

Safeguarding

Safeguarding means protecting people's health, well being and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect. It is fundamental to high quality health and social care.

All charities have a duty of care towards their members, protecting their rights to live in safety and helping to prevent the risk of abuse or neglect. We should aim to promote members' well being and take into account their views, wishes, feelings and beliefs.

Adult safeguarding is a complex issue as adults have the right to self-determination as well as the right "to a private and family life" (Human Rights Act). We have also to consider an individual's mental capacity to make informed choices, and to assess whether they adequately understand the situation they are in and the potential consequences for their well being. It is likely that some U3A members will be experiencing a degree of dementia, and we need to think how we respond to someone who is confused, agitated or distracted and, consequently, vulnerable. How do we deal with someone who is at risk of harm or serious exploitation, bearing in mind that the issue may have nothing to do with the U3A but with their private life? The 2014 Care Act underlines the fact that abuse can take several forms – physical, psychological, emotional, sexual or financial. All forms of abuse are a violation of an individual's human and civil rights and may be perpetrated as the result of deliberate intent, negligence or ignorance.

Neglect is a failure to meet a person's basic physical, emotional, social or psychological needs and is likely to result in an impairment of that person's well being – declining physical or mental health and/or impaired intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development,

Most of our members, being over 65 years of age, could be subject to "elder abuse". It can take the various forms listed above and be either intentional or unintentional. It is defined by the WHO as "a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person."

Committee members need to be aware of the law and guidance for safeguarding. We are not, however, social workers; our responsibility is to **notice** what is going on around us and, in the event of concern, **speak to someone** – National Office maybe or even adult social services. This is particularly the case if it is felt that the situation is becoming dangerous. We are responsible for ensuring that nobody comes to any harm through their participation in U3A activities, and we have a legal duty to act prudently and ensure that members remain safe. These responsibilities fall also upon group leaders, so it will be necessary to arrange a meeting for them once we have a policy in place. Any safeguarding issues that arise need to be discussed and investigated especially if complaints are made. The investigation is to be conducted following the grievance and disciplinary procedures set out in the constitution.

If we do encounter abuse or complaints, it is suggested we take the following action:

- take a deep breath (!)
- say that the matter will be treated seriously
- seek advice / talk to someone

A model Safeguarding Policy should be available soon from TAT.