

Shropshire u3a Network Event
27 September 2023, Mereside Community Centre, Shrewsbury

Key Themes from Discussion Group 1 (1-2 u3as per group)

1. *Why are you in the Shropshire Network?*
 - Because of geographical proximity, demographic similarities and historic links
 - To learn and obtain support from other u3as by sharing ideas, experiences and best practice
 - Because it is a platform for dissemination of information – local, regional and national
 - To obtain advice and, where possible, training on specific issues.

2. *What do you expect from the Shropshire Network?*
 - Opportunities to ask questions and seek support
 - Pooling of ideas and resources for mutual problem-solving
 - To come away with a better understanding of what happens in other u3as, plus contact details for specific u3as (e.g. for groups)

3. *Suggestions?*
 - Network meetings need to be more focused – start to define issues well in advance and facilitate input from u3as to agenda items
 - Share best practice in more detail, with the Network acting as a catalyst e.g. who is the best person/expert to contact for a specific problem, having a ‘Who’s who’ directory
 - Restart/continue with the Chairs and Treasurers informal meetings, which are considered beneficial
 - Consider sharing of interest groups across u3as, particularly where each u3a may only have 1-2 individuals interested in a particular activity
 - Improve awareness of the Network by circulating minutes at each u3a’s general/business meetings and AGM, if not already done
 - Organise more face-to-face meetings, with online options to join in where appropriate to facilitate access
 - Consider a local Siteworks ‘help group’, to aid u3as in the transition from Sitebuilder (and other) websites to Siteworks
 - Starting a Facebook page was popular – Sue Blundell offered to set this up (*Chairs Note: as I recall, we do already have one set up by Robert Toft, but I don’t have the link - does anyone else?*)
 - Other topics included joint social activities, branding, cost of membership, free leaflets and the network providing a video about its activities (!!).
 - There was overall support for similar Network Events to be held in the future, paid for by u3as, if not too frequent e.g. every 1-2 years.

It was also noted that, although the network does have great potential, it is not currently being fully utilised. The above points, and renewed enthusiasm by those present at the meeting, may go some way towards resolving this.

Key Themes from Discussions Group 2 (u3a Role Groups)

1. What are the main issues for your u3a?	2. How can we solve these issues?
<p>Recruitment and retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ New/younger members ○ Committee roles ○ Volunteers <p><i>This was a widespread problem common to all u3as</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ consider rebranding to attract younger people (those with hybrid working lives), and opportunities to fill gaps left by dwindling adult education provision ❖ consider ‘meet the committee’ opportunities, job-shares/shadowing ❖ group talks via our network found helpful ❖ meetings for new members to promote ethos of volunteering ❖ set up short-term groups of volunteers (STAR) with no long-term commitment, to help when needed ❖ shadowing other, successful u3as
<p>Limited IT skills and knowledge amongst membership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Ensure access to IT help (e.g. using a telephone pyramid for non-IT members) and training
<p>Waiting list for groups that are full</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Consider setting up additional groups rather than having waiting lists
<p>Meeting the u3a ethos of learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Social aspects important, but learning can still be encouraged, even in social groups
<p>Banking issues and costs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ use local POs to bank cheques, encourage members to use BACS
<p>Affordable and accessible venues for meetings (towns v. villages)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ consider supermarket community rooms, village halls, church halls, libraries, although costs higher than using homes

3. Is advertising necessary and what advertising does your u3a do?

All member u3as present used advertising. Practices varied in their extent and included local media (newspapers; parish newsletters; radio); social media (Facebook); websites; posters; open days and open meetings; printed bookmarks; u3a-produced materials.

Note: Bridgnorth did leave some printed materials from national office for members to peruse and take home. Items do have to be purchased online, but can be adapted by u3as to suit their own needs (providing the u3a has some in-house expertise).