our Digital Inclusion team and to extend the help and advice already by the organisation given to develop of Hyde's digital inclusion strategy.

Digital inclusion has been on the political agenda since 2002 when the e-Government Strategic Framework was drawn up, which mentioned social housing providers as potentially vital catalysts to improve residents' access to digital technology, helping to tackle social inclusion.

In 2009 Martha Lane Fox was appointed Government's first Champion for Digital Inclusion and the National Plan for Digital Inclusion was launched. Helen Milner is working alongside Martha Lane Fox – now the UK's Digital Champion – to help deliver this initiative.

In March this year Hyde Plus, Hyde's social and economic regeneration department, identified digital exclusion as a socially excluding factor for some residents.

Hyde hopes to implement some key short term initiatives by March next year. Eventually we want to embed digital inclusion into all of our work.

But having a digital strategy broad enough to cover the whole of the UK is one thing; having it sharply focused into a key area of social housing is quite another. Helen Milner is convinced that through Hyde's commitment to improving the digital inclusion of our customers, Hyde

residents will benefit now and in the future.

"Digital Inclusion is about getting people to use the internet. There are still more than nine million people who have never used the internet and we also estimate there are another 10 million who don't think they have the skills to use it in the way they would like to.

"So there are nearly 20 million who would welcome some support to use it better, and that is where we come in," she said.

Helen said her organisation is currently working with a network of community partners, including housing associations, to provide free computer courses for beginners.

She emphasised the importance of getting online now and learning the skills to make the most of what the internet has to offer.

She said, "Last year 20% of all work advertised was only advertised online. And there are lots of potential

employers who expect applicants to email their CV to them. They will also expect you to be able to use a computer to do the jobs you are applying for."

Helen said there were real benefits of getting online for people living on reduced incomes and in social housing.

"Our own research has shown that even the lowest income family can save around £270 a year by shopping online, and that is after you have paid for your broadband," she added.

Being connected to the internet can

have a lasting benefit in helping children with their homework.

Helen admits her children don't send their grandparents postcards anymore, but they do send e-mails and

facebook videos. "It's about younger people having a completely different way of communicating with older people," she added.

Is she concerned about the comments made by Sir Peter Gershon, the first head of the Government's

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**"There are still more than 9 million people who have never used the internet."**

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Helen Milner



Martha Lane Fox

Office of Government Commerce, who warned about excluding the older generation from the digital age, simply because they don't like, understand or can afford a computer?

Helen is adamant that the older generation need not feel excluded. She said her organisation has places people can go to, to access the internet and to get help and support and even to find people to access the internet on their behalf.

She was working with Martha Lane Fox and the Race Online 2012 team to try and bring low cost computers and broadband to the market for people for whom cost is the only barrier to getting online.

"What Hyde can do, and I think you are already doing it, is to recognise the real opportunities being online can mean to your residents.

"Simple steps may include putting a learning centre on an estate which could be used to support residents to use the internet.

"We could even work with Hyde in helping to broker the bulk purchase of broadband," she said.

When told about the work Hyde is doing in developing its own digital inclusion strategy, Helen offered her help and support. "If Hyde would like me to come along, talk to you and take a look at the strategy I would be delighted to do so."

Despite Martha Lane Fox's comments in an interview with the Guardian in August that there was no money in her budget to move the Digital Inclusion strategy forward, Helen Milner remains confident and optimistic about its long term success.

"It is not always about what governments can do for people, but what people can do for themselves.

"If we can work with computer and

broadband suppliers, servicing and equipment suppliers and get low cost computers into the market for people where cost is the barrier, then that doesn't need the government to pay for the computers or to

pay computer companies to make them low cost," she said.

She went on, "We have a website [www.helppassiton.co.uk](http://www.helppassiton.co.uk) – dedicated to individuals to help friends

and family to get online. I know there will be people at Hyde who know how to use computers quite well, living next door to someone who doesn't know how to use them at all. With Pass IT On you've got some really nice and easy online tools to help you help someone else use the internet."

### **What message of support would she like to give Hyde residents about the benefits of digital inclusion?**

"Don't be afraid to take the plunge. If you are not using the internet it is a lot easier and lot less scary than you think! There are people who can help you in a friendly, supportive and low-cost way. Hyde residents can ring our free phone number **0800 771234** to find their nearest UK online centre for free and friendly help and support on how to use the internet.

"Remember you don't need a computer in your own home, you can go to a centre and use theirs.

"If you are online, then think about all the benefits you get, and Pass IT On to a neighbour, friend or family member," she said.

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**"Recognise the real opportunities for [Hyde] tenants what being online can mean and the benefits they can reap if they are."**

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