

Barnsley and District u3a - Annual Report to 31st March 2021

As I write this report Bu3a has just completed twelve months of lockdown caused by the ongoing Covid Pandemic. However, following the Government's 'Roadmap out of Lockdown', we are now witnessing some of our outdoor groups meeting up again within the rules set out by Government and relevant sporting bodies and following the completion of our own local u3a risk assessments. We are also working towards dates when indoor activities might be able to start up once again and work may be needed in order to bring the expected compliance from the Bu3a perspective into line with the expectations of the owners of the premises which we hire.

Twelve months ago we had little idea what the longer term consequences of the pandemic would be and what impact it would have on our members. Our Executive Committee made a very early decision to keep Bu3a open for business and whilst it could never be 'business as usual' we have made every effort to keep our members informed and involved with us every step of the way. Whilst physical meetings have not been possible, we quickly discovered the benefits of Zoom and other video conferencing options. We started running our monthly meetings on Zoom in July and this has continued up to the present day. In September we increased the general monthly Zoom gatherings to three per month with Speakers being found from within either our own or other u3a groups. Additionally our activity groups have been encouraged and supported to use the video conferencing option to the extent that we have been witnessing up to seventy such meetings per month. After receiving the go ahead from our National Office we ran our 2020 Annual General Meeting on Zoom in October with all members seeing all the relevant paperwork in our Buzz newsletter and then being given the opportunity to vote on matters by email or post. With over three hundred members voting, this turned out to be a greater percentage response for our AGM than would have been achieved in normal circumstances.

Despite the clear successes of our Zoom meetings, we are aware that many of our members do not have either the technical option available or do not have the desire to join in with such activities and this has been an ongoing issue for us to address. Our response has been to ensure that we have maintained regular contact with the whole membership. We have done this through the use of emails sent through the Beacon Membership System but our greatest success has been with the publication of our regular printed newsletter, The Buzz, which we have increased in size with up to 52 pages per edition. The Buzz is also supplemented with the online Interim version which is produced midway between the main newsletter publications. During the last twelve months we have arranged regular delivery of The Buzz to the home addresses of over 1000 of our members. Many of these deliveries have been made by members who have volunteered to act as postmen/women in order for us to keep delivery costs to a minimum. The Buzz remains the envy of many u3as and congratulations have to go to all those members involved in its production and delivery.

In recognition of the lack of normal u3a activities being available, we made the decision to reduce our membership renewal fee from £12 to £3. Such a move was designed to say a massive thanks to our loyal members and partly in recognition of 2021 being our 25th Anniversary year. At this stage it looks as though our efforts have paid dividends. At the end of our membership renewal period over 92% of our members had renewed their membership subscriptions. It is also the case that we are already witnessing potential new members stepping forward to join Bu3a.

In the coming year our joint working with Age UK [Barnsley] to reduce loneliness and isolation amongst older people will continue to pay dividends as, in addition to our joint working on the Penistone and South Barnsley projects, there has now been a similar successful bid by Age UK to Barnsley Council for a further project in the Central Barnsley Area. The Chief Executive of Age UK [Barnsley] has explained that the latest bid submission benefitted significantly as a result of their working relationship with Bu3a.

The challenges that we have to face in the future include the need to ensure that our name is recognised and has a positive image in our area and that we maintain our desire of offering something that retired people in Barnsley value. To this end we have increased our external

publicity drive which now sees a new external facing Facebook Page and a vibrant and regularly updated Website, giving a clearer picture of who we are and what we do in Bu3a.

Alan Swann
Chairman Barnsley and District u3a.