

## Group Co-ordinator's Report 2021-2022

This year marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the u3a: a movement for people retired from their work activities but with knowledge and abilities to share with others, similarly retired, who wished to learn, keep active and have some social interaction.

This is still mainly done in smallish groups of likeminded members who meet on a regular basis to study anything from Art to Zoology. Thanks are due to those who generously open their homes for these activities, those who organise each activity, and the Committee who organise the whole process.

Annual reports often look both back and forward. When I joined March u3a Keith Jolly was Group Co-ordinator. It was he who made sure there was something going on most days and curated the calendar so that there were few clashes. Keith oversaw the beginnings of many groups and was the prime mover in setting up the very popular "Grumpies"

Colin Head followed Keith and kept meticulous order, making sure things were run in the best way. It is never easy to fill these organisational roles so when Colin became Chairman Keith came back to help. Then we had the Covid pandemic and things ground to a halt: we couldn't attend our usual groups and some members didn't want to because everything was uncertain. This is how I came to have the role when circumstances allowed March u3a to restart cautiously.

I must express my thanks and admiration for those leaders who kept going throughout and continue today to provide a wide variety of activities for us all. Some longstanding group leaders felt now was the time to rethink and decided not to continue in that role, Jen and David Boxall among them; the generosity of this couple in organising so many groups over the years, from Armchair Travel, Strollers, Understanding Art, Church Visiting, Lunch Group, Music as well as participating in many other ways has been brilliant.

It was a bit daunting to try to bring March u3a back into something like before; it would not have been possible without the willingness of members to step up, not just existing group leaders but also new leaders

who have come forward. I am going to mention some names so apologies if I miss anyone but thank you to Wendy Gardner, Dorothy Hughes, Nick Harvey, Janet Hoskyn and Beryl West who all stepped in so that our members could enjoy a broader experience.

Despite offering so many opportunities to our members some do not attend any groups. In the future we may be able to provide more groups to entice members to join in and we are always interested in new ideas. This year we have started the Tangent group and Writing for pleasure. If you have an idea for a group let me know. We would love to restart a History group or perhaps a dance group, Samba in six weeks, Tango in twelve!

March u3a has done well since the restart and it can only continue with the input from leaders and members and new ideas. Thank you all, in advance.

Lynda Andrews, Group Co-ordinator.

## The Tangent Group

The idea for the group came from discussions during the Writing Support Group. Often, while discussing what had been written we'd go off at a tangent- I am sure that isn't confined to the writing group but also to others - so the idea of forming a discussion group which wouldn't stick to the point seemed a good one.

The first meeting was on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2022 and every monthly meeting since then has been well attended - apart from a recent meeting when it was much too hot!

As group leader I tend to set a topic to start - although anyone else can do so if they wish - because a starting point gives shape to expand and move on from. Whatever the topic might be, it soon changes and the conversation becomes broader; goes off at a tangent!

So far topics have been centred on emotions for example disappointment, anxiety or more obscurely; does visualisation bring you what you want? It is amazing how those subjects can eventually lead to discussing phone apps or the weather before they move on to something meatier.

My own anxiety to begin with was that there would either be silences - there were none - or that people would get bored; certainly not. So far after each meeting everyone says how much they have enjoyed it, how quickly the time has passed and how much they look forward to the next meeting.

Conversation may have been eclipsed to an extent by 'shares' and likes on social media but The Tangent Group ensures the art of people talking, discussing, exchanging ideas with good humour is alive and well!

Jill Monck-Mason

## Writing Support Group.

The Writing Support Group, continues to be varied and thought provoking. Poetry, memoirs, short stories - for both adults and children - and full-length novels are part of our milieu.

The late Christopher Hitchens - author and journalist said most people think they have a book in them...and that is where it should stay. He was known for being a polemicist! But our group does what it says on the tin supports people who simply want to write.

We listen, give feedback and wait anxiously until the next meeting to find out what will happen to the various characters which have a life in the stories created by the group members.

It isn't important to produce a piece of writing, it isn't important to want to write a block buster but it is important to listen and to encourage.

The Writing Support Group is also a social occasion, one in which we sometimes lose track of real time. Instead we find ourselves lost in another world, leaving behind the reality of daily life and enjoying sharing our stories.

And we welcome newcomers, we could certainly squeeze in a couple more people. We meet in the group leader's home in Coldham on the first and third Friday of each month.

Jill Monck-Mason