

August 2018

Golden start for Paisley & District U3A

Photo: (l-r) Trevor Bailey, Mike Lynch and Kathleen O'Donnell with Third Age Trust chair, Pam Jones at the All Scotland Assembly & AGM in East Kilbride Art Centre.

It was a proud moment for Paisley & District representatives when they recently became the 50th U3A to be awarded full membership status in Scotland. With three more Scottish U3As ready to open their doors, there is an obvious appetite among the baby boomer generation to keep on learning using this local self- help model

Chair, Kathleen O'Donnell believes there are some key reasons behind the rapid growth of U3As across the country. She explained: "I have met some really interesting and lovely people by joining the U3A. Had it not started, I might not have come to know these individuals." Her steering group colleague, Mike Lynch agrees: "The best thing about being a U3A member is the friendly atmosphere and being able to meet like-minded people at group activities, and the monthly meetings.

Unlike most of this steering group, Trevor Bailey, already knew about U3As. His sister-in-law has been a member with the Milton Keynes U3A for several years. He said: "What matters is you can share your own knowledge and interests with others but you're also learning all the time, and gaining knowledge from the experiences of other members."

The former career backgrounds of Paisley & District U3A membership could not be more diverse. Interpreter Nancy Gemmell first heard about U3As at a 'Preparing for Retirement' class while council income advisor, Anna White was introduced to it by her friend and retired senior social worker, Kathleen O'Donnell. Mike Lynch, who was a supply chain procurement manager, got involved after a friend brought him along to a meeting.

Although U3As are not yet on the public radar, those who do take part often praise the wide- ranging voluntary educational activities on offer. When Kathleen O'Donnell first told her husband about it, little did they know he would eventually lead the conversational French group. "Initially, he thought it was a good opportunity to get involved because the commercial alternatives are too expensive," she remarked.

The economic principle of supply and demand, familiar to former finance manager Trevor Bailey, is pivotal to how U3As develop so differently. Members put forward topics they want to study. People then use their free time together to learn, share or lead an activity. Among ten top interests in Paisley & District's U3A to date are the architecture group led by Duncan MacIntosh and the walking group by Mike Lynch. Recently, members of the opera appreciation group led by Kathleen (who was also in the chorus) enjoyed Scottish Opera's latest production of Pagliacci held in Paisley.

Each new U3A faces challenges. For Paisley & District, the combined aims for the next twelve months are to increase membership by showcasing benefits in health and wellbeing, as well as learning. Developing the range of groups, and activities further afield - such as a Nordic walking group - will be addressed. To save costs, finding a permanent home to hold regular meetings will be worth its weight in gold.

(490 words by Allana Parker, Paisley & District U3A)