

Barnsley and District U3A - Annual Report 2017

The last 12 months has been a time of significant development for our U3A. In July 2016 we celebrated our twentieth anniversary when we hired the main sports hall at the town's Metrodome Sports Centre in order to display our activities for all our members and members of the public to view. The overwhelming majority of our groups took the opportunity to join in and hundreds of people visited the event. This daytime event was followed by an evening performance featuring our Choir and Ukulele Group [Stringalongs] and included a memorable performance by locally based TV star Bernie Clifton. This 'Showcase' marked the beginning of a new direction for our U3A and followed from a decision taken by the Executive Committee to proactively advertise ourselves. Initially this advertising took the form of establishing a one day stall at Tesco Supermarket and the creation of leaflets and posters explaining about our U3A to be used at the 'Showcase' and beyond.

Following the successful 'Showcase' we entered into discussions with Age UK [Barnsley] about the possible use of available space within their Eldon Street shop in order for the U3A to acquire a desired Barnsley town centre presence. The opportunity to find our own premises had, up to this time, been prevented by the level of excessive costs associated with the options available. The discussions led to BU3A agreeing to enter into an informal partnership with Age UK [Barnsley] who offered the free use of space in their shop for us to use for U3A purposes. Following training for the Advisory Staff, members of the public are now being advised about the U3A and directed to our posters and leaflets on display as appropriate. Additionally, our members can now collect the Buzz magazine which is available immediately after our monthly meetings.

We have also been successful with local news media articles and radio interviews and this has given a further positive profile to our activities. The end product of this public relations initiative can be seen in the membership increases, where at the renewal stage we have recorded some 930 people who have become members of BU3A. However, we recognise that increasing the membership can only be sustainable if we are able to offer enough options for members to join in with our activities and with 92 current groups we are keeping the group to member ratio at a healthy level.

One of the major successes at an administrative level has been the transfer of our membership records onto the nationally U3A created Beacon Membership System. Members can now renew their subscriptions online and, with the majority of Group Coordinators now trained, the communications within groups provided by the system has moved to a higher level. The added advantage of the Executive Committee being able to send 'corporate' messages to the vast majority of our e-mailable members is also proving to be a significant bonus.

A number of new management initiatives have been implemented during the last twelve months including the implementation of a new Constitution and several new policies and procedures which are all now displayed on the BU3A website. We have also undertaken an access audit of all the premises which we use for our activities. Information is now available on our website so that members can be aware of any restrictions at our venues. We have also recently approved policy statements on 'Working with Vulnerable People' a 'Protocol for Recruitment' and a 'Behaviour' policy.

As can be seen from the Financial Statement we have a healthy bank balance and this has enabled us to reduce the annual subscription level from £15 to £12 for the 2017/18

year. We are also offering our groups the opportunity to apply for the funding to purchase equipment in support of their activities.

As to the future, we are currently working with Age UK (**Barnsley**) on a project to reduce loneliness and isolation amongst retired people in the Penistone area. We are arranging community meetings with a view to creating U3A groups in and around the Penistone area and the early signs are looking very promising in this respect with a number of potential new groups already under discussion.

A continuing challenge in the next twelve months will be to keep our members happy and to ensure that wherever groups are full that we have an alternative offer of a duplicate or similar group for members to attend. To achieve this we need to reinforce the ethos of self-help whereby members are motivated to dip their toes into the 'volunteering pool'. So far we have witnessed that Barnsley people have such willingness and energy by the bucket load.

Finally, I need to thank all the members who make our U3A so vibrant and successful. All our Coordinators need a special mention as do all the members who help out in some way or other at meetings and during our activities. My thanks also must go to the Executive Committee, each of whom has a specific role which in every case is performed with whole hearted enthusiasm and commitment. We are lucky to have such people on board.

Alan Swann
Chairman Barnsley and District U3A.

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