

Charity Number SC021683

December 2023/January 2024 Newsletter

A Stitch in Time



U3a treasurer Kathleen Simpson reports on the start of a new u3a sewing group which meets twice a month in Thornhill.

The new u3a Sewing Group began meeting in Thornhill on Wednesday November 22nd, with eight people attending. The format is for everyone to bring something to work on and to share hints and tips.

The group will be meeting on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month, from 9.30am until 12.30pm. Attendance is flexible. Anyone wanting to join should get in touch with Kathleen Simpson on 07810 387917, or just come along to the group at the Friendship Club, West Morton Street, Thornhill, DG3 5ND.

Providing the Lifeline of Food

December's guest speaker at the u3a monthly meeting on Thursday 7th December was Mark Frankland of the First Base Agency in Buccleuch Street, one of Scotland's first food banks.

Mark Frankland began his talk on the work of the First Base Agency by contrasting 2003/4, when the group first began to provide food parcels – at a time when such a thing was almost unheard of in the UK – to now, when food parcels have become acknowledged as part of the C21 welfare system.

In the beginning the agency supplied about 20 food parcels a week, as its main focus was helping people end their heroin addictions. But following the welfare reforms of 2010, the number of food parcels distributed annually quickly rose from 1,000 to 6,000. These were and are available across the region at 25 collection points, from Castle Douglas to Langholm, and this is possible via a partnership with D&G Council through its network of libraries.

The whole system is made possible by collaborations with various organisations and services. There is support from the Little Bakery in Heathhall for some of the food, and voluntary labour from people involved in the community payback scheme to make up the parcels. During the Covid lockdown the demand for parcels shot up from 6,000 a year to 23,000 a year, and the system could have handled up to 40,000 at no extra cost. The food parcel system has become, Mark said, the last layer of the welfare state.

In 2023 the agency is still doing about 18,000 parcels, but there has to be an awareness of what is appropriate food for the parcels. The skills once taken for granted about how to cook are no longer so widespread, so tins of beans are better than 'raw' spaghetti, though 1st Base has begun to teach people basic cooking skills.

Mark also touched on the agency's open-door policy, believing that anyone who applies for a food parcel has already had to deal with the stigma that is attached to this. This policy is actually more cost effective, Mark argued. If an alcoholic person asks for a food parcel, he or she gets it, because eating reasonably is essential for someone who is dependent on alcohol. The cost of treating alcoholism in the NHS is, as Mark insisted, vastly more expensive than providing someone with a weekly food parcel.

Group Updates

Gardening Group



Group leader Alistair Brown provides a report on the activities of the Gardening group over the last twelve months.

As usual the group had a 'planning' meeting to start the season, this year held at Gardenwise in March, when sharing was the order of the day, be it tales of overwintering, ideas for the coming year and excess seeds and seedlings to exchange. One excursion each year is to a nursery and we chose Elizabeth Macgregor's garden and nursery in Kirkcudbright. Her garden is always full of interest and few if any came away without buying something they 'had to have'. The members' gardens visited ranged from Dumfries, Lockerbie, Cargenbridge, Eastriggs, Annan and Dunscore. Who would think you'd find a walled garden in the hills near Dunscore? Each garden is unique, reflecting the owner's approach and particular horticultural likes, with successes and failures being freely admitted and discussed. The failures and particular successes are always useful because often the experience can be used for similar gardens elsewhere. A garden new to a member is always of interest with the same plants in different positions as one's own garden.

Few of us leave a member's garden without some good ideas to try out and some pitfalls to watch out for. All of us are willing to allow cuttings to be taken, extra bulbs or clumps of herbaceous plants promised when appropriate. Bugs, beasties and infections and the best way to make compost usually get the conversation flowing. What to keep and what to change, with ideas from people with similar or solved problems and always sharing excess or split plants – most of us dislike the idea of throwing anything away!

We generally start each visit with a cuppa and a biscuit before exploring the host's garden – in groups or singly – as preferred. It is all very informal and friendly.

We ended the season on November 16th with a quiz held in Gardenwise café and a time for reflection on the year, bragging rights to successes and sympathy for failures and the 'summing up' of the year. This final meeting usually leaves us waiting for that first bud of Spring to begin the cycle all over again, with new and old friends to share our experiences starting again in March 2024.

It was with much sadness this year that we learned of the death of one of the group's early members, Ken Sorrell. He took over the leadership in 2016 from Pam Shepherd and brought in monthly meetings during the summer growing season. He led the group for six years and handed it over to me in good heart. He was a true gentleman and his enthusiasm and patience in passing on his accumulation of lifetime gardening knowledge will be much missed.

Current membership is 18, but we could accommodate a few more. Please contact Alistair Brown (01387 811842) for more information.

Franchement Français

Group leader Wesley Paxton writes that the French conversation group, Franchement Français, needs a few more members.

Salut, mes amis Francophones. Peut-être vous avez appris le Français à l'école il y a longtemps, et la connaissance est caché, mais toujours là, et avec un morceau d'encouragement vous pouvez écouter et parler en plus. Si vous comprenez la petite annonce ici, malgré petits erreurs et la manque des accents de l'ordinateur, vous serez très bienvenue et assez compétente. Répondez à

wlpaxton17@gmail.com

Photographic Group

The joint first winners of a recent Photographic Group competition on December 8th were Earl Gemmell's *Single Malt* (left) and Joyce Gemmell's *Cheese and Wine Night* (right). The competition followed a group workshop with guest Gerry Zambonini.



Drama Discussion Group

Jeremy Shearmur writes: This group was formed during Covid. We watched plays, or films of plays, online, and then met, using *Zoom*, to discuss them. The group is still meeting, and enables its members – who stretch from beyond Thornhill to Dumfries to Lockerbie – to meet without undertaking long journeys. We are currently each subscribing to the *National Theatre at Home*, which has made available a wide range of high-quality productions. We have one meeting in mid-December, one in early January, and will be resuming regular meetings in February. If you would like to join the group please contact Jeremy on jeremy.Shearmur@anu.edu.au

Ukulele Group



Margaret Ward writes: The Ukulele Group spent the afternoon of Tuesday December 6th entertaining the Friendship Group at Heathhall Community Centre, having been invited to join them for tea and a game of *Play Your Cards Right*.

We are hoping this will be the first of many outings for the group, as we had a lovely time and everyone was very appreciative.

Smartphone and Computer Groups

These two groups have recently amalgamated and expanded their scope to take in other issues to do with technology. The group was set up to enable members to share their knowledge in these areas (which is limited: we come to the meetings to learn), and especially to assist members who hit problems with their computers, smart phones or with current developments in technology. Members enjoy sharing information, and we are in many cases able to sort out problems with members' smartphones, i-pads or laptops, but may also be able to offer advice as and when people need help from specialists. *If you would like to join the group, contact Jeremy on Jeremy.Shearmur@anu.edu.au*

Future Newsletters

Items for future newsletters should be sent to:

newsletter.u3adumfries@gmail.com

Please note the next newsletter will be out in early February.

Keep up to date with Dumfries u3a by visiting:

<https://u3asites.org.uk/Dumfries>