



DRAFT PRESS RELEASE/ WARDA AND HEATHER AT NO 10/ 19.07.10

BIRMINGHAM WOMEN GIVE PM THE DIGITAL LOWDOWN



Two Birmingham women whose lives have been transformed through access to the internet have been telling Prime Minister David Cameron how important being online is to them and others like them.

Warda Mohammed from Aston and Heather Hawkswood from Erdington were both given internet access through Digital Birmingham-supported projects. They were invited to join a delegation visiting 10 Downing Street last week with UK Digital Champion Martha Lane Fox to launch her 'Manifesto for a Networked Nation'.

Single mum Warda gained access to the internet via Aston Pride's 'Computers in the Home' project in 2008 and since then has set up her own business as an interpreter, working online and via the telephone from home - work that fits in with her family commitments and has enabled her not only to support her family but train and provide employment to other women in similar circumstances.

"Access to connectivity has changed my life and the life of my family," she says.

"It has allowed me to create employment opportunities while still looking after my children, and given them access to a fantastic learning resource."

22 year old Heather lives in Windsor House, an Erdington tower block with was kitted out with broadband as part of Birmingham City Council's TV aerial upgrade for next year's digital switchover. Digital Birmingham supplied residents with free refurbished ex-council computers in a pilot project to establish the value of providing broadband connectivity to council tenants.

Heather, who had been caring for her teenage younger sister since the age of 19, had become increasingly housebound and isolated. She used the internet to contact friends through Facebook, search for tips on how to deal with teenagers and found a temporary job through an online advertisement.

"In just four months the computer completely changed my life" said Heather.

"It has given me my confidence back and means I can now go out again and live my life. My doctor can't believe I have come so far just from having a computer and the internet."

Both women have become passionate advocates for the power and value of online connectivity and were invited to join Ms Lane Fox's Race Online 2012 'people's taskforce', which represents the 10 million Britons – the combined population of our five largest cities – who have never used the internet. Four million of these are society's most disadvantaged, and all are missing out on the big savings, vital information and chance of a better education that are available with online access.

Prime Minister David Cameron spoke to both Heather and Warda at the No 10 reception last week. Commenting on the launch of the Manifesto for a Networked Nation, he said:

"I want to give this all the support I can... to make Britain the most connected, the most wired up, the most digitally-advanced country there can be.

"In the internet age, we need to ensure that people aren't being left behind as more and more services and business move online. But this issue isn't just about fairness - as Martha's work shows, promoting digital inclusion is essential for a dynamic modern economy and can help to make government more efficient and effective."

"Closing the 'digital divide' is a key plank of our digital strategy," said Birmingham City Council deputy leader Paul Tilsley, who heads up the Digital Birmingham partnership.

“As a leading UK digital city we are very proud of residents like Warda and Heather who are living proof of the difference digital technologies can make. Through the Digital Birmingham partnership, we’re continuing to promote the use of online technology as a route to greater economic and social inclusion for citizens and increased competitiveness for business.”