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Letter from the Chair

Jean Napier



Welcome to the Spring issue of Clarion online!

Edinburgh U3A, like so many U3As throughout Britain, is growing fast. We have recently welcomed our 1000th member! This is very encouraging but the increase in membership brings administrative problems, one of which is the work involved in collecting subscriptions. The committee has decided to streamline the system: from next year we are offering the option of paying the annual subscription by standing order. If you wish to continue paying by cheque that will, of course, be perfectly acceptable.

From your annual subscription a capitation fee is paid to the Third Age Trust. This is going up from £2.50 to £3.50. We will consequently need to increase the subscription. The committee is proposing an annual payment of £13 for single membership and £18 for double membership. This will be discussed and voted on at the AGM in June.

We are very fortunate in having two new co-opted members of the committee: Dianne Fraser who will take over from Colin Williamson as Treasurer in June, and Margaret Farish who will take over from Ruby Skinner as Membership Secretary. These appointments are to be ratified in June.

Thanks to Stewart Emm, group information and notices are now shown on a scrolling-screen at the Wednesday Open Meetings. You can also get information on groups from the Noticeboard and Group list on our website (www.edinburghu3a.org.uk) or by ringing Group Leaders or Coordinators, (see Groups Booklet).

The theme of this edition of the Clarion is 'volunteering'. It was most heartening at a recent new members' meeting to have offers of help – a new group leader, a host for a possible group and help from a native speaker of Spanish – and this reminded me that all we achieve and enjoy in the U3A is dependent on the generous volunteering of our members.

Jean Napier
Chair



U3A in Scotland Meeting in Glasgow, 25 October 2008

The Chairman, Ian Goldsack, announced that a new treasurer had been co-opted and his nomination would be brought before the next AGM. He is Bill Dickson (East Berwickshire); he had prepared an update of the half-year accounts which showed a balance of £2,682.63 at close.

The Chairman in his report said that a few people had asked the purpose of *U3A in Scotland* and he had told them that it was necessary to manage the Region, as Scotland is now designated, and to appoint a Regional Representative to the Third Age Trust. He also said that the *Handbook for Group Leaders* had been circulated throughout the Region and had been well received.

Development Robina Hutton (Tweeddale) gave a résumé of her work in opening new U3As in Scotland. A further grant had been procured to carry out this work and 'interest meetings' had been held in Biggar, Moffat and Castle Douglas. Of these, Biggar had already formed a steering committee. Pitlochry has had its launch meeting with about 16 people keen to get started, and the islands of Coll and Tiree have also started a U3A. Other locations which had been suggested were Penicuik and the Cupar / St. Andrews area. Three years ago we had 21 groups in Scotland, today there are 29. It was hoped that after the closure of Glasgow U3A, it might have been possible to start satellite U3As in Greater Glasgow. In early summer a meeting was held in East Kilbride and East Renfrewshire and it was

helpful to have representatives at this U3A Scotland meeting from these prospective U3As. On 7–8 November 2008 the Retirement Show is being held at the SECC in Glasgow. Barbara Lewis, the Vice Chairman of U3A, is coming up especially to have a stand there, which local U3As will be staffing over the two days.

Scottish Regional Representative, Bill Waugh (East Lothian) then spoke about his new job and what it covered. He also said how pleased he was to hear that the next National AGM was to be held at the Heriot Watt University Campus from 3–5 September 2009.

After the conclusion of business, Marjory Langdon (Edinburgh) gave a presentation on 'Running U3A Study Days' in the hope that it might encourage U3As who have not already held one to do so.

After lunch, the guest speaker was James McGonigal, Professor of English in Education at Glasgow University, who spoke on Education today and how it impacts on all age groups. At school nowadays things are completely different from our days, with fewer exams and more continuous assessment. He encouraged us to tell our grandchildren stories of our early life, especially of war-time, rationing and shortages, as this is living history. He also said that many schools welcomed visits from older people to tell stories and give their reminiscences of times past.

Iain Langdon
Edinburgh Representative

Gift Aid – are we eligible?

Gift Aid is where some organisations are allowed by HM Revenue and Customs to reclaim the income tax element of a gift from a donor who pays tax and has completed a Gift Aid declaration. The benefit is 28 pence for each pound of a received gift.

The trustees of the Edinburgh U3A have examined the regulations to see if we can make a claim under the scheme. We, as members, pay a subscription for a service. The regulations do indicate that subscriptions can be considered by HMRC for Gift Aid where benefits to the subscriber are less than 25% of value of the subscription. The trustees consider that our members receive a much higher benefit than this from U3A. We do not, therefore, believe we can make a legitimate claim for Gift Aid.

Colin Williamson, Treasurer



Notes from the Committee

Edinburgh membership reaches 1000!

When Mrs Christine Todd applied to join the U3A in January she was surprised to find that the Committee had been planning a special welcome for our 1000th member. We have offered her free membership for the rest of this year, and will present her with a book token at the next Open Meeting.

Date for your diary



Saturday 28 March 10.30-12.30 St Peter's Hall, Luton Place.

Inclusive language

Your Committee has decided to adopt gender-free, inclusive language both to describe its office bearers and, as far as possible, within its work. This is in line with usage in universities and colleges in all English speaking countries. (Though not, as yet, in the U3A Trust.) So we now have a Chair and a Vice-chair, who are addressed as such.

Language changes continuously in line with how society changes. The argument that 'man' is a generic term that refers equally to men and women is no longer strictly true in present day English usage. However, this subject tends to get people quite exercised. If you have strong views, please send them to the *Clarion* editor.

Spring Update

This will be produced in April for Group Leaders to pass around. It is an opportunity to include anything you want to publicise about your groups, about possible new ones starting, or about U3A matters in general.

Give information to your Group Coordinators or send to Barbara Clarke by the beginning of April.

Alzheimer's Awareness Meeting – U3A donation to The Disconnected Mind

By the time you read this online, the meeting on 11 February will probably have taken place. This is a free meeting for all U3A members, partners and carers, organised by your Committee with the help of Alzheimer Scotland. The aim of the meeting is to inform ourselves about the many and various forms of dementia and to learn about treatments and coping.

Professor Ian Deary, our main speaker, is Director of *The Disconnected Mind* research programme which has retested the group of 70,000 Scottish children who took the same intelligence test in 1947 to try and unlock the causes of age-related mental decline.

Have a look at the website:

www.disconnectedmind.org.uk

Maureen Thom, the Information Manager at Alzheimer Scotland suggested that we give our group donation of £50 to Professor Deary's *The Disconnected Mind* research project. This we are delighted to do.

Individual donations to Alzheimer Scotland

However, several people have asked about the possibility of giving individual donations to Alzheimer Scotland.

Their website is: www.alzcot.org (click on fundraising.)

Address: Alzheimer Scotland
22 Drumsheugh Gardens
Edinburgh EH3 7RN
Tel: 0131 2431453

Committee Minutes

It was agreed at the February Committee meeting that the minutes of each previous meeting, once approved, will be posted on the website for members to read.

Currently, approved minutes for the committee meeting in December are on the website. [You can read them here.](#)





Volunteering

Mary Walker



In the midst of a seismic credit crunch, of accusations of greed and corruption in the money markets, can we view volunteering as a shining other side of the coin of human behaviour?

Volunteering is a special kind of giving without which our society would be a seriously impoverished one. Thousands of individuals show immense generosity in freely giving of their time, energy and skills to cover so many areas of need. It is impossible to touch here on more than a little of how volunteering has evolved and continues to support and meet a huge variety of gaps in government provision. In this issue you will find some members' personal accounts of their very varied volunteering experiences.

Modern societies now have an enormous pool of volunteering people giving support. This is not a new phenomenon. In pre-industrial societies, farmers relied on their neighbours' help to bring in their harvests. This, of course, was of mutual benefit and essential for food supplies and survival. Developing rural areas in the world continue to work reciprocally with their immediate communities.

Throughout history and right up to the present, individuals with vision, enthusiasm and insight have been responsible for creating charities and organisations where gaps in provision of care were causing suffering and deprivation. Indeed, some of our early charities paved the way for what are now mandatory services.

Everyday life in Britain is heavily dependent on the goodwill of citizens who give without expectation of material gain. Our armed services, for instance, are manned (and now womanned!) exclusively by volunteers. Although they are paid, there is a strong risk of personnel losing their lives, as is currently the case where young men and women are dying in areas of ongoing conflict. There seems to be a growing awareness that the contribution our services provide is not sufficiently acknowledged. Recently postage stamps designed with portraits of young people whose lives have been lost provide a small but positive gesture of recognition of the individual sacrifices made.

On a smaller scale, we can derive comfort and feel safer because of the voluntary friendliness and care simply offered, as no big deal, by neighbours and those around us.

One very special example of generosity in the UK is our free blood transfusion service; some of us will have given and received this life-saving gift. Giving permission for our organs to be harvested

Giving permission for our organs to be harvested posthumously is yet another possible way of offering life to an unknown beneficiary, all due to the amazing advances in medical science developed during our lifetime. And transplant science has progressed to the point where relatives who are biologically suitable can volunteer to sacrifice a 'spare' organ to save another life.

The current demographic position is frequently referred to as a 'time bomb', however this disaster is somewhat defused by the fact that five million people over 50 take part in unpaid work. As well as being a huge potential asset to the economy, older volunteers benefit in numerous ways: offering support to others can provide new structure in one's life and lead to a sense of belonging in the community; a secondary gain is that volunteering brings new friendships and can reduce stress. And there are accounts of individuals claiming that their lives have new purpose, their self-confidence has increased and their health and personal development has improved.

It is the great good fortune of older people who no longer have jobs and careers but have the luxury of time, to be able to volunteer in areas of their own choosing, and thereby feel useful and socially needed.

Many of our members know this well and find satisfaction in a huge range of unpaid work. But the USA of course also exists and grows through the application of generous volunteering. And it's not all goodie-goodie either - we all benefit!

MW

The following accounts by Edinburgh members

are examples of the rich variety of volunteering we go in for. It's by no means an exhaustive list of possibilities.

If you are looking for a new volunteering challenge you can find out what opportunities there are at:

The Volunteer Centre, 45 Queensferry Street Lane.



First Editions in Morningside John Fyfe

I have only just joined U3A, but since I retired 8 years ago, I have worked as a volunteer in the Cancer Research UK Morningside shop. During that time I have worked at the sorting, pricing and 'culling' of book donations. Culling involves removal of books from display if they have not been sold after three weeks, and replacement by new donations, thus ensuring that we have a constantly changing stock on display. Unsold books are then transferred to other CRUK shops. CRUK head office issues general guidelines on the pricing of books, but for more unusual or more valuable books, we rely on the advice of our local expert, Gus, who has worked for some time in the book trade.

One morning a few years ago, I arrived at the shop and began to check the books which had been handed in. Among them was a copy of Ian Fleming's second James Bond novel, *Live And Let Die*. It had a rather dull-looking purple jacket without illustrations, and the manager at the time told me she had wondered before I came in whether it would actually be worth putting on sale. However, I realised it was a first edition, and said I thought it could well be worth about £50. When Gus came in later, he advised that it was actually rather rare. As Fleming's first novel, *Casino Royale*, had not sold well when first issued, fewer copies of this, his second novel, had been published. Gus thought it could be worth at least £500, and advised me to contact Christie's the auctioneers.

When I telephoned Christie's they checked their price guides and thought it would fetch around £1,000 at auction. They arranged to collect the book from us, and when they had inspected it, realised that not only was it a rare first edition, but was one of the even rarer first printing batch. These had omissions on the flysheet which were rectified on later printings, making this copy even more attractive to collectors. On the day of the auction, we could not wait to hear how much it had made, but were not prepared for the news that eventually it was sold for just over £4,000!

Needless to say, we have never sold another book for that price, but we receive a steady supply of good quality books, some of which we are able to sell for more than just a few pounds. I think many of those who donate books and other items to us deliberately choose to support Cancer Research, often because they have had friends or relatives who have suffered from cancer.

Working in a charity shop is certainly an interesting and varied experience. I had not previously worked in retail and only had an interest in books as a hobby, but I have learned a great deal more about books and authors since working at the shop. I have to admit that I did not choose Cancer Research in preference to other charities - I went there because they were advertising for volunteers at the time. However, since learning more of the valuable work which the organisation does, I am pleased that I am able to offer my support ■

Leading a playgroup – it's child's play!

Which language would you like to practise? French, Italian, Spanish, or perhaps Finnish or Arabic? Do you enjoy playing with Lego and Playdo or just drawing? What about some action songs like 'Row, row, row the boat' or 'The wheels on the bus go round and round'. This is what I enjoy with the playgroup I run on Friday mornings in the Walpole Hall. I enjoy chatting with the Mums as well as watching and playing with the children.

The Mums are mainly young wives whose husbands have long or short contracts in Edinburgh, mostly without family nearby. I find it very stimulating to work with them. ■

Alison Howard in action





Acting up for medics Anne Harborow

Seven years ago I saw a small flyer posted in a community centre; it was asking for volunteers to spare a few hours a month to help train medical students in communication skills.

Years before I had been a radiographer; I had also been a TEFL teacher for 10 years and I come from a very medical family. One of those family members – my uncle – was a general surgeon of repute, but a down-to-earth Yorkshireman who certainly could have benefited from some communication skills! All in all I thought, 'what a good idea', filled in the acquired application form and had 2 training sessions.

A simulated patient (SP) is someone who has been trained to portray characteristics of a real patient in order to provide an opportunity for medical students to learn about doctor-patient interaction. Medical students are taught various skills such as Communication and Examination skills. Using SPs allows students to develop these skills by taking a history, explaining procedures, treatments and diseases, in a relaxed and safe atmosphere. We work now with students from years 1 to 5.

Using SPs is not a new idea. They have been used in America for over 40 years and elsewhere in the UK for a number of years, but here in Edinburgh it is a relatively new concept. It has been so successful that volunteers now help in the Sick Kids as 'relatives of a sick child' and at the Dick Vet as 'owners of animals' to help the vet students.

Edinburgh University has an SP co-ordinator who phones/emails around enquiring about availability for a session. There is no regular slot and demand

is highest for SPs at exam time. This year I have done 9 sessions, of around 3 hours each, and last year 8. We are sent a comprehensive scenario before each session to swat up.

In my seven years I have had blood taken – from a manikin arm; blown into equipment which measures lung function; had my history taken; been given various diagnoses and been the relative of a terminally ill patient. The sessions have a tutor in charge and work in student groups of varying size – depending on the session subject. The students help one another with ideas, suggestions and comments and take it in turns playing the role of doctor.

Next week I am doing a session where I shall be:

A 60 year old married women, still working, who is going to be told the tests show she has asthma.

The students have to tell me:

- The results of tests already taken
- make sure I understand the diagnosis
- give advice on medication
- deal with the fact that this patient is in denial !

This requires me to memorize the personal, social and medical background and histories and decide how I shall act as a 'patient in denial'. The main requirement is to stay 'in role' unless requested to come out of role and pass comment as one's real self.

I find it all lots of fun – not least studying the students around me and predicting the future consultants or researchers. In addition it gives me a feeling of satisfaction thinking that I am doing my very small bit in helping to train the medics of the future. ■

Doing my bit for U3A in Glasgow Margot Montgomery

When I read the article in the U3A News asking for volunteers to help at the Retirement show in Glasgow in November, I immediately contacted Barbara Lewis, the organiser. I was delighted to spend the day spreading the word about our wonderful organisation and meeting with other members from Stirling, Fife and the Borders. It was also most interesting to visit the dozens of other organisations who all had a wealth of information to pass on.

I returned home mentally refreshed, but somewhat hoarse and physically exhausted after a memorable day! ■





Cleaning up at Newhailes, NTS Sheila Laing

Newhailes is a superb example of James Smith's late 17th century domestic Palladian Architecture. The early 18th century decorative Rococo interiors and collections have survived surprisingly well, allowing the NTS to conserve and present what history has left, rather than restore what it hasn't.

As a member of the Cockburn Association, I first visited Newhailes in 1993. We were met by the owner Lady Antonia Dalrymple and given a tour of the house. That was the start of my interest and love of Newhailes. Because of lack of finance the rooms we saw had been left untouched for many years; walking through the house was like walking back in time.

Years later after the National Trust had obtained the house in 1997, there was an article in the Scotsman by Jilly Schofield the conservator asking for volunteers to help with the conservation of the collection of Newhailes. I couldn't get there quick enough. The conservation of the contents of Newhailes took place in Granton behind security gates. The conservation we did was cleaning but within the strict guidelines of conservation. The contents of the house varied enormously: valuable antiques, a trunk of old hats; we even had to clean *doodle paintings* that art students had left when they vacated their lodgings in the house in the 1970s.

After cleaning, all contents were packed and eventually all went back into the house. There was also conservation of the house; these *cleans* took place on a Saturday when we cleaned walls, windows, floors etc. The walls were cleaned by mounting a step ladder with a vacuum strapped to our back. Once all the contents had been placed back in the house, the next stage was training to be a guide.

The house opened to the public in 2002. As part of our training we took invited guests on tours. My first tour consisted of many of the tradesmen who had worked in the house. They all knew far more about Newhailes than I did, and then to make matters even worse, the Chairman of the Trust joined my tour!



Once confidence and knowledge had kicked in, the tours became easier. As guides we take a maximum of 14 visitors on a tour, lasting no longer than 1 hr 15 mins. We have certain information that must be given, but we also have a lot of information that can be used at our discretion. Visitor interest varies: some are very interested and others wish they could go around the house without you! Interest is usually engaged when mention is made of the shortage of money in the Dalrymple family.

A conserved house is not always easy to comprehend. I once took a group of conservators from The English National Trust round the house and the head conservator complimented the National Trust for Scotland on getting the conservation of the house totally correct.

Some of us have done a lot of research on the Dalrymples who came to Newhailes in 1709. This has been really interesting and has helped with information to give to visitors on tours. Apart from facts about the Dalrymples, I have also found a letter to a Dalrymple ancestor describing the coronation of George IV.

Newhailes opens again at Easter; my day for guiding is Saturday, one of the busiest days. I will not be able to get there quick enough! ■





The volunteering spirit Rosalie White

In my early life, I did not volunteer of my own free will – I was volunteered, mostly by my grandfather. I handed out hymn books, polished church pews, fed his geese and hens and picked his gooseberries.

Once, he offered me up to pull a little cart containing a hideously ugly rag doll around the village. People were supposed to pay money to guess its name. Since it was called Melody, and most local names were of the Martha, Jane, Sarah and Hannah variety, no one guessed it. I don't know what became of it – and I didn't care.

Longer-term volunteering came later, when a neighbour coaxed me into Meals on Wheels. That was hard physical work – collecting containers from local schools and delivering the food to about 40 people all in a short space of time.

For a while, we muddled through quite happily. Then came change. I was assigned to be helpmate of the formidable Miss Millar. She had been matron in one of Glasgow's big hospitals and ruled Meals on Wheels with a rod of iron. She thought I was hopeless: I could never get the money exactly right, my shoes and stockings were always squelchy with

spilled soup and I chatted too much to our clients. 'God grant me patience!' she would mutter, looking at her watch.

I did have my hour of triumph though, when there was a power cut and I traipsed to the top of tower blocks with our offerings. That impressed her, and we gradually warmed to each other and until she died Marnie Millar and I remained good friends. I learned that she had been one of the nurses who had driven a Red Cross lorry into Belsen at the end of the war. That was real volunteering, I thought.

Back in Northern Ireland, I volunteered for Victim Support because I was told they were desperately short of help. I had two dreadful years during the Troubles which I don't care to write about or even think about much, but it did teach me a lot about what people are capable of, both bad and good.

Nowadays, my volunteering is baby-sitting my grandchildren – hard work too, now that homework is involved. Maybe they will soon be at the stage when I can volunteer them; but I eye my spirited grand-daughter and I really cannot see her pulling that rag doll in a cart. ■

Rosalie White is a member of the Creative Writing group.

The impressive work of Cruse

Isabel Fogarty

Having had a long career in teaching Business Studies both in schools and further education I found on retirement that I still liked to have some structure to my week – I suppose a lifetime of reacting to 'the bell' could make some days drag a bit! For a few years I took on some part-time office work but decided eventually to have a look at the voluntary sector.

My first connection with Cruse Bereavement Care in Edinburgh was simply as Minutes Secretary at Branch Management Meetings (my shorthand skills made this relatively painless). Shortly afterwards when the appointment of an Assistant Administrator proved problematic, I said somewhat tentatively 'I could help out for a bit till you find someone'. More than eight years later – guess what? I'm still helping out, although I have cut down to three mornings a week.

Obviously my office skills had been updated over the years so I did have a basic knowledge of Word Processing and Spreadsheets and was happy to deal with correspondence, updating of client records, handling the day to day financial and banking matters as well as photocopying and so on.

Although I can claim absolutely no knowledge of the counselling process, I have been hugely impressed by the work undertaken by the counselling team in Cruse. Although a few have reached retirement age, most of them give freely of their time on top of holding down full-time and demanding jobs. They have undertaken a fairly lengthy training, mostly at their own expense and agree to commit several hours a week to seeing clients, having supervision on a regular basis (an absolute necessity to ensure they have the back-up to enable them to handle the traumatic nature of their contact with clients) as well as attending on-going training sessions in order to update and enhance their skills.

Cruse's value to the community is reflected in the fact that some funding is provided by the NHS and the Council. In fact a great many clients are referred to Cruse by their doctors or other health professionals. The service is provided free although many clients are good enough to make donations.

The Cruse office in Edinburgh has two paid staff members (both part-time), the Administrator (whose knowledge of all matters relating to the organisation of Cruse is legendary but who can



Isabel Fogarty on Cruse cont.

always find time in her busy schedule to provide a sympathetic ear for a distressed client) and her Assistant. In addition there is a team of five volunteers who cover the referral telephone line for one morning a week – again they have to undertake a training course. I don't have to spell out just how demanding it can be to deal with callers who have lost a family member or friend due to a wide variety of causes, ranging from serious illness or accidents to suicide. Sadly many people in the community do not have a close family unit to help them through such difficult times.

In conclusion I can honestly say that I feel my work in the voluntary sector has proved extremely interesting and I suppose I also like to think that (even at my advanced age!) I am still contributing to the benefit of the community in some small way.

Volunteering in Edinburgh – some personal recommendations

Elisabeth Hutchings

When I left my final job, in 2006, I knew that I should want my retirement to be a busy one. I was not a gardener, a golfer, a bridge-player or an aspiring academic; but I decided that the combination of joining U3A (to enjoy sharing interests with others) and taking on some voluntary work (to be useful, if possible) would provide me with what I needed – and so indeed it has. As the focus for this issue of *The Clarion* is 'volunteering in Edinburgh', I felt I would like to give some publicity to the voluntary organisations with which I have become involved – all of which would welcome new volunteers.

■ Artlink Arts Access

The official text: 'Artlink's Arts Access supports people with a disability and an interest in the arts to attend events, performances and venues with a trained volunteer companion. ... If you enjoy the arts in Edinburgh, why not volunteer for Arts Access? You will accompany someone with a disability and shared interests to varied events. Arts Access pays for all volunteer costs and provides training and support. If you are a driver, have access to a car and are interested, please get in touch.'

Contact: Sally Primrose, Arts Access Co-ordinator - 0131 229 3555, info@artlinkedinburgh.co.uk

Personal note: As an escort, you choose how often and when to undertake an outing; your own ticket is always free; and you meet some delightful clients!

■ Edinburgh Bar Association Benevolent Fund

Edinburgh lawyers raise funds for local charities by buying tea, coffee and snacks from a coffee bar, in the Solicitors' Room at Edinburgh Sheriff Court, run by a team of volunteers. Each volunteer works, as one of a pair, for two and a half hours per week or per fortnight (oftener, if keen!), from 9.00am to 11.30am or from 11.30am to 2.00pm.

Contact: Mary Devine, Organizer - 0131 662 4962

Personal note: Edinburgh lawyers, the coffee bar's customers, are friendly and good-humoured!

■ Medical Foundation Edinburgh Support Group

The official text: 'The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, a registered charity established in 1985, is the only organization in the UK dedicated solely to the treatment of torture survivors.' The Edinburgh Support Group has a regular programme of fund-raising activities, and also aims to raise awareness.

Contact: Sarah Sandow, Secretary, 0131 229 9950 sarah.sandow@blueyonder.co.uk

Personal note: The cause is a grim one; but the Edinburgh supporters are cheerful and positive, and believe that their fund-raising should be enjoyable – which it is.

■ RSVP Scotland

'RSVP' stands for the Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme of Community Service Volunteers. There are several local RSVP Projects, including the Edinburgh Schools Project: volunteers spend half a day per week in a local primary school, helping teachers in the classroom (often with hearing reading) or with various activities. The benefits of this scheme, which has been operating in the UK for over 20 years, are well recognized: listening to children read is one of the most effective ways of helping them to achieve literacy, and the presence of a volunteer in the classroom can help older and younger people gain a better understanding of each other.

Contact: Terry Blair, Development Officer (RSVP Scotland) – 0131 622 7766, tblair@csv.org.uk

Personal note: I started by working as a volunteer in a primary school, and now run the Project in Edinburgh, matching volunteers with schools – an interesting process. ■



Fulfilling a promise

Trish O'Brien

I made a decision ... that upon my retirement I would do something in a voluntary capacity to support organisations that work with young people with learning disabilities.

My grandson was born almost 3 years ago. His birth was memorable, not because he was our first grandchild, nor because we couldn't be present as he was born in Australia. My abiding memory is of a text received at 1.30 a.m. on 22 November, 2005, announcing his birth and the fact that he was having fits. This was due to the fact that he had not been able to breathe for the first six minutes of life. The first prognosis was brain damage, followed by a subsequent diagnosis of possible cerebral palsy.

It was this experience that shocked me into acknowledging that the responsibility for loving and raising a brain-damaged child can become a reality for any family at any time. I made a decision at that time that upon my retirement I would do something in a voluntary capacity to support organisations that work with young people with learning disabilities.

I have been a volunteer a number of other times in my life, but none of these episodes had such a dramatic catalyst.

In the late '70s, whilst I was living in Bahrain and bringing up two young children, an opportunity arose to help out at the Red Crescent Thrift Shop for one morning a week, and I jumped at the chance. Was I motivated by a desire to support the Red Crescent's work in the Middle East? No, my reasons were purely selfish: an opportunity to meet new people, to have the pick of the cast-offs of rich Arabs and ex-patriots, and a welcome break from the demands of small children.

In the early '80s, when living in the Shetland Islands, I volunteered once more, at the Brae Thrift Shop. This time the cast-offs were less tempting but the banter provided some mental stimulation on the numerous days when the cloud never lifted and the hills were lashed by horizontal rain.

My most recent stint of volunteering was at Jericho House in Edinburgh, helping with the soup kitchen. I'm not sure why I did this, especially as I

was working full time and had a number of family commitments. Could my motivation actually have been altruistic? Although there were often worrying, thought-provoking and even distressing incidents, I was surprised by how much I enjoyed the experience. That volunteering stint finished about seven years ago, when a promotion at work meant I frequently had to work into the evenings. So, now I've just retired and am investigating the most appropriate way to fulfil the volunteering promise I made when my grandson was born. He is now almost 3 years old. He not only survived his traumatic birth but has astounded his specialists by recovering fully from the after-effects. He's a happy, healthy, mischievous little boy who was extremely fortunate. But how many others have not been so lucky? ■

Trish O'Brien is a member of the Creative Writing group

A way into work

Isabel Graham

The Open Door in Morningside is a Christian outreach supporting older people and those with special needs in the community. Clubs, groups and outings are run for active elderly, frail elderly people and those with memory loss.

I first started volunteering at The Open Door nearly ten years ago after a period of illness. The support given to volunteers enables many to re-enter the world of work in a non-threatening environment.

The Coffee Shop on the ground floor is the visible part of The Open Door, while attractive premises on the lower ground floor (also accessed by chair lift) are where the clubs meet.

I work in the Coffee Shop with a regular partner on alternate Wednesday mornings: we prepare the food for the morning, serve it, clear tables and much more. We are encouraged to chat to customers and help with any queries they may have. Over the years we get to know the 'regulars' and look forward to seeing them.

Wednesday mornings are busy as the Justice & Peace Group meets downstairs and we have to remember to put the coffee machine on in time for the end of their meeting as most of the Justice & Peace Group members prefer filter to instant!

Prices are very reasonable and all requests will be met if possible. We provide a warm welcome to all and I really enjoy my Wednesday morning stints – it doesn't feel like hard work at all. ■



GROUP NEWS

U3A Geology Trips

Over the last few years we have organised short residential trips exploring the geology of different parts of Scotland with Angus Miller of Geowalks. These trips are aimed at anyone with an interest in landscape and geology, but no prior knowledge is assumed. The day walks are at a slow pace and allow an appreciation not just of the rocks of the area, but also the shape of the landscape, the wildlife and people, and the flowers and lichens. You need walking boots and a reasonable level of fitness.

This year we have two trips planned: exploring the island of Arran (15-19 June) and walking the Fife Coast (8-11 September). If you'd like to know more, please visit www.geowalks.co.uk or give Angus a call on 0131 555 5488.

Line Dancing Group

Thirteen members attended the first taster session in early December. The consensus was that it was fun and an hour's session is long enough for the time being.

We started officially on Saturday 10 January and will meet on alternate Saturdays from 11.00am-12.00pm in St Peter's Church Hall.

The charge is £3.50 per member per session. This is to defray the costs of tuition and hire of the hall. The amount may be reduced if the membership increases.

For more information ring Pauline Cairncross:
0131 620 4980

French Network – Update

In the last issue of *The Clarion* we introduced the Réseau Français. This is a loose network of U3A members interested in France and in talking French. It is a members-led organisation and it is open to any member to suggest activities. At the time of writing 27 people have expressed an interest and a list giving telephone number and/or email address has been circulated. Following the initial meeting for coffee at the Filmhouse in October two sub-groups were formed, one to meet to discuss a book from French literature and the other to discuss current affairs in French, initially using an article from a French daily newspaper as a starting point. These groups may be short-lived or they may emerge in their own right in next year's Groups booklet.

Some of us went to see the film, *L'heure d'été*, and had an enjoyable discussion in the Filmhouse café

afterwards. We hope that we may have other group outings to French films. There is also rumour of lunch outings in 2009!

For the present we suggest an open meeting for coffee and French conversation about once a month so that Network members can get to know each other and make arrangements for other activities. The remaining dates for open meetings in spring 2009 are:

10.30am Fri Feb 27 Café Rouge, Frederick St
10.30am Fri Mar 27 Filmhouse Café, Lothian Rd
10.30am Fri Apr 24 Café Rouge, Frederick St
10.30am Fri May 29 Filmhouse Café, Lothian Rd

Cultural Exchange – Lyon

We have had an enquiry via the website from Keith Gordon in Lyon who is a member of *Université tous âges* about the possibility of an exchange between Edinburgh and Lyon. We would be interested to hear from anyone who would like to take part in such an exchange. We would also like to hear from anyone who would be willing to take the lead role in helping this to take shape.

Keith Gordon is willing to try to find a penpal for anyone wishing to correspond with someone in Lyon. His email: hkgordon37@aol.com

Dorothy Buglass: (447 2804)
Mary McKemmie: (446 3606)

Calling all Group Leaders!

If you are a group leader the easiest way to circulate information to you is to send an email to you or to someone in your group. Please let your Group Coordinator have your email address or that of one of your members.

Pauline Cairncross: 620 4980
p.cairncross@blueyonder.co.uk

Michael McBrien: 445 1918
mcbrien_michael@hotmail.com

Helen Steuart: 337 3509
hls@fireflyuk.net

WANTED!

Mahjong group requires a set of large mahjong tiles for people with visual difficulties. 1" x 1½" at least.

The group is willing to pay a small donation or to arrange to borrow the tiles.

Please contact Averil Fifer: **0131 229 5074**



ENDNOTES

LUNCHES 2009

MARCH	Tues 4th	Weds 5th	Thurs 6th
	Howies	1A Alva Street	
APRIL	Tues 7th	Weds 8th	Thurs 9th
	Indian Cavalry Club	22 Coates Crescent	
MAY	Tues 5th	Weds 6th	Thurs 7th
	Chinese Manor House	2 Glasgow Road	
JUNE	Tues 2nd	Weds 3rd	Thurs 4th
	Daniel's Bistro	88 Commercial Street	
JULY	Tues 7th	Weds 8th	Thurs 9th
	To be confirmed		

All meetings at 12.15pm for 12.30pm.

Book at an open meeting
or telephone Pat Thomas on 667 8992.
It is essential to tell Pat if unable to attend.

SUMMER VISITS 2009

A flyer, with details of the visit, will be available for each trip as booking commences. Please read the flyer carefully.

Cheques are not cashed until after the visit. Booking begins at the Open Meeting two months before the trip and thereafter by phone to Pat Thomas on 667 8992.

Thursday May 14th	Manderston
Wednesday June 10th	Samye Ling Tibetan Monastery
Tuesday July 14th	Alnwick Gardens
Monday August 3rd	Pitenweem Arts Festival
Thursday Sept. 10th	Traquair House (½ day)

Please note that the Autumn issue of *The Clarion* will be available in early August 2009. Deadline for copy is 30 May 2009.

Contributions: typed, please, and sent by post or email to:

Barbara Clarke
Flat 5, 1 London Street, Edinburgh EH3 6LZ
Tel: 0131 556 9417 Email: beclarke99@gmail.com
With any contribution include your name, phone number and address, and please keep a copy.

Still not spent that Christmas book token?

Here are some ideas from Barbara Clarke:

Jen Hadfield, a young poet from Shetland, has just won the TS Eliot prize for poetry. Her new book *Nigh-No-Place* was published in 2008 by Bloodaxe Books.

Ruth Padel, the great-granddaughter of Charles Darwin – among many other claims to fame – is publishing *Darwin: a Life in Poems* with Chatto & Windus in early February '09.

And if you like her style, I recommend *The Soho Leopard*, Chatto & Windus 2004, in paperback.

Alex Ross, music critic for the New Yorker, published an astonishing and wonderful book in 2008 with Fourth Estate: *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*. It comes out in paperback in February '09

The author Alex Ross, presents suggestions of listening and reading to accompany the 15 chapters of his book. It's a magnificent account of styles, influences and passions in 20th century music. You can read the suggestions here: www.edinburghu3a.org.uk/pdf/Ross.pdf

He also suggests 10 pieces in answer to the question, 'What best represents contemporary, post-1980 era music?' You can listen to excerpts at: www.therestisnoise.com/audio

Editor's note

As ever, I am most grateful to the editorial group: Rosemary Miller and Mary Walker for their ideas, support and willingness to write; and to all our contributors to this issue. Helen Steuart and members her Creative Writing Group are a constant source of interesting pieces.

Spring Update This will be produced in April for Group Leaders to pass around. It is an opportunity to include anything you want to publicise about your groups, about possible new ones starting or about U3A matters in general.

Your Group Coordinators will collect information. This needs to be with the Editor by the beginning of April.

New blood needed Are you keen on writing, editing, chasing stories? Come and join the Clarion team. Talk to Barbara Clarke.

Clarion Online Thanks to Neil Duffy, our web-master, for his considerable input and expertise.

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