

Chief Minister Tony Brown visits Age Concerns Lifelong Learning Centre



More than 600 clients a month use Age Concern Isle of Man's Lifelong Learning Centres for access to computers and IT training and on Friday May 15 Chief Minister Tony Brown met just some of those clients at the charity's headquarters in Drinkwater Street, Douglas.

Accompanied by business change manager Dan Davies from the chief secretary's office Mr Brown was welcomed by Age Concern Isle of Man chief executive Penny Creighton MBE and introduced to staff members including Lifelong Learning Centre manager Mike Justice and training officer Barry Hodge, Mr Hodge's post being funded by the Department of Trade and Industry as part of a two-year pilot programme.

Mr Brown's visit followed on from the agreement at the 12th summit of the British-Irish Council (BIC) held in Cardiff in

February this year for the Isle of Man to take the lead among BIC member nations in a new area of work - digital inclusion - aimed at ensuring all sectors of society benefit from advances in information technology. In his address to delegates at the Cardiff summit the Chief Minister had said: 'Information and communication technologies have changed the world, but there is a danger that some sections of society are being left behind and missing out on the benefits.'

Separately, and as part of the Chief Minister's Freedom to Flourish initiative, the programme's Isle of Man Champions recently provided Age Concern Isle of Man with funding for 10 laptops for use in its Lifelong Learning Centres.

Mrs Creighton said: 'Some clients were apprehensive at first about using computers but working with

Mike Justice has given them enormous confidence.' Mr Brown added that when he acquired his first home computer he knew little more than how to switch it on. The Chief Minister has since embraced the digital age, and during his visit used his BlackBerry to exchange emails with Age Concern client Malcolm Powell.

Cheshire resident Donald Holmes received a surprise when his niece and Lifelong Learning Centre user Dorothy Hart introduced him to the Chief Minister during her Skype call. Mrs Hart told Mr Brown how her new-found computer knowledge was helping keep her family together, while other users who met Mr Brown included John Moore, who said he used the computers for researching his family history, Diana Leon, who spoke of how she regularly 'Skyped' her grandson in New York, and Malcolm Powell who, with a little help from Mr Brown,

sent an email to the Chief Minister's BlackBerry.

But it was Marie Nelson who best summed up the benefits of digital inclusion for the over-50s when she explained to Mr Brown: 'It keeps the grey matter going.'

As Mr Brown prepared to leave the computer suite, client Pam Deuchas thanked Mrs Creighton and her team for 'receiving clients with such courtesy and politeness', adding: 'This is such a happy place.'

Mrs Creighton said: 'With almost 40 per cent of the Manx population now aged over 50, and more and more services being delivered online, it's never been more important for older people to be digitally empowered. Our Lifelong Learning Centres in Douglas, Ramsey, Peel, Jurby and Port Erin are proving to be a wonderful source of social alchemy, bringing people from all walks of life together to discover the very real benefits of information technology. Our centres are places where new skills are learned, new career opportunities discovered and, importantly, where strangers become friends.'

Mr Brown also took the opportunity to meet Energy Doctor Gary Stevens, whose post is funded by the Isle of Man Government's Energy Initiatives Fund and delivered by Age Concern Isle of Man. The Energy Doctor service offers consumers practical advice on energy use in a move to help raise energy conservation awareness, reduce fuel bills and increase comfort levels in the home. For a consultation, contact Gary Stevens on 613044 or send an email to energydoctor@ageconcerniom.com

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