

PRESENTATION FOR LR CHAIRS' NETWORKING DAY

ENVIRONMENTAL & CLIMATE CRISIS: JENNY WILSON (CROYDON CHAIR)

My intention is to make a strong case for all u3as having some engagement with environmental & climate crisis concerns at any level, and incorporating some of the new thinking around the developing ethos of the u3a movement.

WHY SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED OR THINK THIS TOPIC IS PART OF THE u3a REMIT?

- we must do whatever we can to protect the future (as sentient beings)
- climate justice needs to be given weight - increasing pressure being put on poorer nations, the risk of countries disappearing and wars for land grab and food have already started. Climate disaster is making refugee crises worse.
- some of the benefits of the u3a are to give members PURPOSE, HOPE & RELEVANCE. Concern for the future of humankind in the world provides tremendous learning opportunities and ways to be relevant.

<https://www.u3a.org.uk/our-impact/future-lives> Check out **Sir Muir Gray's**

talk: Learning is the Elixir of a Healthy Life where he speaks passionately about having a sense of purpose.

- **Sam Mauger** (CEO) argued that u3as, as Registered Charities, have a moral duty to try to improve lives – see your Object Clause in your Constitution.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhfGXctR9Go> Here she talks about our impact on society for the betterment of us all.
- **Eric Midwinter** (u3a founder) said last year he had hoped that the u3a movement would be much more active in influencing society and not as passive as it seems to have become. *“The u3a movement was originally conceived to play a number of roles – including to have a strong public voice and take action on issues of importance to members and people in later life more broadly.”* Eric Midwinter, u3a co-founder, July 2022

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

- we sell a social learning package, but the u3a movement mustn't be seen just as a Friendly Hobbies Club. Opening up the menu could well appeal to a broader range of new members.
- The Envir & CC agenda offers so many opportunities for deep learning (scientific, weather patterns, climate data, changing landscapes & mapping); engagement with nature (studying habitats, recording data, protecting nature as in tree planting, bee friendly planting) and exploring well-being through nature walks.
- **Liz Thackray** (National u3a Chair) is keen to encourage greater digital strategies – any u3a groups dipping into climate data are on the money.
- We have an initiative called **Influencing & Social Change**
<https://www.u3a.org.uk/our-impact/influencing-and-social-change> which was

launched last autumn and will produce toolkits. This is a perfect avenue for the u3a voice to raise its head. Local issues such as air quality, public transport, polluted rivers, recycling and many more are concerns members could really get their teeth into. It might involve taking photos, contacting the manager of the recycling plant or a store manager about say – plastic concerns, a letter to a council officer, a litter pick and so much more. As they say on the railways – See it, Say it, Sort it. We can do that by using the u3a voice effectively to influence policy, making and ensuring policy makers know our views and concerns.

- Another initiative called **Future Lives** is about Living Longer Better. Being concerned about the local environment right up to worldwide issues surely fits this agenda. Living Longer Better can be assisted by anything from reducing meat consumption to making sure the local park is a safe and friendly place for walking.
- What type of environment & climate issues could u3as & u3a members get involved with? Quite a few have been mentioned already:

Here's a few = Researching the science of the climate crisis

Discovering the effects of population growth on fuel, food & water supplies

Why is soil the key to life? Why does soil die?

Which plants are not native species/ are damagingly invasive?

What does local biodiversity look like? can any comparisons be made from a few decades ago?

Which modern farming techniques are bad news?

Are organic farms sustainable?

Which fruit has the most airmiles attached? Would that change your shopping habits?

How could we foster local biodiversity? Are there any local groups or partners? are there any grants? What about schools?

What do climate crisis deniers claim?

Is 'climate doom-ism' inevitable?

What is sustainable fashion? Members check for greenwashing claims: look in their wardrobes – challenge to buy no new clothes for 12(?) months

Investigate the chocolate industry – all the big names are very or pretty bad for environmental production & child labour

Recycling – there's no end to this one but is all the effort worth it? How much is moved to landfill, burnt, shipped to Turkey or Ghana and are we challenging this?

Find out about wind, wave & solar power / electric cars

What exactly is the 'cloud' – not some fluffy white benign thing holding our data but a huge energy-guzzling/ environment destroying/ carbon emitting industry

- I could go on and on, but you get the picture. There is no shortage of topics but my main point is some of these could be (a) **one-offs** and can be relevant, interesting & challenging **AS WELL AS (b) Interest Groups dedicated to Envir & CC** and (c) **-size projects.**

Interest Groups =

Gardening groups checking out insect friendly planting, how to have a healthy soil etc

Writing Group = Climate dystopia

Science & technology = the list is endless

Walking Groups = photographs of fly tipping, litter bins overflowing, saplings damaged, river rubbish, as well as encouraging evidence

Food and Dining Groups= where ingredients come from, vegetarian options etc

HOW?

- Start with something a few members are interested in pursuing so there is a project.
- Have clear aims about the benefits & expectations and a time frame
- Maybe set up a group – these are varied according to members' interests – might be a Climate Crisis group / Biodiversity group/ Enhancing the Local Environment group and can be quite specific.
- Maybe have a statement of Environmental Commitment for your u3a (Croydon has one and there is also a Draft version on the national website)
- Find out about local groups who you can hook up with. Has your Neighbourhood Group interests in this? Has your area got a Climate Action group you could partner with / is there a local Greenpeace or Fiends of the Earth branch? There's a multitude of groups from butterfly conservation to organic farm shops to eco product shops specialising in refills..... they will love you to show an interest & you can get publicity for your u3a at the same time.
- Sometimes churches, mosques, temples & synagogues have environmental interests and contacts.

WHERE?

- Anywhere – your garden / street/ neighbourhood/ borough/ region / country/ world/ space

CONCERNS?

- Actions (including letters & emails) must be COMPLIANT with your Object Clause i.e. 'with the object of improving the conditions of life for the above persons ' is what is stated in Croydon's Constitution. So, no direct support for animal charities or other organisations which are not clearly related to peoples' welfare.
- There must be no reputational risk for your u3a or the movement as a whole.
- Any costings must be carefully examined and agreed.

WHEN?

Start tomorrow!