

Tuesday November 24, 2020

Campaign launches in WA to provide support to seniors lacking digital skills

Social change charity Good Things Foundation has launched a new campaign in WA this week to promote awareness of the support available to seniors lacking digital skills.

Good Things Foundation manages the Australian Government funded Be Connected Network and Grants program which, through a network of over 3000 organisations spread across Australia, provides free information and support to over 50's to improve their digital literacy and the loan of devices to seniors in need. 349 Network Partners are located in WA.

Over 2.5 million Australians are not online and do not have the skills required to access government and other services, stay in touch with loved ones or seek employment. Many of these are seniors who do not know how to use a device such as an iPhone or iPad, which proved to be essential during the pandemic.

“With digital literacy akin to being able to read or write centuries ago, the pandemic has reinforced and, in some cases, increased the digital divide leading to those who are digitally excluded being left behind,” said Jess Wilson, National Director, Good Things Foundation Australia.

“This campaign highlights the benefits of digital skills including the independence this brings as well as showing people where to go for help. Our network partners in WA play a vital role in training and supporting vulnerable members of the community to be online.”

WA has some very active partners in the Be Connected network including Switched on Seniors which is based in Rockingham. Recently-awarded Senior West Australian of the Year Metro, Sheena Edwards started this seniors group eight years ago.

At that time, Sheena had no family members nearby who could assist her in navigating her way around what was then, new technology. She quickly realised that others were in the same situation and set up an iPad support group for seniors which eventually became the Switched on Seniors organisation.

“Once the initial learners were comfortable in dealing with these new technologies, we realised that learners could become trainers as they understand the challenges having been on this journey themselves,” Edwards said.

“We are now providing tech help in retirement homes and training people to set up their own support groups in Mandurah which is very empowering.”

Switched on Seniors' digital mentor, Lynn Locke moved from NSW to Rockingham for family reasons and was seeking a stimulating volunteering role in retirement. She

has always been digitally savvy but says she has learnt a lot through her work at Switched on Seniors.

“Teaching others to be self-sufficient is very rewarding,” said Locke. “Teaching others to create groups like ours is really the next step as there is a strong need in the community for this.”

The need for mentoring became even more apparent during the pandemic when Edwards and Locke foresaw a big upsurge in demand for support and created a Facebook group. This gave seniors in isolation a sense of belonging and provided them with access to information on COVID-19 as well as other material.

Western Australia has been making some slow but steady improvements in ratings provided through the recently-released [Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2020](#) which showed that accessibility to the internet has improved due to the uptake of the NBN and affordability is also improving. There remain however, many people who are still being left behind.

Reflecting national trends, Western Australians aged 65+ scored well below other age groups on the digital inclusion index, with their score being thirteen points below the state average. Through the Be Connected network of community organisations and centres, men’s sheds and other groups, local support and free training are available by calling **1300 795 897** or connecting to www.beconnected.esafety.gov.au

ENDS

For interviews, images or further information please contact Momentum2:

Lyn Tuit

0405 160 275

ltuit@momentum2.com.au

About Good Things Foundation:

Good Things Foundation is a social change charity with the vision of a world where everyone can benefit from digital. Find out more at:

www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au

www.beconnectednetwork.org.au