

Coronavirus Announcement

Dear U3A members,

It probably won't come as a surprise to learn that following this week's firm government advice regarding the Coronavirus and subsequent communications from the U3A National Office, your committee have taken the decision to suspend normal U3A activities for a minimum of twelve weeks. This length of time has been determined by the conclusion that the vast majority of our membership falls into the government's "at risk" categories and this is the duration of social distancing and self isolation which is highly recommended for people in those groups. During this period there will be no gatherings under the U3A banner, so this includes monthly branch meetings and committee meetings as well as interest groups. The other U3A branches in Coventry have come to similar decisions and I would expect this to be true of the country as a whole.

As things stand, it might be that we could resume normal activities in mid June, but this is almost certainly over optimistic and your committee will continue to review the situation and keep you posted as new announcements are made from Westminster.

However, we are working on plans for all members to keep in touch by telephone and the internet. In some cases we will need to challenge ourselves to adapt to technology with which we are not familiar so that we can remotely link existing interest groups or even to establish new groups. Ideas include:

- Groups of U3A friends phoning each other regularly for a catch up and to check on one another's welfare. **We need to identify those among us who might be particularly isolated and in need of support.** Please inform a committee member if you know of someone who is struggling, but the committee cannot keep an eye on everyone and all of us have an essential part to play in helping our fellow members, for example by getting shopping for a member who lives near you and is unable to get to the shops.
- Putting more information onto the Coventry Sherbourne website (<https://u3asites.org.uk/coventry-sherbourne>). Please note that the U3A National Website can be accessed from our home page by clicking on the U3A logo and we also recommend signing up for the free National U3A Newsletter. Information includes the latest guidance on the Coronavirus as well as ideas for staying active and connected.
- Sending out occasional newsletters with updates and items of interest, including some written by our members (content for possible inclusion would be welcomed. Please contact Ness Makepeace).
- Using a closed Facebook group to connect with each other. Mike Copeland is currently setting up a group called "Coventry Sherbourne U3A Chatterbox" and it is planned to individually invite our members to join it.
- Using WhatsApp, a free app for your smartphone, to stay in touch with each other. Much like a closed Facebook group, you have to be invited to join the group and then you can make free calls (assuming that you have an existing broadband/data contract) and share photos, text and other resources. You can even take part in video calls!
- Using one of several free video conference tools which can be used to hold a remote meeting with several members at the same time. It should make it possible to hold an online coffee group, or an interest group that until now would have taken place in one person's home. We are currently looking at a smartphone/ipad/tablet/pc app called Zoom to see if it might be suitable for us.

With all of these options and plenty of time on our hands, it might be possible to expand existing groups such as reading, needles and pins and the study group, or even start some new groups. It's up to you to come up with ideas and follow through with them, or help others who have a promising idea. If we really take this on board, we can only hope that the self isolation will fly by!

Best wishes and take care.

Bill Day

Chair, Coventry Sherbourne U3A